

MARY MARY

The work of Caroline Achaintre, Sara Barker and Alice Channer at Eastside Projects, Birmingham, engages in a faltering dialogue of connected ambiguity. Glazed ceramic masks, fragile aluminium frames and feather-light monuments form an inventory of uncertainty, making us look again.

Curated by Ruth Claxton and Gavin Wade, the show evokes scientist Perianne Senapathy's idea that comparable conditions can develop simultaneously, without, as Darwin would have argued, connection to a common ancestor. All three artists work in comparable conditions, contemplating the language of process, manipulating and pushing the boundaries of materials until a day is made from half a night.

Before installing their work in the gallery space, the artists had to negotiate the residue of works left behind from previous exhibitions; a unique feature of the Eastside Projects curatorial manifesto. Jennifer Tee's 'Local Myths' (2010) and Heather and Ivan Morrison's 'Pleasure Island' (2008) are some of the works that interrupt the space, becoming fragments echoed in a new conversation.

The clumpy viscosity of Achaintre's sparkle-glazed ceramic masks is amplified when presented alongside Barker's precariously poised sculptures and Channer's graceful silk monuments. But these blobs, reminiscent of a PVA-clotted children's summer camp are beguilingly beautiful on their Neapolitan coloured cubes and possess a deceptive sophistication. Like Magritte's Pipe, they mask our understanding of what a given object can 'be'. The fetish black lustre sheen on 'Polymum' (2012) in particular, pushes the materiality of fired earth to its limit. Darkly erotic and simultaneously playful, its duality is the subject matter. A glaze becomes a mask for the clay, the mask a glaze for the wearer; both claiming reality.

A reality which is, in fact, "something else," and "somewhere else" and not what is necessarily seen. This notion is translated into Barker's fragile window-like constructions, which question the concept of looking. 'La Lecon de piano's' (2010) delicate reflection beneath a glass table top echoes Doris Lessing's Sufi-inspired contention that we are all made of transient influences. Our reality is merely a "tiny shining precious thing," but capable of infinite expansion when we catch sight of other visible orders in shadows.

Channer's digital images of classical sculptures found in the British Museum explore that infinite expansion. 'Cold Metal Body' (2012) hangs in the centre of the gallery space filling it with a flimsy grandeur. It is a representation of disembodied stone carved bodies on silk, a canopy of heavy weightlessness, held to the ground by marble so cumbersome it took two people to install it. These materials are manipulated to displace. The pink and white polished marble cylinders that hold the silk to the ground might almost be painted aero board.

Achaintre, Barker and Channer challenge the security of certainty, provoking us to recognise that what we habitually see does not necessarily confirm who we are. The work of each artist hovers on the threshold of what is visible and what is not. Shown together, they reveal the alternative realities that surround us, expanding our experience of a world we thought we knew.