

CUTUP
&
SARA
MACKILLOP

06.11.08–11.12.08

PRIVATE VIEW 06.11.08 / 6.30–9PM

CUTUP & SARA MACKILLOP

It isn't so easy to meet the members of Cut-Up. Like other art collectives the group is loosely built around a handful of artists whose internal organisational structure seems chaotic to an outsider eager to know more about their stealthy activities. This appearance, however, obscures a highly organised practice that targets the language and codes of advertising. By reordering, rearranging and splicing together material we encounter day-to-day they allow ominous images to surface that then are reinserted back into the environment. For this exhibition they seem to have shifted their attention away from the signatory media-fuelled aesthetics of fear and desire to explore the sculptural possibilities of their real-life billboard; Caesura (2008).

Chosen, one assumes, for its convenient location, the billboard has been removed from its original context, dissected into equal parts, packed off in a van and reassembled in the gallery like a form of reclaimed flat-pack architecture. As a symbol of communication, a billboard needs little or no introduction to critical interpretation as a much exploited emblem, but Cut-Up's use of the object is very much a personal nod to the history of their own practice and an acknowledgment of the framing device that has supported their reworked imagery.

Exploiting any visible inch of the city, advertising holds a particular hegemony of communication in the visual landscape. Yet as non-consensual viewers we might feel we have little or no say in an enforced aesthetic environment. Accordingly, one feels small sense of victory at the prospect that there is one less billboard to negotiate, yet we are led to look at one point-blank range - this time without a familiar external context.

Caesura operates here at odds with its orthodox function by filling space but equally offering a slab of emptiness. A blankness hosted by an according blankness of the gallery. However, the angling of the billboard suggests a friendly gesture as one enters the space, welcoming one into the domain rather than asserting a more stubborn presence. It's mouldy panelling seems strangely comforting in comparison to the sterile walls, and the blankness dissolves to give way to an abundance of visual stimuli reintroducing the imaged based element of Cut-Up's practice. The one-way street of corporate vocabulary opens up to ambiguous formal readings that even touch on the painterly - with landscape qualities hinted at by splintered wood, damp patches and the residue of the ubiquitous advertising blue. Unable to view the object from the distance that it was intended to be seen by the manufacturers, we are treated to a sensual experience viewing it at the tip of one's nose.

Both Cut-Up and Mackillop approach the test of curatorial pairing with paradoxical finesse. While Cut-Up's billboard might seem overpowering, it is angled generously towards the direction Mackillop's work is installed. As we turn accordingly we might not notice her work at first, a prospect many artists might feel anxious about.

Above a ledge just on the periphery of our visibility, Mackillop's Two Books (2008) – acquired on the basis of their

archaic index system - rest in a manner that seems difficult to ascertain whether they have been casually abandoned or seek deliberate evasion. The work seems to return a confident gaze at us from the ridges and ledges of the gallery - out of reach, like two canny birds. Akin to Cut-Up's Caesura the work operates in a similar vein to mute communication in favour of exploring the mechanics of its transmission - if on an altogether more modest scale. At first it seems Mackillop relegates the books to objects to their physical function fetishising the thumb-shaped index system for its tactile appeal. Placed at a height that leaves one without the option of flicking through them, she denies us this simple pleasure she has brought to our attention through her cheeky humour, but also encourages us to contemplate the structural indentations as a strange configuration of ciphers and codes.

Qualities that are equally quotidian and alien, they seem to reference more analogue methods of encrypting language such as Morse code or even posit alternative approaches to overcoming the intangibility of language by suggesting a form of inverse Braille. Two Books solidify the abstract qualities of information whilst dissolving the pragmatism of an index system, and, considered in light of these 'inverse' properties, in turn suggest a strain of warm negation that runs through the exhibition.

The pairing of Two Books is mirrored with the other piece Mackillop has chosen to show: Two Keyrings (2008). As a drawing in space these two articles (possibly found in charity shops) connect two supporting components of the gallery's industrial architecture, and in turn bring one's attention back to the looming billboard of Cut-Up's. Again, with a smile, Mackillop draws attention to structural support of one kind with an antithetical method - in this case the feeble but effective use of kids' key-chains. The intention at work here seems again bent on dissolving one function in favour of another more playful one born out of a penchant for slight subversion.

I find myself viewing Mackillop's key-rings through half closed eyes. Looking back and forth at the architecture, the skinny cables connecting the wall with a beam (or a beam with the wall), the slightness of the yellow and the orange blurring that suggesting movement which makes me recall the simple pleasure of swinging similar key-chains as a kid. In much of Sara Mackillop's work one can see examples of the use of materials salvaged from the doldrums of charity shops – dumping grounds for unwanted items but also sites of bargains for the more fashionably or quirky minded. As has been noted, Mackillop's choice of materials have been seen as neither 'new' nor 'retro' but reflecting a current strand in popular culture that contemporary life is working 'out-of-tense' - somewhere between past and the future. *

This sense of disenfranchisement with time and place is also reflected in Cut-up's billboard by soliciting an implied absence elsewhere - a gap in the neighbourhood somewhere that might remain unnoticeable. Advertising structures seek not only to consume conscious space but also time – whether it is for a split second from a glance at an advert or more unnervingly, subconsciously over an indefinite period. Similarly, Caesura is not just a slab of space in the commercial order but also offers a neat antidote to a culture that is in opposition to 'time wasting' as we can spend ages gazing on the tributaries

of damp, the formalism of the billboard manufacturer's imprint or trace of the posters.

One wonders at the time it took to claim Caesura knowing that the collective have to work outside the day-job hours often working in the small hours of the night. When a discussion I had with Mackillop drifted to the subject of part time jobs and more specifically the space that the lunch-hour offers. Sandwiched between the beauracratics of the contemporary work ethic, its limited parameters allows just enough time to wander along the periphery of the working environment but not much further. The artist mentioned that sometimes she feels like a 'lunchtime flâneur' free to drift through the non-time lunch break like a sort of libertine.

Amusing as her quip is, Mackillop's work also intervenes with the periphery of the exhibition space, leaping over the gaps and attaching itself to overlooked areas of the gallery. Opting to work within in these migratory spaces Sara Mackillop shares a similar sense of Cut-Up's restlessness to make sense of place amongst the rapid acceleration of the contemporary visual landscape. The collective's interventions with public modes of advertising suggest an attempt to counter or obstruct the speed and freedom at which consumerism gets away with promoting certain ideals. Similarly, Mackillop's taste for less overtly 'contemporary' materials that hang between epochs imply an ambivalence to time and place, and like her co-exhibitors work it seems to connect then retract in one breath.

* See Andrew Hunt's essay at www.saramackillop.co.uk

Sara MacKillop

Sara MacKillop studied at Leeds University and The Royal Collage of Art. Recent exhibitions include Floor/Wall, Leicester City Art Gallery, Ian Kiaer / Sara MacKillop, International Project Space, Bourneville Centre for Visual Arts, Jessica Bradley Art and Projects, Toronto. She lives and works in London.

CutUp

CutUp 's work has been staged from Barcelona to New York, including Conflux festival 08 and The New York Centre for Architecture. Other recent exhibitions include BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead 2008, Kulturhuset Mazetti, Malmo and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York 2006. CutUp live and work in London. They are represented by Seventeen Gallery, London.

PROVOCATION.

DO WE REALLY DESIRE TO REPLACE THAT WHICH WE ONCE SOUGHT TO REMOVE?

WOULD IT NOT BE MORE DESIROUS TO CREATE A SILENT COUNTERPOINT – A CAESURA – TO THE VIOLENT POETRY OF THE SPECTACLE?

WE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND FIND NONE, ONLY IT'S LACK.

THE RELIC, A LOOMING SILENCE THAT CANNOT BE BROKEN, YET HOLDS WITHIN ITSELF ECHOES OF ITS BIRTH.

IDEAS BECOME CASTRATED BY THE SPACES THEY INHABIT; SUBJECTED TO A SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE WHERE ONCE WE NAIVELY THOUGHT THERE WAS NONE. A REALIZATION DAWNS – WE ARE DISTRESSED TO FIND OURSELVES MERELY THE REFLECTION IN A SHATTERED MIRROR; THE LOOKING GLASS IN WHICH THE SPECTACLE VAINLY CONGRATULATES ITSELF.

CUTUP 2008

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