**Maxine Bristow: Catalogue text, *Made With*, Cross Lane Projects**

In the introduction to the catalogue accompanying the *Art\_Textiles* exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery in 2015, the curator Jennifer Harris notes that ‘[t]extiles are having a ‘moment’…enjoying exciting new currency as part of a renewed critical engagement with material practices’.1 Undoubtedly, this renewed critical currency has come to the fore through a resurgence of interest in identity politics and an acknowledgement of the social, political and cultural significance of the medium. In what might initially appear to be a counterintuitive and retrograde move, as textile materials and processes are gaining greater prominence in terms of their signifying capacity, my new body of practice seeks to return authority to materially embodied aesthetic experience and the ambiguous resonances of an abstract sculptural language over more over strategies of representation. However, such an approach is not to deny the somatic and semantic potency of the textile (and non-textile materials) employed in the work. Indeed, by privileging affective resonance and the productive indeterminacy of the sensuously bound experiential encounter, the aim is open up a material richness and complexity which in emerging through the process of making can often exceed the limitations of subjective intentions and thereby resist an all-too-easy collapse into predetermined contexts and conventions.

The work takes the form of a constellatory ‘catalogue’ of interchangeable sculptural components that are conceived in a way that can be configured and reconfigured within a series of staged *mises-en-scène.* Offering the opportunity for continual rearrangement, the physical form of the work remains essentially mutable. Meaning similarly remains mutable mobilised through the various connections and temporary coalitions that are set in play across the different elements, the installational context and the subject of the experiential encounter. Prompting a host of contradictory resonances, the intention is to simultaneously materially seduce and conceptually confound. On the one hand the work gives rise to a heightened sensuous correspondence where rigid divisions between subject and object become blurred. This is materialised through the subtle affective intensities and bodily attunement of a haptic aesthetic: the way that a slim salt and pepper flecked brushed cotton sits neatly between the soft striated density of hand stitched woollen canvas-work; the way that a knitted woollen binding wraps around the wipe-clean smoothness of faux leather; or the way that a seamed biomorphic stuffed form whose soft bulging plumpness can hardly be contained by its all too tight textile skin balances precariously on the straddling rigidity of a steel leg-like structure. On the other hand, the familiar yet unfamiliar ‘thingly’ quality of the components gives rise to numerous connotations yet remain ambiguous and elude cognitive grasp.

Rather than submitting sensual intuition and the very *particular* nature of materially embodied experience to the synthesising control of conceptual cognition, the work aims to preserves a sense of material otherness. This otherness or what Theodor Adorno calls ‘non-identity’2 is what exceeds cognition. It is manifest in an ambiguity of feeling that continually oscillates between a sensuous affinity and embodied connection that reaffirms subjective stability, and a momentary separation or loss that puts subjective stability at risk. Simon O'Sullivan describes this paradoxical dimension of aesthetic experience as an 'affective gap' that is characterised by both a sense of ‘rupture’ and ‘affirmation’3, suggesting that ‘[i]t is in this gap that genuine events emerge’4 as we are provoked to think and feel differently.

1. Harris, J. (2015) ‘Art\_Textiles: An extra/ordinary medium’, in *Art\_Textiles*. Manchester: The Whitworth, p.8.
2. Adorno, W.T. (2007) *Negative Dialectics*. Translated by E. B. Ashton. London: Continuum, p.146.
3. O’Sullivan, S. (2006) *Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.38.
4. O’Sullivan, S. (2006) *Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.1

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