

Mikala Dwyer, by Toni Ross

Perhaps more than ever, Mikala Dwyer's recent work shows a renewed concern with the possibilities of sculpture. Such a claim can only be made, however, with the proviso that a memory of sculpture's surpassing is also folded within these works. They acknowledge a post-minimalist history of sculpture's passage into other domains – installation, architecture, the site specific and the environmental – where, according to Rosalind Krauss's famous formulation, sculpture becomes an art of the expanded field. But the memory of sculpture's breaching of precise formal and physical parameters, its transit into architecture for example, is inflected here in a particular way. In the clustered, painted off-cuts of pvc pipes that make up *iffytown*, the shelf-size, modelling clay dwellings of *un*, and Dwyer's cylindrical, pineclad cubby house, the expanded field, while remarked, shrinks, recedes, turns again to matters sculptural. These works are miniaturised architectures as sculpture – tiny towns or child-scaled domestic interiors that grown ups too are invited to inhabit and pass through imaginatively or physically. This doesn't negate the expanded field, establishing sculpture on its own ground, safe as houses. But it does gently nudge us towards thinking about what the sculptural might be today. It may be . . . *iffy*. – uncertain and unsteady – but does Dwyer's practice, as has been claimed, turn its back on the art of sculpture towards the so-called . . . disorder of life. or the . . . everyday. ?

Assembled here in lapidary masses is the motley stuff of Dwyer's idiom. Recycled household objects and materials, pinned and sewn soft fabrics and ersatz furnishings, constructions in perspex, plastic, *das* and wood, mark out temporary domestic habitats that include the walls and floors of the gallery. They bespeak the artifice of a DIY and playpen rusticity, too quickly judged if said to merge art and life, or if imagined to make a fetish of a spontaneous naivete at times ascribed to children's play.

A sculptural heritage that includes the interplay of the visual and the haptic, intersections of volume and space and place inform and are transformed by these works. But perhaps the most insistent preoccupation of Dwyer's art is the staging, with carefully selected materials, of shifting relations between enclosure and porosity, solidity and vacuity, the density and dispersion of massed materials as they curve, enclose and

inscribe space. Or better, such dichotomies of sculptural grammar are subject to minute, differential adjustments and displacements. The ironically titled closing plan swaddles the wall like a curtain, suggesting some kind of interior decoration. But this decorative activity is foreign to one that strives to complete and enclose the space of a home. The honeycomb filigree of the grey tulle is a fragile, permeable coverall. At every point its surface is punctuated by openings onto the gallery wall, or apertures that allow light to pass unevenly through. At the same time, this porous drapery never attains complete transparency and therefore never quite disappears or dissolves into the architecture of the gallery wall. Instead it hovers and falls there, a soiled grey cloud marking a minimal, barely perceptible threshold where architecture and sculpture encounter each other and fall apart.

Here every effort to cloister and solidify an interior, self-sustaining space is touched and turned by something other than itself. Surfaces are broken, forms opened and closed, masses loosely gathered together and scattered about. And because Dwyer's materials and invented habitats are so haunted by human connections, whether past or still to come, her sculptural practice hints at a particular ethical posture. Such a posture makes the thought of a body, a home, or community not inviolable and enclosed, but from infancy sustained, affected, breached by otherness. This is the promise of Mikala Dwyer's profoundly sociable art.

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