

Flexible Spaces for Happy People (almost, almost)

Charlotte Drayton

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Drayton', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

7 October 2014

Acknowledgments

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Figure 1.



Figure 2

Abstract

My project generally circulates around site-specific installation practice, working with exhibition spaces in a manner that engages both in the particularities of the site in which the work is made, sites external to the gallery and a wider language around renovation, construction and suburban DIY. Often this results in large scale works using materials such as concrete, plaster, tiles, house-paint or gib, to make forms that gesture towards domestic architectural tropes: a wall, painted in spanish white; an off kilter pad of stippled white tiles; a staircase, flipped on it's side; a generic looking door handle, hand-cast in aluminium; a floor-to-ceiling window 'frosted' with Jiff. I am interested in how these objects or interventions might be used to both highlight and interrupt a viewer's relationship to architecture, and how they might then become trigger points for subjective associations. Furthermore i am interested in the idea of 'taste' in this context, how it is manufactured through a network of both subjective associations and wider socio-cultural conditioning.

Introduction

INTERVIEWER

You have said that writing is a hostile act; I have always wanted to ask you why.

JOAN DIDION

It's hostile in that you're trying to make somebody see something the way you see it, trying to impose your idea, your picture. It's hostile to try to wrench around someone else's mind that way. Quite often you want to tell somebody your dream, your nightmare. Well, nobody wants to hear about someone else's dream, good or bad; nobody wants to walk around with it. The writer is always tricking the reader into listening to the dream.¹

This excerpt, taken from an interview in *The Paris Review* seemed to me a good way of starting this exegesis. To me, Didion's comment about trying to impose one's own idea on to their reader translates quite seamlessly into Art; as an artist, I am trying to visually communicate or articulate a (selective) view of some aspects of the world that I find interesting or important, and to make a viewer examine these aspects too. When architecture first became a focus in my practice, I thought it was a kind of arbitrary interest that I had picked up along the way, but in looking back now I can see that it was simply a response to what I saw happening around me. As such, I have written this document entirely in first person as a means of both recognizing my subjectivity, and attempting to speak directly to the reader. I have attempted to contemplate both aspects that I see as core to my practice over the past few years – such as site-specificity, installation, architecture and DIY processes – as well as ideas that are newer to my practice and which have widened my thinking around what I do and why I do it, such as taste, association, text and a discussion around the ready-made. Writing an exegesis was described to me as being like writing a manual for a car (in which the manual is this document and the car as my practice). I'm not entirely sure whether or not it has turned out to be a comprehensive manual for my car (practice), it may read more as a car writing a diary, however I have attempted to identify the various critical contexts through which my practice moves at this particular moment.

A kind of subjective approach to my practice has been something that has sat under the surface as method in my work for quite some time, and materials I choose have been utilised because of their particular associations for me. However, I have always found it incredibly difficult to speak subjectively without falling into nostalgia and sentimentalism. I often use particular aspects of external spaces (taken from my own life) as a way of bringing the subjective into play in an open-ended way. Ultimately, only I can ever articulate my own experiences with any kind of authority, and as such I utilise architectural tropes, languages and materials that figure somewhere within my own encounters. In using processes such as renovation, I want to create works that draw from my subjective associations but which also speak to a wider socio-economic context – works that gently probe questions around the middle-class idealism, aspiration and taste inherent in renovation culture. This is enacted through my choice of materials, the DIY process and my use of parallel text and titling— co-opting the writing style of real-estate advertising or lifestyle magazines as a manner of speaking in a detached way about sites that are actually intensely familiar to me.

¹ Kuehl, L. (1978). "Joan Didion, The Art of Fiction." *The Paris Review* 74.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

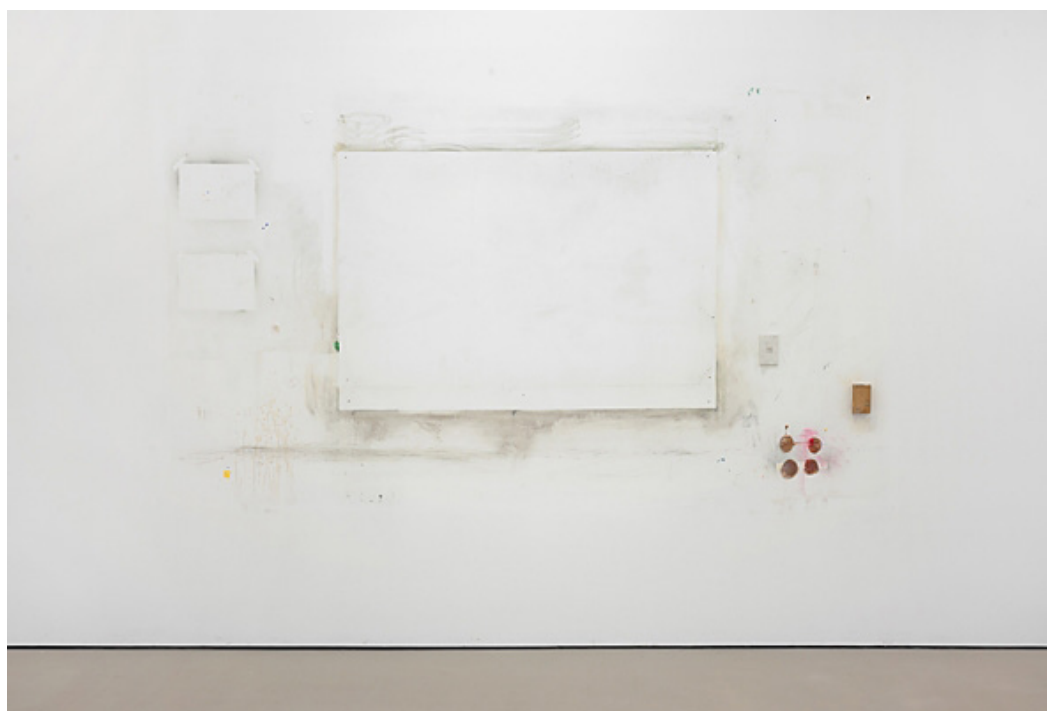


Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

1. Ways of looking — *Silence, Site-specificity, Establishing context*

The notions of silence, emptiness, reduction, sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc. — specifically, either for having a more immediate, sensuous experience of art or for confronting the art work in a more conscious, conceptual way.(Sontag 2002)

John Cage's 4'33" is a work that I continually return to as a frame of reference; the work involved a musical score that detailed that the musicians playing it were to sit for 4 minutes and 33 seconds in silence. What 4'33 pointed out to its audience was that true silence does not exist, instead what the work did was to bring the peripheralised aspects of the aural landscape through the duration of the work into the fore. The score—determined each time by the specifics of its audience and environment— was composed of incidental sounds such as coughing, chairs scraping and the wind outside.

In this view, Silence operated in as a catalyst to make an audience *notice* aspects of a given situation, which have been ignored through daily habit and practicality. Similarly, in an art context the gallery space often attempts to act as a kind of visual silence, a kind of supposed blankness and emptiness that artists use in order to bring focus on their work². Indeed, in *Positively White Cube Revisited* Simon Sheikh comments:

...The white cube not only conditions, but also overpowers the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content *within* a context to making the context *itself* the content... It is only through the apparent neutrality of appearing outside of daily life and politics that the works within the white cube can appear to be self-contained—only by being freed from historical time can they attain their aura of timelessness.(Sheikh 2009)

Until recently my practice focused primarily around inverting this relationship through making works that attempted to expose this habit of mental editing through interventions and adjustments to the given exhibition spaces architecture. This wasn't something I saw as an institutional critique, but rather a call to viewers to *look*— which is why 4'33" became so pivotal. This kind of practice is often referred to under the generalized rubric of 'site-specific'. I want to unpack this a little and attempt to establish how over the past year my work has shifted in relation to the notion of site-specificity.

Fiona Connor is a New Zealand artist who has been repeatedly referred to me in relation to the ideas around architecture and site-specificity. Connor often deals with architectural features, creating large-scale works that act as facsimiles. I want to initially focus on several of Connor's earlier works, particularly *Old Buildings* and *Something Transparent (please go round the back)*. These works all saw Connor using the gallery space itself as subject for replication, in *Old Buildings* the artist replicated the entire floor space of the artist run space Gambia Castle at a 1:1 scale, raising it by approximately a foot. In *Something Transparent (please go round the back)*—first shown at a previous site of Michael Lett Gallery, and subsequently nominated for the Walters prize, and installed at Auckland Art Gallery (AAG)— the artist replicated respectively: the glass concertina frontage of the Michael Lett gallery 15 times; and the large triangular ceiling beams of the AAG³. What these works did extremely well was to highlight the various architectural idiosyncrasies of the exhibition space, but also to force a viewer to carefully renegotiate their relationship to the site in what writer and curator Ariane Craig-Smith referred to as a "rupture of the familiar"(Craig-Smith 2008). This to me is site-specificity at its purest—occurring where the work takes the site itself and inverts, intervenes or shifts the space in a manner that exposes and redirects a viewer's relationship to the given site.

² Despite critique about the modernist-style white gallery space going back as far as Brian O'Doherty in 1976, the gallery as 'void' or 'white cube' is still a widely accepted (and sometimes useful) construct, Sheikh comments "O'Doherty's texts attest to the epistemological shift from the modern to the postmodern era of art and politics... the text [*Inside the White Cube, the ideology of the gallery space*] not only marks a beginning, an end, or a part of a history, but is equally relevant today as part of a continuous debate—an ongoing struggle, if you will. After all, most galleries, museums, and alternative spaces still employ the white cube as the favored modus operandi for exhibition-making—as the dominant model for the showing of art."

³ The Auckland Art Gallery has since relocated



Figure 8.



Figure 9.

In her nomination for the Walters Prize, the artist chose not to recreate the initial Michael Lett work⁴; instead the replication of the gallery ceiling beams became a way of representing the strategy employed in the initial work, whilst still maintaining its essential site-specific-ness.

Connor's more recent work has become increasingly occupied with representing particular sites, often public and outside of the gallery. This manifests in works such as *Murals and Print* (2012), in which the artist created facsimiles of various modernist era walls; or the current show at Hopkinson Mossman *Can Do Academy* (2014), in which Connor has replicated a series of architectural fixings (such as windows and sinks) along with the associated patinas of the given context (replications of paint splashes from a primary school sink; the stains and silhouettes of painters canvases once attached to a wall; scuff marks on the gallery walls). In Connor's practice what seems to me to be the primary concern is the way in which the facsimile accurately captures its original, and how it consequently points towards the contexts of the replica— be they architectural replications within the space of the exhibitions or quotations, taken external sources.

It seems that the faithfulness of the replica is key in Connor's practice⁵ and takes precedent over the actual material truth of the object. This, for me is where my practice diverges— although I am often quoting from other spaces, it is always important that the materials I use and the spaces that I build follow the logic of their material, process and use in actual renovation. Walls I have built are often left half-exposed, or the applied plaster half-finished in order to expose the reality of the process as taking precedent over the perfect likeness of the finished product. Operating in the same manner as an amateur home renovator, I spend a great deal of time doing practical research into DIY renovation processes— be they teaching myself how to build a wall, how best to lay concrete foundations (without earth to peg into), how to perform the 'hacienda' style plastering accurately, or how to correctly lay tiles.

In the past few years my work has changed its relationship to site significantly, shifting from a responding directly to the space in which I was exhibiting, to gesturing towards sites and contexts outside the gallery. The work that acted for me as a primary catalyst in this shift in my practice was *Towards an Outside* (2013) at Te Tuhi. I took multiple site visits to Te Tuhi where I sat and observed the manner in which the space functioned in a day-to-day manner. The drawing wall space acts concurrently as the main entrance from the car park into the Gallery and as Te Tuhi serves not only as a exhibition space, but also as a community center, the range of people coming through is vast. I was interested to note in conversation with the curator, that the trajectory most often taken (understandable in its efficiency) was diagonally through the space. As a result I decided to build a wall, in line with the steel supports of the outside walkway, as a means of creating a corridor and redirecting the unconscious movement through the space. The built wall was then plastered and painted seamlessly on one side and left exposed on the other. A curtain made of thin plastic was used to screen off the newly enclosed space created by the built wall, and the building windows, left half-open activated the curtain, causing it to move ceaselessly in and out of the built space.

It was through the planning and production of this work that I grew increasingly interested in DIY and renovation in a suburban context, and as such it became important that this work exposed its making, that the use of material and its process was explicit—and that these site-specific interventions were not only concerned with the gallery space, but also interested in utilising the language of renovation. The specific choices in materials I was working with were often those employed in DIY, attempting not to be seamless, but rather to be pointedly unfinished. In the accompanying text for the show Will Pollard wrote "In *showing her working*, keeping the wall's internal supports visible, Drayton submits her part of the dialogue in the form of an open-ended question: what else could be here?"(Pollard 2013)

⁴The Walters Prize is nominated based on a specific show, rather than the artists practice, and as such stipulates that the artist re-make that particular show.

⁵ I posit this mainly due to the careful and accurate rendering of minute details such as smudges on the walls or even the replication of dust in the Walters prize work, an element that the artist had noted when examining the roof beams, but viewers were unable to see in the original. Also, in the examination of material lists and accounts of Connor's work in process, it becomes clear that the artist will often use MDF or Polystyrene as a means of replicating as accurately as possible.



Figure 10.

Silence in a Cagean sense, as a point of noticing, still interested me as a method in my practice, however instead of applying this inward to the gallery, I had begun to draw from aspects in my everyday encounters— both from my own life and from the wider context of Auckland’s increasingly fast-paced expansion and gentrification. Although it took some time to realise, the introduction of renovation materials coincided with the beginning of the renovation of my Father’s house. Through the processes of watching a space with which I was intimately familiar being taken apart and entirely reconfigured, I subsequently began to notice construction and renovation everywhere. At the time of the renovation (2012) I was living in the Grey Lynn, a suburb which was in the later stages of gentrification which had rapidly displaced a large number of its original inhabitants. I became increasingly aware of how renovation fits into the landscape of gentrification— how I too fit into this landscape as an art student looking for cheap rent⁶. Although this figured, at the time, in a very peripheral way in my work, it was these observations of renovation, gentrification and displacement that contributed to my interest in renovation as a subject in my practice.

Between making this work at Te Tuhi and my end-of-year work in 2013, *Following a logic of renovation* (85 Wharf Rd, Te Atatu Peninsula, 0610) I began to think about how I might make a work that hovered between the site of the gallery and a site that was pointedly external and unrelated to the gallery. I was interested in making works that operated in a way that pointed towards specific sites and a renovation context, but also contained a kind of emptiness, a space for a viewer to project upon.

⁶ It is widely recognized that artists and ‘bohemians’ play a key role in the establishment of gentrification in working class neighborhoods “Cultural analysis of gentrification identified the individual artist as an important agent in the initiation of gentrification in old working class neighborhoods. Alternative theorizations, emphasizing the role of property capital, traced a second stage where capital follows the artist into gentrified localities, commodifying it’s cultural assets and displacing the original artist/gentrifiers” Coaffee, S. C. J. (2005). “Art, Gentrification and Regeneration— From Artist as Pioneer to Public Arts.” *European Journal of Housing Policy* 5(1): 39-58.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

2. A Quarter Spanish White – *Taste, Aspiration, Association and Desire*

To describe a building as beautiful...suggests more than a mere aesthetic fondness; it implies an attraction to the particular way of life this structure is promoting through its roof, door handles, window frames, staircase and furnishings. A feeling of beauty is a sign that we have come upon a material articulation of certain of our ideas of a good life(De Botton 2008)

In *The Architecture of Happiness* Alain De Botton suggests that there is a defining psychological logic behind the types of buildings people are drawn to. As an example, De Botton refers to a series of dwellings designed by Le Corbusier for French Industrialist Henry Frugés in 1923. Frugés asked Le Corbusier to build these apartments for the purpose of housing his factory workers and their families. The houses are cited as being quintessentially modernist and Le Corbusier as being particularly proud of their lack of “local and rural allusions”. For Le Corbusier, they represented a break from tradition and a new idealism situated around technological advancement, supposed function and simplicity. De Botton writes, “in the houses he designed for the labourers, his admiration for industry and technology expressed itself in expanses of concrete, undecorated surfaces and naked light bulbs”. However these houses provided little comfort for their inhabitants—most of whom had come from small rural villages—instead acting as a constant reminder of the grind of their daily working environment. The factory workers slowly adapted the Le Corbusian spaces into a style that recalled the architecture of the villages from which they had come.

Unconcerned with spoiling the great architects designs, they added to their houses pitched roofs, shutters, small casement windows, flowered wallpaper and picket fences in the vernacular style, and, once that was done, set about installing a variety of ornamental fountains and gnomes at their front gardens... The tenants’ tastes may have run in different directions from those of their architect, but the logic behind the exercise of those tastes was identical. Just like the renowned modernist, the factory workers had fallen for a style evoking the qualities with which their own lives had been insufficiently endowed(De Botton 2008)

The adaptation of the Corbusian flats by the factory workers shows a clear distinction and separation between the preferences of ‘taste-makers’ like Corbusier, and his intended occupants. Far from finding the brutal modernist apartments emancipating, as Corbusier had perhaps intended, the factory workers adapted the spaces in a manner that sat more in line with the aesthetic values they felt to be most essential. What seems important here is not the question of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ taste, but rather how it is that these tastes come to be. I began to become interested in the idea of taste when my Father and Grandfather were renovating the house, which I now live in. When the house was being painted, my Grandfather had spoken to the painter and asked for advice on colour tints to paint the house. The painter recommended Spanish White, noting it was the most popular colour for rental properties. My Grandfather agreed that he thought it was nice and neutral and gave the go-ahead for the interior to be painted in a quarter Spanish white for the walls and full Spanish White for the doors and door frames, as he thought it would provide nice contrast. This decision was met with a considerable amount of resistance from my Father when he caught wind, and still years later, remains a sore point.

Though I had been focusing on materials and ideas related to renovation for a while, this particular moment stuck in my memory as a particularly interesting example of the contentiousness of taste—that something so seemingly innocuous could become a battleground. I think that in my work this year I have been looking at ways of highlighting this push and pull that taste brings, and the utter subjectivity of it. As a result, the works I have made this year have quoted particular architectural features and fixings that seem to me to function as triggers for this kind of response. The first work that acted in this way for me was *Hacienda facade, a quarter*

Figure 13.



Figure 14.





Figure 15.

Spanish white a work that I presented initially for a group show at Papakura Art Gallery called *Carpet Burn* and then re-worked for a studio critique.

Prior to making this work, I had been thinking about an anecdote that had been continuously repeated to me by my Grandmother—it was about a house my Grandfather and she had moved in to. They bought a ‘Hacienda’, Spanish mission style house that was at the time the absolute height of middle class fashion⁷. In typical Hacienda style, the doors were all arched; the balconies had decorative wrought iron railing; the roof had a border of terracotta tiles (which hid the more functional corrugated iron) and the walls were hand-plastered in a regular semi-circular pattern that typified the style. Even as my Grandmother’s Alzheimers progressed and her memory began to fade the stories about the house still stuck, the details became less clear, but this place was etched firmly in her mind. In the repetition of this story, it became clear to me that this house represented a kind of pinnacle for my Grandmother, a manifestation of my Grandparent’s economic and social aspirations and a signifier of a particularly middle-class taste at the time.

This repeated description stuck out to me as a manifestation of how architecture can act as a kind of empty vessel into which people pour their hopes, aspirations and desires. Like heirlooms, the places I have encountered sit as specters in the periphery of my memory, and in their recollection even the most generic seeming features can become imbued with personal association. An arched doorway recalls a passed-down distant Mediterranean fantasy; Resene’s quarter Spanish white is the colour of contention; tiles recall the sterility of hospitals and retirement and Jif for me is the scent of an oppressive cleanliness.

Furthermore, in examining the individual aspects that make up a particular space like an interior, it becomes clear that cleverly emotive marketing is also at work, that is, tailoring an interior environment that *seems* personal and appeals to people’s innate desires. Gib board, for example uses the slogan ‘look beyond the surface’ intimating both a literal reference to the plaster that lies beneath the paper surface on which the slogan is printed; and that consumers can rely on Gib, that it is a brand with substance. In a promotional video for Gib, a sales representative is quoted saying “look beyond the surface is a way of highlighting that there is more to Gib than just plasterboard” (GIB 2011). What is being sold here is the idea of a lifestyle, and that as a product it can be relied upon *more*, that they go beyond regular plasterboard. Similarly, the naming of paint colours clearly displays a marketing strategy that uses allegory as a means of building meaning in interior decoration. For instance ‘Potential’ is a name used to describe a neutral off white colour or indeed Spanish white is perhaps a way of trying to evoke a similar sense of exoticism, fantasy and luxury that the Hacienda style plastering of the 70’s did previously.

⁷ Appropriately, the word Hacienda translates from Spanish to a large estate property or substantial dwelling on a plantation. As a result, the appropriation of this architectural style in New Zealand in the late 60’s and early 70’s has a particularly aspirational edge. It could be seen both as a kind of yearning both for the supposed exoticism and luxury of a Mediterranean lifestyle, and the accompanying social and economic status and power that the Spanish Hacienda afforded its owners.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.

3. Ordinary Habits – *The everyday, Installation Practice and Material*

Kate Newby's new walls, column and carpet are not any claim to know better, to clean up proportions, say, or to improve an ambience. Simply, tactically and —I'd say, with more tact—they present us with a re-imagining of the...Gallery space, even if one that might shift vividly our experience of familiar rooms. (Bywater 2009)

Kate Newby often deals with space in an improvisational and provisional seeming manner. Even her largest works—concrete ramps tinted in primary blues or greens or reds— have an air of casualness, evidenced through hand prints, informal puddles, pull tabs from cans and various small twigs caught up in the process. Of course, the construction of such a huge object takes careful planning, but there is somewhat of an attitude in Newby's work of 'making do' and drawing from her immediate environment. Newby represents another type of site related practice; an approach that is responsive to her environment, but casually circumvents the gallery, referring instead to the world directly outside. A press release for a recent exhibition *Maybe I won't go to sleep at all* at La Loge suggests:

While the propositions Newby develops emanate from specific dialogues with sites, they seem to always go beyond pure site-specificity toward carrying out a quality of transposable form.(Newby 2013)

The view out the window; the footpath outside; the place she sleeps at night, whether that is home or hotel; the city she is in at the time—and the way in which she travels through it—are all things that figure into the artists dealings with her given site. Large swathes of fabric, used to divide or reconfigure space in her installations, are applied to various facets of Newby's life and altered through functional use: hung on her roof during a storm, picnicked upon or left in her mothers water tank to develop patina. Bringing in these objects to reconfigure sites, Newby brings the outside in and turns the viewer's focus outwards into the world.

My first encounter to Newby's work was in Myer's park in central Auckland in 2010. The artist had cast a series of 'seats' made of various rocks, scoria and crystals, embedded in concrete mounds—I remember finding them strikingly ugly. Yet the memory of them stuck. Newby's work for me recalls the affectionate mishaps in an attempt to 'do it yourself'. What Newby's work often does is to take notice of the most banal, or ordinary non-aestheticized aspects of the everyday and transform them into something that shifts the focus of the art-viewer from the monumental to incidental. The viewer is then left to ponder about the gum stuck to the sidewalk, the litter in their pockets, small puddles that form slight variations when pouring or how bricks look when they are mortared together by someone that lacks professional skill.

This casually responsive approach that Newby takes to her environment is one that has influenced my practice. An important aspect of this is what I see as a lack of idealisation of the 'everyday'—it is translated and presented in a manner that maintains its ordinariness and it's sometime ugliness. This idea of the 'everyday' was initially coined in 1980 by Michel de Certeau in *The practice of everyday life*, as a means of beginning to theorise ordinary practices as being something other than an "obscure background to social activity" and rather something deserving of both articulation and theorization. In the introduction de Certeau notes:

The analysis of images broadcast by television (representation) and the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complimented by a study of what the cultural consumer "makes" or "does" during this time and with these images. The same goes with urban space, the products purchased in the super-market, the stories and the legends distributed by newspapers...(de Certeau 2011)



Figure 18.

Nearly at the end of the hallway, next to a communal bathroom, just before turning the corner : a small room with a single bed (navy coverlet and white pillow), a lazyboy chair (in navy vinyl), an analogue television (black), a small portable CD player (silver, playing mozart or strauss) and a vase of fake flowers (plastic). Pale mint coloured walls with a slightly darker trim and a dark grey nylon carpet . With a double wardrobe (half- filled), an ensuite toilet (no shower), thin floral curtains on a pale blue background, empty picture hooks and a view out to the veranda and garden border

Though not overtly political-seeming in intent, Newby's work goes some way towards deflecting systems of power or commodification in its ability to adapt its given circumstance to the artist's own ends. I think particularly of the large carpet piece in the air-lock corridor of Newby's Walters Prize work in 2012, spelling out in large handwritten letters 'feel it forever'—a phrase that Newby stated in her artist talk as being from the label of a bottle of pomegranate juice. There is something really compelling for me in this, taking an empty marketing slogan—designed specifically to make it's consumers feel something, but devoid of any kind of human touch—and injecting meaning back into it, re-claiming the phrase as her own. Newby's adaptations have lightness and mobility to them, they refuse to be categorized as political, yet often seem to contain within them the ability to subvert and escape the system in which they are presented.

I am interested in this idea of the 'everyday', both in the manner in which Newby and de Certeau articulate it, and also consequently in how it has been recently co-opted and commodified as shorthand for a type of style: recognizable through expensive handmade-looking objects, furnishings and environments, rendered in raw materials. I think for instance of the boutique home-ware shop *everyday needs* and their spin-off blog *the everyday*⁸ in which beautiful objects display their authenticity through an uneven patina, raw wood or natural fibers. Or lifestyle magazines, that describe "flexible spaces for happy people", authenticity is now marketable and it comes with a hefty price tag⁹.

The kinds of spaces I want to reference through my work occupy the other end of the spectrum. I am more interested in examining aspects of my everyday that bring up questions for me around taste—the kind of objects, furnishings and environments that, though taken from specific personal associations with sites, might be available in MITRE 10 catalogues. As such they are recognisably ordinary and ubiquitously available. The inclusion of text as a component of an artwork towards the middle of this year interested me as an opportunity to co-opt the language of real estate marketing or lifestyle magazines in a manner that points towards this question of taste and how it manifests as a kind of signifier of class. In a critique of the work I made for Talk Week, *Flexible Spaces for happy people (almost, almost)* various people spoke about the text as evoking recognizable personal associations with the houses of their aunts or parents. I was interested to note how when using a parallel text, viewers seemed to oscillate between the site in the installation and the site described in the text, without attempting to link the two together too concretely. The use of text seemed to me a way of evoking similar concerns to the work *Hacienda façade a quarter Spanish white* around taste and style, but without becoming too prescriptive—it allowed viewer's the space to move with their own ideas of what the text evoked, in relationship to places that they had in turn encountered.

⁸ <http://www.everyday-needs.com/blogs/the-everyday>

⁹ I should note here that I own several objects from everyday needs and browse their web-store regularly, their tactics are obviously successful. The current trend for being 'eco-friendly', which I absolutely buy into, offers it's consumers a kind of moral high-ground and the opportunity to 'support local' and buy 'quality handmade goods'. However to do so is exceedingly expensive—it is a luxury lifestyle, disguised by its rustic-ness.



Figure 20.



Figure 21.

4. Approaching the Ready-made — *Contemporary contexts*

Earlier this year, it was suggested to me in conversation that my work might operate as a ready-made. Initially I resisted this; my idea of the ready-made was firmly entrenched in what I saw as a Duchampian convention. That is, the notion that the ready-made was untampered with by the artist and that it was a choice that, in Marcel Duchamp's own words "was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste". My work, conversely draws from specific visual cues, taken not from a relationship of indifference, but rather from architectural details that are intensely familiar to me, and furthermore is precisely interested in both good and bad taste. However, in looking to the idea of the ready-made in a contemporary context, particularly through the lens of the Boris Groys' article *Marcel Duchamp's Absolute Art*, and artists such as Danh Vo and Luke Willis Thompson, the notion becomes significantly more complex. I wanted to open up and examine this idea of the ready-made in contemporary art not so much because I see my work operating explicitly or solely as ready-made, but rather because I wanted to look at what the ready-made, as a strategy *does*, and how that might register in various ways within my own work.

In the article *Marcel Duchamp's Absolute Art* Boris Groys (2012) begins by suggesting that Duchamp's ready-mades are a way of revealing a mechanism for the 'production of the new', restructuring the established mode of thinking around art at the time and throwing the distinction between traditionally valorized artworks and traditionally profane everyday objects in disarray¹⁰. Groys writes, "When... one refrains from physically transforming the object, the question of the mechanism that produces the revaluation of values is posed in an appropriately radical form". Accordingly, Groys suggests that Duchamp's contemporaries feared that the act of the ready-made heralded the end of art, and that by devalorizing traditional art, artistic practice as such had become defunct. Instead, what the ready-made could be seen to emphasize is the value of the profane: the everyday, banal aspects of the world entering into the realm of art.

However, Boris Groys cites that if Duchamp's ready-mades operated on a register in which their sole purpose was to represent the 'profane realm', then a single ready-made could suffice to prove this point. Instead, Groys suggests that the ready-made can be seen to "manifest artists hidden desire, their unconscious rituals and fetishistic fixations... the profane realm ceasing to be homogenous, becomes the unconscious' field of articulation". Perhaps what Groys is suggesting is that in a contemporary context, what has become important in the ready-made conversation isn't so much the profane nature of the objects themselves, but rather the process of selection used by artists. Through this selection the ready-made moves beyond the pure 'revaluation of values' and to the idea of the subjectivity of the artist, evidenced through their specific choices. The focus instead becoming what these objects, sites or situations point towards; the contexts that they evoke. Groys cites:

Today's art diverts the observer's attention from the chosen objects in order to direct it toward the context in which they appear. New art after Duchamp is concerned with the previously neglected social, political, semiotic or mass media contexts of art. An artist's choice of his object is... subject to cultural-economic logic: this choice is supposed to draw attention to contexts in which art appears and functions. Here again the attention is shifted from normative, "autonomous" spaces to the profane contexts of art and the profane ways it is used. Here again, every such individual profane space in which art is situated becomes a sign for the total space of life, social activity and political struggle.(Groys 2012)

¹⁰ To Valorize is to "give value to", but also secondarily connotes fixing the value of something (often via governmental intervention). The primary meaning of profane is "to treat (something sacred) with abuse, irreverence, or contempt" and "to debase by a wrong, unworthy, or vulgar use" is used repeatedly by Groys to describe Duchamp's use of everyday objects as ready-mades, it also seems to refer to both the particular objects (especially the *Fountain* as a receptacle of human waste) and his later assertion that one of the functions of ready-mades, the "revaluation of values", was reflective of a wider cultural shift to a secular desire to "find a cultural signifier for the totality of the world — after the death of God". Groys later extrapolates on this, indicating that Duchamp's *Fountain* can be compared to Jesus Christ (via Kierkegaard) "Christianity takes the figure of a human being and puts it, unchanged, in the context of religion... The new artwork looks really new only if it resembles, in a certain sense, every other ordinary, profane thing. And the art space can be seen as new only if it resembles any other profane space."



Figure 22.

Luke Willis Thompson's *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* is currently showing at the Auckland Art Gallery as part of the 2014 Walters Prize, however I will discuss from the perspective of my initial encounter in 2012, as I have made a choice not to go and see the work again. The work involved viewer's encountering the empty Hopkinson Cundy (now Hopkinson Mossman) gallery site and being directed by gallery staff to a waiting taxi. The taxi took the viewer's through a carefully constructed route, stopping in the driveway of a house in Epsom. The house, a Victorian age villa was in a comparative state of disrepair, at odds with its carefully renovated neighbours. On the veranda of the house sat two docents, who unlocked the door to the house and indicated that viewers were able to go into the house—but did not usher the viewer over the threshold. The viewers were then left to sift through the house at their own pace, before leaving to return to the gallery.

The house itself appeared to be home to a number of inhabitants, but didn't appear to have been staged, altered or intended to be presented as a spectacle—rather the house and its contents were an extensive and constantly shifting ready-made (in both scale and content), determined not by the artist, but by the people who lived there and the fluctuations of their daily life.

Although empty during viewing hours, there was obviously a family living in the house—evidenced through informal family photographs, traces of everyday activity and detritus throughout the house—giving the house the feeling of being simultaneously inhabited and evacuated. For me, this translated to an almost palpable feeling of intrusion, the utter uncomfortableness in the act of going through someone's personal space without a sense of invitation—like a voyeur or a stalker. This was combined with a feeling of curiosity, of the desire to find *something*.

Information from the gallery text, word of mouth and various clues embedded within the work—such as high school art boards, family photos and letters—pieced together to reveal the fact that the house wasn't that of a stranger, but was in fact the artist's family home. Marcel Duchamp's claim that ready-mades were defined by "...visual indifference" (Duchamp 1961) is undone in Willis Thompson's work. The ready-made is not indifferent to the artist, rather it is incredibly familiar—the vulnerability inherent in the action of presenting this as ready-made is what made the work so palpably affectual.

Dominant readings of the work at the time circulated around a politics of class, taste and gentrification, however to me this seems to oversimplify something that was incredibly complicated. The absence of information, coupled with the incredible physical presence of the house and its containments offered the viewers the opportunity to place themselves within the work, to direct their own responses and resultantly, to respond subjectively. Through this work, viewers came face to face with their own presuppositions, assumptions, judgments and desires. As such, accounts for Willis Thompson work have varied widely.

inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam operates simultaneously as artwork and as real life and as such makes the complexity of its context explicit.

The artist Danh Vo deals with similar themes to Willis Thompson, tracing the fault-lines of both his personal and collective social, political and cultural history. *Where the Lions Are* exhibited at Kunsthalle Basel in 2009, is a rough translation of 'Hic Sunt Leones', a Latin phrase used by Roman cartographers to mark out spaces that were yet to be colonized—such as Vo's native Vietnam. As the title suggests, each of the elements in this exhibition contain within them reference to Vietnam's history of colonization. The ready-made appears surreptitiously in Vo's works, and can be seen to work on multiple levels. Most obviously, this can be seen in the work titled, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* which is a chandelier he presented taken from the ballroom in the Hotel Majestic in Paris, the site at which the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1973. Vo describes this object as a "mute witness" to an event that proclaimed to bring peace to Vietnam, but instead lead to the invasion of the South of Vietnam by the North and subsequently Vo's family fleeing as refugees to Denmark.



Figure 23.

However, Vo also employs the ready-made in less obvious ways; branches propped up against the wall are taken from a tree reportedly sits atop the unmarked grave of the artist's brother, tacitly highlighting incredibly personal aspects of Vo's biography. Intricate botanical drawings made by French missionaries, sent in the initial colonization of Vietnam in the 19th century are printed onto wallpaper, embedded in the architecture in a manner that seems so innocuous yet represents a classic colonizing desire to classify, categorize and claim. Vo's wallpaper could be seen to serve to remind the viewer that even the most initially innocuous seeming things, when unfolded and examined, can reveal systems of power and control. In a similar vein another work *Tombstone for Nguyen Thi Ty* (2009), draws from a previous work exhibited by Vo in which he stacked a fridge, a washing machine and a television, all items given to Vo's Grandmother by an immigrant relief program and the Catholic Church when she arrived to Germany as a refugee. Critic Luigi Fassi writes:

Aestheticizing this array of goods by turning it into a teetering monolith, Vo highlights the almost comical blatancy with which the gift givers sought to socialize his Vietnamese grandmother in the image of modern capitalist standardization - and this new, normalized identity would, Vo implies in other works, persist unto death and beyond.(Fassi 2010)

In *Where the Lions Are* Vo had these objects carved in marble and granite, noting that the object would act as his Grandmother's tombstone upon her death—the tombstone, may currently be a handmade sculpture, but it ominously awaits it's ready-made function.

Vo and Willis Thompson both employ the ready-made in unexpected ways as a means of drawing together aspects of their own biographies with wider socio-political contexts. In doing so, the artist expand the understanding of the ready-made to encapsulate places, motifs and assemblages of information (as well as the traditionally understood autonomous object) in a way that brings depth and nuance to the idea. Both artists make works rich in affect that engage with the experiential and the conceptual simultaneously. The trajectory that was launched by Duchamp has taken ready-made and unfolded it, opened it out and unpacked it. As Groys asserts, the role of the ready-made in contemporary art is not only to draw attention to the 'profane' (or everyday) and to 'revalue values', but to "draw attention to contexts in which art appears and functions". As such, the ready-mades distinct power lies in its inherent ability to make it's viewers consider it's original context in the world, and this particularly is something I keep in mind when making work. I think that the work of both Willis Thompson and Vo provide a new perspective on what a ready-made might be and how it might operate in a contemporary context.

Although my work doesn't operate solely in a ready-made manner, there are certain aspects that benefit from this analysis. In recent works such as my talk week work *Flexible homes for happy people (almost, almost)* and the works that I made for a group show at Fuzzy Vibes Gallery, titled respectively: *Another peculiar feature: the light switch was positioned on the left hand side of the door, which is to say the door swings in to the light switch.* and *The room at the rear of the property was added later, evidenced through a minor change in the tone of the brick foundations, a window (stippled with dashes) leading from the kitchen into the bedroom and the use of a different type of timber flooring (Matai as opposed to Rimu)* the ready-made strategy was employed in an indirect manner through both the language I employed in the titles and the motifs from which I was borrowing. The titles, descriptions of my Fathers house from memory, took the language of real estate marketing or lifestyle as form — in doing so relating the objects both to specific sites and a wider language that their context.

In reconsidering my work in the context of the ready-made, it seemed important for me to clarify how exactly I might identify the ready-made in my work.

One way of thinking about the ready-made could be to think about how the work would operate if not framed by an art context—by which I mean, the gallery or institution either presenting it or supporting it's operation as artwork. In this case, Willis Thompson's *inthisholeonthisislandwhereiam* would be, once again, his family

home; Vo's work would be variously: a chandelier, some ornate wallpaper, an oddly shaped tombstone and a collection of tree branches; and My work could appear as a seemingly badly painted wall, a collection of concrete chunks, a section of misplaced tiling or a pile of plastered Gib. Duchamp's ready-mades, likewise, would be a urinal, a bottle-rack, and a shovel. This process also works in reverse: a friend mentioned that whilst she was in France she saw bottle-racks everywhere in second hand stores and flea markets and was amused by thinking about these endless Duchamp works. Similarly, as an integral part of my research is to keep a careful eye out around construction sites for things that might be 'art waiting to happen'—objects and sites in the process of renovation that stand out in a way that communicates a kind of rupture, becoming tacit vessels for subjectivities such as taste.

One might also think of the ready-made materially, at the end of the text *Apropos of readymades* (1961), Duchamp posits "A final remark to this egomaniac's discourse: since the tubes of paint used by an artist are manufactured and ready made products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are "ready-made aided" and also works of assemblage". By that same token the Gib, concrete, tiles, Jif or the house paint that I use in my own work, are arguably ready-made and as such refer to the ready-made material language of construction and renovation. They also create contexts through which to understand or think about process and the appropriation of methods that belong to other modes of 'making' such as building, maintenance and renovation.



Figure 24.



Figure 25.

Appedices

i. Thesis exhibition plans

My preferred choice of space for the end of year is the left side of Gallery one, the work I have in mind has been developed specifically for this site and in particular uses one of the non-structural walls, opposite the entryway to the gallery as an entry point into the work. The work I have in mind involves three main elements, cutting a doorway in the existing wall, building a wall that runs perpendicular to the existing wall to enclose the space and tiling a large section of the space. It also involves a smaller element, using frosted wall sconces to adjust the light in the space.

Doorway

I plan to cut a door into the wall that runs directly in front of the main entrance to Gallery One. I want to build in an arched doorway, providing an alternative entry point into my work for viewer's, this will be coupled with building a wall (running perpendicular to the current wall) which will create an enclosed space. The doorway will be constructed by cutting into the existing MDF or Gib on both sides of the wall with a jig-saw and removing the panel, and then adjusting the framing to create a doorway space. The doorway will be 1200mm wide, meaning that only one stud will need to be removed, assuming that the existing wall is built with standard framing measurements. I will not cut in to the baseplate, so that will remain intact and exposed for the duration of the exhibition. Once the exhibition is completed, I will replace stud and the panel of MDF/Gib and plaster it back to its original state. In consultation with a builder, it was indicated that the best way to construct an archway would be to cut the cladding into the arched shape whilst it was still attached, creating an even line and then removing it, after that the framing can be adjusted.

New Wall

The new built wall will be constructed in standard framing timber, at a height of 2400mm (standard domestic architecture height), It will run all the way to the opposite wall and be anchored on both walls, with a doorway nearest to the opposite end. It will most likely be clad in Gib and will be easy to take down and remove. I am as yet undecided on whether the wall will be clad on both sides or not and think it would be good to figure this out in negotiation with the other people showing in Gallery 1, so far I have spoken to Ziggy and Lucy and they have indicated that they are interested showing in Gallery 1 as well, and also that they will potentially be building walls.

Tiling

I also plan to have a section of this space tiled, this will be done on top of a plastic carpet adhesive, this will cause no damage to the gallery floor and will be relatively easy to remove. I have tested this out in a previous work.

Wall sconces

Within this space I intend to install wall sconces on both the wall I have built and the gallery walls, providing a soft diffused light, these will not be wired in, but will plug in to an extension cord (to be hidden in wall). The overhead fluorescents will be turned off so the wall sconces will provide the main sources of light in the space I have built.

ii. Documentation of Final exhibition

The work that resulted, titled *Nearly at the end of the hallway, just before turning the corner*, predominantly followed the outlined plan detailed above. I built a large, self-contained space using an existing temporary wall alongside a wall that I built at the same height, intersecting the gallery and creating an angled four wall enclosed space. This new space contained two entry/exit points— an arched doorway immediately opposite to the entry of St Paul st Gallery 1, which was cut in to the existing wall, and a standard domestic sized doorway, built in to the wall that I had constructed. Instead of using the overhead fluorescents I used frosted wall sconces with halogen eco-bulbs, installed into the walls at a domestic height, creating a soft, warm diffused glow—rather than the even cold-white gallery standard lighting. Roughly in the middle of the enclosed space was a tiled expanse, which mapped (to scale) my grandmother, Dorothy Murdoch's bedroom, in the secure dementure unit, Seadrome, where she currently resides. The tiles were cut around an electrical outlet positioned on the floor as a means of taking the gallery site not as a given, but as specific.

Accompanying the space was a parallel text and a list of materials (both included below). The text was necessary as a means of evoking specific ideas around taste and renovation in relation to the what could be perceived as a generic seeming space, a way of citing a subjective element to the work. As such, the first part of the text detailed the room mapped out in tiles, and the second part a now non-existent living room of my fathers house prior to renovation, from which the ready-made sconces I used were taken. The material list had particular significance as I believe it is a way of simultaneously cataloguing the generic items used in renovation processes, pointing out to the viewer that the materials used as 'genuine' (rather than an aesthetic facsimile), and also stating that the space itself is constructed rather than pre-existing.

Figure 26. Nearly at the end of the hallway, just before turning the corner

A small room with pale mint coloured walls with a slightly darker trim and dark grey nylon carpet. With a single bed (navy coverlet and white pillow), a lazy boy chair (in navy vinyl), an analogue television (black), a small portable C.D player (silver, playing Mozart or Schubert) and a vase of fake flowers (plastic). On the right hand side double wardrobe (half-filled), ensuite toilet (no shower), thin floral curtains on a pale blue background, empty picture hooks and a view out to the veranda and garden border.

At one point, a feature wall in burnt orange was painted in contrast to the remaining three walls (a deep aubergine purple). The fireplace was made of heavily textured brickwork with an outdated wood burning stove and a thick mantle made of mahogany. Carpet has been pulled up, revealing wooden floorboards that had been partially varnished around the perimeter of the room. Curtains made of calico covered a set of French doors opening out to a concrete patio, with scoria feature walls and a rock garden.

Figure 27. Material List

Arched Door opening (cut into existing gallery wall)

2200x900mm

Standard Door opening (built into new wall framing)

1980x900

Half-round Frosted Wall Sconces — Ecolife lighting 3B series

Philips Tornado Light Bulb Screw 23w Energy Saver Warm White

Dimensions variable

150x100 H1.2 Timber framing

GIB Wallboard

GIB-GRAB SCREW SCAV 6x32

SUREFIX Chipboard Screws SQ Zinc 10G 75mm

Tradepro Self Adhesive Joint Tape 153mm

GIB Tradeset 90 Minutes Plaster

Hamiltons Hilite Air-drying Finishing Plaster

Easysand Sealer Trade X SCRUC Undercoat

12415x3460x176

150x150mm Ceramic Tiles

Cement based Tile-adhesive

White Grout

Mortar

3670x2990x1190x1140x1460x3470

Figure 28.



Figure 29.





Figure 30.



Figure 31.



Figure 32.

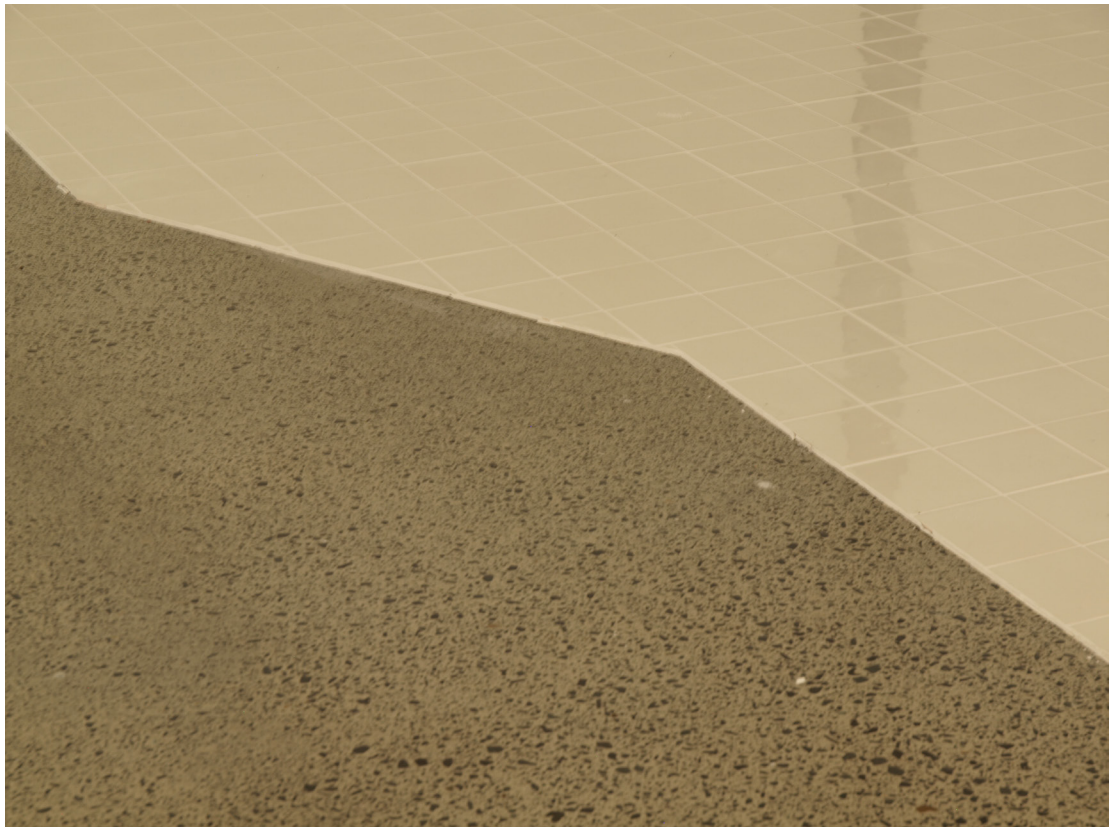


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