

Ossuary

by Ilsa Colsell

If we think about a constant layering of one material over another, of a return to an object in a studio, to its surface, observing the operator in repeated communion with its uppermost accessible layer and for us then to take ourselves down into the intervening spaces, where each of these layers meets another. Seams resembling the human body, where voids that have no defining shape of their own are drawn by the boundaries of those that they neighbour, expanding and contracting in response to changing pressure or release. Malleable nothings in a system of constant change. The sculpture is itself, developing from these layers and their resulting interstice, formed in a returning loop of activity and retreat. Each modification made by both additive and subtractive methods, delayed by drying and thinking time, material applied in one visit, paint glopped or plaster filler smeared to its surfaces and the next sanding, cutting or scraping back, inflating and deflating the object as it goes. Each of these process-returns a digging into or an expansion of the developing strata below. All of which are interrupting and discontinuing these contours of meeting and allowing layers to bleed up and downward, pushing at and through each other until all are intertwined, dependent, their actions evidenced and manifest upon one another.

In this system of production an object might never complete itself, might leave its surface open to be repeatedly worked upon, its fellows similarly worked on, all pulsating up and down, in and out, in the hands of the maker. Such simultaneity in the surfaces' provisionality and potential completion allowing for seemingly cosmetic 'final' layers to be used as commonplace within its entire fabric. Colour

not just as the superficial disguise as we often consider it, added at the last to finish or square an illusion, but as integral and wound alternately throughout the meat of this accreted structure. Pale tinted tiers of material, marking previous attentions, pigments mixed with plaster, worked into, discarded, obscured or later drawn out and revealed, augmented and deepened to pull the eye towards one surface and away from another.

Could we think of ourselves descending down, to anthropomorphosise further, right into the sculptures bones, to its internal armature and consider what all this rests on or *in* even. Bones equally holding things from the outside in, pressing toward matter, keeping it contained like the skull. Here such outward limitations might be provided temporarily so that the space within could be filled, allowing a material to expand and its changing properties to set hard before *de-boning* and removing this improvised shuttering. The resulting object then shedding its skin on the studio floor and emerging formed as if arrested in a state of constant resistance to a now removed other. An inverse surface that would likely still invite being returned back into this whirring system of accumulation, all process marks obliterated by further layers being added or abraded.

Structural bones might also be found or scavenged from the maker's surroundings. Their happened upon and recognisable forms consumed into the processes of the room, removed from their domestic utility, given new roles and placed alongside objects that have been entirely conjured from within the studio; all forming and re-forming in response to each other. The hollow bone too, emptied of material

marrow (and perhaps belonging to former experimentation), offers itself up, creating an opportunity for another more outwardly directed register of apprehending. Here the surface is again one repeatedly returned to but this time held in, close to the body rather than away from it, a line of string worked around the object in a slow looping motion, hands rotating it, the action and the material transforming the exterior into a single, visually demanding layer. Its complex, optically shifting surface suppressing any imagined or even real volume beneath to create an entity that appears to us as *all* skin, closed and complete like an impenetrable fruit, materialised instead of grown and with no way in or out to reveal or consume it. Chimeric and vibrating, these shapes lift themselves just slightly away from the solid and conversely open frameworks they rest on, separate in both their seemingly mobile figuration and comprehending accessibility.

This contrast between one element and another, top and bottom, seat and sitter offers a great deal to the now gathering forms who continue to oscillate, swapping object and plinth between themselves until third, unfixed composites emerge. Read upwards or down, the sculptures or their supporting platforms, using the same processes, the same cadence, might easily be pushing up as pulling down, displaying as well being displayed. And where tone and surface texture might be oftentimes homogenised by shared process and primary material use, (plaster brightening the palette to an almost universally high luminance through the principal of additive mixing), it is here in this calmed space of equivalence, as each part slowly vies for its position that stark difference can emerge. Intense colour disparities turned up and down by the hand application of tinted gesso (again a whitened, priming or base material), grab at the visual system, playing with depth, movement and figure/ground perception. And where the assembled group does not allow or concede that something must

be weighted to the floor, to take the role of traditional plinth (carrying or being compressed depending on your view), the forms instead hang themselves out from hooks, bulbous and distended as if pulled or crumpled, the pressure of holding upwards too great a burden on their apparently stable geometry. The solid and reliable made vulnerable, formally caught in their moment of collapse.

The sculptures, now removed from their previous site of making to a contained clearing, linger together as concatenated players, richly marked and at the same time not giving complete visual access to how they were created, denying the viewer any easy way in. Offering only suggestive cues, material evidences, slight tells from previous usage, revealing this layer as overlaying that one and alternating apparent masses with implied or real emptiness or density, until all surfaces coalesce across the room into a single scene of ambiguous and shimmering exteriority.

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She has also written essays and short stories on and alongside the work of other artists, included in exhibition catalogues, artist monographs and in various contemporary art journals, working on themes around the composite art object, collage, film-montage, biography, loss, spiritualism and the stage. She is also the author of *Malicious Damage: The Defaced Library Books of Kenneth Halliwell and Joe Orton, 2013*, graphic design by Roland Brauchli and published by Donlon Books.