

DOMOBAAL

REBECCA GELDARD WRITING ABOUT MHAIRI VARI'S WORK, EXTRACTED FROM THE ESSAY FOR OYSTER GRIT, A GROUP EXHIBITION AT DOMOBAAL IN SEPTEMBER 2007.

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MHAIRI VARI'S BRAND OF ECLECTIC METAMORPHOSIS TAKES PHYSICAL FORM THROUGH TIME-INTENSIVE DIY PROCESSES. SUBURBAN BRIC-A-BRAC, TOOLS AND NATURAL MATERIALS ARE CUT, PUNCTURED AND ADHERED FOR THE BIGGER SCULPTURAL PICTURE. FINAL PRODUCT THOUGH, SEEMS MORE ABOUT THE END POINT TO A VITAL CUMULATIVE PROCESS THAN CONCEPTUAL RESOLUTION. VARI'S PLAYFUL APPROACH TO THE PROPERTIES OF HER CHOSEN MATERIALS OFTEN YIELDS FANTASTICAL, BORDERLINE SINISTER RESULTS. THE FOUND AND PROCURED ELEMENTS SHE BRINGS TOGETHER ENABLE THE EVOCATIVE HISTORIES OF THE OBJECTS TO IMPLY CULTURAL CONTEXT, WHILE INCONGRUOUS TEXTURES PROVIDE AN ASSOCIATIVE CAT FLAP BETWEEN VISCERAL AND COGNITIVE RESPONSE. FAMILIARITY IN THIS CASE IS NOT A VISUAL DECOY BUT THE AFFIRMATIVE TREAT WE ARE REWARDED WITH FOR NEGOTIATING THE SPIKY EXTREMITIES OF HER OTHERWORLDLY MANIFESTATIONS.

THE COMPONENTIAL BUILD OF THESE HYBRID FORMS SUGGESTS A NEED TO DEFINE THE LIMITS OF THE WORKING PROCESS AND THE PHYSICAL CAPABILITIES OF THE STUFF FROM WHICH THEY GROW. IT'S HARD NOT TO RECOIL FROM A SEEMINGLY WRITHING HEAP OF UNTITLED MATERIAL CURRENTLY RESIDING IN VARI'S STUDIO. BUT THIS POTENTIALLY INFESTED FORM IS ACTUALLY A PAIR OF JEANS RIVETED SOME 35,000 TIMES WITH PLASTIC CONSUMER LABEL TAGS. NUMBERS, IN TERMS OF DEFINING MASS, IT SEEMS, ARE KEY. IN AN EARLIER WORK, 'SHED', VARI PARTIALLY COATED ASSORTED ITEMS FROM SOMEONE'S GARDEN SANCTUARY IN COLOURED DISCS OF PLASTICINE (CUT FROM THE PRE-SCALED TUBES AS BOUGHT) TRANSFORMING THE PROSAIC JUMBLE INTO SOMETHING RESEMBLING AN EXOTIC BIRD.

VARI'S CURRENT PROJECT, FOR THIS THE EXHIBITION, WILL SHOWCASE HER PARADOXICALLY SURGICAL/PRODUCTION LINE COMMITMENT TO THE MAKING PROCESS: FOR SHE HAS PERSONALLY DRILLED IN THE REGION OF 16,000 HOMES IN A LARGE (BUT NOT MONUMENTALLY SO) BRANCH FOR A COMMUNITY OF FLAT-HEADED CLOUT NAILS. THE HEADS OF EACH HAVE BEEN INDIVIDUALLY PAINTED WITH MANY COLOURS OF NAIL POLISH TO GIVE THIS TWISTED NATURAL FORM A CONTRASTINGLY MACHISMOID, YET UNDENIABLY FEMININE FACELIFT. VARI MAY ESCHEW TRADITIONAL SCULPTURAL MATERIALS, YET SHE CREATES ENTITIES THAT REFLECT THE FORMAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE CRAFT. THE SCALE OF THIS PIECE IS BEYOND THE ORNAMENTAL BUT SMALL ENOUGH FOR US TO FEEL CHARMED BY, IF A LITTLE WARY, OF ITS SERPENT-LIKE BULK.

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NO MATTER HOW QUIETLY SHOCKING OR OUT OF THEIR TIME THE WORKS OF THESE EIGHT ARTISTS MAY APPEAR, THE APPARENT NON-CONFORMITY OF THIS GROUP IS DRIVEN BY INDIVIDUAL DEFAULT SETTINGS OVER A COLLECTIVE SENSE OF DESIGN. THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF PREOCCUPATION WITH TREND OR OWNERSHIP – AS IF THEY MIGHT BE CURATORS OF LOST THOUGHTS OR PROPERTY. THE PAST, THE MANY SOURCES OF REFERENCE UNASHAMEDLY ACKNOWLEDGED IN THESE WORKS, OFFERS AN ESSENTIAL PORTAL BETWEEN STATES, A NARNIAN WARDROBE OF UNKNOWN ELEMENTS THAT MUST BE NEGOTIATED IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING FORWARD, A BACKSTITCH DURING THE RE-HEM OF A SECOND-HAND GARMENT ESSENTIAL TO THE WENDING LINEAR STRENGTH OF THE HAND-SEWN WHOLE.

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