

CHANGING ROOMS



‘How To Live in A Flat’ by Rachel Adams
(Photo credit: Neil Mudd)

Exhibition: Rachel Adams – How To Live In A Flat (runs until 15th June 2014)

Venue: The Tetley, Hunslet Road, Leeds (thetetley.org). Free entrance.

By Neil Mudd

His surname was shorthand for something intricately pointless, but the cartoonist, William Heath Robinson, has faded from the public consciousness in recent years. This is a shame because he was the most celebrated Dada artist Britain never produced and therefore – you might assume – a most unlikely influence for a modern day conceptual artist.

Nevertheless, Heath Robinson is an acknowledged presence in 'How To Live In A Flat', the brilliant show by Glasgow based artist Rachel Adams. Part of an ongoing project entitled 'A New Reality', the flat in question occupies two rooms off the main gallery space of this wonderfully eccentric venue, the former art deco headquarters of the Tetley brewery firm.

Furnished in the style of the inter-war period and utilising existing fixtures of the building itself – parquet wood flooring, tubular steel, sharp geometric patterns, polished glass – the casual visitor could be forgiven for thinking he or she has wandered by accident into a serviced apartment. ('Right Ho, Jeeves!'). Look more closely, however, and all is not what it seems: those opera gloves, so nonchalantly cast aside on the day bed, are they fashioned from perspex? And why is there three of them? The effect is mischievous and faintly unsettling.

Other objects placed throughout the space are imbued with a similarly teasing absurdity – a desk lamp snakes away out of the easy reach of its user; a lounge is upholstered with loose swatches of fabric with no visible means of support; a disassembled chair is Marcel Breuer re-imagined by Alien designer H. R. Giger. Adams has stated that her purpose is to 'examine the contradictions of the highly functional furniture design of the 1930s.' In other words, it might look fantastic in a Sunday colour supplement, but just try living with it.

This witty and inventive show, which runs until 15th June 2014, is organic and evolving. Adams, along with invited guest artists, will make return visits to rearrange furniture, reshape pieces, add or subtract decorative items. With each revised configuration comes a new perspective, a fresh understanding. The version reviewed here is unlikely to be the version on show today.

The danger with conceptual art is that either the artist takes themselves a little too seriously, or the artwork loses sight of the spectator along the way. Rachel Adams, infused with the sinuous lunacy of Heath Robinson, suggests she is unlikely to fall into that trap.



How To Live In A Flat (detail) by Rachel Adams
(Photo credit: Neil Mudd)



'Irrational Logic & Long Reach' by Rachel Adams
(Photo credit: Neil Mudd)



‘Irrational Logic’ (detail) by Rachel Adams
(Photo credit: Neil Mudd)