

Untitled, after Nick Hornby

Brooke McGowan enters the white space of Nick Hornby's expanding modernism.

In 'Restitutions of the Truth in Painting', a text originally conceived for the Louvre, Jacques Derrida queried, 'Why always say of a painting that it renders, that it restitutes?' Derrida continued: 'it's a matter of knowing from where they *return*...if it's a question of knowing what revenue is produced by their out-of-service dereliction, what surplus value is unleashed by the annulment of their use value'.

Though the question in this case addresses painting, it is no less appropriate to the art and work of Nick Hornby; the terms of inquiry, however, must be changed. It is not a matter of knowing 'from *where* they return', but rather *to what* they return. At once celebrations and citations of differing images of the future, of modernist aims towards an ideal, each of Hornby's objects renders and returns the subject to the seemingly austere space of the object. As much formal object as citational form, each work exists in its own emergent archive, where what cannot be escaped is what always returns, within the work and outside of it: '*outside* the picture, *inside* the *picture*, and as a *picture*'.

What cannot be escaped in Hornby's work, in its adherent authorship and intentional subjectivity of the artist, is what is not immediately evident. The first object seen on entering the white space of Hornby's graduate show at Chelsea College of Art in 2007 was a large spiral structure reaching a few inches above head height. On an adjacent wall, a clip from *Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back*, lasting one minute and fifty-two seconds, played on a loop with apparently the same structure at the centre of the film image. Two further objects occupied the central space of the room. The first, *Untitled, after Brancusi* (2007), resembled a solitary Victorian table leg on a white plinth; the other, *Untitled, after Hans Arp* (2007), was a large and incomprehensible form: boxed, tilted and unyielding. Like the space itself, the works gleamed bright white.

And indeed, the space itself is important. 'I re-plastered all of the walls to make them perfectly pristine and white,' says the artist. The construction of a modernist space is undeniably relevant to the conceptual and actual process of making this installation. For if the white space introduces the safe conception of the museum or gallery, in which object, found or otherwise, can accumulate value, it is this process of presentation and performance that Hornby addresses. Each object in the room is *performed* as part of a process of discovery on the part of the spectator who, having first perceived the three primary sculptures in the centre of the room as independent modernist forms, comes to understand them as 'specific objects', as unitary forms but also as the distillation of a personal and political process of intention.

'It is a glyph for globalisation', says Hornby, in reference to *Untitled, after Hans Arp* (2007), which as a massive and uncanny stone white object is in fact derived from a freestanding Boeing 727 locker compartment. 'I was always interested in airplanes, little inscriptions you see in the sky, distant and far away. If you are close to them, you experience them not as objects but as a vessel. You can never really touch them.' As symbol, the work stands in for the abstract weight of systems of global displacement: transition and transnationalism greatly effect the lives of each one of us and yet, as actualities, they are at once as material and dematerialised as the airplane itself - remaining just beyond our reach: heavy, and as light as air.

'I hope that they are readable as purely formal objects', states Hornby. His objects continuously conflate expectation. The sweeping linear shape of *Untitled, after Brancusi* is intended as a reference to Brancusi's elegant and untouched sculptures, and equally to a turned Victorian table leg. Standing alone on a white plinth, this duality resonated throughout the space, echoed in a large print of the object on a wall close by and, in a far corner, by a table supported on equivalent hand-turned Victorian legs.

If what is at stake in the work of art in an era after the reproducibility of the image or production of the object is the potential loss of its 'aura', then Hornby's work addresses this peril by reproducing it. Instigating a repetition of image and object underlines the tension that lies between the perceptively manufactured item (ie, a table leg, any table leg) and one that is in actuality, hand made, with the aid of mechanical reproduction.

Lying casually in the corner of the room were photographs in a stack that testified to the process of producing these objects. Each object was made by hand, carved in plaster, through the misuse of the front axle of Hornby's father's car. Indeed, if capitalist dissolution enacts the *invisible hand*, it is sheer visibility of process in Hornby's work - a crack running the length of the side of a single leg, the imperfect grooves revealing where the object had once been attached to an automobile - which cites the hand which cannot be removed; the intention that cannot be denied. the subject which returns, 'slowly', as Derrida sates, 'but always too quickly.'

Nick Hornby graduated from Chelsea School of Art in 2007. He lives and works in London and was awarded the Clifford Chance Sculpture Award 2008. His work will be shown at Clifford Chance, Canary Wharf, London, from February to- July 2008

Brooke McGowan is a freelance writer