

art  
exchange

Sally Underwood  
Roxy Walsh ———  
————— OUTWITH

**Animated Materials:**  
**The work of Roxy Walsh & Sally Underwood**

Close your eyes...

Imagine an old cottage. The walls are warped, the floorboards wonky and the light above your head keeps flickering. The house is physically marked by the domestic histories of the families who have lived here. As you turn your head, you can see that the fabric of the building is saturated with the consequences



of time. From the soot in the chimney to the impressions left on the bannister, a home is a verb, a process as much as a place. Furthermore, one can see the home as a collective product, with each successive body helping shape it.

Echoes

The collaborative practice of Sally Underwood and Roxy Walsh similarly engages in the thematic of habitation as well as an absorption in material biographies. Living in Berlin and London respectively, the artists have found common ground in their process-orientated approach to making. Engaged in dialogue, the artists have worked on a number of exhibitions over the last 4 years that have dissolved the usual distinction of a two-person exhibition in favour of something more integrated. Underwood's sculptures and Walsh's paintings don't as much share the same space as engage in an intense proximity, eroding the autonomy afforded by distance. Instead, the artists' installations seek an immersive clamour, with paintings hung from sculptures and works



encroaching on each other.

Each artist plays both parasite and host, continually switching roles and providing each other with sustenance and sustained dialogue. Wandering around their installations is a

compelling experience, with each work finding ally and antagonist with others in the gallery. Like that old cottage, materials are put into motion, constructed and reconfigured. The gallery feels like a lived space, worked through and onto. Forms are repeated and translated across the room, creating a type of visual reverberation. This deliberate spatial compression flattens hierarchies between methodologies and approaches. Much like early museological displays, objects are aligned in purely formal, rather than chronological and ideological lines. If one were to extend the metaphor of the home, the combined work can often feel like the chatter around a kitchen table, a polyphony of competing but familiar voices.

The Ticklish Tree

When I was a child I thought that trees were the nerve endings of the world and tickling one would literally cause an earthquake somewhere. From John Constable to Caspar David Friedrich, trees in art have often stood as proxies for the human subject. At the centre of the exhibition Underwood has fashioned a large tree from pieces of timber. Surrounded by a makeshift wall made from construction bricks and kindle, any intended elegance is thwarted by the rudimentary materials. In comparison to the clean modern lines of the campus architecture,

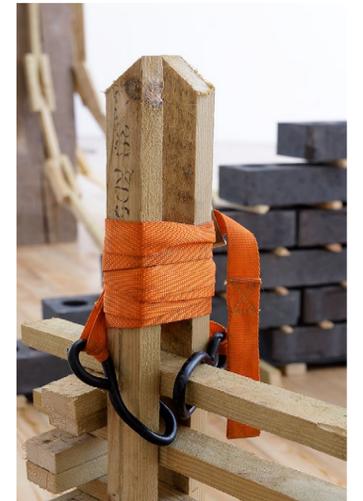


the tree offers a radical potential as both subject and shelter, too big for the gallery yet not quite sturdy enough to withstand the weather. It is an equivocal tree, an operative metaphor yet one hindered by its lack of stabilising roots.

Underwood's tree acts as an anchor around which Walsh's amphibious paintings are like curtains or blinds. Typically, the paintings blur distinctions between figurative and abstract elements. Small works on panels are hung in clusters and situated amongst wall paintings extending their formal motifs. The recent paintings are often more economical with divisions of colour veiled under layers of glazing. Underwood's conditional sculptures and Walsh's liquid paintings provide a tension between mobility and refuge, something contemplative and restive.

In Underwood and Walsh's work there is a continual attempt to dissolve the clarity of divisions and binaries. A bucket coated in mod-roc, a make-shift wall. In Underwood's sculptures the conflation of industrial and domestic iconography undermines the production line modernity seen outside the gallery. Similarly in Walsh's indeterminate forms we see each artist, in different ways, alluding to rather than enunciating their chosen subject.

One can draw parallels to the 19th century home where rooms were brought into a complex network of possible functions. The kitchen had productive, social and recuperative functions; the stove, like the tree, suggested multiple



utilities. If Underwood's tree provides the fire then Walsh's paintings recall the reverie of staring into the flames and seeing figures and images.

A Breathing Gallery

The artist Beatriz Olabarrieta recently articulated to me her desire to "give the gallery a new set of lungs" I'm reminded of this when thinking about the collaborative work of Underwood and Walsh. Both the lung and tree, just like the creative act, are involved in acts of transformation and translation. The tree turns carbon dioxide into oxygen and lungs do the opposite. The lung and tree are dependent on each other, operating on different sides of the same system. It begs the question, which artist is the tree and who is the lung? Like previous exhibitions, Outwith is an installation as an ecology: the lung and the tree in concert.



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