

Read Thou Art and Read Thou Shalt Remain / Friendly Fire

Dundee Contemporary Arts 21 May - 31 July

Reviewed by Jon Blackwood

'Read Thou Art and Read Thou Shalt Remain' and 'Friendly Fire' showcase the recent work of two artists - one emerging into a hectic career spanning exhibitions across the UK, the other emerging from nearly two decades' worth of work as an anonymous member of a Berlin collective. Although the shows share marketing and publicity, any suggestion that they might relate closely to one another is dispelled in the gallery space itself.

Cara Tolmie's 'Read Thou Art and Read Thou Shalt Remain' is an intense, cerebral show in a confined space. The starting point is an anonymous, mountainous landscape filmed jerkily from a moving car, scenery that is transposed into the claustrophobic video piece *Chronicle*. Taking the initial landscape and re-imagining it in a theatrical interior, *Chronicle* gives us three characters: Bob, June and Linda, each offering a different view of their immediate environment and the landscape beyond.

The video, articulated in muted interior beige and ochre, offers little in the way of sensual appeal, instead encouraging the audience to engage with issues of suppressed violence, the clash of a rarefied aesthetic sensibility with the shoddy realities of mass production, and the limitless possibilities of the visual in confronting the seemingly mundane. Tolmie's work requires a focused, sympathetic engagement from its audience in order to fully appreciate its subtlety. Consequently, there is a sense that the rich material in this show - the anxieties of the everyday, the limitations of language, the ephemeral handprint of past utopias fading on the cold glass of contemporary reality - are far too tightly wound up here to yield anything, other than for the most committed viewer.



Nina Rhode, 'Three Colour Separation', c-print, steel, varnish, 2011. Photo: Ruth Clark. Courtesy: the artist and Sandra Bürgel, Berlin. Procurator, burnt fireworks, wood, paint; and Untitled (Column), c-prints, steel, all 2011.

Nina Rhode's 'Friendly Fire', occupying the larger of the two galleries, is a remarkable counterpoint. Rhode's beautifully made mobile sculptures -offering an arched eyebrow to both the legacy of high modernism and its recycling in contemporary consumer culture - joyfully overwhelms even the most gallery-weary visitor. From the opening Ikea Wheel to the shimmering, fast spinning circular mirror Heat, each piece reads as the outpouring of an extraordinarily fertile and adaptable imagination.

Harmonica, C-Major sees a number of harmonicas attached to a spinning wheel, producing a beautiful, warm sound, much like the opening of Can's iconic 1973 track Future Days. The middle of the main gallery is dominated by The Procurator, a three-dimensional wooden construction featuring hundreds of discarded fireworks collected by the artist after the New Year celebrations for the beginning of 2011. There is much to hold the attention here, too, with the overall effect being like one of Eduardo Paolozzi's 1960s screen prints blown up and made in three dimensions.

Perhaps the most striking images, amidst all these sculptural pyrotechnics, however, are two photographic self-portraits. Es It, begun in 2004 and reworked for this show, shows the artist turning away from our gaze in a circular mirror, holding up a shining semi-circle almost as a barrier between herself and the viewer, marking the boundary between public artist and private interior. Lens, meanwhile, calls to mind the intense self-imaging of Francesca Woodman; a large lens magnifies the form of the artist's left breast and forms a focal point for the rest of a softly lit interior.

It can often be difficult for an artist to leave the anonymity of a collective and begin to exhibit as an individual again. In truth, however, Rhode's remarkable show stands as one of the most striking transformations back to individual authorship, in recent times.