

Rory Duckhouse Helen Sear's "Lure"

The work of Helen Sear plays on the duality of revealing and concealing, the multiple layering of the images mimicking the conceptual layers that run throughout the work. The aesthetic qualities of the work are layered with historical and theoretical concerns about the act of looking, in relation to the natural and rural landscape.

The act of looking is highlighted in 'Chameleon', a video projection where Sear literally illuminates nature with a torch. The sunflower takes on the appearance of an eye as the light shifts and oscillates across its surface. The video references the representation of looking and being seen as the sunflower eye looks back on the viewer.

Many images within the exhibition are obscured; layers are added over the image creating a barrier between the viewer and classic pictorial representation that challenge our perceptions. 'Blocked Field' presents a stack of hay bales obscuring the view onto the pastoral scene. Printed onto aluminum, and displayed in grids over the whole wall, the work confounds our expectations, drawing on notions of Dutch Golden Age painting. We are denied the view we expect, and are instead presented with a structure of human intervention on the landscape.

The allusion to art history and classical painting is also present within 'Pastoral Monuments'. Sear has collected wild flowers that grow near her studio, presenting them in vases that recall Dutch still life paintings. The work is given depth by texturing the image, creating the impression that they have been crumpled up, flattened and represented like flower pressings in a book.

The images hint at domesticity, with the flowers photographed in the artists kitchen, however this is countered by titling each image its Latin name, 'Angelica Atropurpurea', 'Myosotis Arvensis', and 'Daucus Carota', revealing the taxonomic nature of the work.

In 'Sightlines', female portrait sitters have their faces obscured by mass produced ceramic birds. The background has been painted with gesso, a wash made out of ground marble, positioning the female sitter in isolation. The sitter, obscured by the hand painted bird, is relieved of the viewers' gaze, protected by the cheap ornament from the politics of looking.

The space in 'Sightlines' is extended into the gallery with 'Plinths for Imaginary Birds', large fiberglass sculptures where the bird has escaped its resting position. The bird protecting the sitter's identity has gone, leaving only a bare white plinth, a plinth occupying space, waiting for the return of these imaginary birds.

'Brisées', French for broken branches, reveals a series of monochrome images sourced from an Internet search for "Tree Surgeon". Each image features a circle, or orb placed at the intersection of a tree that is digitally manipulated. These selections represent the meeting of the human and the landscape, where an incision or cut has been made, altering the physical space and highlighting the tensions between vision and touch.

Lure is deeply rooted in its locality; the divides between nature, culture and history are laid out and examined through the ideology of looking and being seen. Sear sets out a series of strategies that engage and frustrate our stereotypical views in

order for us to question our ocular centric environment. Sear's intentions and artistic perspectives might alter our focus on our surroundings and the intimacy we hold within our immediate locality.

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