

All-Seeing Fingers

Insides are often inaccessible places. Both bodies and homes have insides that are housed within a protective outside; layers that restrict interlopers and obscure vision. Unlike the familiarity of home and despite our bodies being our own, we are strangers to our insides; we can never scrutinise (nor necessarily want to) the visual details of our physiological workings, nor really know its unique complexity. Yet we are continually reminded, from the sensations and occasional biological abnormalities which resonate to the outer surface, the inside is bustling with goings-on to which we will never be privy. Putting surgical expertise and medical/scientific technologies aside, human folklore has often reconciled this lack of internal vision through metaphor; by re-situating corporeal attributes and bodily sensations out into the world of things and stuff as a way to conjure what we cannot see. A most familiar place, and a ripe site for art practice since the women's movement, is the home, which is crammed full of objects, furniture, soft furnishings and wall hangings with which we have intimate bodily connections. The art work of Fiona Roberts collides these intimate yet unhomely realms as a way to look inside from the outside – a form of intimate surveillance. There is a catch to her discoveries however ... the inside stares (and bites and kisses) back.

Most encounters, at least at the beginning, happen upon a surface; it requires the development of knowledge, intimacy, or skill to finally reach inside. Whereas medical education, practiced burglary, psychological training each offer ways 'in', Roberts has negotiated her way inside using her repetitive and rather obsessed art-making skills. These skills enact a form of care; a tacit form of knowledge that learns and comes to know its subject intimately through repeated acts. But more than this, in Roberts' work her attention to inserting every strand of hair, painting stretched skin, casting each finger, or attaching one eye after another with expertise, has created a homely atmosphere pregnant with the potential to come to life. In the long lineage of artists since postminimalism who have been colliding embodied practices with domestic materials and bodily qualities, what is most disarming about Roberts' work is its aesthetic of visceral slickness. Again and again she uses camouflage as a tactic and positions mouths, eyes and bodily creases as patterns to literally become part of the fabric, yet when they reveal themselves these human accoutrements surprise momentarily with their uncannily

life-likeness. The precision in Roberts' mimicry, its emulation of a dated home at real-world scale, creates a spectator experience that is believably theatrical. Yet despite this mock homeliness, or perhaps because of it, being inside always equates to being an outsider; this home is rife with palpable traces of its prior occupant...not you.

Roberts' tactics of camouflage, accumulation and compulsion have remade furniture and furnishings into unhomey and activated versions of themselves. Their lips, fingers, eyes and tresses do not appear still but rather in the midst of grasping, watching, and writhing as if wanting to connect outwards. Perhaps these unbeknownst biological specimens have grown from the residue of past occupants; their skin cells, nail clippings, blood specks and who-knows-what-else to be found in upholstery, in marks on walls, or between the floor boards. Either way, these traces amplified by Roberts seemingly want to touch; they are past lives reaching out to present ones. To anthropomorphise in this way, other than being somewhat unsettling, points to a contemporary re-evaluation of this tendency and our motivations for doing so. Anthropomorphism, not to be confused with anthropocentrism (placing humans in a dominant position in this world), recognises the latent and somewhat humbling forces that lie in a shag rug which has as much potential to reach out as a loved one does.

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