

Object Q / Pursuit of Happiness
James William Murray / Garth Gratrix
Gallery DODO, Phoenix Art Space, Brighton
29 May - 28 June, 2021

Object Q / Pursuit of Happiness is one of two collaborative exhibitions between Garth Gratrix and James William Murray which take place concurrently at Abingdon Studios, Blackpool and Gallery DODO, Brighton. The project is conceived as a coastal cultural exchange between two artists working with themes of queer materiality but who demonstrate contrasting aesthetic approaches.

Gratrix's work considers how working with materials, language and space can remain 'slippery', experimental and curious. Their queer, minimal practice explores formal relationships within given or used spaces; the tensions between hard-to-soft, camp-to-controlled, formal-to-frolicsome play out in the choice and arrangement of materials, interrogating how 'queer' is embedded within construction materials such as wood, concrete, metal and paint.

For James William Murray, the desire to make works of art is the desire to establish privileged points of contact with the material world, to leave a mark that says: I lived, and loved, and worked in a particular way. Concepts of 'mediated touch' and 'indexical trace' are central, stemming from his appreciation of photographic theory. Murray's work expanded out of photography into painting, drawing and sculpture, and he now works at the intersections between these media.

Based around the theme of 'queer verticality', the exhibition at DODO was planned entirely off-site and features just one example of each of the artists' work. In both, Minimalist form is troubled by traces of embodiment. The spareness of the installation concentrates the attention allowing a subtle but complex dialogue to emerge from the artists' longstanding interest in Minimal art and queer aesthetics.

In Gratrix's *Pursuit of Happiness* - a pair of florist's blocks painted with yellow household paint - the modularity of Carl Andre's firebricks is invoked. Bearing the indents of the artist's knees, however, Gratrix's blocks put into play a number of other possible connotations: is the artist kneeling in an act of devotion? A gesture of tenderness? To deliver a proposal? Or a sexual favour? Are they taking the knee as a political act?

The basic construction of Murray's *Object Q* derives from the fortuitously configured bundles of stretcher bars he received when ordering materials for another series of works. Bound with the hems and seams of garments acquired from people Murray was once intimate with and coated in a graphite gel, the 'found formalism' of these constructions is given a striking but ambiguous emotional charge.

The pairing of these two works thus brings into focus and examines a number of habitual binaries: the coolly rational and the emotionally redolent, the gaily coloured and the sombrelly monochromatic, the campily kitsch and the handsomely refined...

Garth Gratrix lives and works in Blackpool and is the founding director of Abingdon Studios. They also lead the curatorial and exhibition platform, *In Collaboration With*.

James William Murray is based in Brighton where he co-founded *Niagara Falls Projects* in 2017. He is represented by Stephane Simoens Contemporary Fine Art in Belgium.

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