

Going out of our way

Rhona Byrne's sculptures evoke objects that are designed for some unknown use. Rhona diverts them from their purpose, picking us up along the way and leaving us off course.

The work often operates on and occupies the threshold between sculpture and something else; sculpture and architecture, sculpture and building, sculpture and theatre, sculpture and performance, sculpture and psychogeography.

Her work is concerned with our behaviours in in-between spaces and in our in-between behaviours themselves; the activities which are not quite work and not quite leisure, not-quite active and not-quite passive. She makes objects and spaces that use the aesthetics, ethics and ingenuity of re-use and hacking; rethinking and stretching the capacities of materials. She will often work with colour that jars, pulling somewhat awkwardly out of its surroundings to declare itself an interloper - an imposition even. These works coerce us into a choreography that transfers from viewer to participant in an unavoidable, immersive encounter; this would be almost rude if it wasn't managed with enough humour to dilute the discomfort.

Much of Rhona's work is adaptable or modular so that it can be taken down and reconsidered over and over to fit each new exhibitionary situation. She frequently works outside of galleries, either outdoors or within very weighted contexts; a dementia care centre, a rugby stadium. The works, although often very large-scale, are physically light and mobile and many are constructed using materials that have already had a life to which they may one day have to return. Thus their stability can seem tenuous, or even commitment-phobic, occasionally emerging to stake very large claims, but only for a moment...

Works like *Merrygoround*, *It's a Roller Coaster*, *I Want to Get Off* and *Interval* engage with what Rhona's collaborator, the environmental psychologist David Canter, refers to as the 'Rules of Space'; as though the gallery space was a piece of paper on which these rules were written, and Rhona has taken a packet of markers and drawn a series of circles and wobbly lines across them. With these works, the artist chops at our perspective by moving us through the gallery in disconcerting ways, round and round or up and down, forcing us to actively reconsider what we are looking at. These works have a peculiar affect in group exhibitions, leading us into a series of new and not always comfortable perspectives on the other artworks.

Deleuze describes affect, giving the example of being in a dark room thus; 'All of a sudden someone enters and turns on the lights without warning: I am completely dazzled.' The two states - of being in the dark and being in the light - are close together but there is a passage from one to another so that 'your whole body has a kind of mobilisation of itself, in order to adapt to this new state'. Rhona's 2012 performative sculptural work, *Threshold**, consists of two related lines of fabric worn by strings of performers who form them in to curved or straight lines always acting in relation to one another. In the first iteration, the performers formed 2 concentric circles at the entrance to the Gracelands event. The performers would break the blue outer circle of the work, pick up the visitor and spin slowly around them, as they in turn spun around the inner pink circle, eventually opening at the other end and to deposit the viewer, who has been immersed in a highly coloured temporary room, back out into the wider space. It has the effect of 'making passage', like an environmental palette cleanser, between inside and outside or one space and another, so that we are forced to gather ourselves again, to overcome the effect of its cloying clinginess.

It's All Up in the Air is a dense knotty sculpture made by looping a series of long black balloons - such those used by street performers to make animals or swords - into one another so that they are held together by surface tension. The structure lasts as long as the air stays in the balloons or the stays hold off the wind. It is a big dark cloud, occupying a space that sculptures rarely occupy, above the exhibition or performance site, looming over the proceedings like a cartoon 'ominous shadow' or what the film industry (science fiction, in particular) calls a big dumb object, an object from an unknown source that seems to hold tremendous power but which has a silly weakness. It is around this object or terrain that the narrative of the film is tethered to this object and it is often used to measure the progress of the protagonists. *It's All Up in the Air* suggests the future unfolding of an as yet unplanned sequence of events.

This project, *the Huddle-tests*, was first developed earlier this year during a residency in Facebook Headquarters (Dublin,) as a physical manifestation of the kinds of engagements that Facebook commodifies. The term 'facebook' was a colloquial word for the book given to new students at Harvard as a way to facilitate engagement with other students. At Temple Bar gallery the entire room is covered in a soft furnishing 'event-carpeting' yellow that is either a comforting egg-yolk or a green-tinged bile depending on how the light falls and possibly your frame of mind - it hovers over the familiarity/contempt spectrum depending on how long you spend there.. The *Huddlewear* itself, on the face of it is a series of 'wearables' designed to promote intimate encounters with various numbers of people for a set of activities or interactions whose purpose is unclear but which seem jolly and convivial. They produce a somewhat regulated moving together; a dance. This is undercut for the 'dancers' by the anxiety that it may induce when added to the downsizing of 'personal space' and the linking of free movement to a co-dependent. It is like being a dog tied to a lamppost except there are two or more dogs and no lampposts. Awkward.

Vaari Claffey, 2015