

„While there are ideas about psychological and emotional developmental processes held within the sculptures I make, the things themselves are actual physical explorations into thinking, feeling, communicating and relating. They are parts of an ongoing learning, or search for understanding, through a material experience that has been prioritised over language.

The finished work has a looseness and messiness that is allowed to exist within an overall attempt at simplicity, purity, cleanness or smoothness. The sculptures are rooted in Psychoanalysis and Feminism; in theories about the violent and sexual underpinnings of both individual mental mess, as in neuroses and psychosis, and the formlessness of specific points in art history, i. e. German and Abstract Expressionism, Viennese Actionism, Land Art, Anti-form and Feminist Performance.

Materials I have used include medicines for minor ailments, packaging, old clothes, carpets, foodstuffs, household cleaners, toiletries and make-up. These softer elements are often used along with harder or more structural and traditional art-making materials like plaster, glass, wood, cardboard, mirror, paper and paint.

Recently I have taken the formless materials through a process of tentative repression, and have been concentrating, through very specific colours and qualities of surface, on the level of attractiveness in the various sculptures made. There is often a physical struggle involved in arriving at the structure of a sculpture that then solidifies itself into an idea about, or an overall attitude towards what could be called conflict resolution or emotional and practical/technical problem-solving. Known rules and techniques are intentionally not learned or adhered to. Instead, more haphazard, individual methods are found. This can be seen in the sculptures as evidence of touch or something close to performative gesture. The hope is that the work can elicit at least an impetus towards physical response.

Essentially, then, I make different configurations with or from mess or formless matter (that which is in a 'pre-object' type state), and from waste or used materials (that which is left 'post-object'), as well as from straightforward art store materials. None of the work is purely gestural, since there is always intent, a support (plinth/frame/stage/structure), and evidence of a decision-making process; the finished things are almost objects, or only just objects. While nearly being performances, installations or paintings, the works actually retain a large amount of the autonomy of modernist sculpture. That which exists in between mediums does, nevertheless, excite me. This area of study feels like a place where negotiations can begin; somewhere that I can go to listen as well as speak. It is important, however, that what the work becomes in the end is "sculpture". Sculpture as a category is its root, its limitations and its discipline. This is because sculpture is real. It is completely in the world, and therefore has the capacity at least to attempt to withhold the offer of travel elsewhere through an imaginary optical/ cerebral escape or engulfment. Sculpture inherently lends itself to forcing an initially physical/emotional acceptance, confrontation or engagement. Since it is actually here, perhaps it is here to help.

The work is, to a certain extent, site specific in that I respond, albeit vaguely, to a gallery space or at least think about where the objects will end up before and during making them. The sculptures are never really finished until they are in place, and are often unavoidably destroyed, broken, or at least damaged, when an exhibition is over, then remade or re- installed slightly differently elsewhere.“

(Karla Black)

Bad Thing

Lying on her side on the floor she stared at a cup. She thought about what had happened, and how it existed in the world now like an unchangeable and definite solid.

To begin with there had been no words, only the staring and a feeling that what had happened actually was the cup. By looking at it she got to know it. The cup could not be ignored or denied because there it was.

She eventually realised that if the bad thing that had happened had edges and could be looked at, then it must be separate from her and she must, therefore, be able to get away from it. She kept lying there looking, not used to it enough yet to leave it.

(Karla Black, Tollcross 111, Ed. Neil Bickerton, Neil Mulholland, Glasgow 2005)