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I am fascinated by the delicious peculiarities of the everyday and the surprising richness to be found in the minutiae.

Using sculpture and installation, I create immersive worlds that function as a stranger, more highly saturated version of reality. The work is made using mass-produced and throwaway materials that have been transformed and reimagined in order to envision novel and implausible outcomes for ordinarily overlooked objects.

FOSSILING THE TIDELINE. SCULPTURE
AS A FESTIVAL OF
EXPERIMENT

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. OBSERVING THE EVERYDAY	3
III. CONSTRUCTION SITE OBSERVATIONS	6
IV. MAKING DO.....	9
V. REALITY AND MAGIC.....	12
VI. DISCOVERY AND PROCESS.....	15
VII. ALTERNATE WORLDS	18
VIII. DURATION	20
IX. THE SILVER DREDGER, THE COBBLED SWEEP, AND THE GLOBULE.....	22
X. FOLLY IN BLUE AND PEBBLEDASH.....	25
XI. COBRA CORD AND CONTROL PANEL	27
XII. NON SEQUITURS	29
XIII. CONCLUSION	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	33
CATALOGUE OF IMAGES	34

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The earth is not flat and neither is reality. Reality is continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and partly invisible. The imagination alone can fathom this and it reveals its fathomings through art.¹

My practice is an exploration of this vast and malleable reality, coaxing new worlds out of the detritus of our society. Throwaway materials and tired overfamiliar objects are reshuffled, recontextualised, and tampered with in a playfully investigative manner. Split from their ordinary associations they are granted new leases of life and possibility, allowed to be fluid. Like the gold ‘fossils’ that are caught up in the bluish green sweep of the sculpture, the *Silver Dredger*: which are at once fish caught in a net, broken trilobites made of precious metal dredged up from the depths, and also casts of the biscuits that I frequently ate while making the installation. They would circle peripherally in my mind everyday, these patterned wheat slices, they looked so much like the fossils I used to rummage for on the

¹ Jeanette Winterson *Art Objects*

English coast, slipping about on the slimy algae, a radioactive unreal green
against the dark wet stones.

CHAPTER II

OBSERVING THE EVERYDAY

My work is intimately tied to observations of daily life. I am fascinated by the curious relationships formed between disparate materials all around me, in an apparently endless parade of joyful accident.

One morning several years ago, cycling through town early on a Saturday morning I saw the most luscious of sights: a pink, frothy feather boa slung over the branch of a blossoming cherry tree; remnants of a night of revelry, or a cunning maneuver to introduce these long lost sister-objects? Both were pink and gorgeous, one a shining example of natural beauty, one unashamedly synthetic. To come across them unexpectedly intertwined was both glorious and outrageously comical.

Often, it boils down to proximity and juxtaposition. Objects or materials that are unsurprising on their own become inordinately strange once they are pushed together. Another example gleaned from my surroundings growing up is Hampton Court Palace in South West London, a different building depending on which angle you view it from; Tudor at the

front, Georgian at the rear, somehow mashed into one experience. Where does this transition from one distinct style to another lie? Which two opposing bricks reluctantly rub shoulders? Or is there a corridor in the depths of the building that smoothes you from one era to another?

The world as I encounter it every day nourishes me, and my art practice. The construction site that I cycle past has become a rich hunting ground for images and occurrences to pore over.

Walking with no other aim than to look at things, and taking 'field notes' whilst doing so, has been an important part of my life for almost a decade. To begin with I needed a premise, an arbitrarily chosen rule to direct my walk in order that I was freed from making choices, and could look around. Flipping a coin to determine right or left, or following a colour for example. The resulting way of seeing has become so entrenched that now all I need to do is walk and look. This has always been an urban activity.

The way in which I view the world has also been shaped by the art I have seen. Richard Wentworth's series *Making Do and Getting By*, has been particularly influential. This work consists of an accumulation of snap shots taken over the last forty years in cities around the globe. Objects are the protagonists in these images, often in odd arrangements and divorced from

their original functionality; a cup pushes open a window, two mops form a barrier across a doorway, an empty wine bottle and a ketchup bottle sit together on a step, a fast food box is impaled on a railing spike. Wentworth captures these peculiar scenes as he finds them, never interfering or altering. Wentworth's attentiveness to the richness to be found in the minutiae of everyday life has enlivened my own perception of my surroundings; as I walk about I look for the curious and beautiful lurking in the rubble and detritus, and often I find it. It is hugely exciting and hopeful for me that Wentworth's photographs have actually changed the way I see the world, and reinforces my belief in the ability of art to loosen objects from their typical associations and contexts, making them unfamiliar and open-ended.

CHAPTER III

CONSTRUCTION SITE OBSERVATIONS

Writing is extremely important to my process. By writing my observations, they are put through a transformative filter, imbued with alternate possibilities through metaphor. This then becomes a reservoir of material already one step removed from reality, ready to be tapped into in the studio.

At present I am taking notes on the construction site on my street. What looks like a town, is being built (it is actually a new part of the school, probably halls of residence) and is constantly attended to by fleets of workers and brightly coloured machines. The following are excerpts from my construction site field notes:

‘Two fluorescent men wield impossibly long yellow poles. Wobbling wildly in the wind they telescope upwards to tug on a part of an electric pylon. One retracts slowly, back down to earth, the other is waved vigorously at the pylon, until a small part of it appears to unlatch. Now the man lowers the long yellow pole with the help of two others; it appears to be heavy.

A great deal of activity in this corner of the site today. The road is closed off, and two white trucks with buckets like oversized washing-up tubs jerk men about to fiddle with the electrical cables. A man in a bucket attaches a pole to a cable and leaves it hanging there. Now the bucket bounces over to the pylon and I hear him drilling a hole. A cable, a thin black line amidst all this noise, is snipped to a length I must assume to be significant. It dangles and flutters, barely there. There are yellow tubes around the electrical cables; like pool dividers in the sky. They look like fat yellow cobras, strange bulges at regular intervals along their length.

In the distance, over the far side of the site, a crane swings a brown cube menacingly way above the buildings. Is it comprised of bricks? The thin line holding it aloft extends downwards, depositing it on the scaffold raft where the high-vis people flock about to meet it.'

It seems fitting to watch the way the construction site functions, as correlations between this and the studio can be drawn. I am attracted to the aesthetics of the site, but I am also curious about the way in which progress is made here, and how that can speak to a studio practice. The way in which a part of the whole becomes a locus of activity, brought to the fore and acted upon in stages is particularly relatable to the studio. The site will go through regular state changes; white is put down first, like a primer, which is in some places covered by a pink layer, almost everything is then covered with bricks. Similarly, in the studio a sculpture will be made, only to be

transformed by the number of moves made upon it. In this way, process has become very important.

CHAPTER IV

MAKING DO

I use mass-produced and semi industrial materials such as expanding foam and 2x4's. These materials contain connotations of building and making for functional means. Readily available, they speak of both the DIY enthusiast and the sprawling construction site, and are basic ingredients that are typically not visible in whatever it is they are part of (a building or a filled gap, for example). In my work they are transformed, but still evidently themselves; wooden 2x4's are gnawed away in parts to reveal a dark blue shiny interior, however their material origin is undisguised. It is the 2x4's that are the material, rather than the wood; it is their format as a dimensional unit ready for use in construction that is important. There is nothing about their use in my work that references trees or their natural beginnings in the world.

I relate to the British sculptor Phyllida Barlow, for her exciting and unapologetic use of construction materials to create awe-inspiring environments and forms with an incredible presence, that are made in an ad-

hoc manner and without concealing the nature of the material. In her piece, *Dock*, made for the Duveen Galleries at Tate Britain, Barlow made great, illogical structures from wood, on top of which were bundled an array of cardboard, Styrofoam, plastic and rope, all bound messily in coloured tape. There was no attempt to make these materials anything other than themselves, and to see them looming precariously from their considerable height, a tangled mass of colour, was intoxicating and alarming.

Barlow's are the kinds of materials used by huge numbers of people for all sorts of different functions all over the world, from building roads to mending roofs to constructing shelves from flat packs; for Barlow these materials have their own integrity that represents, for her, a huge potential for transformation.²

These materials are so versatile they imply infinite potential outcomes. This is part of the excitement of the construction site; in its early stages it seems as though almost anything is possible. However, as progression is made and the buildings begin to take shape, these possibilities are whittled down until the structure is eventually complete, static and devoid of the whiff of potential. When I peer through the holes in the fence at the site humming with activity; a thicket of metal lines jutting upward in

² Frances Morris *Phyllida Barlow. Sculpture 1963-2015*

varying colours; the great mounds of pipes, plastic, rubble, foam, and innumerable other materials scattered about; I imagine what might happen if the plans were scrapped and perhaps instead the site could become a festival of experiment. By using these materials in my work and manipulating them in ways that would never occur on the site, I hope to envision more implausible, magical conclusions for these objects

CHAPTER V

REALITY AND MAGIC

In my work, I explore the place where the mundane becomes magical, exceptional or even impossible; fantasies unfolding from brick and mortar beginnings. The moment when the fur coats at the back of the wardrobe become snowflakes in Narnia, and how much of the receding real world is seen simultaneously with the imaginative counterpart. Is there a split second when they overlap?

This might seem far-fetched or whimsical. However, experiences where reality becomes slippery are not so unusual. Recently while out walking I saw what appeared to be three felled silver birch trees on someone's lawn, somewhat rotted and eroded, but unmistakably trees. As I approached them though something in my perception shifted, and they became their true selves: three long shiny pipes wrapped roughly in thick tawny insulation.

This sense of reality as similar to sands shifting underfoot is aptly demonstrated in Martin Boyce's installation *Do Words Have Voices*, in

which the artist has transformed a room in the depths of the Tate Britain by a few, quite slight, interventions. Although the sculpture at the centre of the room commands the space, the small pieces of folded brown paper quietly scattered about the floor are much more exciting. Boyce evokes urban settings in his work, and this piece hints at a city park. For a moment, when I first noticed that there was stuff on the floor, I registered the brown paper as fallen Autumn leaves. The realisation that my mind had been tricked momentarily into believing the indoors to be outdoors was exquisite; it was the silver birch tree pipes, but intentional.

In *Fossiling The Tideline* I play with the idea of multiple, co-existing realities at odds with one another; *The Globule* is a different sculpture depending on which side we encounter it (something like Hampton Court Palace) and although we know it to be one object, we can only experience one side, or one of its realities, at a time. Memory plays a part in creating this object in its entirety in the mind of the viewer.

My hope is that these curious objects at times transcend the materials they are made from, re-constituting themselves into something new and alien, whilst simultaneously revealing their low-brow materiality upon closer inspection. For example, the *Globule* seems cell-like, the orange netting

twisting in its depths like thousands of synapses, but it never pretends to be made of more than spray foam, plastic and a duct.

CHAPTER VI

DISCOVERY AND PROCESS

Fossiling The Tideline hinges around discovery.

Firstly, in that it conjures a scene actually reminiscent of an object being unearthed, as well as multiple opportunities for the viewer to experience a sense of discovery. For example, the *Globule* that must be circumnavigated in order to find its surprising flipside, or the flashlight that illuminates part of the tower. The lighting throughout the installation adds to this sense of looking and finding. The clamp lights and flashlight direct the light in certain concentrated areas, in the way a hand might thrust a light source up close to something in order to inspect it. This search is necessitated by concealing parts of the work from immediate view. For example blocking the view from the main entrance with the green plastic drapes of the Silver Dredger, and then releasing information a little at a time; letting details swim into focus from the dimly lit depths.

Secondly, these sculptures all came to exist through a careful process of investigation and discovery. Each has been through a series of changes that transform, degrade, re-construct or obscure the original form, in the same way that the building site will go through many state changes before completion, so that the first stage is unrecognisable in the last. The difference is that the moves in construction are planned and choreographed, whereas in the studio each step occurs in relationship to the one before, instead of in relation to an end product, so the outcome is unpredictable and strange.

Artist Sarah Sze speaks about the role of process in her practice, talking specifically about a lamp covered with sand

After editing and tearing apart the work, that's what was found. What's interesting is that, even though the majority of the sand is gone, I think the reader or onlooker senses that the work is found through a long process: that quality of discovery is palpable³

This sense of a sculpture emerging through the actions made upon it embeds an awareness of time into the work. In *Fossiling The Tideline*, it appears that either something has just happened, or is about to happen. That

³ Sarah Sze *Triple Point*

we are witnessing a work momentarily frozen in time, and if we returned tomorrow we might be looking at something completely different.

CHAPTER VII

ALTERNATE WORLDS

Using readily available and cheap materials, I make universes of possibility where new rules apply. These rules are created to immediately be broken elsewhere in the installation, in this way narratives are created that oppose one another, and will not add up to anything conclusive.

Fossiling The Tideline is intended to be immersive; it rejects the real world in favour of a stranger, more highly saturated version. It speaks of real-world activities, such as searching for precious metals, fossil hunting, dredging waters, but these have become abstract ideas to muse over, rather than illustrations of feasible actions.

By employing a kind of material confusion, where one material has many roles rather than acting as a stand in for one object, everything is thrown into doubt; are these orange slivers scaffolding for the tower or carrot sticks? In this way, materials cannot be pinned down and what is false and what is real seem to be in a constantly shifting state.

The installation toggles between suspension of disbelief and playful reminders of reality. This is seen in the use of the tinfoil; in one instance it plays an imaginative part, as a silver nugget, but somewhere else it reminds us of its everyday use as a wrapper for food. Also in the multiple uses of the duct tape; in our first encounter with it, it has become a chain, but as we move through the space it can be seen as duller nuggets interspersed with the silver, and finally in the depths of the installation it reverts to its intended use, sticking orange cords to the walls in small grey rectangular gestures.

CHAPTER VIII

DURATION

In *Fossiling The Tideline* I have created an installation that relies on duration; the passage of time experienced by the viewer as they navigate the strange terrain, and the jumbled narrative that this creates. Objects take up roles, only to switch them later on, motifs are repeated, such as the grid pattern, and dramatic scale shifts occur; small net bags that used to contain fruit become tiny versions of the bundled construction netting of *The Globule*. In this way time elapsing can be used to confuse content and to sustain a sense of discovery.

I am excited by the way in which artist Jessica Stockholder addresses time in her installations.

‘In numerous explicit and implicit ways...*Three Oranges* invoked or explored duration: real time, as in the time taken to apprehend the work, was compared with the limited life span of the gas in the cylinders, the nearly imperceptible deterioration of trees and fruit... Taken together these temporal aspects reverberated in a singular way, serving to structure the work in the present and in recollection.’⁴

⁴ Lynne Cooke *Jessica Stockholder*

Similarly, in *Fossiling The Tideline*, the passage of time is also alluded to in the content of the work. *The Folly* is the most obvious example of this; the towers have been eroded in a way that references ruins, but we also have a sense that whatever action was taken upon the wood had a duration, that this process of gradual reduction was not immediate.

CHAPTER IX

THE SILVER DREDGER, THE COBBLED SWEEP, AND THE GLOBULE

The *Silver Dredger* and the *Cobbled Sweep* were made originally as mechanisms for acting upon the *Globule* or facilitating its discovery. In this way narrative is created between them, and the sculptures begin to reveal something about one another.

During the making process these connections became slacker, as formal decisions detached the sculptures from their first function within the installation. In this way they upgraded from mere supporting roles to characters of equal importance. As a result the sculptures are interconnected, but the narratives that weave around them are ambiguous.

The *Silver Dredger* derived from the question of how the *Globule* had arrived at this place. The verb ‘dredge’ kept resurfacing in my mind. To begin with I carefully avoided looking at images of real-life dredges, and started to invent my own interpretation of what this might be. Eventually curiosity triumphed, and through my research I found old images of

dredging for gold. The idea of dredging waters for precious metals was so evocative, that the sculpture became a silver dredge, bedecked with shiny silvery strands and spewing out gleaming nuggets.

The *Cobbled Sweep* came into being as a support for the *Globule*, but became its own curious object; a wooden structure atop large circular brushes, laden with black bulges that resemble rubbish bags. This is surmounted by a swirling purple disk that is like a hybrid of a wheel and a planet. The title references the term ‘cobbling together’, which means to mend or fix something in a slapdash fashion. This idea of something fixed poorly or temporarily informed the conspicuous taping and wrapping that occurs in multiple places throughout the installation; giving a sense that this is a place where making do is valued.

The *Globule* is perhaps the most elusive of the sculptures in that it does not specifically reference any one thing, but spins several far-fetched tales about its nature. Dark in coloration and richly textured with pockets of iridescent light emanating from within, it is in stark contrast to the highly saturated orange and blue splashed world it inhabits. Of course, this description refers only to one side... the back (if this is what we assume it to

be) of the *Globule* is a bright orange mass encased in a huge silver tube, quite at home in this bright reality.

The *Globule* is an object of multiple identities: flotsam and jetsam that has been washed ashore, unexamined and existing on the periphery of consciousness; an underside teeming with exotic infusoria; an ancient relic from some uncharted Atlantis; or some unassuming scrap on the shoreline placed under a microscope to reveal its incandescent strangeness.

CHAPTER X

FOLLY IN BLUE AND PEBBLEDASH

The wooden structure with the blue chewed upper part alludes to a tower or folly. Follies were buildings popular amongst wealthy land-owners in the 18th Century; to be considered a folly they had to be built with no discernible purpose other than ornamentation. This is fitting for this sculpture, as its purpose as an object is unclear, and it stretches scant material into a structure as tall as possible, in a way similar to the follies that were sometimes made so impractically tall as to be structurally unsound. Everywhere that the mysterious nibbling has not occurred, the structure is thickly coated with a mixture of paste and stones, referencing the British style of covering exterior walls on houses with a finish called ‘pebble-dash’ used to conceal poor quality brickwork.

The tops of the uprights have been worn away to look like charred ruins, a crumbling vision of something ancient that is simultaneously still in construction. It is an awkward endeavor to allude to the archaic using 2x4’s; an invention of the 19th century that seem ageless in their anonymity, and is

a move akin to the follies that were sometimes made as shams; mock versions of ruins or gothic towers.

CHAPTER XI

COBRA CORD AND CONTROL PANEL

This part of the installation is perceptibly different to the rest. Open and linear, with no central focal point it reads like a painting using objects, and is at odds with the large sculptures that dominate the space.

Cobra Cord and Control Panel is at once peripheral and integral to the installation as a whole. It acts as an insight into the importance of process that runs through all the work. It alludes to the place on a construction site where breaks might happen, workers might rest their coffee cups, unwrap their lunch, and where unused materials might accumulate. This piece is in tandem with and in response to, the large heavily worked sculptures such as *The Globule*. It is a composed meditation on what it meant to make *Fossiling The Tideline*.

Cobra Cord... takes the construction site as its reference point, but there must necessarily be a space like this in the studio too. The control panel: where the materials wait, where the intense thinking occurs, where I retreat to eat lunch, where new alliances between materials form through

careless arranging and storing. This zone is distinct from the sculptures that are being made, although they act constantly upon one another.

CHAPTER XII

NON SEQUITURS

Fossiling the Tideline is an object driven installation. These sculptures occupy space and demand immediate attention, which creates room for smaller, odder moments to creep into the installation unnoticed at first. These non-sequiturs punctuate the space with moments of absurdity that complicate material relationships, add layers of narrative while confusing meaning, and inject some of the humour that was present in my earlier work.

I have always had a fascination with everyday objects. Eggs, houseplants, meat, and brooms have shown up periodically in my work, crudely and comically represented.

As I have allowed my work to become more bizarre and magical, and less firmly rooted in daily reality, these representations of food and other domestic items have become less prevalent. *Fossiling The Tideline* is a logical next step in this investigation, as otherworldly objects and scenarios are accessed through the ordinariness of familiar materials, and the mundane location of the construction site becomes a portal for parallel realities.

There are several moments within the installation where found objects are playfully altered, for example the fruit bags strung up and filled with unappetizing materials. One, an onion bag, contains the leftover sticks from the scaffold around the tower on the *Folly* that in this context seem like pieces of carrot, while another is full of blue balls the size of the clementines the bag used to hold. These objects lend a human presence to the work, scaling it to our size and preventing the installation from floating off into pure fantasy. This place might be unfamiliar, but it is strewn with the stuff of our everyday lives.

CHAPTER XIII

CONCLUSION

It's in that immersion one can really play with multiple interpretations coexisting to create a place where it seems impossible to take it all in at once. A place that swings between states or narratives at odds with each other.⁵

The narratives interwoven throughout *Fossiling* take the viewer on a curious expedition, from broken biscuit fossils caught in a net; to a shimmering jellyfish lampshade hybrid dangling from the ceiling, ready to be plugged in; to a glittering, glowing blob resting on a nest of concrete blocks that is hooked up via a cable to a control panel that is both powering and testing it; to a complete fossil guarded by an orange snake with a clamp light for a head that kinks across the floor.

These sequences of events pose more questions than deliver answers, making *Fossiling* occupy a space of shimmering uncertainty. In it are intertwined allusions to the archaic and the ageless; fossils and castles mixed

⁵ Sarah Sze *Triple Point*

up with 2x4's and plastic wrap to create a place that oscillates between past, present and future. Neither a vision of a post apocalyptic future nor a direct critique of consumer culture, it is instead a celebration of making do and resourcefulness, and an invitation to the viewer to see the world afresh.

Although the scenarios in *Fossilizing* are bizarre and otherworldly, they are all nonetheless informed by my own experiences, absorbed from daily observations of the strange and the poetic in my surroundings. For example, *Folly in Blue and Pebbledash*, is informed by the folly that I would visit during walks in the countryside as a child in the South of England. The last time I saw this structure it was completely enveloped in scaffolding. These sights permeate my work, arriving in a circuitous fashion, making it a re-shuffled reality, an unconventional construction site where the components of everyday life are untangled and re-built to reveal their sheer strangeness in ways that are both experimental and celebratory.

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CATALOGUE OF IMAGES

Figure 1. *Fossiling The Tideline*. Foam, paint, plastic, foil, rocks, concrete, lights, electrical cables, wood, tape, tires, plaster, fabrics, orange peel, fruit bags. 2017

Figure 2. *Fossiling The Tideline*. Foam, paint, plastic, foil, rocks, concrete, lights, electrical cables, wood, tape, tires, plaster, fabrics, orange peel, fruit bags. 2017

Figure 3. *Silver Dredger*. Plastic, wood, tape, foam, tires, fabrics, plaster, paint. 2017

Figure 4. *Cobbled Sweep*. Wood, fabrics, tape, pipe, tinfoil, brushes, foam, black foil fringe

Figure 5. *Globule*. Foam, cinder blocks, duct, electrical cord, lights, fabrics, plastics, rocks, paint. 2017

Figure 6. *Globule*. Foam, cinder blocks, duct, electrical cord, lights, fabrics, plastics, rocks, paint. 2017

Figure 7. *Folly in Blue and Pebbledash*. Wood, foam, pebbles, joint compound, foil, plastic, paint. 2017

Figure 8. *Cobra Cord and Control Panel*. Fabrics, clamp light, foam, wood, electrical cords, fruit bags, tape, plastic, tinfoil, tire, rocks, disposable gloves.

Figure 1. *Fossiling The Tideline*. Foam, paint, plastic, foil, rocks, concrete, lights, electrical cables, wood, tape, tires, plaster, fabrics, orange peel, fruit bags. 2017



Figure 2. *Fossiling The Tideline*. Foam, paint, plastic, foil, rocks, concrete, lights, electrical cables, wood, tape, tires, plaster, fabrics, orange peel, fruit bags. 2017



Figure 3. *Silver Dredger*. Plastic, wood, tape, foam, tires, fabrics, plaster, paint. 2017



Figure 4. *Cobbled Sweep*. Wood, fabrics, tape, pipe, tinfoil, brushes, foam, black foil fringe. 2017



Figure 5. *Globule* Foam, cinder blocks, duct, electrical cord, lights, fabrics, plastics, rocks, paint. 2017



Figure 6. *Globule* Foam, cinder blocks, duct, electrical cord, lights, fabrics, plastics, rocks, paint



Figure 7. *Folly in Blue and Pebbledash*. Wood, foam, pebbles, joint compound, foil, plastic, paint. 2017



Figure 8. *Cobra Cord and Control Panel*. Fabrics, clamp light, foam, wood, electrical cords, fruit bags, tape, plastic, tinfoil, tire, rocks, disposable gloves. 2017

