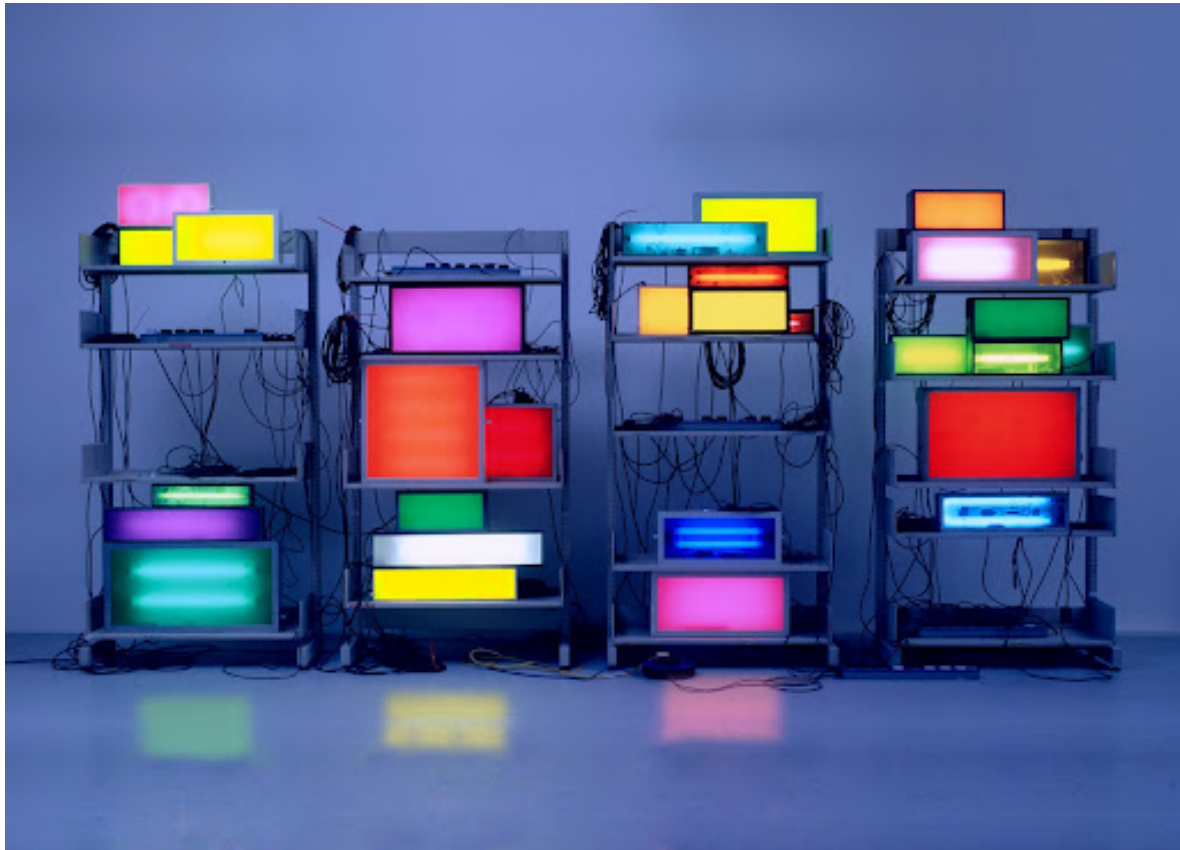


Aesthetica



The Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture, Saatchi Gallery, London.

At first glance the exact shape of things to come suggested by the sculptures included in this exhibition can seem disparate and inconclusive. The selections are testimony to the broadening materials and mediums available to the sculptor; from the amalgamation of found objects in Anselm Reyle's *Untitled*; to Rebecca Warren's coarse modelling of clay; with Roger Hiorns' 'no-hands method' precariously sat somewhere in the middle. It is a riotous collection of materials and imaginations that are assimilated here in the Saatchi Gallery's first exhibition exclusively of sculpture.

Thematic preoccupations, however, do emerge. Sculpture facilitates a potential for a powerful conveyance of movement; sculptors from Bernini to Moore held a Promethean ability to shape a kinetic fluidity from marble that reaches well beyond the plinth. In these modern mediums however, many of Saatchi's sculptors excel in successfully capturing a movement that is uncanny and powerful. No pieces evoke this quite as well as Dirk Skreber's *Untitled (Crash 1)* and *Untitled (Crash 2)*. In the two pieces Skreber has wrapped two cars around metal columns suspending them above the floor as if in mid catastrophic crash. Approaching the sculpture is a bizarre experience: such heavy, daily machinery in a violent suspense of animation seems threatening, like holding your breath around a slumbering lion.

Similarly, David Altmejd has produced a group of faceless individuals engaged in a joyless, convoluted orgy reminiscent of one of Dante's infernal writhing circles: a purgatorial mess of penetration punctuated by a less than redemptive pair of wings in a piece sardonically entitled *Healers*. The hot, neon scrawl of Anselm Reyle's light installation *Untitled* is another example of animation in stasis. Sculpture of this kind is intrinsically engaging. Like coiled springs, the potential movement of the pieces is in some way discursive with the viewer and suggests a relevance and function beyond the immediate aesthetics of the sculpture.

Other preoccupations are clear, there is particularly an inclination towards the grotesque. Exaggerated contortions of the human body are prolific and various figures appear to groan in the corners of the gallery, most notably in Berlinde de Bruyckere's haunting

Marthe. Typically this extends to the frequent conspicuous inclusion of sexual organs: in order to be displayed one feels the addendum of something breast like or phallic (preferably both) was necessary. Although in most cases, notably the parodic nature of Rebecca Warren's Corccioni, this avoids being gratuitous. De Bruyckere's Frankenstein-like K36 (The Black Horse) is another wonderfully disconcerting piece and represents a further successful foray into the grotesque that in its subversion of something familiar exploits the uncanny.

Sterling Ruby's collection in Gallery 10 has a unique atmosphere to its composition. Its rough aesthetic and vastness – while making good use of the gallery's abundance of space – is overpowering and alienating making it immediately evocative of an alien terrain which initially left me a little cold. Although I dare say this was intentional. Not all the pieces are fundamentally confrontational though; after feeling the contamination of Peter Buggenhout's post-apocalyptic dust bunnies in The Blind Leading the Blind #21, Björn Dahlem's The Milky Way feels redemptive and cleansing, particularly in its location at the heights of the gallery's top rooms. Stretching across the room, the wood and neon light construction is immediately reminiscent of its title and pays homage to it with its purity and unobtrusive simplicity.

Also of worthy note is Richard Wilson's wonderful 20:50: the only permanent installation at the Saatchi Gallery. It is a suitable complement to the other rooms of sculpture and is infallibly meditative, a crowning of this collection despite its permanent placement. I feel that alone this merits a visit to the gallery. It also highlights the great use of space in this exhibition; housed in the old Duke of York barracks the gallery has a number of vast rooms and the abundance of space available is perfectly exploited and handled to the benefit of the installations in a way that isn't as easily achieved in exhibitions focused on wall hangings.

As could perhaps be expected from the Saatchi Gallery the title of the exhibition is largely a marketable sound-bite of convenience. Many of the artists are far from new, let alone undiscovered, as the title may suggest. Nevertheless, there is a great deal on offer. Many specific works are deserving of individual praise, but what is most satisfying in this collection is indeed the numerous directions that appear to be manifesting. Concerns of commoditization and human interference resonate alongside other anxieties of the fractured individual and the frightening nothingness of the morphing sexless left trailing behind the consequences. A frightening vision indeed, but nevertheless one that is largely thoughtfully executed.

While the speculative enforcing of a narrative upon the pieces from these twenty artists is likely to be counterproductive, there is still much to be gained from their individual high concept genesis that points promisingly towards the shape of an artistic future that is now being sculpted.

The Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture runs at Saatchi Gallery until October 16th 2011.

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