

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Press Release

RUTH CLAXTON

Specular Spectacular

7 June - 27 July 2013



Ruth Claxton, *Specular Spectacular* (Cheryl, Jo, Joanne, Elinor, Claire, Anna), 2013, steel, mirror, air drying clay, found ceramic figurine, mirrored blown glass, imitation silver leaf

Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is delighted to present *Specular Spectacular* (Cheryl, Jo, Joanne, Elinor, Claire, Anna), a new site-specific installation by Ruth Claxton. *Specular Spectacular* is a complex maze comprised of interconnecting structures, holding mirrors that both become part of and reflect the installation itself. Worlds within worlds are housed here, and inhabited by found figurines that are themselves swallowed up by amorphous reflective masks.

Claxton's installation draws upon real and virtual architectures. Recently becoming interested in the physicality of the internet and computer-generated space, Claxton has taken the classic Windows™ 'Pipes' screensaver as a starting point for the geometric structure she has created. *Specular Spectacular* explores what happens when this propositional space becomes actual, from its 'human' dimensions to its temporal character.

With the birth of a kind of avatar, Claxton has created a realm where expectations and conventions are disrupted and challenged. This installation explores what it might mean to make a structure female, and the 'wrong' size. Inverting the maleness of classic Vitruvian proportions, she decided to use her own hand as the unit of measure for each of the sections of piping. And in deploying this new factor, Claxton's references to an architecture that is used to demarcate public and social space, from balustrades to tabletops and building signage, are somehow skewed and abstracted. Whilst these architectonic reference points suggest a use and a function for the installation itself, they are both inherently disorientated and disorientating; challenging the viewer to consider what might be embodied in the experience of this unified abstract whole.

As a development of Claxton's contribution to the Guangzhou Triennial 2012, this new installation works through ideas of 'touch' and 'taking care of the body'— ideas that might conventionally be perceived as feminine. After initially fabricating the underlying armature, she has invited a group of women to spend time with her in the studio applying clay to the structure. From the meditative marks to the squeezed areas of clay, this organic layer provides a material index of the conversations Claxton has had with her collaborators, capturing their levels of concentration and distraction, as well as evidence of their engagement with the object itself. Claxton is interested in the fugitive nature of objects, and the way in which they might render themselves and 'hold surface'. As well as creating touched clay structures, she embeds mirrors in the clay and finally silver-leafs them to produce objects and structures that undergo subtle changes when activated by the viewer's body and gaze.

The steel, mirror and glass construction Claxton has developed creates a kind of landscape for smaller figurative pieces to exist within, using scale, reflective surface and the physical experience of moving through the work to create an expanded space. The figurines are at once embedded within the installation, their form mirrored and continued in their blown glass masks that become one with the overall organic, mirrored structure, whilst also providing a kind of frozen counterpoint to viewers themselves – who are also masked from garnering a view of the 'whole'. All surfaces are rendered by the environment around them and rather than being static, reveal themselves as a constantly shifting set of viewpoints which fix, multiply and collapse as one moves through and around their perimeter.

Ruth Claxton was commissioned to make a site-specific installation for the Guangzhou Triennial 2012, China, and has recently had solo shows at Nottingham Contemporary, SITE Santa Fe; Spike Island, Bristol; Ikon Gallery, Birmingham; Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool; and Oriol Davies, Newtown, Wales. Other shows and projects include *Undone*, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds; *Remake, Remodel*, National Glass Centre, Sunderland; *The Figurine Dialogue*, Crystal Palace, Stockholm; *Known Unknowns*, Gallery Loop, Seoul; *Daybreakers*, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton and *An Archaeology*, 176, London. She has completed public art works for Situations (*Wonders of Weston*, Weston-super-Mare); Meadow Arts (*House of Beasts*, Attingham Park), and most recently a permanent sculptural installation for the Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool, commissioned by the Contemporary Art Society, London. Claxton was awarded the 2012 Arts Foundation Sculpture Fellowship.

Opening Hours: Mon-Fri 10-6, Sat 10-4. For further information, please contact gALLERY@houldsworth.co.uk.