

Neil Ayling.

Facet.

14th November – 5th December 2015

Neil Ayling's sculptures have the mercurial quality of being able to insinuate themselves into any given space, commandeering their surroundings with an air of almost aggressive presence. Ayling has exhibited his sculptures in outdoor pastoral settings, in pristine Mayfair galleries, in dilapidated, poorly lit townhouses and industrial cityscapes. The scale of the sculptures varies, from the diminutive *Concrete Candy* (2013) to the monumental *Vert* (2013). They can either be free standing, hanging from the ceiling, on a plinth, or clinging to a building. What is it, then, that gives these sculptures *carte blanche* to sit so confidently wherever they are placed?

Part of the answer is to be found in the fact that Ayling is a sculptor who also deals with flat imagery. This may sound contradictory, but his simultaneous exploration of both dimensions creates a new, transformative space, which is where Ayling's practice crosses over with our experience of the world. The sculptor in him keenly understands (as to a lesser extent we all do) his corporal relationship with the objects and spaces around him. He spent much of his childhood on a skateboard, exploring and absorbing the urban landscape from his fast, fluid position two or three inches above ground. (*Concrete Cut and Fold SB* (2011), with its clarity of line and its whip-like change of direction, seems to capture something of this rapid-fire urban interaction, with snatches of architectural detail glimpsed before turning on a sixpence to reveal the next.) Later, as a young man, Ayling would traverse the city landscape on foot at a slower pace, recording architectural details otherwise overlooked, seeking out, contemplating, and recording details of our surroundings that we are too busy to notice.

We as viewers, whether we like it or not, understand Ayling's practice instinctively. We all move through the world physically, and process it visually. We combine these phenomena in nanoseconds as our neurons fire. What Ayling does is bring these moments of visual understanding to the fore. His sculptures arrest the process of comprehension in a cognitive freeze frame, literally removing a chunk of visual information from the world around us and recreating it in three dimensions. We empathise with what we see, even if we can't recognise it for exactly what it is.

As Ayling's practice progresses he digs deeper into our methods of visually processing the world, and takes us back to the wonder of nineteenth century invention, arriving at the pin-hole camera. The sculptures that Ayling has produced from this simple process of light manipulation and chemical alchemy create a Mobius strip of self-reference; the very walls of the dwelling-sized camera built by Ayling to produce the images have been broken up and used as both literal and metaphorical armatures for the photographs that it had previously recorded. What we are left with are broken images of bricks, fencing and windows, reassembled using the hard-edged architectural language that the objects in the images are bound to adhere to. Yet the syntax of that language (to stretch a metaphor) is disrupted, which in turn forces us to return to what we thought we knew, and look again.

Hywel Livingstone

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