



Alastair Mackie. Not Waving but Drowning
Exhibition dates: 16.01.09 – 28.03.09

For his first solo exhibition in London since 2005, British artist Alastair Mackie (born 1977) will present a new group of three major sculptures. The works in the show have been especially commissioned and produced over the past 12 months by The David Roberts Art Foundation.

Mackie introduces the exhibition with a 1930s glass taxidermy display case. Entitled *Metamorphoses* (2008), the object originally created to protect and reveal has been mirrored from the inside thus changing its function. Instead of viewing the object displayed within the glass the viewer is now confronted with their own distorted reflection. *House* (2008) is a large scale dolls house meticulously built from the wood pulp of 262 abandoned wasp and hornet nests. Shown on a high plinth, the toy becomes a possible model of drama partly inspired by Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. *Untitled (+/-)* (2008) is a large scale wooden loom with a material woven from mouse hair.

The title of the exhibition refers to a 1957 Stevie Smith poem about a man whose frantic thrashing about while drowning at sea is mistaken for waving by those on shore - who nonchalantly wave back to him.

Alastair Mackie gained his BA at City and Guilds School of Art in 2000. He has since exhibited solo shows at Mark Moore Gallery LA and Max Wigram Projects. His work has been exhibited in group shows including ARTfutures and New Blood at the Saatchi Gallery. Alastair Mackie lives and works in London and is represented by All Visual Arts, London.



***House* (2008), work in progress.**
Photos by Tessa Angus (courtesy All Visual Arts)

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Alastair Mackie in conversation with curator Vincent Honoré.

Vincent Honoré: This exhibition is your first solo presentation in London since 2005. We have developed it for more than twelve months. You decided to produce three major new works and not show past works or those from the David Roberts Collection. How did you conceive of this exhibition? Does it mark an important step in your artistic practice?

Alastair Mackie: The conception of the show came at an interesting time for me, just as I was starting to relax with the way that my work was going - really for the first time. I had previously been doing a lot of group shows, but wanted to stop showing my work for a while so that I could take stock and focus more specifically on ideas. This exhibition gave me something more specific to focus on, so in a sense it was good timing.

VH: The works are ambitious; not only in terms of scale but also in that they sum up a number of your previous preoccupations. You carefully choose the materials to highlight the tensions between natural and constructed structures. Using uncommon materials in surprising ways enables you to create at once delicate and unsettling sculptures and installations, and to raise a subtle sense of the uncanny. Can you describe the way you have created the three works?

AM: I had worked with some of the materials before but felt that they could be pushed further. I wanted to focus more on the processing roll behind the production of a piece, which was becoming more important to the general concept of the work, as well as the relationship between the end product and the original material. The dolls house and the loom were both very much process based pieces, whereas *Metamorphoses* was more of a diversion, something that would off-set the atmosphere of the show by approaching similar ideas from a different angle, both conceptually and aesthetically.

VH: Can you explain the loom piece further: its process and how you made the work?

AM: Over a period of one year I collected tens of thousands of barn owl pellets (the regurgitated indigestible parts of a mouse). These were subsequently processed into their raw components of mouse fur and bone. The fur was then spun into yarn and the yarn woven into a sheet of fabric with the use of a loom. The skeletons, which are the by-products, have been left in a heap alongside the loom to show the correlation between the length of fabric and the amount of mice it took to make it.

VH: Childhood, science, beliefs and traditions are some of the themes you have addressed in your work. They all point to a broader exploration of time, decay and melancholia with, from time to time, a certain sense of humour and absurdity. This description could also apply to works produced by Damien Hirst or Kris Martin. How do you position your work first in relation to the previous generation of British artists (the YBAs in particular) and second, in the current contemporary debate?

AM: The YBA generation were in their prime when I was at art school. Although I had been making "things" for a long time they helped me understand where I was coming from - in terms of why I was making these things, and inspired me to become an artist. Much of their works shared a sense of sensationalism, which I appreciated, but this is quite different to the feeling that I'd like my own work to hold - which is quiet in comparison. In this sense, I believe my work relates more closely to particular artists from the current generation who are using a quieter voice, whilst speaking a similar language.



VH: Could you name some of these artists?

AM: Initially, although they're probably considered to be more associated with the slightly older generation, artists like Tom Friedman, Olafur Eliasson and Ai Weiwei strike a cord. From the current generation I am interested in the work of artists similar to Jochem Hendricks, Mircea Cantor, and Kris Martin.

VH: You will be also presenting a public art project in London, coinciding with the exhibition at the David Roberts Art Foundation and you are planning your first catalogue for the spring. Can you tell me about your upcoming projects?

AM: The public art project will be at the Economist Plaza, commissioned by the Contemporary Art Society as part of their programme of outdoor sculptural works. It's my first outdoor piece and touches on ideas to do with place, context and confrontation. The book will be published by Other Criteria as the second in a new series of project based publications on young artists. It will be focused on the two process based pieces I've been working on this year – the loom and the dolls house.

RS&A have commissioned me to make a chess set for the forthcoming 'The Art of Chess' Exhibition at Reykjavik Art Museum, Iceland, opening at the end of January and there are a few group exhibition opportunities looming as well as my first major exhibition with AVA, which is pencilled in for 2010.

Interview conducted November 2008