

## 'The Fall' Summer Group Show

07.02. – 21.02.19

Curated by Alanna Irwin

'The Fall' is about failure, made manifest in broken pieces, unexpected deviations and murky erasures. Behind these material traces, the crux of each failure is embedded in the values and snares of the systems that consider them defective. Instead of discarding fractured plates, cups and lightbulbs, **Kei Takemura** 'renovates' them with cloth and silk thread, giving them a tentative renewal. For me, there is no doubt that these objects would lose their fragile beauty if they were perfectly repaired, leaving no trace of the accident. With no means to reverse their cracks, she offers a limiting but attentive respect to an object that has lost its function. Failure becomes more complex in these moments of transition, as materials are hammered, oxidised, fired and re-fired, or warped into the impossible pirouettes of **Andrew Rogers'** sculptures.

**Emma Fielden** relentlessly whittles down small monoliths of magnet and marble in 'A Diminishing Force', working with materials that wield a historical and physical power. The magnetic shards cling together as she tries to break them down into pieces, then into dust, and even into their atoms. She eventually stops short of this tiniest gradation, which reminds me of Sigalit Landau's idea that "the struggle is more gratifying than the achievement in the end." This is the same man who argued that Sisyphus, after having achieved his goal, would ultimately roll the rock back down the hill to regain his sense of purpose. It seems almost inevitable that, following this show, Emma will seek out a new stone to hammer down to continue her efforts to undo infinity. This feeling of being cyclical is also present in **Liam Garstang**'s 'Psychic Whip', a nine-part ceramic work that began with a single punch. After 19 firings, the initial impression has dwindled in scale to the size of an infant's fist, a transformation that suggests vulnerability can come back to us with whip-like momentum.

No work is more apt in conveying how failure comes in increments rather than single blows than **Sara Morawetz**'s 'Acts of Inexactitude', in which she attempts to mark out the exact length of a metre with charcoal on paper. She does so through an iterative process of drawing, measuring and re-drawing, observing that "measurement is not so benign an act [as] it is inevitably bound up in ideas of judgement and comparison." Her goal is apparent by the end of the process, but sits within a smoky crowd of charcoal lines that makes any recognition of her success near impossible. But, would the work be as revealing if she got it right the first time? Here, her marks are both purposeless and powerful, asking us to re-examine our systems of measurement and control.

In a society where maintaining control is rewarded, relinquishing it may give us back another kind of agency: sheer desire, stripped of any concern for outcome or achievement. **Lottie Consalvo**'s four-panel piece 'I Told Myself I Was Painting A Field Of Flowers' muses on just one action from her year-long performance 'Desire'. The artist wanted to garden, and so she did. As Lottie travelled, she "brought with her a pocket full of bulbs and seeds at all times, planting them in public flowerbeds, at monuments and shrines, in Monet's garden, in vineyards, in fields on the side of the road, at the bottom of a waterfall, in ruins and [exhibited here] in the field where Vincent van Gogh allegedly shot himself." She never returned to see any of these bulbs grow, which makes her a failed horticulturist, but also ensures that these flowers could never fail to exceed expectations, existing only in her imagination. The feelings of disenchantment and re-enchantment that arise when something is abandoned is also central to **Dani Marti**'s portrait 'Hanging with no title', which he began in 2008 and only returned to this year for 'The Fall'. In this work, twisted leather and steel bulges outward in a state of self-dispute: at once a failure and a triumph. In the same way, **Natasha Walsh** has completely re-worked an early painting to make 'Janus', a self-portrait that is both backwards- and forwards-facing. This work is made up of two half-portraits of the artist that visually leach across into two blank copper side panels, forming spectral mirror images that continue into imagined space.

The fitful sleep of the artist in **Francisco de Goya's** iconic etching '*The sleep of reason produces monsters*' is both a personal and a public haunting, surrounded by malevolent bats and owls that warn of a world seized by disorder. These monsters find their echo in **Locust Jones'** achingly honest and violent scrawls across 8 metres of paper. Uncertainty feeds our contemporary *caprichos* and the spectre of failure hovers over Western democracy, furnishing Locust with material for his twisted diary. From another perspective, Goya's monsters are more like **Claudia Terstappen's** ceramic *bichos* or beasts. These playful, nascent forms seem to breathe and belch on their wooden pedestals, butting up against the artist's photographs that picture nature as timeless and still. Thinking about how wilderness is variously worshipped, exploited and protected, the two mediums allow her to move between imagined and real places. Compellingly, an 18<sup>th</sup> century dictionary from the Spanish Academy of the Arts describes *capricho* as work "which is done by the power of invention rather [than] by the observance of the rules of art."

Sitting quietly behind Locust's basilisk coil on the gallery floor are **Stefan Thiel's** unassuming, black-and-white paintings of German landscapes, where wheat fields and undergrowth have veiled the sites of atrocities committed by the Nazis. These corrupted arcadias act as a kind of anti-monument to a very harrowing history. His works set an eerie tone that makes me think back to Goya's nightmares and to Alexander Nehamas, who says "it is always night somewhere, and it will be night again here – without fail." What's more, **Marion Borgelt's** lunar void gives us a sense that these shifts between dark and light are primordial.

Failure is not necessarily the antithesis of success in this exhibition, but instead refers to something that is unexpected and errant. Drawing from the work of Dutch master Rachel Ruysch, **Wendy Miller's** ceramic floral 'Ruins' toy with the still life tradition of *memento mori* by stretching out the narrative of decay over three shape-shifting bouquets. Accepting chance as a collaborator, one of these pieces remains unfired and will wilt over the course of the exhibition, allowing us to witness the unpredictable beauty of its gradual decline. This kind of material disruption is also present in **Kirtika Kain's** 'ravines', tackling a powerful history of prejudice through the use of screen-printing processes. She coaxes bright green crystals from a copper plate with bitumen, obliterating excerpts from the Indian historical archive about the 'untouchables' caste. A contemporary alchemist, she tries to transform metal and text into something more valuable, asking us to consider the worth of these materials and how they are allied with the manual labour of the lowest caste.

**Desmond Lazaro's** 'The Dymaxion Map VI (after Buckminster Fuller)' also inverts our common narratives, inspired by Fuller's non-hierarchical approach to geography. Using the gilding tradition developed for Christian icons, Desmond's map gleams a sacred gold and offers a world without north, south, up or down. Combined with pigments prepared by hand in his South Indian studio, he imagines a map that is outside of our conventional reference points and their embedded cultural biases. The faint geometries that edge his sprawling world are echoed in **Kevin Osmond's** mobile 'Midnight Cloud', which holds an affinity for the chance combinations of mathematical forms.

The title of this exhibition was inspired by a stanza in 'The Hollow Men', a poem by T.S. Eliot:  
*Between the idea  
And the reality,  
Between the motion  
And the act,  
Falls the Shadow.*

The feeling of having not yet arrived that stretches over the course of a lifetime and surfaces when reaching for the unattainable is both beautiful and hopeless. Upon re-reading the rest of Eliot's poem, I realised that my interpretation was more or less wrong. Eliot's Shadow causes stasis, dread and paralysis. The Shadow in this exhibition leaves a gulf for the imagination, allowing impossible monsters and alternative paths to flourish.