

2: Revulsion and Return

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This is one of the reasons why I'm always more interested in constraint than supposed freedom; the information about what I could or couldn't have was confusing and drip-fed. This sounds negative, but comparatively it wasn't, it's just that this part of making an exhibition is rarely recounted. There's a parallel with a touring project I had worked on in one of my other jobs, where we were invited to choose what we wanted to show and then each selection was turned down until we ended up with a totally different set of works and had to reverse engineer our reasoning. I think that probably happens a lot. This time I made a long-long list that was just links to the pages for each work on the Arts Council Collection website. At the time it seemed like this was the only way to see what was available, but later I was told by someone else that the collection publish a big book with everything in, which seems impractical. Either way, I made this really long list based on a rationale that I'll explain in more detail below and then Simon (the producer at The Art House) put it all into a spreadsheet for me. I love spreadsheets for keeping track of information about art and artists, the sort of information that you/they/I/we hope would be encountered fleetingly, purposefully, knowingly, or at least with some sort of romance and not in a cloud-based spreadsheet. Too bad. After that I colour-coded the spreadsheet based on which works I wanted to show together, with sets that would also perhaps work with each other. In this way four small exhibitions were posed, and two larger exhibitions, or any sequence thereof. Bear in mind, though, that I hadn't actually seen any of these works.

At first I had looked at interiors, or those tagged as such. I decided that it would be a waste to only look at artists I'd already heard of, I take no joy or pride in collecting information or bringing it to mind quickly to throw at other people, and find those that value this skill to be untrustworthy, preferring to seek it out and hold on to it gently for a little while before it sinks. It's also worth acknowledging that the artists whose names and ouevres I could call to mind were probably only familiar due to being shown and covered elsewhere, and I actively didn't want to feed into this feedback loop of attention and success. This lead to looking at interiors from far-past eras that seem exotically delightful, and then those from only 20 or 30 years ago that reminded me of the alienation and disconnection I feel from the various homes I've had, and how the objects and furniture in them can never really become familiar the way it should.

The artist, Laura Yuile, that I'm making this exhibition around is concerned with the places we live, with the objects that characterise those places, and I didn't want to crowd her. I don't enjoy crowded exhibitions because I don't like being distracted, I find it suspicious and manipulative; a technique from advertising, so I looked at flat works that point toward spaces and textures, flat works by sculptors, actually. However, I then found out that I should've really been looking exclusively at sculpture. With that I went back and tried to retrace the steps I'd used for finding the flat works, to see if they would lead to interesting sculptures, and discovered that I was mostly drawn to works from the 1980s and 1990s. I think this is due to the way that their various shapes, surfaces, colours etc. have been copied and recuperated into high (and then low)-end furniture and household items.



It's also important to recognise how my selection will have been led by whatever algorithm the ACC website runs on, so that I feel I must be doing a cruel disservice to the artists collected at the tail ends of the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s, who I didn't reach, and the 1940s, 60s, 70s and 00s which I didn't even bother with. We've all got to have some initial criteria for selection, it's just that for a long time people have gotten away with leaning into their unacknowledged biases and claiming them as unassailable. Here I'm trying to actively avoid going with what I know because that's how the same artists end up on the same circuits showing in the same galleries and groups, or are 'rediscovered' and subject to the process a bit later on. What I know is mostly what I've been told, after all.

There are fairly strict parameters for this project, but it's important for the organisations involved to seem open and adaptable, so the parameters aren't made clear until it's too late. After having made these dream-selections I find that I can only really loan 4 or 5 pieces, they have to be sculpture that is held at the longside store, and also that anything delicate or electrical won't work because they're either broken or have requirements that the venue can't fulfill. I can't tell if this is something coming from The Art House's side, or the Collection. I guess The Art House aren't allowed to share their budgets for this with me, in the same way that I'm not allowed to share my exhibition budget with participating artists in other roles. This is something that I find especially ridiculous and try to find ways around given that many artists are living on £10,000 a year or less and are, as such, very very good at budgeting. Maybe it's that the Arts Council Collection don't make the costs clear up front in the hope that people will commit beyond what they can afford? Again, this seems like I'm being purposefully negative, but this seems to be what everyone does and saying it out loud feels like breaking a spell. Later on when we're installing it turns out that some of the works I've loaned are often shown, which could be because they're relatively cheap and easy to show, or because of how the search algorithm on the collection website works.

While most of my initial, long list selections are women I end up with an even split, and given that only something like 30% (this is remembered from a conversation so don't quote me on it, even though I've quoted you) of the work in the collection is by women that's ok. Having (mostly) selected works by artists that I didn't know much about, once we reached the final selection stage I looked each of them up and enjoyed being reminded that some were Turner Prize nominees (Shirazeh Houshiary and Alison Wilding) or finding that they were still showing regularly (John Cobb and Gary Woodley), whereas others had completely changed their practice and were now making cutesy hotel paintings (John Wragg), and only one was not still living (Kim Lim). The other show that might've happened was much more overtly emotional and concerned with inner life and psychoanalysis, there would've been wall based works by Jane and Louise Wilson and Cathy Wilkes, along with two large sculptures made from reconstituted white goods, vents and polystyrene by Jane Simpson and Stephen Hughes. We'd have had to ship the wall based works from London though, and electronics put together by artists three decades ago often don't work anymore. I still think it would've been good, so try to imagine it over the top of this one based on my very

