

## Furnished Archipelago at Paradise Works

Cycling away from Paradise Works in Manchester, having visited their latest exhibition *Furnished Archipelago*, I felt intrigued by the exhibition itself and the discussion I had with curator, artist, and occasional furniture maker, James Ackerley. The exhibition, curated by Ackerley, features the work of Rowan Eastwood, Jack Ginno, Sam Potter and Alistair Woods. Collectively these artists make up Depot Studios, another Manchester based initiative. The works in the exhibition are interspersed by 'uncomfortable furniture' that Ackerley has created.

Seated on the uncomfortable furniture (which is surprisingly comfortable) Ackerley and I discussed his reasons for creating the objects, and how they interact with the works on display. I asked why it is important that they are uncomfortable, and Ackerley explained that the discomfort is on the part of the artist, not the viewer. This show 'is about works that are lost in the act of scrolling' Ackerley tells me. In an age of fanatical Instagram scrolling, art can be created on the understanding that it will be momentarily acknowledged, and swiftly forgotten. Therefore, to linger and critically engage with an artwork might expose the uncomfortable truth, that the more you look the less there is to see. *Furnished Archipelago* challenges this notion because the works included require time and thought, and the furniture facilitates this. It sets up the conditions for us to explore our own ideas about authorship and our role as an audience.

There is a strong aesthetic link between the works in the show, with three out of the four artists displaying paintings on predominantly found surfaces. These minimal works feature subtle marks where authorship is ambiguous and the intentional is blurred with the accidental. Potter's '*Untitled (Landscape)*' and '*Untitled (Scribble)*' exemplify this. The latter providing a handy reminder of what an artistic gesture looks like that can then be used as a tool to explore the myriad of scuffs and scratches throughout the exhibition. Woods also uses small catalysts to help us ground his paintings in the everyday, giving the impression of things that are found and not made. He does this with the use of everyday objects such as a clothing security tag in '*Houses for Sale*' or a betting slip in '*Weekends Spent Outside The Bookies*'.

Initially out of place amongst the monochrome tones of the rest of the exhibition, Eastwood's '*This Is Bliss*' influences our experience of the space and intensifies our encounter with the other works. It channels our attention in a similar way to Ackerley's furniture. Splitting the space in two using a large expanse of yellow textile; it requires the audience to move through, around and behind it in order to explore the exhibition.



*Furnished Archipelago* installation view. Photography by Jack Ginno.

Totally obscured by '*This Is Bliss*' when you enter the exhibition, is Ginno's '*Untitled (Install)*'. Comprising a field of blank canvas bordered with fingerprints and smudges it is reminiscent of Bob Law's '*Mister Paranoia*' (1969-72) and '*Nothing to be afraid of*' (1969-72) series. Both distil the role of the artist down to the fundamental act of marking out a space in which art takes place. Stripping away the superfluous to focus our attention on the artist delineating something as art. Another of Ginno's works, '*Untitled (xxx)*', amplifies this idea to encompass the entire exhibition. A faint pencil line, which begins as an unintentional mark on a found piece of board, extends in an unbroken loop around the whole room. Another act of delineation which declares that this is a space in which art has happened.

Throughout *Furnished Archipelago* there are marks that move outwards or trace a perimeter, leaving large areas of central space which invite the viewer in. There is a link to Marcel Duchamp's *The Creative Act* on Ginno's website, whose statements in this essay are a fitting context for whole exhibition. Duchamp's art coefficient, a 'relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed' encapsulates the questions posed by the depot artists, and his statement that 'the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world...and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.' Aptly describes what is being asked of the spectator.

As a curator and an object maker Ackerley has facilitated a deeper understanding of the Depot artists works and encouraged the viewer to ask questions. Not only about this exhibition, but about how we encounter art more widely.

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\*all works 2018 unless stated.

\*a shorter version of this piece is published on Corridor 8  
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