

THE COMMON GUILD

Visual arts: Projects / Events / Exhibitions



Photo by Ruth Clark

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COMMENTARIES

Hayley Tompkins

21 June – 02 August 2014



Lying flat on trays of dried paint, two hunks of meat sit too lightly for flesh. Oversaturated pink and scentless at room temperature, they're plastic: ordered online, made somehow and elsewhere, then delivered. Next to the painted trays and phony foodstuffs, the photographs in vitrines on the floor have been outsourced, too. To look down on and to circle the horizon lines of these stock photo seascapes and roads causes a little vertigo. Usually decorating websites and supermarket banners, these functional images are now as flat on their back as specimens. Their tacit claim to simple communicability is revealed. In the very same moment, it is made suspect.

Next to the photographs on the floor, as well as under the plastic food and on the walls, there are other objects that are only probably paintings. Paint has been poured into plastic document trays, tipped with care and left to evaporate in thin layers. Painting without a brush, obvious autographic marks have been substituted with "WEIGHMANS.com" – protruding through the patinas of dried acrylic paint in small letters. Just like the stock photos, the only indication of authorship is "© Jupiter Images JUP-040201-1941-3963-ashes-FB" or "08 10 14 06 LA3098R". Even with the right knowledge to decipher these codes, there are still the incomprehensible implications of technically organised production.

In the first room the work comes at once, with the same simultaneity of the windows of a (disorganised) virtual desktop. Upstairs, however, the semi-transparent plastic trays are hung on the wall in a long, single-line sentence. The thin paint on these clear trays glows from the reflection of the white walls behind. Though working in acrylics on plastic, there's the same watercolour logic of a glaze on white rag. Each titled "Digital Light Pool", when mounted on the wall these trays could be the backlit colorful abstractions of a broken laptop screen, internally bleeding liquid crystals.

Not militarily occupying The Common Guild, Tompkins' work instead furnishes the space considerably. Her installation ethos is a negative-spatial reversal of the usual "where should this go?" and after identifying the best spaces in a room, work is set down around these areas. Instead of the usual superimposition of work on space, there is coalescence. Just the same with the facture of the painted trays: it's difficult to discern material from technique; the behavior of the paint is easily confused with its delicate manipulation. This absence of usual distinctions is an important feature of Tompkins' practice,

which is itself "not rarefied or separated from life; it is melded into ...relationships, family household responsibilities, earning money". There is an enmeshment of practice and work, technique and material, practice and life that collapses their taken-for-granted contiguity.

Effacing formal separations and alienations, the work doesn't rise to greet. Sprawled on the floor or hung low at Tompkins' eye level, it operates to its own comfort. Without bluster it subtly bends neck and knee into a physical respect: head down, bow, genuflect closer to its detail.

Adam Benmakhoulou participated in the Scotland + Venice 2013 Professional Development scheme as a student at City of Glasgow College, one of five academic institutional partners.