

THE COMMON GUILD

Visual arts: Projects / Events / Exhibitions



Photo by Ruth Clark

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COMMENTARIES

Carol Bove

20 April – 29 June 2013



'The Foamy Saliva of a Horse'

The Foamy Saliva of a Horse (2011) takes its title from the tale of the Greek painter Apelles of Kos, as recalled by Sextus Empiricus, an ancient Roman philosopher. In the story, Apelles struggles with representing the frothed saliva in the corner of a horse's mouth and in anger throws his sponge at the painting, serendipitously producing the desired effect.

Bove first exhibited the work in one of the vast spaces of the Arsenale as part of the 54th Venice Biennale (2011). Positioned on a tall platform scaled to shoulder height, this version included a collection of objects presented as if suspended mid-air, hovering above the viewer. The plinth, usually an aid used to ease the beholder's encounter with an object, became an obstruction: less a piece of exhibition furniture and more an inherent part of the work. For her exhibition at The Common Guild, Bove radically reconfigured the assemblage, disposing not only of the plinth and a number of original elements, but also its original arrangement.

Throughout her practice Bove resists the idea of sculpture as a fixed and stable entity. The act of exhibiting is as crucial as the act of making. Her sculptural assemblages, such as *Setting for A. Pomodoro* (2005) and *La Traversée Difficile* (2008), have also been consistently reworked in subsequent showings, forging new constellations between their enlisted elements. Responding to the specificity of the gallery space, Bove's approach to sculpture is typified by a sense of setting. Each opportunity to exhibit acts as a way to explore how new contexts catalyse new readings and experiences. Bove employs methods of display (shelves, plinths, and low-lying platforms) to bestow meaning upon mundane objects, elevating them to the status of artwork. In writing on an earlier sculpture, *The Oracle* (2010), that consists of a hollow bronze pedestal with a concrete base, upon which a fine wire armature cradles a collection of shells, Bove remarked—“when the sculpture is not on display the elements are removed . . . its energetic state is more relaxed when it is on duty”.¹

The exhibition at The Common Guild includes two such shell sculptures—one fully installed, while the other holds only one shell in place, the others scattered at its base. As if part undressed, this arrangement draws attention to the transition from 'off' to 'on duty', from dormancy to activity.

The story of Apelles is often referenced in defining ataraxia, a state of absolute tranquillity and happiness. He is said to have experienced this in achieving the desired painterly effect. Bove's title may suggest a momentary alignment, a fleeting resonance between the many scattered objects she energises into 'on duty' sculpture. She could also be pointing to the frustration at the heart of artistic practice and the need to constantly re-examine and question the methods and outcomes that become typical of an artist's practice. Bove struggles against creating works that crystallise into what she calls *glyphs*, recognisable, signature works that belong to a certain set or grouping. Each opportunity to exhibit breathes new life into the work, allowing for its reconfiguration, remaking and redisplay, placing its experience firmly in the present.

Pavel S. Pys is exhibitions and displays curator at The Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

1. Carol Bove, 'To Rescue Time from Photography' in *Art Journal*, vol. 70, no. 2, Summer 2011, p. 27.