

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Whitechapel Gallery online
Summer 2002
Interview by Iwona Blazwick

Interview - Claire Barclay

Interviewed by Iwona Blazwick, Director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery

Iwona Blazwick- Is the term sculpture relevant to your practice?

Claire Barclay- I was originally making installations and I think that people would describe me as an installation artist, but I've never been interested in these categories. Even the more self-contained works have been placed in groupings that then emanate some sort of atmosphere into the spaces, becoming an installation in that way. I'm hovering in between I think.

IB- Do you subcontract the making of the works or do you make everything yourself?

CB- It's important for me to make things myself... I need help with the larger structures, although I still remain involved with their fabrication. I don't give someone a plan because it's very much a case of designing it as I go along... Some other things are more obviously handmade and this is important to me I don't know if that's because I enjoy making the work... I've also realised that I have a belief that crafts are vital within society, the idea of making something yourself with love, or having something that somebody you know has made for you.

IB- You mean craft as opposed to design?

CB- Yes I mean craft in a sense of things that come from a functional need, but then acquire some sort of decorative or designed quality, or in the actual production become special objects This has become very bastardised with commodification - you go into a craft shop and it's full of mass produced things, some sort of product, say a dream catcher kit for kids for example. I'm quite interested in how new age culture is becoming commodified, and amalgamated with craft.

IB- We encounter your work, first as a composition on a flat plane, then as an individual object in space.

CB- Yes. I think that if I make some sort of structure, then that is the thing that evolves with the space. It's not that I have a two dimensional image of it, it's more about placing things in the space and then adding something else on. It grows in a more organic process... I like the idea of something that is architectural to an extent, almost like a limpet - a thing that's attaching itself to the more conventional architecture. This thing adopts strange angles is in opposition aesthetically to the formality of the existing space.

IB- Do you think of bodies moving through that space - of how people will perceive the work?

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CB- I think that this has always been a recurrent theme in my work... I shifted from using found objects to making installations, towards the idea that I need to fabricate the objects that I use. That way you have far more control over the suggested meanings of something, rather than it having a particular association. I started to make these hybrid objects that are suggestive of different scenarios all at once... the ambiguities are what I am interested in.

IB- Your work is very seductive, yet then there's a disturbance.

CB- Subversion is something which I feel the need to do. I suppose that's when you get into the psychology of artworks, and it becomes difficult to explain. People might read my work in terms of certain themes, say fetishism and the body or the nature/culture thing, or architectural intervention. These different interests inform the work at different times. For me though, the work is very much an investigation into contradiction and grey areas and points of balance which are found within these subjects.

The artist is based in Glasgow. Recent shows include CCA, Glasgow, The Showroom in London, the Moderna Museet, Stockholm and Doggerfisher, Edinburgh.