



Diary

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Ears to the fractured ground - what's next?

Biblical rain. On opening night big fat droplets fall spattering faces, dripping down necks and dive-bombing heads like recycled effluent endlessly spritzed from the backsides of London's pigeon dead. Not good for the hole, not good in attracting the private view crowd or art-going families on this a day of worship. But the power of Muscle proves a bigger draw than copious cosy domestic moments across the capital and the hole is as the hole does. In damp dribs and drabs the public bravely keep coming up path, perhaps compelled by the promise of art unleashed, or called by some previously buried ancient force recently unearthed when four dug as one.

The glass doors of the gallery open into another portal, roughly, yet lovingly secured within the Muscle's site office frame. Neither obviously domestic nor the functionally bland variety favoured by the administrative institution, this door into the DIY unknown sets up a curious tension. For to turn the handle and enter the space means abandoning yourself to the architectural and creative whims of four individuals who for 12 days have lived, laughed, loathed, loved and lumped all manner of materials within its and their very differently constructed walls.

This spatial device works brilliantly. On a responsive level, the structure incorporates the theatricality of a big architectural effort with the cavalier two-fingers sensibility of the crudely constructed den and the composed formality of the sculptural object. Once inside and faced with doors every which way you turn, you could be within a stage set for a minimal production of Alice, but for the lack of direction provided by the artists' offerings scattered across an over-

Intelligent Muscle

Tom Ellis
Daniel Robert Hunziker
Max Mason
Liz Murray

What happens when you confine four artists, with reputations as independent problem solvers and makers, within a gallery space for 12 days and charge them with the task of conceiving, creating and curating an exhibition?

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sized table.

Through the other doors you will generally find more familiar art offerings. Behind one, attractively strung branches and a hybrid heating assemblage do what a lot of sculpture does - explore material, physical and philosophical concerns through the combination of natural and manmade stuff. Another will guide you into the largest space, windowless and perfect for film (if a little acoustically tricky). It is almost empty bar the black box of the projector and a concise, simply executed line-drawn animation incorporating the enduring motifs representing the Muscles' time here together. Staccato pools of light lap insistently at the floor as a figure rises atop the middle finger of a giant hand. And yet another door that, for this night only, leads to the bar and soggy bit of physical poetry waiting in the garden.

People rub, shoulders, chat and cautiously try the many handles on offer. While some feel comfortable loitering within the central hub of the shed, others gravitate to the wonderful hole and shadowy pile of earth that resulted from an eight-hour cylindrical dig. Outside the jurisdiction of the hazard tape and staring pensively under umbrellas, private view women might be widows mourning the loss of their husbands in a tragic mining accident, comforted by kindly men folk that hope one day to take their place.

As much as the tacked up drawings, paintings, objects, text and graphic pieces inside provide titillating glimpses into the world of Muscle, there are times when they seem like a distraction from the sculptural purity of the site office and crafted graft of the outdoor cavity. As statements of joint artistic output these pieces embody the spirit of the project, the hardship endured throughout and the big tick in the after-event success box, for they also work on a formal level. I don't know exactly what the four of them went through, that was never the point, but I feel moved enough by these works to know that whatever it was, it wasn't in vain. From the reductive soup of their combined efforts individual projects will likely grow. As I experience withdrawals following the abrupt end of my regular Muscle meetings, I can only hope that news arrives soon.

Rebecca Geldard

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