

60|40's gentle revolution continues

**Notes for a Future Work:
an installation by 60|40**

*The Siobhan Davies Studios, London
21 July – 4 September 2009*

Reviewed by Glenn Adamson

Lose your balance. Express a slight preference. Tilt your head just to one side.

Those are some connotations of 60|40, the name that three of Britain's top craft artists adopted a year ago for their new collective devoted to progressive thinking and making. Even readers of *Crafts* who missed the recent profile of the group (see *Crafts* No.215, November/December 2008, p.21) will know their names well. Clare Twomey defines post-studio and relational work in British ceramics; David Clarke is a prodigious metalsmith, whose works often seem to be in a state of becoming; and Tracey Rowledge is a bookbinder whose hand-tooled scribbles nail the sweet spot between fineness and expressionism (see feature on p.34 this issue). In short, 60|40 is a dream team, like nothing else in British craft.

For their most recent outing, the trio have created a joint installation at the Siobhan Davies Studios. This recently converted school serves as a teaching space and as the headquarters of a dance troupe headed by Davies, an influential choreographer. The context implied content: movement, the body, rhythm.

Clarke's response to the space was simplest, and probably the most effective for the casual visitor. He took an assortment of found metal buckets and fitted them to the building. Each was cut on one or more planes so that it would nestle perfectly into a corner or appear to sink into the floor. In one case, two buckets met, their shapes melding in a sort of Brancusian kiss. It was a nuanced investigation on the theme of posture.

Rowledge's two-part installation captured movement more literally. Upstairs was a graphite-covered board, in which you saw a murky reflection, as if looking 'through a glass, darkly'. Downstairs was a video projection, showing the reflections on the graphite board of people passing by. Rowledge found a way to turn everyday movement, magically, into a dance.

Avoiding ceramics, Twomey contributed an abstruse set of

monochrome photographs showing the blurred image of a woodcarver's hands. The images were printed on architect's plotting paper and hung about the building – in front of the windows, in a layered composition on a wall – and were also made into notebooks for visitors to take away with them.

Taken as a totality, the installation hardly seemed the handiwork of an avant-garde wrecking crew. It was marked by a certain restraint, with something provisional in all the works. Twomey, especially, seemed determined not to overshoot the title: *Notes for a Future Work*.

This brings us back to the name 60|40, and its suggestion of the ever-so-slightly off-centre. Just to put things in perspective, reflect that we are in an art season dominated by the *Futurism* exhibition at Tate Modern. So we are freshly reminded of the drastic measures demanded by a true avant garde. Burn down the museums. Glorify war. 'Leave good sense behind like a hideous husk.'

Now read 60|40's manifesto. 'To respond to the current concerns within the applied arts. To create opportunities for makers to debate their work. To engage

in wider dialogues with other disciplines.' That mild admonition 'wider' is the only hint of critique – certainly it comes as no vertiginous plunge into the unknown. It's that phenomenon so familiar to historians of craft: the gentle revolution.

And yet, despite their perhaps excessive modesty, 60|40 reminds us that if avant-gardism is dead elsewhere in the visual arts (try shocking your local bourgeoisie; they've seen it all by now), it still has a special value within the crafts. The commitment and care of craft, the years of skill-building, the intimacy with materials, make radical impulses seem all the more necessary, all the more risky.

One misses here the force of their more resolved work: the breathtaking courage of Twomey's public projects, the cussedness of Clarke's hand-made/readymade mash-ups, and the punk snarl of Rowledge's bindings. But the mere fact of their collective action may carry more weight than any of those aesthetic achievements. So far, 60|40 has not necessarily brought out the best from these artists, but it might be their most important work of all. *Glenn Adamson is Deputy Head of Research at the V&A Museum*



Notes for a Future Work, 3, David Clarke, 2009