

30 MARCH TO 12 MAY 2007

ALISON BRITTON 'CONTAINING'

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Losing the Plot

My first thought for this exhibition was to show my work on a shelf running around the edge of the gallery; this would leave most of the gallery empty and I would need to gather a collection of *something else* to fill the space and make sense with whatever pots I might put on the shelf. Showing at regular intervals in this gallery I have come to know and feel for the space; its clean proportions and its hull of three main exhibition walls, leaking into the corners with gaps running the full height of the room. The desire to 'play' in this plain and generous white space increases with time.

Conversations between objects, and across categories, matter increasingly to me and I took this opportunity to mix pots on the shelf with chairs on the floor. Chairs, which also contain, have always seemed to me the most animated and expressive of furniture types, echoing the body and structured with limbs. Pots have inbuilt anthropomorphism too though the scale is condensed.

I have picked these thirteen chairs only with a strong visceral response to shape; there is no stylistic or historical agenda. I happen to have chosen several from the turn of the 20th century some from the 1920s, and one from 1885. These are from the David Bonsall collection. The new chairs by Martino Gamper are hybrids, drastic blends of existing ones that he finds or is given. His chairs mix disparate styles and materials - design classic, old bentwood, cheap garden chair - and emerge triumphantly usable and beautiful. He is re-making a hundred chairs, completing each piece in a day. The Gamper chairs will be auctioned later this year.

Both ordinary and extraordinary, the whole group of chairs, with their feet in three centuries, have taken dramatic hold of the gallery space.

The pots I have just made that surround these chairs are new and strange in the context of recent years' work. Two years ago at Barrett Marsden the shelf was high up on the wall and carried the seventy pieces of the Ed Wolf collection of my pots, like an archive hovering in the upper margins of sight. My new pieces on the plinths in June 2005 were the largest I had ever made and I couldn't glaze them by myself.

In the intervening two years I have been trying not to make finished objects until I know how they should alter. In 2006 I made two trips to Istanbul looking, walking, photographing, reading. I was drawn to this complicated city full of diverse overlap and conflict because of reading the novel *My Name is Red*, by Orhan Pamuk, which is concerned, among many things, with the relationship between words and pictures. As I make pots now, I am interested in seeing how fiction might affect form. Also of course some of the qualities I'm currently pursuing have been affected by things seen in Istanbul, mostly not ceramic. Another spur for change has been my exhaustion with spraying the outsides of my pots with glaze - which is a dull dry way to deliver a surface - I would prefer never to do it again. I now want to use glaze in a fleshier way, to drip, to pour, to slosh it on, with leeway for lapping and flowing, and a little uncontrolled dribbling in the kiln. This, with my wish to get off the plinths, has moved me to make smaller pieces that I can manipulate freely over a dustbin of wet glaze, suitable for a new beginning.

Pleasure in making ceramics has a lot to do with accepting the balance of control and the lack of it, freedom and constraint. I am trying not to be overrun by the sudden plethora of glaze possibilities - to be both aloof to, and engaged with, its domineering danger. Some lovers of ceramics have always been more entranced by glaze than by form, but I have spent the last thirty years as a potter with the opposite in mind; form is what counts. The forms I have made recently continue working with the pipe as a ludicrous attachment, squares and cylinders, columns and boxes. I am still playing with the juxtaposition of architectural and domestic forms, and the underlying body. I have made a series of plates to see some horizontal surfaces, and some open and evident containers.

The shelf is a running line, a long horizontal to inscribe with odd objects placed on it like words in a sentence. It is a delight to occupy for a change the fringes of the gallery space - not giving the option to see all round the pots, but offering instead the chance to sit down in thirteen different ways.

Hopefully objects and feeling will continue to communicate and coexist.