

### **Consumed: Stilled Lives Exhibition**

*Consumed: Stilled Lives* plays with the traditional concept of still-life painting, which grew in popularity in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Often featuring silver plates, ornate glassware and expensive foodstuffs such as shellfish and exotic fruit, still life paintings became a fashionable way for the Dutch and Flemish to illustrate their wealth. When interpreted using emblematic symbolism the paintings represent a conflicting relation with material wealth. In response to this reading Woolley produces still-life objects that suggest contradictory relationships to contemporary consumer culture. Drawing on both definitions of the term 'consume' (to ingest and to purchase) she uses food still-life photography to represent different characters and positions in relation to capitalist society. What we eat and how we eat are symbols of our wider consumer habits. We are what we consume.

In addition to photographs and installation this exhibition presents a series of still life objects installed in vitrines. The Celebrate installations suggest the conviviality of a feast but the materials used to make the food disrupt this reading. The objects were produced in response to research into the visualisation of food in eating disorders. Food is imagined to be drained of colour and aroma to help suppress desire. The food is inedible, eradicating its value as food. In the white installation (objects produced in 2012 with supported by a training grant from the Arts Council of Wales), the food is made of the same porcelain as the containers, raising the food to the status of a crafted and delicate object. The grey party food is made of concrete, a common, inexpensive material. The black banquet is made from plastic, material that will not break-down, it is indigestible. The different materials evoke the shifting status of food in the lives of eating disorder sufferers, in turn object of disgust and obsession.

Two new installations '*Barmecide Feast*' devised for the exhibition at Blyth Gallery, are named after Barmecide, a prince in Arabian Nights. Barmecide invites a beggar to a feast, but serves only imaginary food. The beggar plays along, acting as though he were intoxicated by the imaginary wine and hitting the host during a drunken brawl. Eventually the beggar is rewarded with real food. The Barmecide feast has become a name for situations, in which promises are made but not delivered and acts of generosity that are no more than illusions. In the installations the illusion of plenitude and extravagance is undermined by the material of the food. The overabundance of newspaper headlines are intended to leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth, and invoke ideas of food insecurity.

Celebrate Installations











Barmecide Feast Installation









### Artworks

Celebrate 2012-15

Lure 2014

Pacifier 2014

Hysterical Selfies 2015

Wish Book 2015

Memorials 2016

Relics 2017

Barmecide Feast 2018

### Exhibition

**Consumed: Stilled Lives** (solo exhibition) Blyth Gallery, Imperial College, London, 26<sup>th</sup> September – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2018

### Workshops

Relics Art Club workshop, Consumed: Stilled Lives exhibition, Blyth Gallery, Imperial College London. 24<sup>th</sup> October 2018

### Exhibition Invitation



**Dawn Woolley**  
**Consumed: Stilled Lives**  
**Private View: Tues 2nd Oct, 6-8pm**

**Blyth Gallery, Level 5, Sherfield Building  
Imperial College London  
South Kensington, SW7 2AZ  
Wed 26 Sept - Fri 2 Nov, 9am - 9pm**

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**Blyth Centre**

Press Release

NEWS RELEASE

DATE: 20 August 2018  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Exhibition shows shocking side of consumption**

### **‘Consumer: Stilled Lives’ goes on show at Imperial College London**

Extraordinary, and at times shocking, still life images connecting the consumer and the act of consuming will go on show in South Kensington next month.

The exhibition, at Imperial College London’s Blyth Gallery, runs from Wednesday, 26 September until Friday, 2 November and showcases the work of Dr Dawn Woolley.

Woolley is a visual artist who uses photography, video, installation, performance and sound. Last year she [beat over 14,000 entries to win the #SAATCHISELFIE competition](#).

Titled “Consumed: Stilled Lives”, the exhibition plays with the traditional concept of still life painting, which grew in popularity in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Often featuring silver plates, ornate glassware and expensive foodstuffs such as shellfish and exotic fruit, still life paintings became a fashionable way for the Dutch and Flemish to illustrate their wealth.

[Dr Woolley, a research fellow at Leeds Arts University](#), said: “The term ‘consume’ describes the act of eating as well as purchasing a commodity. The still life table expresses this dual meaning because the objects on display are edible and indicate an individual’s social position.

“I therefore approach the still life table as a portrait of a particular type of consumer. This allows me to view food in a still life as an expression of a relation between an individual and consumer society, and a symbol of the effect commodity consumption has on the consumer’s body.”

The exhibition comprises of six series of mounted and framed still life photographs and online projects on Instagram and Twitter.

And some photographs, such as the Memorials series, are not for the faint-hearted. Dr Woolley added: “Memorials are neither still life nor portrait but represent the subject becoming nature morte. Rotting flesh is arranged among the paraphernalia of celebration, signalling the end of the consumer party.”

“Consumed: Stilled Lives” runs from 26 September until 2 November at the Blyth Gallery at Imperial College London’s South Kensington campus. The **private view** is on **Tuesday 2 October** from **6pm – 8pm**. The exhibition is open to the public, from 9am-9pm and entry is free. Further information is [available here](#).



Ends

## Notes to Editors

### Dawn Woolley Biography

Dawn Woolley completed an MA in Photography (2008) and PhD by project in Fine Art (2017) at the Royal College of Art. Recent exhibitions have included; “Self/Selfie” Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Australia (2017), “Le Féminin” Circulation(s), Arles (2017), “From Selfie to Self-Expression” Saatchi Gallery, London (2017) and “Basically. Forever” Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (2014). Solo exhibitions include; “Consumed: Stilled Lives” Ffotogallery, Cardiff (2018), Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (2017), Dyson Gallery, London (2016); “Visual Pleasure”, Hippolyte Photography Gallery, Helsinki, Finland (2013); Vilniaus Fotografijos Galerija, Lithuania (2012); Ffotogallery in Cardiff (2011) and “The Substitute”, Murray Edwards College, Cambridge University (2010).

Recent academic publications include ‘Aberrant consumers: Selfies and fat admiration websites’ *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society*, 6(2). Her forthcoming book *Consuming the Body: Capitalism, Social Media*

*and Commodification* is due to be published in 2019 by I B Tauris. Woolley is a research fellow at Leeds Arts University.

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website: [www.dawnwoolley.com](http://www.dawnwoolley.com)

Exhibition and research kindly supported by Leeds Arts University

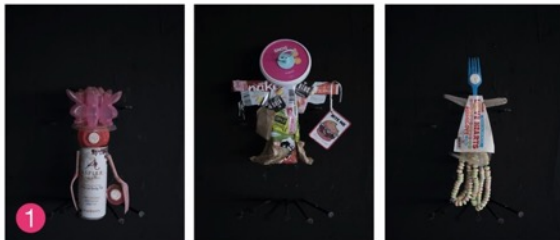


*Celebrate (Blancmange Dentata 2)*, 2012, 2 50cm x 62cm [Photograph in walnut tray frame]



*Relic (20)*, 2017, 40cm x 30cm [Photograph mounted on mdf]

## Exhibition Leaflet



*Consumed: Stilled Lives* plays with the traditional concept of still-life painting, which grew in popularity in the 16th and 17th centuries. Often featuring silver plates, ornate glassware and expensive foodstuffs such as shellfish and exotic fruit, still-life paintings became a fashionable way for the Dutch and Flemish to illustrate their wealth. When interpreted using emblematic symbolism the paintings represent a conflicting relation with material wealth. In response to this reading Woolley produces still-life objects that suggest contradictory relationships to contemporary consumer culture. Drawing on both definitions of the term 'consume' (to ingest and to purchase) she uses food still-life photography to represent different characters and positions in relation to capitalist society. What we eat and how we eat are symbols of our wider consumer habits. We are what we consume.

In Woolley's artwork, photography is both subject and medium: She produces photographs in response to advertising imagery. Her research examines the relation between people and objects, and the impact that adverts have as producers and disseminators of social values. Her central argument is that commodity culture turns everything into adverts, from still-life paintings to selfies. Alongside her exhibition works, Woolley makes site specific works for commercial advertising spaces on billboards and social networking sites in order to intervene in commercial visual culture and interrupt the repetitious order of consumerism.

*Consumed: Stilled Lives* was first presented as the practical element of Woolley's PhD by Project (*Consumed: Stilled Lives and the Pathologies of Capitalism*) in the Dyson Gallery at the Royal College of Art. Her forthcoming publication *Consuming the Body: Capitalism, Social Media and Commodification* is due to be published in 2019 by I B Tauris.

### Biography

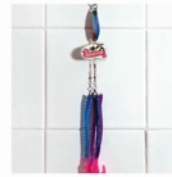
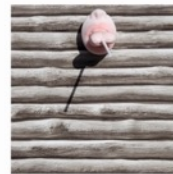
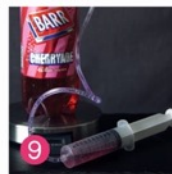
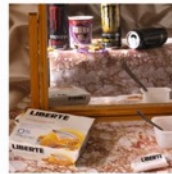
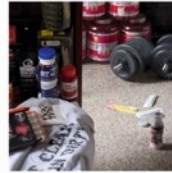
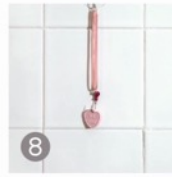
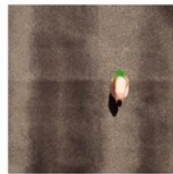
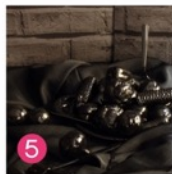
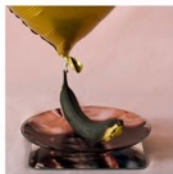
Woolley completed an MA in Photography (2008) and PhD by project in Fine Art (2017) at the Royal College of Art. She is now a research fellow at Leeds Arts University. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Consumed: Stilled Lives* Fotogallery, Cardiff (2018), Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge (2017), Dyson Gallery, London (2016); and *Visual Pleasure*, Hippolyte Photography Gallery, Helsinki, Finland (2013), Vilniaus Fotografijos Galerija, Lithuania (2012), Fotogallery, Cardiff (2011). Group exhibitions include: *Still Life: Things Devouring Time* The Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery, University of Leeds (co-curated with Dr Katie Herrington) (2018), *Self/Selfie* Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Australia (2017), *Le Féminin* Circulation(s), Arles (2017), and *Basically*, Forever Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (2014).

## CONSUMED: STILLED LIVES



Dawn Woolley

2



**1. Relics**  
Reminiscent of devotional artefacts and ceremonial figures such as totems, votive candles, and janus figures, these relics imply an over-valuation of commodities. Made from different types of packing material, and beginning to show signs of age, these relics are not sacred objects that are preserved for centuries because they are considered to be important, rather they are waste that cannot be destroyed. They show themselves simultaneously as commodities to be worshipped and rubbish to be discarded. They conflate ideas of the sacred and profane.

**2. Memorials**  
Rotting flesh is arranged among the paraphernalia of celebration, signalling the end of the consumer party. Regardless of body-labour or workout ethic the body sags into amorphous organic forms. To evoke the idea of a memorial to a lost object the photographs are installed leaning against the gallery wall propped up by two deflated balloons.

**3. Celebrate (Vanitas)**  
The objects in Celebrate suggest contradictory relationships to consumerism through methods of condensation and transformation of materials. In a traditional vanitas painting, a bowl of fruit beginning to rot connotes that life is short and pleasure has consequences. In this vanitas photograph the fruit is plastic and will not decay.

**4. Pacifier**  
Overt sexualisation and infantilisation is implied by the sweets, sex toys and nail art practice dummies representing pacified consumers. Each work contains multiple surfaces vying for attention, the textures of the faux surfaces in the ellipse directly compete with the objects they support and the coloured expanses surrounding them. The vignettes may be viewed as portraits or the beheaded trophies of a hunter.

**5. Celebrate (Installation)**  
The installations suggest the conviviality of a feast but the materials used to make the food disrupt this reading. The objects were produced in response to research into the visualisation of food in eating disorders. Food is imagined to be drained of colour and aroma to help suppress desire. The food is inedible, eradicating its value as food. In the white installation, the food is made of the same porcelain as the containers, raising the food to the status of a crafted and delicate object. The grey party food is made of concrete, a common, inexpensive material. The black banquet is plastic, a material that will not breakdown, it is indigestible. The different materials evoke the shifting status of food in the lives of eating disorder sufferers, in turn object of disgust and obsession.

**6. Barmecide Feast (Installation)**  
These feasts are named after Barmecide, a prince in Arabian Nights, who invites a beggar to a feast, but serves only imaginary food. The beggar plays along and is eventually rewarded with real food. In this installation the illusion of plenty and extravagance is undermined by the material of the food. Union Jack tableware, mud-

**7. Barmecide Feast continued**  
cakes and newspaper headlines are intended to leave an unpleasant taste in the mouth, and invoke ideas of food insecurity.

**7. Hysterical Selfies**  
Rather than reflect the body of the individual, the mirrors in these selfies reflect commodities suggestive of an identity formed entirely by products and advertising concepts. Each image is printed on a commercial 'pop-up banner', further emphasising the commercial origin of the identities that the selfies evoke. The commodities in the photographs are grouped by the gendered ideology they perpetuate. By grouping the products in this manner, their ideological messages become apparent.

**8. Lure**  
Cakes, sweets and diet chocolate bars dangle from fishing hooks, lures and bait. The objects in Lure suggest equivalence between duped prey, a consumer dazzled by an advertising image, and the 'absorbed credulity' of a fetish worshiper.

**9. Celebrate (Scales)**  
Scales considers the social stigma of fat and the medicalisation of the overweight body. The photographs were produced for a series of advertising posters displayed in Cardiff City center in January 2015. The images draw attention to the abrupt shift in advertising rhetoric once the Christmas and New Year period is over, alluding to the excesses of the holiday period that are often followed by self-recriminations and sometimes lead to diets and even surgery.

**10. Celebrate (Night Feeder)**  
Night Feeder refers to the case of Sarah Jacob, the nineteenth century 'Welsh Fasting Girl'. Sarah was heralded as a miraculous saint. She lived at the advent of medical empiricism. Doctors decided to test her miraculous devotion by observing her closely over the course of eight days during which she starved to death. She was later labelled a hysterical night feeder.

**11. Celebrate (Blancmange Dentata) (over leaf)**  
The Blancmange Dentata photographs were made in response to written entries on 'thinspiration' and 'pro-anorexia' websites. The photographs suggest consumption is both threatening and appealing – although the food is a biting mouth, it is also soft and unable to cause injury.

Exhibition supported by



Blyth Centre

Installation Photographs













## Workshop Outline

### **The Social Value of Things: Relics Workshop**

#### Materials and Equipment:

Digital SLR and tripod, black paper / material (photo backdrop), a range of packaging and objects, glue guns, scissors, pens, wire, double-sided tape etc., stapler, string etc.

#### Dissemination of outcomes:

The photographs will be shared on Instagram. If funding is available the photographs could also be printed as advertising posters / billboards and / or shown on screens / posters around the campus.

Participants will be asked to collect packaging and objects to bring to the workshop (some packaging will also be provided). The workshop will begin with a brief discussion about still life and vanitas, in relation to the Relics series and anthropological objects, the environment and sustainability. Participants will work alone or in groups of two or three to create 'relics'. They could take the form of 3-D objects, or 2-D collage / collagraph images made using different textured packaging. The objects / images will be photographed and disseminated via Instagram and other social networking sites. Participants will be asked to come up with suitable hashtags to describe their objects. If funding is available some of the photographs could be reproduced on a poster/s to be displayed in commercial advertising spaces in the city. The Lure poster will be shown as inspiration.

The aim of the workshop is to increase knowledge in relation to consumer habits and sustainability while developing 3-D and 2-D creative skills. It is hoped participants will also begin to critically interpret brands, packaging, and advertising texts.



Lure Poster, 2014, 100cm x 150cm, Cardiff



Relics, 2017, 30cm x 40cm.

## Workshop Sculptures and Social Media Posts



consumer\_relics Edit Profile

15 posts 69 followers 76 following

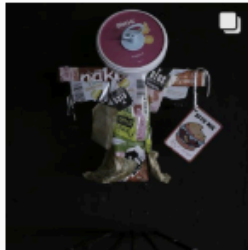
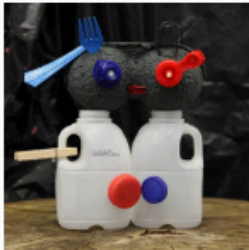
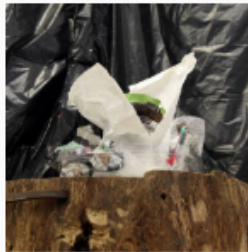
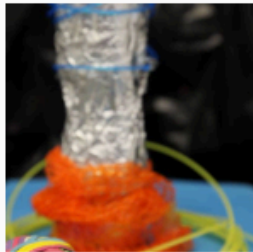
Dawn Woolley  
Workshops that consider the environmental  
impact of consumption and critically interpret  
brands, packaging, and advertising texts.  
[www.dawnwoolley.com/relics.html](http://www.dawnwoolley.com/relics.html)

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mandygamsu Dawn is your exhibition still on and where if YES? THANKS MANDY

consumer\_relics @mandygamsu hi, no unfortunately the exhibition at Blyth



7 likes

NOVEMBER 20

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consumer\_relics

consumer\_relics #consumer #relics by @weiwenss @blyth\_arts #love #sculpture #silveranniversary #howmuchcanahearttakein #anniversary #celebration #silverheart #recycling #silverlining #recycledart #recycledsculpture



3 likes

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5 likes  
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consumer\_relics #consumer #relic by Jelena Dragovic @blyth\_arts #outofdate #outonadate #kissing #sculpture #assemblage #packaging #recycled #recycledart #recycledsculpture #consumerism #waste #inlovewithplastic #outofdateidea #timeforchange #timeforaction #actnow

davinwatne I love these ❤️  
consumer\_relics @davinwatne they're great aren't they! This one reminds me of a Joan Miro sculpture. I had real creative envy when I photographed it. ❤️

18 likes  
OCTOBER 28

Add a comment...

[https://www.instagram.com/consumer\\_relics/](https://www.instagram.com/consumer_relics/)

