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Cast Contemporaries

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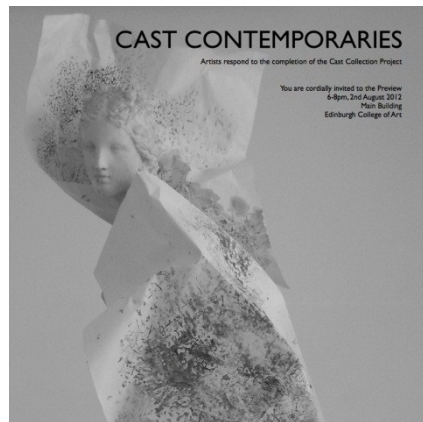
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Cast Contemporaries



artists respond to the completion of the Cast Collection Project at Edinburgh College of Art

An exhibition curated by Chris Dorsett in collaboration with Margaret Stewart (ECA Cast Collection)
3rd August – 2nd September 2012
10-5 daily

Cast Contemporaries is an exhibition that explores contrasting responses to the fate of plaster cast collections in art schools. Many contemporary artists question the relevance of preserving reproductions of antique sculptures, anatomical figures and architectural details. However a growing number of young and emergent practitioners are rethinking the role of these historic educational resources. Edinburgh College of Art has one of the most important cast collections in the UK and, following a two year project in which this unique legacy has been conserved and researched, *Cast Contemporaries* considers the casts as catalysts for future visual arts experimentation. The exhibition, which reinterprets Edinburgh's casts with contemporary artworks, is a collaboration between Chris Dorsett, an artist based at Northumbria University whose exhibitions combine contemporary fine art practices

with museum display, and Margaret Stewart, curator of the Collection at the College.

Visitors to *Cast Contemporaries* will find selected examples of the celebrated collection of plaster casts that are, for those who teach and study at Edinburgh College of Art, a feature of everyday life. The exhibition places these sculptures alongside the inventive use of plaster as a medium in its own right and approaches to casting that replicate, and yet curiously transform, over-familiar objects. However the aim is to also explore how artists are responding to the forgotten casts that have been stored away in college basements and art school cupboards for decades. Chancing upon an anonymous anatomical figure, dusty and broken, can sharpen our understanding of the ethical dilemmas that straddle the gap between art and science (Christine Borland) or, in relation to a discarded *Eros of Centocelle*, trigger an interest in aesthetic pleasure, suggesting contested notions of sensual and intellectual wellbeing.

Chris Dorsett Cast Contemporaries Press Release

Research visit

The wall piece in the Cast Contemporaries exhibition was inspired by a research visit, made in July 2012, with Margaret Stewart, cast collection curator, and Ed Hollis, design historian, to:

L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris (ENSBA) morphologie/anatomy collection and cast collection and meetings with- Professeur Philippe Comar and Professeur Emmanuel Schwartz

The ENSBA store at St Denis which houses the college's collection of paintings, casts, books and other objects

The Louvre's cast store in the stables of the Palace of Versailles, which houses collections taken from various art colleges and other institutions, where we met the cast curator, Elizabeth Lebreton

Purpose of visit:

- to photograph and draw the Morphologie collection and to use this research as the basis for a series of prints and other artworks
- to visit and photograph the ENSBA cast collection to make comparisons with the eca cast collection
- to view, photograph and draw the Louvre's collection of casts taken from various art colleges and other institutions

Developing research themes based on the visit:

- Historical anatomical objects used in teaching art; the breadth and complexity of collections of these objects and their provenance
- The production of copies, copies of copies and the degrading of the original image as a result
- Cataloguing and referencing systems; defunct references scored out and replaced by newer ones, summarising movement of casts from institution to institution (in the Louvre collection)
- The damage and wear and tear caused by the people who used the collections, the marks left behind by them



Part of the ENSBA Morphologie collection



The Louvre cast store at Versailles

Cast Contemporaries

Outputs so far

Series of prints using images from the collections viewed in Paris

Drawings exploring repetition and copying, using classical forms as starting points

Stencilled wall piece in Cast Contemporaries exhibition

www.joansmithartist.weebly.com



'Echo' graphite and acrylic on paper with cut out form 76cm x 112 cm

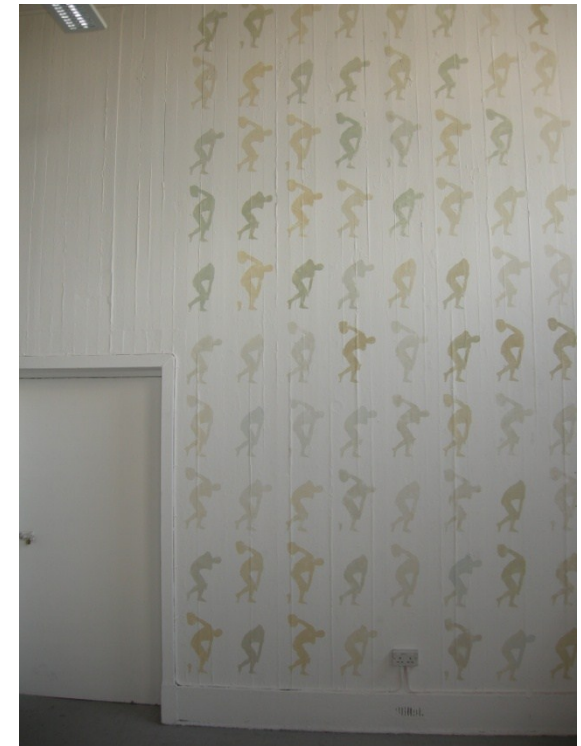


'Fold/repeat' oil bar and graphite on folded and cut paper 76cm x 112 cm



Untitled screenprint 20cm x 29cm

Portfolio Submission REF 2014



'Inventory' printing ink on wall in Cast Contemporaries exhibition

Cast Contemporaries

Introduction by curator Chris Dorsett:
Cast Contemporaries website

<http://castcontemporaries.weebly.com/index.html>

Whilst some exhibits help us rethink a time when casts were common-place teaching aids (Andrew Sneddon uses an anatomical figure by Eduardo Lanteri), others celebrate the conservation techniques now required to restore these sculptures to a museum-worthy standard (Ruxandra-Iulia Stoica & Graciela Ainsworth). The exhibition also demonstrates how young artists are turning new eyes, sometimes with clear reference to popular culture, on the Classical and Renaissance sculptures that the casts reproduced (Tim Croft, John Farrugia, Clare Flatley, Dylan Shields).

Because the Hellenic styles that dominated 18th and 19th century European taste were, in part, disseminated and absorbed through cast collections, *Cast Contemporaries* also embraces Edinburgh's status as an 'Athens of the North' (Douglas Cruikshank & Scott Licznerski), digitally reconfigures a Classical frieze (Beverley Hood), and discovers a Punk-Stuckist dimension to the decorative designs of Pompeian wall painting (Paul Harvey). Moreover, the exhibition has its own contemporary way of representing the mentality and materiality of Neoclassicism (Graeme Durant's out-of-scale Platonic form and Maria Mitsoula's photographic abstractions of marble quarries in Athens). In the 19th century casts were collected for the purposes

of study, mostly through careful observational drawing. These days artists use photography to explore the shapes and forms of Graeco-Roman sculpture (Murdo Macdonald, Norman McBeath) whilst others continue to make cast drawings in museums or art schools, with unexpected humour and poetry (Steven Morant, Joan Smith).

Cast Contemporaries also offers a unique opportunity to compare a contemporary application of 'stump' drawing with 19th century examination works which used this technique to draw the ECA casts (Charles Stiven) – it also features a live video stream from a drawing class in ECA's 'golden' studio (Chris Speed, Jane Macdonald, Jules Rawlinson & Margaret Stewart). Lastly, we must not forget that the starting point of a monumental sculpture is often a clay model which is destroyed as the mould is made. *Cast Contemporaries* would be incomplete if it did not try to represent this unexhibitable stage in the development of a public sculpture (Alexander Stoddart).

The Graeco-Roman and Renaissance sculptures presented here as casts are: St. George; Lorenzo de' Medici; Crouching Venus; Spinario; Funerary Statue of Marcellus, nephew of Augustus; Discophorus of Naukydes; Discobolus; Venus de Milo; Castor and Pollux; Male Nude (possibly Hermes); and Venus de' Medici.

CATALOGUE: *Cast Contemporaries* catalogue
ISBN 978-0-9565433-5-6 Northumbria
University Press

Portfolio Submission REF 2014

REVIEW

<http://www.scotsman.com/the-scotsman/scotland/visual-art-reviews-dieter-roth-diaries-cast-contemporaries-1-2483568>

RELATED BLOG: <http://fields.eca.ac.uk/>



Cast Contemporaries. Picture: Jane Barlow The Scotsman showing eca cast collection and wall piece 'Inventory' by Joan Smith in background



installation view of Cast Contemporaries exhibition