

## **a study of duration - the encounter**

I enter the gallery and the first thing that is noticed is the aroma. The sweet smell of beeswax lingers in the air. I take a deep breath. I look down the long narrow space and observe the unfinished decaying space of the building. Walls crumble, surfaces are scarred, lathe and wires are exposed. In the centre of the space, separate and on an angle I see a large solid monumental wall that houses a fireplace and mirror. Unlike its surroundings it is white, perfect, and beautiful and in one glance it suggests 'home'. I walk towards it but am stopped by the awareness of a smaller structure.

I am standing in front of a vertical stack of white beeswax blocks which measure approximately in scale and height the size of a child. They are smooth and draw your hands to delicately touch the surface. The interior of the top box is illuminated. It glows and reveals the trace of something inside but I cannot see in. The box is sealed. I feel frustrated and anxious. I try peaking through the cracks that leak light but to no avail. I walk around it only frustrated by the traces that can be seen from the exterior. I make out a miniature door, a window, a fireplace, a mirror. I move away and towards the large massive fireplace wall and look back and see the traces emanating from the box becoming clearer but still remaining ambiguous.

I find myself at the massive white wall. I discover that white beeswax envelopes this architecture. It is sealed like the small minimal wax box. But unlike the clean cool exterior of the light box the surface of the large walls are covered in wax that clings to the embossed wallpaper, that drips on the architectural surfaces such as the mantle, the firebox, the crown mouldings and baseboards. The outermost surface of this architecture appears as skin, as flesh but in this state it is impermeable. Everything is sealed except the circular mirror hung above the fireplace.

This mirror reflects but in its reflection I cannot insinuate myself because of its height. What I can see is the decay of the walls of the building being inhabited by this structure. This reflection is mobile and changes as I move. Is this the leak? Is this the portal to the interior? I notice a second reflection, an elliptical sphere of light on the decaying walls of the gallery but it is opaque. I am shadow. I begin to feel there is no entry point.

I round the back of the wall and discover a doubling of the wall, the fireplace and the mirror. They echo but are different in shape and size. They are treated in the same manner. Wax covers the fleshy surfaces. Like the first mirror, the second is open but the reflection is unlike that of the first. This mirror grabs my countenance, it forces my likeness to be immersed in the boundless decay. I am pulled into the centre, into the space of spectres. The facade's beauty becomes disturbing. I am disturbed.

I look away and in so doing I discover a third work. I am persuaded, impelled by the curious collection of white objects in the centre of the small end space of the room. I move closer to discover a pile, a mass of white wax doorknobs. I bend to examine closer. Each one is articulated. Each one offers me touch. My hands reach for the handles. I want to inspect it with my fingers, my skin, my eyes, my nose. I caress one

and then another. It is as if I am looking for the perfect one. I become aware of my search. I linger with my thoughts of the collection. Why? I consider the obsessiveness of the production. I contemplate the uselessness of the wax replicas. I think about the threshold and the doorknob as a tool to open the door, to allow passage to the "other side". These doorknobs however could open nothing but their excess speaks of frantic, relentless attempts to locate, to find the one that just might allow passage through. With each repetition the knobs suggest mastery is eventual but the material, the beeswax belies this notion. It becomes a haunting collection, like a nightmare where one's teeth begin to fall in never ending streams.

All three works are beautiful and seductive but as I am pulled into their aura I begin to feel unsettled. Time is encoded in the sealing of the wax. It is pressing and it makes me anxious.

Each of the works in *a study of duration* incorporates simultaneously the positions of Bachelard and Foucault. *doublure* presents the fabula, the archetypal fireplace of our childhoods. It may respond to an actual fireplace in our realm of experiences or it may be the nostalgic fireplace from the colouring books of the 'Night Before Christmas' we had as children. Either way it is the fireplace that triggers our response and suggests that we too will be "snug in our beds" safe from all evil waiting the arrival of delight (Santa Claus). It presents an image we carry with us and one we long to return to. *doublure* however, through the heavy layers of the beeswax seal on all the surfaces, through the positioning of the mirrors, through the opaque or bleak reflections, counters this mythology. We are struck by our somatic responses to the visual apparition. A corporeal language emerges and defies our first reading of *doublure* as beautiful and perfect. All is undermined and the language we feel is one of "heterotopia".

Likewise, *étui* plays simultaneously with the ideas of utopia and "heterotopia". It is a miniature room and as Susan Stewart suggests, the miniature is the perfect world. The miniature is both stable and controllable, a world of minutia and detail and as such is a fascination to both children and adults. It is a site, an imaginary room in which all things are possible including utopia. *étui* however, is sealed and coupled with its wax foundation presents a site of precariousness, of instability and one that cannot be controlled. It is both compelling and anxious. The beeswax exterior is smooth and slippery and at its joints it leaks light which suggests entry but to no avail. Only the trace is knowable. The desire to enter into the perfect interior world is acute as the spectator wanders around trying to make out the shadows, trying to peak through the cracks. This unattainable space is like remembering. Only the trace of memory is available to us and in the trace we can write the utopia while in reality it is the "heterotopia" we experience.

Like the other two works *poigner/to grasp* engages in the simultaneous relationship between our imaginary sites and the real. The wax doorknobs present the possibility, the promise of the idealized space but they cannot deliver. They are, once held in the hand a trigger for remembering like the "madeleines" of Proust's tea in the garden. They conjure up the past and take us to the emotions of that space and time. But it is filtered and idealized. No real threshold has been crossed. We find comfort in the entropy or exchange. Yet at the same time these doorknobs which are physically manufactured from a material that cannot function and therefore useless, form an uncanny relationship with

the threshold. They exist in excess and are evidence of the tireless, relentless quest to cross the imagined threshold, to search for 'home'. They personify our gestures, but they too in their pile suggest bones, a reliquary of sorts.

***a study of duration*** is work that provides a site to project the imaginary and the real not in a binary relationship but rather one of proximity, one where the surfaces or the edges of utopia and heterotopia slip and are permeable, mutable to each other.