

Props Room Configuration #2: Hollywood Regency Erica van Zon

Not Quite, Almost, Once More With Feeling

A conversation that began on a street corner in Berlin between Emma Bugden and Paula Booker.

Emma Bugden: Thinking about a film set within a film set within a film set... a starting point for this series of works by Erica van Zon is the film set from *Mulholland Drive* (2001). This set was recreated for the first component of this project at her 2007 Masters presentation at Elam School of Art. The hallucinatory incoherence of David Lynch's film, layers of fiction upon fiction, a film within a film, is echoed yet again by Erica's recreation of the filmset rendered in cardboard and paper... each step another twisted removal, from what is, after all, only fiction.

Paula Booker: To me, the faked-up fake seems to be part of Erica's project—to remove all content from these things as objects, if that is possible. I think it is quite a difficult thing to produce new non-items in the world. Judd and Co. tried to make their objects unobtrusively perfect to steer us away from reading meaning... could these lumpy handcrafted forms of Erica's be read in a direct lineage from minimalism as de-objectified, de-materialised non-objects?

What do we behold? When faced with such a constructed reality as the reconstituted filmsets or parts thereof, do we begin understand the nature of deceit any better?

EB: Deceit is an interesting idea. Erica's deceit is somehow so sincere though—it's something about the honesty, the clumsiness of her making. The handcrafter, the hobbyist, the amateur fan. Like a teenage devotee she creates painstaking homage to the original films, seeks to occupy them herself, inserting herself into the picture. Yet, perversely, the items she selects to remake—the cat from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), a hanging chain for Almodovar's *Woman on the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988)—are incidental, peripheral to the narrative. Redundant. A democratisation of product over plot.

PB: I'm digging what you're sowing here, Emma. Often Erica's porcelain figures or soft props seem drawn not only from films, but from classic cinematic tropes—in particular the device Hitchcock called a MacGuffin. He saw these particular key props as narrative devices and in themselves almost incidental, unimportant to the audience: merely a steering point for the central plot and motivator for his characters. Tarantino knowingly references Hitchcock's MacGuffin with the contents of the briefcase in *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Back to Erica though, when we understand that even the original prop from whatever film being replicated by her as an artwork has the function of a signifier already, it becomes very reductive. There is no 'signified'.

With *Props Room*, Erica has created key pieces from films but also from her own life, for example the pair of cat vases from a North Shore opshop window that she passed often at



one time in her life. Recognisable props from famous movies sit beside the artist's obscure childhood half-remembrances on the tables. What do you make of this curious entering of fiction by the artist?

EB: Hmm, yes, perhaps what we are confronted with is Erica as the star. Or at least as the narcissistic understudy performing familiar scenes to us, becoming the scene for us. As Connie Stevens, lip synching her way through *Sixteen Reasons*, heartbreakingly blonde, tenderly poignant and oh so young; or as a scared but resolute Tippi Hedren, posing before us with a bird in hand, with the pathos of somehow confronting her demons. Both references bring us back again somehow to the sexually charged surrealism of *Mulholland Drive*—Stevens' cool clear voice on the soundtrack, while Naomi Watts, like Erica, channels Hedren's elegant victim.

Now, you say something radical to finish off with...

PB: Well, I wonder if you mean 'radical' in the 90s sense as in 'cool' or radical as in 'outlandish'? I feel I've already said some outlandish things so perhaps I'll just wrap up by saying that I find this body of work surprisingly difficult. The difficulty is surprising because the work is easy to enjoy, but if one chooses to, there are many white rabbits to chase.