



Consumed: Stilled Lives Exhibition

Dr Dawn Woolley

Solo Exhibition

This body of artwork, comprises photographs, artist books, pop-up display banners, lenticular images, and site-specific artworks made for commercial advertising spaces in cities ([Consumer Poster Project](#)) and on social networking sites ([12 Days of Christmas / 12 Days of New Year](#) Facebook project and [Wishbook](#) Instagram Project).

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. Woolley applies literary concepts to her interpretation of the paintings to view them as forms of irony and allegorical irony, enabling her to conceptualise Banquet and Breakfast Still Life paintings as ironic adverts for the expensive artefacts that are depicted.

By interpreting the paintings ironically and applying the method to her own practice, Woolley produces still-life objects that suggest contradictory relationships to contemporary consumer culture. *Consumed: Still Lives* presents 'an adroit reprisal of the still life genre, creating artificial and fictive scenarios involving and centring on our relationship to food. Food allows her to address matters at the heart of consumer culture— a primary relationship that allows her to refigure our conception of the body and in doing so confront us with our desires and wants, our phobias and fears.' (Durden, [Consumed: Still Lives](#) Exhibition Catalogue, p. 31)

Drawing on her research into advertising on social networking sites, and her writing that hypothesises selfies to be adverts, Woolley examines the impact that adverts have as producers and disseminators of social values. The artworks explore social ideals, particularly gender norms, and how they are transmitted through commercial visual culture. In adverts, commodities are given human characteristics in order to make them more desirable. In turn, identities are commoditised and bodies become adverts for social ideals. Commodities are integrated into the consumer's identity and their identity is shaped to a marketing demographic. We are what we consume. We are adverts for the commodities we consume.

To reflect this, the artwork in *Consumed* blurs the boundary between portraiture and still-life, producing inanimate bodies and animate objects.

Through her consideration and use of the aesthetics of advertising, Woolley challenges and critiques consumer culture: 'Dawn Woolley's art never seeks to speak from outside, but she often uses the vibrant, ersatz and often sweet forms of consumer culture, to mess with and spoil consumerist modes of address. The result is an unpalatable, abrasive, discordant, comic and violent art that alerts us to the fundamental contradictions and hypocrisies, as well as the obsessions and indulgencies, of our present culture.' (Durden, [Consumed: Still Lives](#) Exhibition Catalogue, p. 34)

Photography is as much the subject of Woolley's artwork as the medium she uses. She 'strategically deploys photography's proliferation and excess [...] Embracing seriality, [...] she mimes the conveyor-belt processes of both commodity production and display. This over production and excessive quality is apposite in relation to her concerns— an art of glut that mirrors the proliferations of consumer culture.' (Durden, [Consumed: Still Lives](#) Exhibition Catalogue, p. 31)

In addition, she produces site specific work for commercial advertising spaces, on billboards and social networking sites. It is her intention to intervene in commercial spaces to disrupt the invasion of public space by advertising, and present her critical research to a wide audience.

Iterations of the exhibition have been presented at Blenheim Walk Gallery, Leeds Arts University (11th July – 22nd August 2019); [Blyth Gallery](#), Imperial College, London (26th September – 2nd November 2018); [Ruskin Gallery](#), Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge (21st September – 14th October 2017); [Ffotogallery](#), Cardiff, (13th Jan – 3rd Feb 2018); and [Dyson Gallery](#), Royal College of Art, London, (14th – 18th December 2016).

Additional activities include: poster campaign sponsored by City Centre Posters (Dyson Gallery, 2016); *Animate Objects: Encounters Between People and Things* symposium (Ruskin Gallery, Oct 2017 in collaboration with Dr Ellen Sampson); In Conversation with David Drake, Director of Ffotogallery (Janu 2018); Relics Workshop (Blyth Gallery, Nov 2018); an [exhibition catalogue](#) with thematic essays by Dr Francette Pacteau (Royal College of Art) and Professor Mark Durden (Director of European Centre for Documentary Research, University of South Wales), poster campaign and In Conversation event with Dr Kate Random Love, supported by Leeds arts University (Blenheim Walk Gallery, July 2019).

Site-specific artworks have featured in;

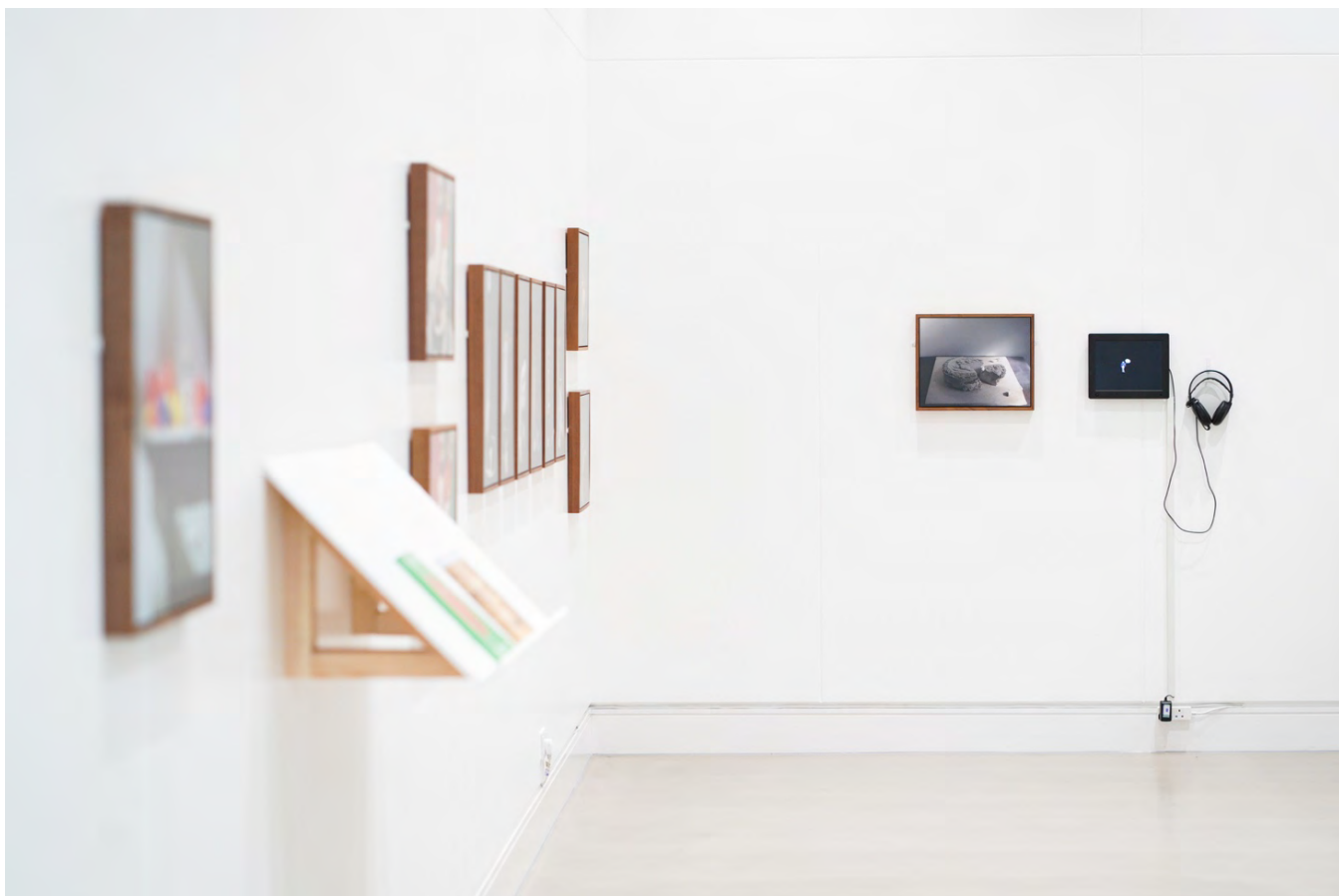
Dawn Woolley, '[Critical Clickbait: Artist Interventions in Commercial Visual Culture](#)', *InMedia* [Online], 7.1., 2018.

Dawn Woolley and Zara Worth, 'Creative Consumption: Art about eating on Instagram' in *You Are What You Post: Food and Instagram*, London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

Artworks

- [Celebrate](#) 2012-19
- [Consume Book](#) 2013-16
- [Estrange Restrain Book](#) 2013-16
- [Lure](#) 2014
- [Pacifier](#) 2014
- [Consumer Poster Project](#) 2014-19
(including The Sculptress poster produced for the Blenheim Walk Gallery exhibition)
(<https://lau.collections.crest.ac.uk/17401/1/Consumer%20Poster%20Project.pdf>)
- [Hysterical Selfies](#) 2015
- [Sirens](#) 2015-16
- [Infomercials: 12 Days of Christmas / 12 Days of New Year](#) 2015-16
(<https://lau.collections.crest.ac.uk/17408/1/12%20Days%20Infomercials.pdf>)
- [Wish Book](#) 2015
(<https://lau.collections.crest.ac.uk/17413/1/Wishbook.pdf>)
- [Memorials](#) 2016
- [Nature Morte](#) 2016
- [Relics](#) 2017
- [Host figures](#) 2019

Installation Images by Hamish Irving





Consumed: Stilled Lives Dawn Woolley

Dr Dawn Woolley is a Research Fellow at Leeds Arts University. Her research examines the relation between people and objects, particularly how adverts produce and disseminate social values.

Her central argument is that commodity culture turns everything into adverts, from seventeenth century still-life paintings to selfies. The title 'Consumed: Stilled Lives' refers to the process that turns a consumer into a display of commodities. The consumer's body becomes an advert for the brands it is adorned with and the social values that it reinforces.

The exhibition encompasses a variety of different still lives, using media including photography, video and sound, that suggest different types of consumers and contradictory relationships to consumer culture.

In Woolley's artwork, photography is both subject and medium: she produces photographs in response to adverts. Commercial advertising and social media networks are examined as methods of circulating the social value of commodities and also as sites for potential disruptions. Interventions into the commercial visual landscape include artworks produced for posters and billboards, and site-specific artworks for social networking sites. To accompany the exhibition, a new design will be presented on posters in Leeds city centre.



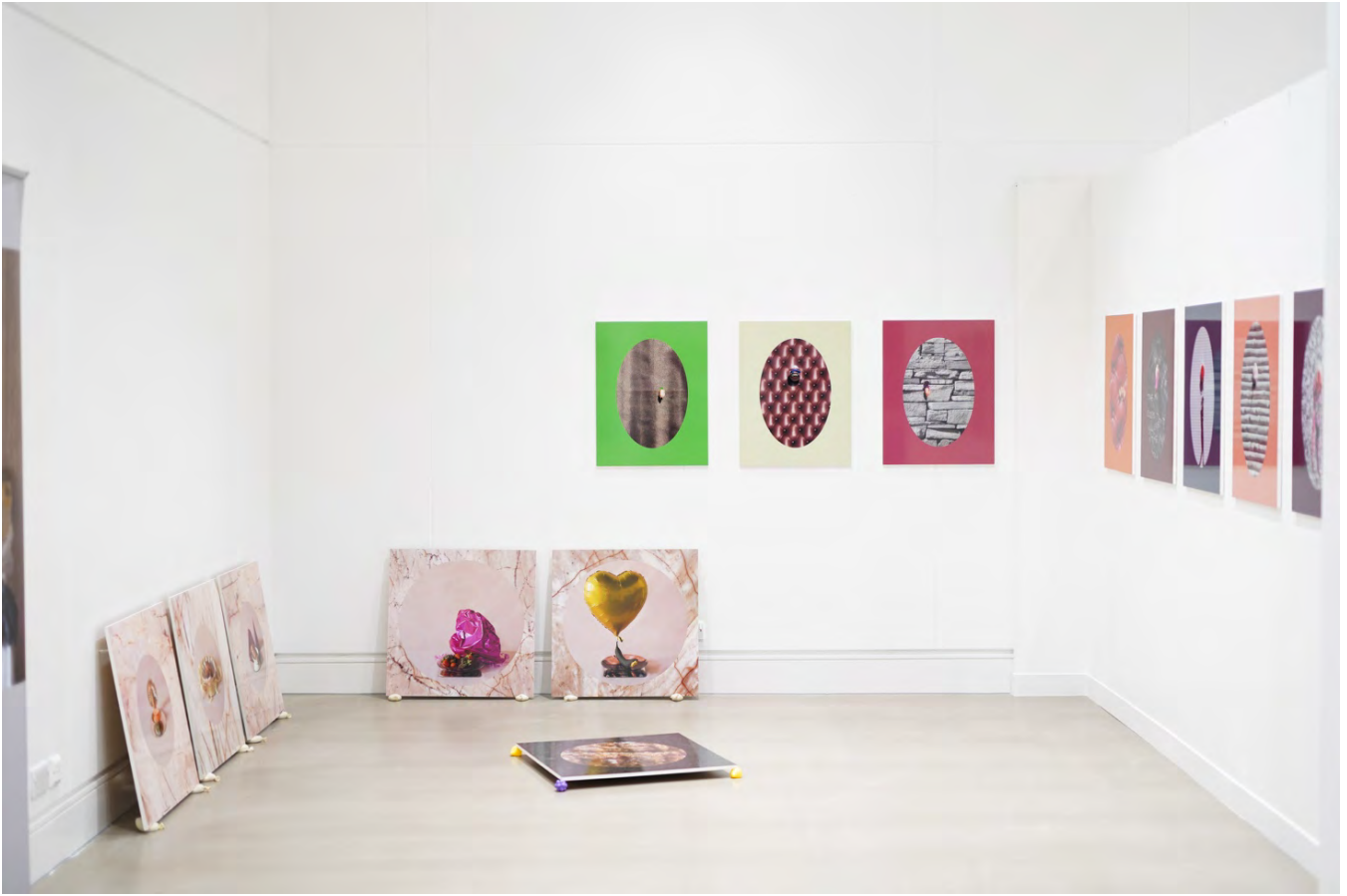
Celebrate (Blancmange Dentata)



Estrange Restrain
Celebrate (Scales)



Lure
Relics



Life Cycle: Pacifier, Memorials and Nature Morte







Host Figures [They Live]



In Conversation Event with Dr Kate Random Love

16th July 2019, Photographs by Dr Catriona McAra and Matthew Wheeldon



Exhibition Catalogue



https://issuu.com/leeds-art7/docs/dw_csl_digital_version_singles_issuu



Dawn Woolley

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The title 'Consumed: Stilled Lives' refers to the process that turns a consumer into a display of commodities. The consumer body becomes an advert for the brands it is adorned with and the social values that it reinforces. The still life table expresses the dual meaning of the term 'consume' because the objects on display are edible and imply an individual's social position through their ability to buy commodities. Therefore, the still life table is a portrait of a particular type of consumer.

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12 July — 22 August 2019
Blenheim Walk Gallery
Leeds Arts University
Blenheim Walk
Leeds
LS2 9AQ

Preview:
5–7pm Thursday 11 July

In conversation with Dr Kate Random Love:
5–6pm, Tuesday 16 July

Image: Dawn Woolley, Celebrate (Vanitas), 2012. Photograph. Image courtesy of the artist.

Handout

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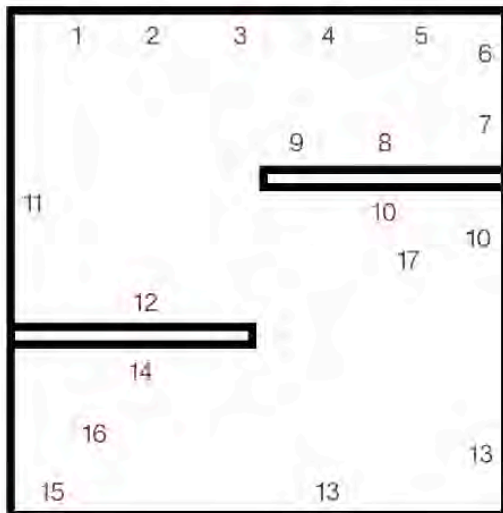
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12th July – 22nd August 2019,
Leeds Arts University, Blenheim Walk Gallery



1. *Celebrate (Vanitas)*, C-type print, 2012. 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, suggesting a different type of consequence for today's consumer practices.

2. *Consume*, Artist Book, 2013-6. Photographs of real food become photographs of photographs of food establishing a connection between consumption practices and adverts, surface appeal, lack of substance and a form of consumption without pleasure.

3. *Celebrate (Blancmange Dentata diptych)*, C-type prints, 2012. The photographs suggest consumption is both threatening and appealing – although the food is a biting mouth, it is unable to cause injury.

4. *Celebrate (Scales)*, 6 C-type prints, 2015. Scales considers the social stigma and the medicalisation of fat. The photographs were produced for a series of advertising posters displayed in Cardiff City centre in January 2015. The images draw attention to the abrupt shift in advertising rhetoric once Christmas is over.

5. *Celebrate (Nightfeeder diptych)*, C-type prints, 2013. Sarah Jacob, the 19th century 'Welsh Fasting Girl', was heralded as a miraculous saint. She lived during the rise of medical empiricism and so doctors tested her miraculous devotion by observing her closely over the course of eight days. She starved to death and hysterical night feeding was diagnosed.

6. *Celebrate (Concrete Cake)*, 2016. A study for *Celebrate (Grey Tea Party)*.

7. *Intomercials (12 Days of Christmas/12 Days of New Year)*, 24 videos, 2015-6. Intomercials survey the key words that appear in magazines for women and men during the Christmas and New Year periods. In the spirit of festive unwrapping the videos contain quotations from Marxist theorists to unpack the meaning of these key words. The videos were posted on Facebook between 13th – 24th Dec 2015 and 1st – 12th Jan 2016.

8. *Estrange Restrainer*, Artist Book, 2013-6. Some of the tactics of anorexic eating habits, such as cutting food into small pieces, can be found in consumer culture. For example, feminised treats such as Hershey Kisses are sold as individually wrapped chocolates, indicating that indulgence must be restrained.

9. *Celebrate (Tea Party diptych)*, C-type prints, 2013 & 2019. The photographs suggest the conviviality of a feast but 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 concrete, a common, inexpensive material. The materials evoke the shifting status of food in consumer culture, in turn object of disgust and obsession.

10. *Lure*, 20 C-type prints, 2014. 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 a fellish worshipper.

11. *Relics*, 54 digital prints, 2017. Made from different types of packaging, 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: they are waste that cannot be destroyed.

12. *Host Figures (They Live)*, 5 Lenticular prints, 2019. Host figures feature in different belief systems. In The Met Museum in New York a hollow, Guatemalan figurine contains a diminutive spirit figure who drives the actions and intentions of its host. The objects contained within *Host Figures (They Live)* also shape the thoughts and actions of their hosts. The title also references John Carpenter's 1989 dystopian film 'They Live'.

13. *Hysterical Selfies*, 10 Pop-up Display Banners, 2015. The commodities in the photographs are grouped by the gendered ideology they perpetuate. Each image is printed on a commercial pop-up display banner, to emphasise the commercial origin of the identities that the selfies evoke.

14. *Lifecycle (Pacifier)*, 9 C-type prints, 2014. Sexualisation and infantilisation are implied by sweets, sex toys and nail art practice dummies. 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.

15. *Lifecycle (Memorials)*, 5 C-type resting on balloons, 2016. Rotting flesh is arranged among the paraphernalia of celebration, signalling the end of the consumer party. Regardless of body work ethic the body sags into amorphous organic forms. To evoke the idea of a memorial to a lost object the photographs stand on two deflated balloons.

16. *Lifecycle (Nature Morte)*, C-type print resting on plastic fruit, 2016. The object body in *Nature Morte* (2016) no longer reproduces the values of the consumer culture. The distinction between subject and object, food and feeder, and self and other is lost. It is an allegory of a body that is no longer recuperable by capitalism.

17. *Sirens*, 3- or 2-channel sound piece, 2016-7. When viewing a webpage the soundtrack of an advert begins to play and the viewer is forced to look for the ad in order to stop it. We can choose not to look but it is difficult not to hear. In *Sirens*, the commodities featuring in *Hysterical Selfies* share this aggressive insistence. Commodities speak with almost human voices, softly whispering their absurd ideological messages.

Some of the artworks in this exhibition reference eating disorder. For information about the impact of and treatments for eating disorders please visit www.beaieatingdisorders.org.uk or call the helpline (0800 601 0677).

The Sculptress

Site-specific artwork, 2019



Various locations, Leeds city centre, supported by Leeds Arts University.







