



Consumed: Stilled Lives Exhibition

Dr Dawn Woolley

Solo Exhibition

Perth Centre for Photography

20th Feb – 3rd April 2021

This body of artwork, comprises photographs, pop-up display banners, and site-specific artworks made for commercial advertising spaces in Perth.

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)

For example, Woolley's Relics infer an overvaluation of commodities and packaging. They seem powerful. Made from different types of packing material, and beginning to show signs of age, these Relics are not sacred objects that are preserved in museums for centuries because they are culturally significant. They are waste that cannot be destroyed. In the exhibition at Perth Centre for Photography, the Relics are displayed propped on shallow shelves, inviting visitors to rearrange the Relics, creating their own anthropology museum display.

Woolley also creates public domain interventions in commercial advertising spaces in cities and on online social networking sites. Some of the artworks on display were originally produced as billboard posters. *Pacifier* draws attention to consumption — particularly to achieve an ideal body — as a form of distraction. A quote from *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) further emphasises the idea of distraction and pacification through consumption. It was originally displayed in Cardiff, UK just before Christmas 2014, because, during the holiday period the imperative to indulge is heightened; we are encouraged to spend a lot of money and worry about the consequences later.

Celebrate (Scales) were displayed in January 2015, to draw attention to the abrupt shift in advertising language that takes place once the Christmas and New Year period is over. The images allude to the excesses of the holiday period that are often followed by self-recriminations and sometimes lead to diets and even surgery.

The Wonderland poster, (Cardiff, 2015), uses the 'Eat Me', 'Drink Me' labels from Alice in Wonderland to evoke the magical food and drink that made her shrink very small and grow very large. There is an added contradiction in this work, as there is an overabundance of products designed to reduce the body, implying we can eat to excess and still diminish, and a solitary item that purports to bulk up the body. The less we consume the more we grow, and vice versa. The Sculptress was commissioned by Leeds Arts University to accompany Woolley's solo exhibition at Blenheim Walk gallery (2019). The title references the diet food brand that features in the still life, and humorously denotes Woolley's profession and her position as a woman who is told by the diet industry that she should work on her body.

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).

The exhibition was accompanied by a public poster campaign and an Instagram Live Event, in conversation with Christine Tomas (Curator) on Wednesday 31st March 2021, 5pm AWST.

Artworks

- [Celebrate](#) 2012-19
- [Pacifier](#) 2014
- [Consumer Poster Project](#) 2014-19
(including The Sculptress poster produced for the Blenheim Walk Gallery exhibition)
- [Hysterical Selfies](#) 2015
- [Memorials](#) 2016
- [Relics](#) 2017

Documentation photographs by Kate Webb



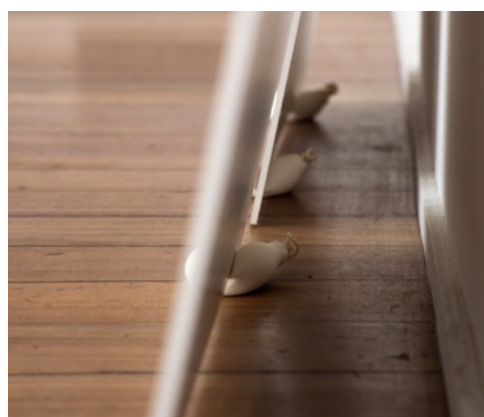
Relics, 2017, digital prints mounted on PVC, 200cm x 80cm and *Memorials*, 2016, digital prints mounted on PVC standing on half inflated balloons, 70cm x 70cm

Celebrate (Concrete Tea-party), 2019, self-adhesive print, 150cm x 120cm



Relics, 2017, digital prints mounted on PVC, 200cm x 80cm and *Memorials*, 2016, digital prints mounted on PVC standing on half inflated balloons, 70cm x 70cm

Hysterical Selfies, 2015, double pop up display banners, 200cm x 80cm and *The Sculptress*, 2019, self-adhesive print, 150cm x 100cm



Hysterical Selfies, 2015, double pop up display banners, 200cm x 80cm and *Memorials*, 2016, digital print mounted on PVC standing on half inflated balloons, 70cm x 70cm

Memorials, 2016, digital print mounted on PVC standing on half inflated balloons, 70cm x 70cm



Celebrate, 2012-9, self-adhesive prints, various sizes, and *Pacifier*, 2014, self-adhesive print, 500cm x 150cm

Pacifier, 2014, self-adhesive print, 500cm x 150cm



Wonderland, 2015, self-adhesive print, 300cm x 150cm

Hysterical Selfies, 2015, double pop up display banners, 200cm x 80cm



Wonderland, 2015, self-adhesive print, 300cm x 150cm



The decanted infant howls; at once a nurse appears with a bottle of external secretion. Feeling lurks in that interval of time between desire and its consummation. Shorten that interval...

Pacifier, 2014, self-adhesive print, 500cm x 150cm



The Sculptress, 2019, self-adhesive print, 40cm x 60cm

Photographs courtesy of Perth Centre for Photography



The Sculptress, 2019, self-adhesive print, 40cm x 60cm