

Kate McIntosh: Work Table

Review by James Smith

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The first thing that one thinks about on leaving Kate McIntosh's piece 'Work Table' is the nature of the creative act, and how destruction is an inevitable part of that process. To create a new work necessitates breaking apart at least a small element of existing thinking. Taking this idea to its logical conclusion leads us to intentional iconoclasm, akin to the Chinese Cultural Revolution where all elements of the past are obliterated in the most meaningful way possible. One could argue there are two possibilities; either a 'blank canvas' stares the destroyer in the face, or the broken, fractured elements lie around for someone to reconstitute if they so wish - and it is Kate McIntosh's work that gives participants the chance to play out the second of these two options. Those arriving at 'Work Table' are presented with a diverse selection of objects; a porcelain dog, a record, a globe, a set of dominoes, and a typewriter among others. Each participant is invited to choose one, which they carry through to the next room to deconstruct. In that space, and on your own, you are free to attack the object as viciously or thoughtfully as you should wish with one or more of the many tools on offer. I chose a globe; something about fracturing a surface which speaks of inherent schisms created by man appealed to me. In the room I donned protective glasses and gloves before unscrewing the top of the globe to set it free from its axis. I liked the idea of the landmass being broken into small elements, so I took out an oversized hammer and struck the surface of the globe, puncturing a sizeable hole in the Pacific. But something stopped me after that moment; perhaps it was the realisation that I didn't want to act like a megalomaniac, perhaps it was that the hole looked crater-like, like bomb or meteorite damage. Either way I did as the instructions bid and put the globe in a tray to take through to the next room.

In that space I was asked to place the globe amongst many more broken but recognisable objects. I was invited to choose a tray of fragments, and using tape and string to reconstitute an object. For some unfathomable reason I chose a smashed record and cover sleeve by Cilla Black (don't ask me the name of the song). I think I was drawn to the puzzle-like nature of the record which I could clearly and easily fit back together as if nearly new. Once it was complete I took Cilla to the third and final room which was a display of other objects reconstructed by other participants. I propped Cilla next to a porcelain dog which was so bastardised in its reconstruction it was nearly unrecognisable, its head was on backward and it looked like it had a disease of the bowels.

There is no doubt there is a strangely therapeutic feeling to reconstituting an object, as if you are apologising to it somehow, and to perhaps everything you have intentionally and unnoticingly broken in your life. The object becomes a totem to the potential that we all hold to continue the cycle of destruction and renewal of ideas and objects, with all the pathos and hope that entails.