

CARLY FISHER
TIME STANDS STILL WHEN I THINK OF YOU

It wasn't long ago that vandalism and graffiti were the Achilles heel of the inner suburbs. They were the indicators of poverty, of lawlessness, of a system gone awry. Middle class visitors to these areas turned their noses up, shuffling hurriedly past walls covered in 'tagging', and saw it as a sign of wayward youth.

Then something happened. The inner suburbs became gentrified and graffiti became an indicator of cool. Inner city councils scrambled to update their policies, which on one hand punished anyone caught with a spray can, and on the other exonerated street artists for bringing life and colour to the laneways. Cashed up young professionals sought out decrepit warehouses as fast as their SUVs could carry them and suddenly real estate prices seemed to operate on a graffiti-level indicator. The more graffiti, the higher the property value.

However it soon became apparent that while the new residents sought to be surrounded by street culture, they objected to the smelly, sticky residue it left behind. To live high above a smashed bus shelter was fine, as long as there was a calculated distance between the resident and the hooligans who smashed it.

Carly Fisher trades on this distance in her practice, in which she proposes a kind of street culture that has been cleansed and disinfected for general consumption. There are no sharp edges in her work, no actual rusted metal or smashed glass. Fischer deconstructs our world, only to replace it with a shiny, new and improved version. The grime, the faded paint, and the imperfections have been exchanged for pristine, clean surfaces, but on closer inspection we discover that not all is what it seems. This replacement world has been fabricated entirely from paper, rendering it superficial, flimsy and ephemeral.

Each object becomes a vapid ghost of its former self. The mildew of inner-suburban grunge has been surgically removed and a sterile carbon copy laid in its place. There is a collision of contradictory forces where supercharged meaning meets apathetic meaninglessness, resulting in a deadpan resignation in the artworks.

This skewed logic applies similarly to the tourist industry, especially in places irrevocably altered by war or social upheavals. A case in point is Berlin – Fischer's adopted home city – where the scars and wounds of the city are now being traded as a tourist commodity. It is possible to purchase small pieces of the Berlin Wall – an authentic memento to decades of suffering to keep on the mantelpiece. However these conditions are not a localised phenomena, and the compulsion to absolve urban waste in gentrification is occurring worldwide.

Fischer is interested in this commodification and fetishisation industry, where the products of misfortune become the accretions of cool. She presents stylised models of destruction that exude a minimalist apartment chic. In recreating the carnage of street culture in paper she references the tourist postcard, in which the evidence of authentic experience becomes distilled into a small disposable card. Fischer gives physical form to this rupture, where the very characteristics of urban character have become mass-produced consumables – leading us to doubt where the authentic ends and the fabrication begins.

In *Time Stands Still When I Think Of You*, Fischer fashions paper models of everyday street forms. She selects forms that are at our very fringe of awareness: broken railway station signs, construction signs, timber palettes, wind-strewn leaves

and discarded cigarette butts. Locating these models in a gallery space immediately informs our approach to them as aesthetic objects, but in placing them in the real world – as Fischer has done – creates a rupture in real space that does not tally with our understanding of the world. The works propose a heightened sense of commodification, where the very substance of our physical world has become homogenised, packaged, marketed, and sold back to us as a ‘must have’ consumable.

Transplanted into the gallery, the sculptures act as physical documentation of this rift. Their likeness for real world objects momentarily confuses us into thinking they *are* real, but once the mimicry is apparent the wicked irony emerges. In being useless, cheaply reproduced copies of material that is, in itself, useless and cheaply produced, Fischer’s sculptures become indicators of gross hyper-production and gentrification. In holding a mirror up to ourselves, they reveal the shallowness and superficiality of contemporary life, and call to account our understanding of experience and authenticity. They also call to account our compulsion to streamline squalor, and critically engage the tendency of some to deliberately look past this material, just as much as others seek to fetishise it.

Fischer rams the point home with titles that pay homage to pop tunes. Where lines such as *Time Stands Still When I Think Of You (Cut Copy)* or *I’ve Been Looking So Long At These Pictures Of You That I Almost Believe That They’re Real (The Cure)*, might have once embodied deeply meaningful sentiments, they have become repeated so many times through ubiquitous media exposure as to become empty, meaningless expressions. Like her artworks themselves, their highly charged meanings have become denuded through mass duplication.

Fischer’s project forces us to confront uncomfortable questions about waste, and the way we operate as humans. The great accidental paradox of her work is that in seeking to expose the fetishisation of urban waste, she makes a compelling case for that very fetishisation. Her dextrous craftsmanship is a joy to behold, and her cacophonous installations very often verge on being beautiful. With this ambiguity of intention and stance, Fischer’s objects make us think for ourselves. Her objects are like hidden clues that, once uncovered, awaken us to what was around us the whole time. If we are to learn the lesson of these paper model installations we must prepare to face real life with real consequences. To not do so is to risk the loss of the charisma that makes authentic character so appealing.

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