

DAILYSERVING

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February 7, 2011

Four Works at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

By John Pyper



Dominating the discussion of what's new at the MFA Boston is the Americas wing. Reviews generally see it as a state treasure, an intangible cultural property that will bring the gospel of Copley and Sargent to the general

public and a great reason to visit the museum again soon. During the success of the wing's opening, there has been a quiet revolution going on at the far end of the museum. In preparation for the projected September opening of the seven galleries in the Linde Family Wing for Contemporary Art, there is a small temporary installation of 4 contemporary artists.

There is a bit of mischief in combing Allan McCollum, Rachel Whiteread, Darren Foote, and Donald Moffett. Their formal proximity make you feel like they belong together and have some deep intellectual meaning set in a grand narrative, but I'm not sure that their power is conceptual in nature. Dog, door, chair, and hand: they are objects that trigger relatable haptic memories. Each has a physical and emotional weight centered on loss and the body. Many of us touch these things daily (feel free to change the dog to a cat if you want). We have unending poetic descriptions of these objects: furry companions, endless friend, locked/slamming doors, doors of perception/consciousness, chairs of departments, pull the chair out, on the edge of your seat, and the hand and its touch are one of poetry's standards.

Starting from the corner, unceremoniously installed above the escalator on two small plinths, are *The Dog* from Pompeii (editions 92.2 & 92.3). These were originally displayed in a large field of similarity, part of McCollum's non-original, original cast works, as each object is a cast of a cast of a dog that died in the Pompeii volcano explosion. These objects play with the idea of multiple and original. The actual dog was not found, but an empty shell in the settled ash was, and the original casting was cast from that shell. McCollum was able to get a casting of the casting and made a sculptural field of memories from a catastrophe two-millennia ago.

Rachel Whiteread's *Double-Doors II (A + B)* also are cast multiples that play with originality and repeatability. These mirrored replacements, are the door, but reject the function and reality of the door. While the dog is historically located in the past, these doors are our now. The reflections of light on their shapes, the proportions of their design, their visual rhythm is so easily recognizable that some have dismissed them as not being art. Their materials, the neutral grey tones of the plasticized plaster, makes them seem unfinished and somehow less than something they could be. They deny their own handmade and unique features by simply being what they are, unique and handmade. I think that is what makes me most interested in them. Their repulsively exciting dullness.



Darren Foote's *Two Chairs* is a life apart from the first two works. His chairs are a mirrored pair that have dissolved, leaving no question of their handmade qualities. Their shape, a melting dissipation made

in oak, doesn't reveal any secrets or hold any graphic pattern that we need to unlock. Instead, their usefulness is squandered and we are left with a scarcity of possibilities. Either these chairs are being eaten by something in their interior or reflect shoddy workmanship by the producer. Erase a bit here, casually destroy a section of wood till it's barely there—having a physical manifestation of what you can easily do in photoshop is unnerving. Are they a pendant pair, a portrait of disconnection? Their emotion, a punch you in the stomach feeling of decay, outweighs any concept that may be driving their creation.

Lastly, Donald Moffett's *Facts, Which If True* (Joe McCarthy) is an unusual work from the artist. Instead of being direct and didactic, it is sly and witty. It is effectively a line drawing on the wall of two crossed fingers, made out of fake flowers. It seems to be based off the V for victory or a hippie peace sign, but instead is an ambiguous sign of either hope or a lie. McCarthy hoped that his lies were true, but that did not make them so. This work speaks about how the post war era, the G.I. bill, the anti-communist 50's, and the peace & love generation are all part of the same process. Without the financial, baby boom, and GI bill there couldn't be a growth in college education or a 60's counter-culture on college campuses. This symbol goes right to the heart of post-war America's propaganda.