

Exhibition Guide

Alice Cattaneo

28 November 2007- 20 January 2008

Second Floor Galleries and Tower Room

This is Alice Cattaneo's first museum exhibition. Born in Milan in 1976, she returned to her home town to live and work having studied at both Glasgow School of Art and the San Francisco Art Institute. Cattaneo has always made sculpture but as visitors to this exhibition will see, instead of traditional materials such as wood, metal or clay, she assembles work from everyday materials that could easily be found in a desk drawer or kitchen cupboard – paper, fabric off-cuts, adhesive tape, thread and thin sticks of wood that look like the remnants of a children's science lesson. As a whole, the exhibition proposes an enthralling modesty and a fragility that conveys a sense of wonder.

At first look, these 'do-it-yourself' sculptures suggest spontaneous invention; advancing across the gallery floor, evolving into architectural shapes or cityscapes. Made within the gallery itself, to some extent, they respond to the space they occupy but, more than that, they are playfully opportunistic. Tall, spindly, three-dimensional models cling to available walls, balance in corners and reach up to the ceiling as if to assert an unstoppable enthusiasm for construction. The lightness of Cattaneo's touch conveys an idea that these works resist functionality, are structurally precarious but yet imply her understanding of the way our universe works. She achieves the same kind of balance struck by popular science in its explanations of our interaction with the planet alongside the pervasive laws of physics that govern it. Installations sometimes appear to defy gravity as if caught in a moment before inevitable collapse, before chaos takes over. They engender a feeling of privilege in the viewer – another minute and it might all be gone.

Likewise, Cattaneo's distinct apprehension of the object world is evident in her videos, where objects become unstable characters in mini-adventures made possible by the technology of her equipment. Thirteen untitled pieces from 2005, are short, funny, touching vignettes where, for example, through simple editing,

two capers jump together in the middle of a saucer and make a kissing noise. There is an ascension of moisturising cream from a teaspoon as a filmed sequence is reversed; a suggestion of homicide as a plastic utensil is flicked over the edge of a rock, accompanied by sci-fi screechings; an intimate moment when the shadow of an indoor plant is touched by a fingertip; an auto-focus revelation of a mountain, following its eclipse by the artist's thumb.

In *1min 41seconds* (2007), a new work made for this exhibition, the artist is seen in a variety of banal situations into which she momentarily intervenes. She jumps out of the way of water thrown from an unidentified source, plays with our perception of distance, appearing to get a plant to 'feed' out of her hand and takes a giant leap over a tiny flower. The videos all contain an element of surprise that catches the spectator unawares, suggesting that what we observe is never fixed but instead, open to the transformation of our own interpretation. For Cattaneo, nothing is monumental and sure. Everything is what you make of it, the way you see it. A sense of humour could be a kind of salvation. Some small accidental event could completely change the complexion of ordinary life and make it seem magical.

A fully illustrated catalogue with documentation of the installation at Ikon and text by Giorgio Verzotti accompanies the exhibition. Visit the gallery's new online shop at www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/shop for the full range of Ikon catalogues.