

Makeshift Living

Made up of 600 overlapping, fractured and somewhat discombobulating images of the artist's living room, Vanessa Crowe's installation 'Makeshift Living' seems to suggest that 'real' living is taking place elsewhere, far from this suburban habitat. The muted palate of the photos, flattened and manipulated against the gallery space promotes a sense of claustrophobic domestic ennui. Yet far from being a critique on suburban living, Crowe, like many women artists before her, has made a conscious choice to use domestic imagery to inform and sustain a vibrant artwork that invigorates and intrigues the viewer.

'Makeshift Living' is the latest in a series of installation pieces from the artist, dating back to 2007 when Crowe began to focus on the tension between modernism and decoration; rejecting the commonly held concept that one automatically negates the other. In contrast, Crowe explores the notion that abstraction and decoration are intertwined, and that modernism, devoid of human content, can only ever be an artificial construct. The trajectory of Crowe's thinking can be traced back to when she began work on her Master's thesis in fine art in 2007 with a fixation on the 'grid'. With a background in textiles, this linear preoccupation is perhaps not surprising, but a change in life circumstances that saw her at home with a young son, began to 'blur' the edges literally in her artwork, and conceptually in her thesis.

If Crowe's artistic focus can be said to be on the everyday, mundane reality that most of us inhabit, then it is easy to understand her preoccupation with the ongoing rhythm of daily life that oscillates between order and chaos. As Crowe states, "pattern in everyday life is far from being homogenous or linear - it has to accommodate all sorts of bending, slipping and surprises". The progression is noticeable in her earlier installations, when Crowe confesses to attempting to impose an artificial rigidity on domestic topics, such as her 2007 installation 'An Island of Precarious Stability' at ..., which featured a photo of her family's carefully stacked washing, frozen in time and place. In contrast, 'Makeshift Living' celebrates the temporality and 'makeshift' nature of domestic life; simulating a kaleidoscopic effect in which the contents of Crowe's living room appear to shift and shake with the viewer's movements.

'Makeshift Living', while not flinching from the mundane, is able through its artistic and technical virtuosity to challenge the viewer to make intellectual and emotional connections that span far beyond the domestic arena that lies at its heart.

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