

## Vistas and Ruin

Borrowing materials and techniques employed in construction and fabrication, such as plasterboard, marble and concrete - and subdued palettes redolent of suburban interiors - Amy Unkovich creates sculptural installations that appear in turns fragmented, collapsed and rebuilt - invoking the destructive and regenerative cycles of the built environment.

In her 2016 exhibition *Pastoral Schemes*, Unkovich juxtaposed stark white archways with lean to slabs and small, irregular paintings shaped like workshop offcuts. A grid of matching pastel paintings - chalky with thick impasto - provided a sharp counterpoint to the show's more ad-hoc arrangements. Together, these works subtly signalled various spatial and material languages, from paint charts to construction zones, historical artefacts and country idylls.

*Gathered Vernacular* in 2019 furthered this exploration of painterly mark-making and architectural forms, yet seemed to also hint at a disquiet through incidentally skewed doorways and heady paintwork smeared into plastic sheeting then thrown over frames like a used shower curtain. These moments of unease seemed to hint at the psychological potential within architecture's bounding geometry.

Often, Unkovich's installations contain vistas framed by archways, or the suggestion of a landscape through an aperture, either literally or metaphorically. The strongly evocative quality of her works lends itself to sensory impressions: muted abstractions dissolve into tactile effects, becoming an atomised glimpse of sunbaked earth through sheer curtains, or the passing of a shadow across a window. The boundaries between intimate interior and their environs become diffuse, permeable, insufficient. This obscuring of spatial clarity allows for an endless reframing and renewal of our senses through the act of viewing.

For May Fair, Unkovich has placed four works within a green-tiled space. The booth has been designed by Ophelia King to resemble a public bath and at its centre sits a cool, square-shaped pool astride which stand three steel bar sculptures, their attenuated forms rising and tumbling like the outline of ruins or figures in motion and recline. Titled *Rococo Hand-rail*, *Sibylline Arch* and *Fallen Column with Fig Tree*, these playful forms recall the functional supports of classically inspired architecture, albeit hollow approximations of their true counterparts.

On the wall of the space is a painting composed of oxidised reds and bruisey greens and purples. This sits beside a central window containing a photograph of undulating hills. The specificity of this image departs from Unkovich's usually elusive style, pointing instead to the hills south of the Greek village of Chiliomodi. Recent archeological excavations have uncovered a sophisticated Roman-era bath, locating this site as the 'lost' city of Tenea. Connecting the works with this archeological site thus denies a straightforward reading of the works in strictly formal or material terms.

Rather Unkovich seems to be establishing a narrative between the bath house as a site for community and knowledge, and the temporal range of architectural styles dating back to ancient times. Roman baths were places of lively recreation and social interaction, where people of all classes might meet. Bathing complexes could incorporate libraries, gymnasia and lecture halls and were one of the most direct architectural expressions of imperial concern for public welfare. However in Unkovich's work, these powerful feats of engineering and architectural splendour are reduced to stylistic motifs across time.

Archeological ruins themselves are sites for artistic rumination, embedding collective memories and the afterlife of civic ambitions. Perhaps in evoking the public bath house, Unkovich reveals a nostalgia for the intimacy of physical proximity, communal wellbeing and shared knowledge contained within its walls. Each artwork is richly patinated by the hand of the artist with earthen skeins of paint and irregularities formed through makeshift processes. In doing so, the works seem to deny the alienation of mass produced, commodified living.

The architecture of ruin also brings us face to face with the decline of civilisations and systems of knowledge, their consequential entropy and shifts in power.—*NewVision400AD*, with the accumulated layers and piecemeal quality seems to gently allude to this, how contemporary architectural taste is ideological, reminding the viewer that such narratives are not impartial.

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