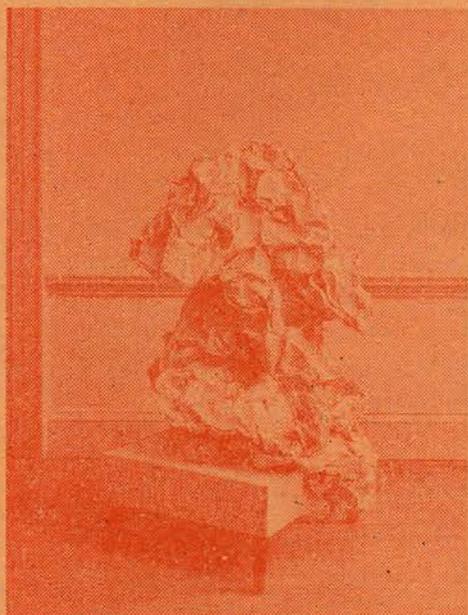


# THE INTRODUCTION

## RACHEL ADAMS

Ian Giles interviews Rachel Adams, a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art, 2008



*Ottoman* (2011)  
Wood, fabric, glue, photocopy paper,  
gouache, furniture legs

In 1993 Anthea Turner made Christmas when she showed a nation of young BBC TV viewers how to make their very own Tracey Island out of crumpled newspaper, toilet roll and a Philadelphia pot. I am reminded of her DIY Thunderbird Launchpad when looking at Edinburgh-based artist Rachel Adams' work. Adams often produces her work out of large amounts of crumpled paper, which she paints to render solid. Anthea turned tabloids into rocks by painting them with household emulsion, and Rachel too creates moments of trompe-l'œil in her work; paper becomes three-dimensional and sculptural – it can look like stone or crumpled metal.

But Adams is not trying to fool her viewers, rather she is delighting in her materials' humble beginnings. Adams creates playful and elegant objects that are proud despite their true nature. Her works look like blurred Greek statues as if remembered in a dream. Rachel often uses pastel colours; these soft shades remind us of the domestic (peach loo paper, a Body Shop soap perhaps). It is her blending of art historical references with softer playful notes that makes her work a pleasure to look at. She is good with titles too: a mass of black ink dipped paper is called *Serious Moonlight* – the title is both theatrical and spot-on: the title suggests a physical lightness: we enjoy the visibly weightless paper which has been coloured a dusty grey/black. Adams' title also succeeds in transforming the ink logged mass, into an awe inspiring form that suggests that it could be more than the sum of its parts.

Remember viewers: only Blue Peter and Rachel Adams can make paper look this good.

O B J E C T

Rachel, I am interested in the anthropomorphism that arises in your sculptures. Jackson Pollock remarked: 'I'm very representational some of the time, and a little all of the time. But when you're painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge.' It strikes me that figures must emerge easily when you are creating sculptures out of crumpled paper. How much do you lead this process? It seems that there is an almost flirtatious pleasure in some of the works becoming figurative, a work like *Ottoman* (2011); looks like a sexy Jabba-the-Hut. How do you manage and place the characters that emerge in front of you in the studio?

In the beginning the work is quite direct and I collect images from craft and design – Greek Pithos vases, handheld ancient venuses and photographs of chaise-longues alongside the work of twentieth century sculptors such as Arp, Hepworth and Moore. But my drawings are never that detailed, more a suggestion of a bulbous biomorphic form. Once I begin to model the paper I have to let the material take over because the moment you start trying to make it stay in a certain shape it begins to rip itself apart. This means that the modelling process becomes more spontaneous and intuitive. I think this is why the work has the 'character' you mentioned; there is an underlying sense of the work building itself.

What I don't want is for the materials to mean the work was viewed as fragile, failing, or entropic; I want to transform them so they sit triumphant as equivalents to traditional sculptural materials. This is how they sit in the studio on an odd collection of shelves and plinths, generally with scraps of fabric stapled to them and colour tests of paint dotted over them. I sometimes think they only get their real character when they sit defiantly in their intended setting.

S U B J E C T

In your recent solo show at Domo Baal, London you presented a series of painted crumpled paper works on stripey fabric clad plinths. The works called up lots of references: Rebecca Warren, dishcloths, museum display stands and figurative sculpture from prehistoric statuettes to mid-twentieth century abstraction... Could you talk about your choice and handling of colour and materials and the associations they have for you? I am really interested in your use of pale stripy fabric, which allowed your plinths to resemble both starched tea towels and elegant Grecian columns.

Formally the striped fabrics are really interesting to me because however bright the colour is it is always muted by the white stripe, making the fabric appear like a pastel shade at a distance and revealing the pattern close up. However, I didn't really find a reason for using them until I read *The Devil's Cloth* by Michel Pastoureau, in which he traces the history of striped cloth. In the medieval period stripes were the costume of the devil, as the medieval eye couldn't understand the equal foreground and background. This meant to have anything other than white clothing for pyjamas and underwear was thought of as unhygienic, impure and even sinful. But losing their original meaning over the centuries stripes and pastels appeared in underwear, night-wear and bed sheets, as a way to allow colour to creep into these intimate cloth designs. The stripes on night-wear were even thought to act like bars protecting you from demons whilst you slept. Today of course these patterns and colour seem synonymous with domesticity and the home, and I wanted to use them for plinths for these immediate connections to interiors.



*Marble  
Mouthed 3  
(2011)*  
Wood,  
fabric,  
glue,  
photocopy  
paper and  
gouache

P A S T

Thinking back to the work you showed in *4 New Sensations* when you were graduating and then to the works you have shown more recently at Frith Street gallery – how has your approach developed in the two years since leaving art college; both in method and subject matter?

I think I have thought a lot about shape and scale. They sound like very formal concerns but they really are connected completely to the concept of the work. In the older work I chose very simple shapes, using spheres, making objects that attempted to function in the same vein as a footstool or an easy-chair, whereas recently I have become concerned with making the works more and more complex, trying to create work that holds many ideas at once. My interests in art, design and minimalism have become increasingly inclusive of abstraction in general, and the relationship between these shapes and those of the decorative and domestic, and what the relationship is between the sculpture and the plinth. Within all these ideas there is a consistent return to the function of an object, ultimately questioning what it is to be sculpture.

P R E S E N T

The Turner Prize should perhaps be re-labelled the Burns Prize of late due to the Scottish massive seemingly taking the lead (Susan Phillips, Richard Wright, Karla Black...) The Scots seem to be producing the goods – how do you see the Scottish art scene? What keeps its juices flowing?

It's very hard to work out what I think about the scene as I am within it, but I think Scotland, and Glasgow in particular, has a real cultural bent towards visual art with a large proportion of art galleries and artist-led spaces for the population. It's a really good place to make work, as rent is cheap and there are lots of ex-industrial buildings for studio space. In that way it's not a surprise to me that people keep appearing from Glasgow, as there is a very serious network set up there.

*Rachel Adams is based in Edinburgh; she studied Fine Art at Edinburgh College of Art.*

*Solo exhibitions include Cut From Whole Cloth, Domo Baa!, London; Marble Mouthed, The Duchy, Glasgow and New Work Scotland Programme, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh.*

*Group exhibitions include Look With All Your Eyes, Look, Frith Street Gallery, London; Nothing New Under the Sun, Skafffell Centre for Visual Art, Seydisfjörður, Iceland and 4 New Sensations, A Foundation, London. She has been a recipient of a Visual Art Creative and Professional Development Grant from the Scottish Arts Council.*

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