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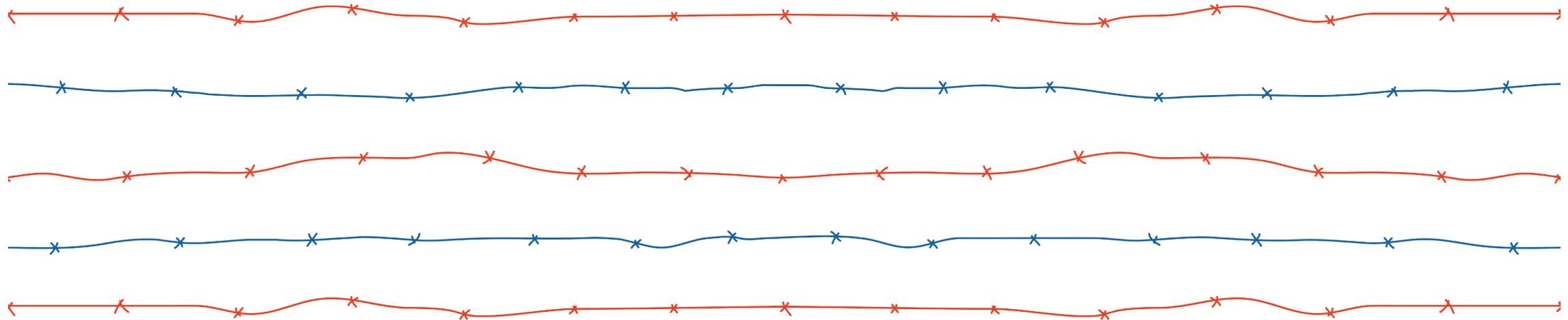
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Rachel Adams

Posturing



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Rachel ADAMS b. 1985

Adams received her MA (Hons) in Fine Art from the Intermedia department at Edinburgh College of Art in 2009, and is currently based in Edinburgh. She is co-director and studio holder at Rhubaba studios and gallery in Leith and has had numerous group and solo shows in both the UK and Europe.

Conversation between Julie-Ann Delaney, curator at SNGMA and Rachel Adams.

Can you explain a little about the motif that appears on the silk scarf on display?

Across the silk scarf is a repeating barbed wire pattern, which is based on a motif that appears in many textile designs by the artist Henry Moore. Moore made a number of textile designs with David Whitehead Fabrics and from the mid 1950s he also collaborated with Czech-born entrepreneur and textile designer Zika Ascher. Many of his designs were produced as wall hangings as well as dress and upholstery fabrics. Although promoted in books and exhibitions in his lifetime, the first exhibition of the designs was held in 2008 and various design swatches were discovered as recently as 2006.

The barbed wire motif first appeared in his work in 1939, in a political work Moore made to highlight and aid the plight of Republican refugees fleeing Franco's Spain. At first it seems an unlikely and surprising design for a fabric. I was drawn to the motif because it seemed that Moore had created a strange and knowingly ironic pattern, trapping the wearer in a myriad of spikes.

You then wrapped the silk scarf around Moore's bronze *Reclining Figure*, 1951 – which is in front of the Gallery – for a staged photograph. Can you say what you were interested in highlighting about the sculpture, textile motif or Moore himself through this?

I wanted to bring this pattern back to the original biomorphic sculpture *Reclining Figure*, to attempt to explore the idea of

Moore as a macho modeller who often produced representations of the female form, alluding to the fact that many aspects of history become simplified and distanced from the original meaning. Those roles of male artist and female model stay in our mind from the Pygmalion myth right through to twentieth-century biomorphic sculpture. However, textile design is often associated with woman, as both the creator and model. In reality many artists crossed between disciplines, with the socialist belief that design could make a difference to people's lives and bring a little art into the every day. That's what I'm trying to pull out here, the way we often over-simplify art and design history, whilst in reality it is diverse and rich, full of counter-narratives and contradictions.

Can you tell us about the influence and referencing of other artists or designers in your work? Are there recurring references, artworks or objects that you look at?

I am very interested in the muddled waters between art and design, and how function plays a part in this: when is something a sculpture or when is it a chair? As a consequence I look consistently at modernist designers in particular and ask: why isn't that considered a sculpture just because I can't sit on it?

Eileen Gray (Irish furniture designer and architect, 1878-1976) has had a real influence on my work. Gray was somewhat disregarded in her lifetime, sidelined by other designers, yet now her work is well respected and highly influential. For me she reveals the contradictory nature of the

ideas central to Modernist design. In early works she used very decorative processes including tassels, which later she thought had a complete lack of function and were purely decorative. However, the later modernist works she made were often irrational and had extra bends and shelves, which seem to me to be purely decorative, only in a different direction. With the *Compleat Lounger* works I wanted to re-enact this, creating works which although they appear like furniture in size and material, have no functions at all. The addition of pompoms adds to the ridiculousness of the twisting shapes, taking Gray's tassels even further toward the decorative and into the irrational. As with the Moore work, I am really interested in questioning the orthodox narratives that surround modernist art and design history.

In each of the works made for your room at the Gallery you have used a variety of materials: fabric, chromed copper, yarn and material. Can you explain what is it that draws you to a particular material? Do you think there is a common thread which links these choices?

All the materials that I work with are in many ways opposed to those which you might traditionally associate with sculpture; I instead take inspiration from things such as a haberdashery departments, furniture production, or drawing materials. I became interested in the idea of repeated motifs that were used by artists, including the reclining nude, the seated figure and even the *Three Graces*. I was intrigued to see whether I could work with these subjects, repeating and re-using the motifs but in relation to contemporary culture. I was interested in why these works were often configured in stone and plaster and I thought, why not fabric, and why not paper?

Perhaps you could explain a little about the production process of the works, where you begin, whether you work

from sketches, how you approach the materials etc.?

I often find the materials or techniques first, or images I find really appealing, then slowly the works come together. I draw a lot, mainly in very quick pen drawings. More and more these drawings take place on the computer, where I mock up the sculptures.

The materials I use often take a reasonably long time to make sense as sculptures. Often I will just be messing around or reading DIY craft books and blogs, and suddenly I'll know why I've been interested in something for a while. For example, in *Posturing* the plinth is covered in a tie-dye fabric, tied in the 'marble fold' which is the closest that dyeing techniques get to stone. I am really interested in things pretending to be something they're not, almost *trompe l'oeil*. Many plinths, particularly those made in the nineteenth century, are marble, and many are faked, often painted to appear like stone, buying into the pomp and ceremony of memorial statuary. However, I never try to fool anyone; the plinth is clearly fabric and the sculpture obviously paper. This means they switch and change between the two.

Where do the titles of your works come from?

My titles come from a range of sources, thesaurus searches, song lyrics, and phrases. I try to create titles which mirror the way materials are neither one thing nor the other. This means that the titles are often ambiguous, alluding to something figurative, but also not trying to fix themselves to one particularly meaning. The title '*Posturing*' seemed to fit as the sculpture was trying and be something it clearly isn't and also a positioning of pseudo limbs and bodies. For *Compleat Lounger* I took the title from a 1926 upholstery catalogue: the title suggests that we should be lounging on the sculpture or that it is lounging.