

Stacy Boldrick of the Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, profiles the sculpture and installation of Edinburgh College of art MA graduate, Rachel Adams.

Rachel Adams makes sculpture that is concerned with the liberation of materials from the constraints of their conventional properties. Most of her work is made out of paper – photocopier paper, wall liner paper, paper plates.

One of the most fundamental characteristics of any piece of paper is its flat, double-sided surface, a surface disrupted by Adams's acts of shredding, folding, scrunching or crumpling. Paper is also thin and light, and perhaps relatively a-historical, but in its transformation into sculpture, Adams gives it mass and a concentrated presence, an almost animal-like vitality and a history.<sup>1</sup> 'Crumple' (2010) is ready to whiz away on castors; 'Landed' (2010) has indeed landed, but is positioned to take flight again at any moment.

Anthropomorphism aside, Adams' attitude to materials is direct and visceral: labour and craft are critical to her practice. She prefers to make things herself, occasionally integrating into sculptures found objects such as curtain rings and tent poles. Adams uses readily available, inexpensive materials and equipment, including photocopier paper, paint and office shredders. Coloured photocopier paper has a particular sheen, palette and weight; Adams often applies gouache to flatten out the material, later shredding or folding it. Larger work is made out of brown paper that is also often painted.

Although abstract, Adams' work is at home in a domestic environment: it is similar in scale and sometimes in form to furniture, although it does not function like furniture. In fact, the work fails to 'function' at all. Its dissimilarity to functional objects, and its complete lack or denial of functional potential, rather than its dysfunction (its potential to function that ends in failure), distinguishes the work and makes it compelling. Its visual associations are multifarious and open-ended: sculptures can look like pairs of vintage clocks or sets of eyelashes, as in 'Golden Years' (2009). In 'Polar' (2009), a composition of tent poles, curtain rings and pink ribbon do not allude to a familiar object, yet the individual elements convey a range of affinities and possibilities.

Adams confounds the desire to locate the work's primary meanings in some sort of functional capacity. One of the founding philosophers of phenomenology, Henri Bergson wrote about the experience of any object in terms of its relationship to function: 'To recognize a common object is mainly to know how to use it. This is so true that early observers gave the name apraxia to that failure of recognition which we call psychic blindness.'<sup>2</sup> Adams' work presents an amalgamation of resemblances resulting in a response akin to psychic blindness – an inability to identify the object in relation to function – which grants the work its own beauty and authority.

Stacy Boldrick, May 2010

#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup>: Adams has said that she is interested in the 'a-history' of paper. Personal communication, March 2010.

<sup>2</sup>: H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1908 edition), trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York, Zone Books, 1996, p. 93.