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**Kingsgate
Project
Space**

MASLEN & MEHRA - *Impermanent Collection* (*La Négresse, Pourquoi! Naître esclave? Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux 1873, Why Born Enslaved?*)

Temporary intervention with mirrored sculpture and drawing, documented with Mamiya 6 x 7 film camera.

14th August - 4th September 2021

Artists' reception: Saturday 4th September 2021 12 - 6pm



The idea of an 'impermanent collection' embodies a paradox. We tend to make collections either to preserve some aspect of the historical past, or to preserve some aspect of our own personalities. They act as mirrors, held up to events, or else as mirrors held up to ourselves. However, unlike mirrors, the image they offer is fixed, frozen at a particular moment, while the river of time, with its flotsam of emotions and events, flows inexorably forward to a future none of us, either in our public or our private capacities, can fully discern.

Those of us who collect are uneasily aware of some verses by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore, which describes how the poet sent his disobedient little son to bed in disgrace, and, visiting him later, found him sound asleep:

'For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.'

Public museums, of course, are allowed no such uprush of personal feeling about the objects they possess, though occasionally, one may suspect, individual curators become sentimental about certain objects in their care. Yet museums, in the modern age, have become, in a

strange and perhaps unexpected fashion, repositories of collective emotion, almost displacing the great churches and other sacred spaces that once fulfilled that function.

This witty collection of photographic images and three-dimensional objects made out of deliberately 'humble' materials by Maslen & Mehra is a commentary on the way in which what seems fixed and eternal is in fact always in flux – not because it undergoes dramatic material change, but because of the fluidity of our own feelings about the objects that museums offer for our inspection.

The mirrored silhouettes, which are photographed in various outdoor locations, pick up the shapes, colours and other forms that surround them. Each photograph brings us the record of a single, unrepeatable moment.

The three-dimensional items are always a commentary on, not just a representation of, a particular object you might encounter in a museum. The representations of high fashion boots and shoes* are particularly thought-provoking, since the essence of fashion is that it belongs to a particular moment. I suspect that Maslen & Mehra chose footwear for this segment of their exhibition because contemporary fashion so often fetishizes shoes, more so than any other item of costume. The Alexander McQueen Armadillo shoe 'translated' here is a good example of the extremes to which shoe design has recently been pushed. One might guess that it could be pushed no further, until one encounters it in its new form. The Maslen & Mehra version of McQueen's creation – a tribute that is also a satire - asks a lot of questions that we are not yet ready to answer about posterity's possible reactions to this aspect of our society.

One of the weaknesses of contemporary, supposedly avant-garde art in recent years has been its fondness for rather crude jejune social commentary. Fashionable avant-garde artists – too many to count – have smugly treated us to statements of the obvious. That is not the case here – these are playful, subtle images that can be interpreted in a number of different ways, according to the inclinations of the viewer. Yet they also have an underlying seriousness. They ask questions, not only about our relationship to museums, in their new role as shrines, containing relic that range from the trivial to the sublime, but about our relationship to time itself.

Edward Lucie-Smith

* Impermanent Collection by Maslen & Mehra comprises a series of photo-sculptures and documented temporary installations based on historical and contemporary objects found in museums. To view the full series, visit: www.maslenandmehra.com/art-imp-collection-photo.html

EDWARD LUCIE-SMITH is an art historian, art critic, curator, poet and photographer who has written books on contemporary art published in many languages. Among his best-known titles are 'Movements in Art since 1945', 'The Visual Arts of the 20th Century' and 'Art Today'. He curated the survey exhibition 'New Classicism in Art', at Palazzo Forti in Verona. Among his many books is a monograph on the American feminist artist Judy Chicago [published in May 2000], and 'Art Tomorrow' [published in October 2002], a survey of the most recent developments in contemporary art, which includes work by Maslen & Mehra.

MASLEN & MEHRA

Tim Maslen studied Fine Art at Curtin University, Perth and completed an MA at Goldsmiths University, London. Jennifer Mehra studied Fine Art at City Art Institute, Sydney and the National Arts School, Australia. Maslen & Mehra have worked collaboratively since 2000. Highlights: Arts Council of England grant for their ongoing work Cash, Clash & Climate (2015 -). Work from this series was presented as a solo exhibition at the Hastings Museum, UK in 2017 and was included in an exhibition selected by Jenni Lomax, Melanie Manchot and Brian Cass at the Towner Contemporary (July 2016). They exhibited work from this series in the exhibition The Fall Of The Rebel Angels in Venice in 2015. Solo exhibitions have been staged in New York, London, Paris, Rome, Barcelona, Dubai, Istanbul, Toronto, Perth, Sydney and Berlin. In 2011 there was a solo presentation of their work staged at General Hardware Contemporary for the Scotiabank CONTACT International Festival, Toronto. Their work is included in the Altered Landscape Collection, Nevada Museum of Art and the stunning accompanying book titled published by Rizzoli. A monograph, Mirrored –Maslen & Mehra was published by Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg in 2008 with texts by Hamburger Bahnhof Museum Curator, Eugen Blume and art historian, Edward Lucie-Smith. Earlier projects include an installation at the Frissiras Museum, Athens during the Olympics (2004), a sculpture installation exhibited at Artspace, Sydney (2002), and a solo project at Dilston Grove, London achieved with awards from the Henry Moore Foundation and London Arts (2001).

Over twenty years of collaborative art www.maslenandmehra.com @maslenandmehra