

TATE BRITAIN
EXHIBITION
ART NOW: BECKY BEASLEY, THE OUTSIDE
6 APRIL – 2 NOVEMBER 2012

Becky Beasley's large hand-printed silver gelatin photographs bear the unevenness of their darkroom origins - her process is arrived at through experimentation and an unusually physical approach to darkroom printing. In around 2004, she began to design, fabricate and photograph her own objects instead of focusing on found motifs. Since this time she has developed her practice through a deep engagement with a series of literary works and, more recently, historical episodes. This close reading of a source allows Beasley to investigate how her own photographs, sculptures and limited edition books deal with the way image, object and language operate in relation to each other. Rather than setting one subject aside for the next, each enhances the relevance of its successor and is in turn enhanced by it. Her literary 'godfathers' include William Faulkner, Herman Melville, Bernard Malamud and Thomas Bernhard. Through the writing and presence of these figures, Beasley's work has touched upon a wide but consistent range of concerns such as the anxieties of decision-making, sanctuary, the history of photography and the approach of death.

Following a visit to the private apartment of the Italian architect and designer Carlo Mollino in Turin, Beasley discovered two texts that he had published in 1949: one a beautifully produced book, *Il Messaggio Dalla Camera Oscura (Message from the Darkroom)*, the first history of photography published in Italy, the other a two-part essay on the history of the interior published in consecutive issues of the magazine *Domus* under the title 'Utopia e Ambientazione' ('Utopia and Setting'). These texts along with the interior of Mollino's apartment became a rich pretext for the body of work titled *The Outside*. Mollino's writing is both instructive and highly personal and offers an insight into the existence of his clandestine apartment, *Casa Mollino*. Having purchased it in 1960, Mollino spent the last 13 years of his life decorating and photographing it, without ever actually living there. At the time of his death in 1973 his friends were unaware that it had been completed. This private mausoleum is perhaps indicative of his strong interest in the Egyptian Museum in Turin. To a large extent the apartment existed through its photographic renditions. This idea of a photographic print being both representation and an object in its own right resonates strongly with Beasley's own interests in photography.

As this show demonstrates, Beasley carefully choreographs the relationship between her two and three-dimensional works. Here she has devised a linoleum floor design as a key element of the installation and as an original artwork for the leaflet. The inspiration for the design is described in Beasley's text 'The Yellow Circle'. The circle within a square, evocative of an eye or

camera lens, plays on the fact that 'camera' is also the Italian word for 'room', and its effect is to emphasise the symmetry and intense interiority of this perfectly square, windowless room.

The dimensions and hinge-details of the cedar-framed prints that are either presented hung on the wall or as freestanding multi-part objects are derived from a blueprint Beasley discovered for a pair of swing doors Mollino had designed but never built. Each loosely hanging photograph represents a fragment of the negative that depicts a shelved trapezoid unit Beasley constructed. In the panelled sculptural works the white backs of the photographic paper are also visible, collapsing the notion of front and back. Adjacent prints depict a photographed section of white Chantillylace that features in Mollino's apartment. Colour is added by the simple addition of a pinkish-orange acrylic glaze that brings vibrancy and emotional resonance to these otherwise monochromatic works. The artist describes the visual encounter with the work as 'like a Chinese paper game', in which the individual elements 'seem to fold into and out of one another, each time anew.' Two piles of offset litho prints of the Chantillylace image are an integral part of one of the sculptural works and are available for the visitor to take away. The remaining two small, identical sculptures, *Perinde Ac Cadaver* (Latin for 'in the manner of a corpse') directly embody Beasley's fascination with Mollino's work, with exactitude in copying and the question of interior and exterior. Meticulously made from black lacquered cedar wood and glass, their volume derives from the footprint of *Casa Mollino* and the spine dimensions of *Il Messaggio Della Camera Oscura*. In some way a reliquary, they relate to an earlier piece, *Sleep, Night*, that came out of Beasley's response to William Faulkner's novel *As I Lay Dying*, in which a dying woman lies in a bed by a window in order to oversee the coffin her son is building for her, a drawing of which appears as a symbol in the published text. As Christy Lange has written, 'as mute and minimal as they often appear, Beasley's works unexpectedly open onto literary worlds.'

The Outside is concerned with a space which is ultimately deeply interior. The abstract forms imaged in photographs or made as sculpture, do not spell out their underlying theme, yet there is a strong sense of a set of narrative coordinates that have informed their conception. The 1:1 scale of Beasley's seductive prints and the anthropomorphic dimensions of her objects hold an autonomous reality of their own, whilst the referent for each body of work makes available another dimension for the viewer, should they wish to access it.