

Camilla Brown / Strange Encounters and the work of Anne Hardy

July 2013

Last year Anne Hardy produced her first monograph, an art object in its own right; when the seal wrap is broken, colourful confetti flutters out. It would seem they have tumbled from the floor of *Coordinate* 2009. A text which is taken from *Concrete Island* by J G Ballard appears. Titled *Through the crash barrier*, it is written from the perspective of a driver who is disorientated after a collision. Another extract is from *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lem, recounting a scientific murder mystery where the protagonist meets an alien life form. Both written in the first person narrative, the extracts are by people who seem confused and to be probing the thin line between sanity and madness. Reading the texts, we enter into a type of parallel universe: familiar yet unknown to us. This is very similar to the experience of encountering Hardy's work. The power of her images is that they hover uncannily between reality and fiction. Her spaces seem everyday, masquerading as found rooms she has stumbled across. However, over time one realises that each space is constructed, with a meticulous eye for detail.

The materials she uses are very urban, sourced whilst walking around London; they are objects left in skips or on the streets. She combines such found objects seamlessly with pieces and items she makes herself. To date, the installations once photographed are then dismantled; having served their purpose they will no longer exist. Hardy works in a studio context, and over the past 13 years I have visited each of her three spaces to see work in progress. On reflection it strikes me that each studio manifests itself in the work produced there. The space not only impacts physically on what and how she could construct her installations, but each studio also represents a phase of her practice.

Her first studio was a relatively small corner of a shared group space. One work she made there is the piece *Lumber* 2003 where cast-out Christmas trees are rescued and left piled up in the space. The work speaks of overcrowding as the trees jostle each other, whilst it also considers how an object shifts from being valued to worthless in a short period of time. The next space she moved to was larger, and she could begin to work on two pieces simultaneously. We started to see more complete rooms which were often cluttered and densely packed, creating a sense of claustrophobia. Dictated in part by the shape of the space at this point, the rooms she created were often long and narrow such as *Close Range* 2006 and *Prime* 2009. Her current studio space is over two floors and lends itself to Hardy being able to work independently on two concurrent works, with each piece living and breathing in its own space. *Rift* 2011 and *Rehearsal* 2010 have more light and air around them, with mirrors used to cleverly affect. Here Hardy creates a more complex sense of space with unclear entrances and exits.



'Prime', Diasec mounted c-type print © Anne Hardy, 2009

Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

The experience of seeing Hardy's work in progress made it clear that she became almost like a method actor, allowing each piece to grow and evolve. Although she never includes people in her work, many of them evoke personas. This seems another reason why the novels alongside her work in the book seem so apt. Her photographs are in many ways the visual embodiment of a novel. They imply and suggest just enough information so that we can believe in the scene and imagine the characters that might inhabit them.

Hardy's most recent photographs, three of which were included in her Maureen Paley exhibition, seem to mark a new use of her current studio space. She has moved from the complex to the minimal and *Script* 2012 and *Notations* 2012 seem almost to be fragments from a whole. Both show simply one wall. In *Script* we seem to be examining a photograph of a colour field painting with bold areas of colour. In this work Hardy expands her use of text, revealing an inter-play of words which seem to lead somewhere and nowhere all at once. An extract from the wall includes the following words:

Gather

Gathering

Worship

Well

Assemble

We imagine, as the title suggests, that these are notes from a writer's brainstorm for a play or film, which we have found left behind in the room. It transpires that they are words that Hardy has been courting as potential work titles over the years, the ones that got left on the editor's floor, or in this case, on the wall.

In *Shelf* 2013, we see the most simplistic formal photograph in the show and for me the most evocative. It seems to be in dialogue with Eggleston's well known study in red of a light bulb hanging from a ceiling in his piece *Greenwood, Mississippi* 1973. Hardy chooses a vibrant green colour and rather than us seeing a real room, we see a constructed corner of a space. She uses what has become her signature material of white oozing foam. The shelf size and shape seem totally pointless except that it holds a collection of air rifle pellets. This suggests the potential for a violent event or action, which we assume might happen elsewhere.

But if the photographs have become more minimal and de-cluttered, then the chaos and plenitude has moved into the sculptural form of her work. There are two pieces of sculpture in the show. One *Two Joined Fields – Field (A) and Field (Decagon)* 2013 was built in situ, and filled the entire second floor gallery space. Walking around the piece it is hard to anticipate the interior space. Entering through slated swing doors, you walk quite literally into another world. The light levels drop significantly and the walls are painted a dark indigo blue, which suggests outer space. The almost lightweight plasterboard walls seen outside contrast in the interior with the heavy cast concrete shapes placed on a domestic carpeted floor. Custom made by the artist, these concrete shapes have insignia on them so they seem alien and familiar at once. At the end of the space you enter a bizarre decagon, which of course is not symmetrical, but other-worldly. Human presence is noted here with drawings left chalked onto the walls. Perhaps a significant epiphany has been realised here, but we are not privy to what solution has been found, or what problem was solved.



Interior view of 'Field (decagon)' with 'Tools (calculation)', multimedia installation

© Anne Hardy, 2013, Courtesy Maureen Paley, London

An encounter with this installation is so much more than seeing one of Hardy's previous works in progress. Perhaps it is this play with light, form, mass and shape that is so different. It is certainly an exhilarating experience to be so literally inside the work. This inclusion of sculpture does not mean that the artist has left photography behind. But it does represent a significant shift for her work, as Hardy has changed the relationship between her photographs and the constructions. To date the sculptures were made to produce a single image, but now they need several photographs to attempt to convey them. Equally the photographs had to describe and encapsulate the scene they were representing. Now the photograph and the sculpture have broken free of each other and can have their own independent voice. It would seem in this process they have both been liberated and can now move freely into a world of new possibilities.

- [Camilla Brown](#)

With thanks to the artist and Maureen Paley

For more images please go to:

<http://www.photomonitor.co.uk/2013/07/strange-encounters-and-the-work-of-anne-hardy-2/>

For further reading:

[Anne Hardy 2012](#)

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