

1 GRANARY

RA GRADUATE REBECCA ACKROYD AND THE 'POLITICS OF SHINE'

Friday, February 26, 2016 - By Sian Toolan

Rebecca Ackroyd is a graduate of the Royal Academy Schools. Her confrontational feminine forms and pastel palette made for a spectacular degree show and recent Frieze-approved solo exhibition at London's Hunter / Whitfield. Her current group show, *Is it Heavy or Is it Light?*, playfully explores notions of the body, architecture and a deep-rooted domesticity. We caught up with the artist inside her South Bermondsey studio to discuss the exciting evolution of her work since leaving the RA.



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Rebecca's current works at Assembly Point

Your recent solo exhibition, *Taken Care*, seemed to be a continuation of the ideas explored in your RA Schools degree show. How do you feel your practice has evolved since leaving the RA?

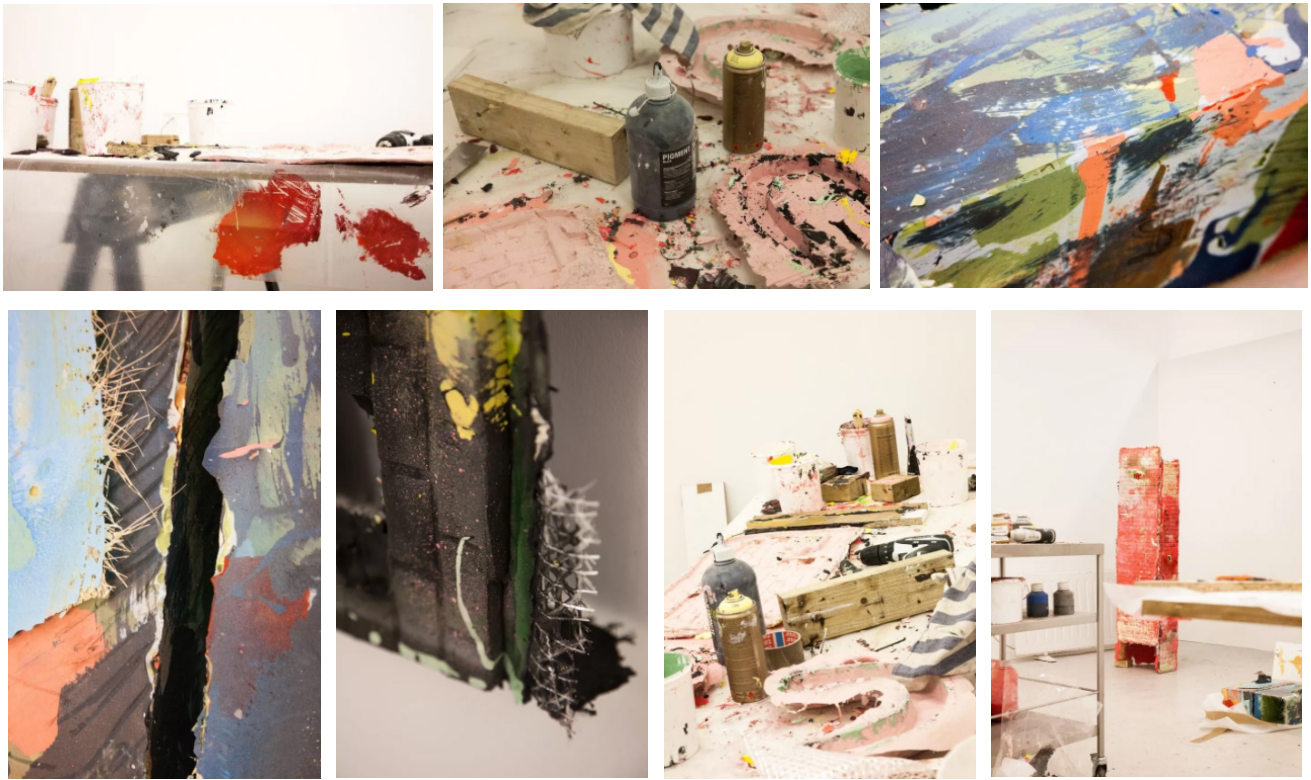
I think it's opened up a lot more. Doing the degree show helped me to think about what it was that I find important in making, in opening up different questions and relationships between works. Since then, it's becoming more direct or more narrative, in a way that's a bit more free, through the way I use materials and references.

Your use of materials often references the body, architecture and femininity. What would you say your approach to materials is? Is it instinctive?

Yeah, it's whatever seems appropriate for what I'm making. So, with the big figurative sculptures that I've made, I used plaster bandage purely because it wasn't about what they were made of, but about the form, attitude and stance that they had, and that I wanted them to be realised quite quickly. The rawness of that material became quite important in that body of work. Whereas now, perhaps things are getting much more laboured and layered, and I don't know if I'd return to that material again.

Can you tell us a bit about your current group show, *Is it Heavy or Is it Light?*, and your work in it specifically?

The show itself was devised by James and Sam at Assembly Point. Their concept, the "politics of shine", was taken from an essay on e-flux, and they selected five artists they thought had an interesting relationship to that. My work is a continuation of some of the works shown at Hunter/Whitfield, but very much more about creating these autonomous and imposing structures that referenced prisons or watchtowers. These brutal structures are maquettes for something bigger, and they're also much more solid and whole in comparison to the stacks of plates and body parts, and their jewel-like or berry colours. It was quite important that these body parts (ears, noses, tongues and feet) were to scale with the body, altogether throwing you between places, spaces or realities.



Your colour palette has noticeably shifted into darker, and arguably heavier, shades; purples and greens with less pastel pink. Was this a conscious decision?

For this body of work those berry colours just seemed appropriate, I wanted them to be almost edible. There's things I'm working on in the studio which are much lighter again, it just depends, really.

The show's title, taken from Brian Kuan Wood's essay, also thinks about what mood art can put you in. Is there any particular feeling you'd like an audience to take away from your work?

I don't know what the specific feeling would be, I know that when I make it, it makes me feel something, it often makes me feel quite uncomfortable or like I don't really know where it sits. And so I often look at what I've made and I don't know what I'm looking at. It's as if I'm searching for something that isn't there, which is then difficult to pinpoint or talk about; there's not a sentence I can sum it up in. There's obviously certain things I'm thinking about when making works, but then it's difficult to impose them on people.

For current students interested in the Royal Academy Schools, how do you think your time there shaped your practice and developed you as an artist?

I think just having the three years, as opposed to one or two, is incredibly important. It gives you a lot of scope to try things out. If I think about the work I made in my second year, it completely shifted in the third year. So the time is hugely important, as is the amount of space, access to workshops, materials and tuition and it's really emphasised that this is what's important there.

Last of all, what are your plans for the future?

There's a few things I'm excited to be working on, but I can't really say what they are. I am hoping to organise a group show and just keep working. The work is always the most important thing.

Photography by Oliver Vanes for 1 Granary
Rebecca's current works at Assembly Point