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Dai Roberts

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Dai Roberts is a London based artist working predominantly in sculpture and drawing to produce an interlocking series of works. Often applying certain rules or constrictions to his working process, these collections of sculptures or images unfold, generating an accumulative construction of meaning.

To create your work, you often impose certain limitations or certain rules upon yourself, as with the UNIT series. What are your reasons for structuring your working process this way?

UNIT started as a way to stop myself making anything new, to see what happened if I continued working with the same simple elements. In the end I did 175 drawings in about 6 months.

Do you find that in creating rules or limitations for yourself within the working process is actually quite an expansive way of working – that it actually opens up possibilities?

Definitely, all artists set themselves limits to some degree. I like to emphasise a set of obvious constraints within a series this then allows other nuances though. If there are no filters there is too much to comprehend.

Occasionally in your work, one series will lead onto another, as with the UNIT drawings that followed the sculptures. Within your practice, do you feel that one series of work quite often leads onto the next?

With the UNIT drawings I tried not to recreate the UNIT sculptures but, instead to work in a similar manner with a set of limits. Focusing on the differences between the methods of presentation, gravity is not an issue in two dimensions. I tend to jump between 2 or 3 core interests that do not quite meet up, so there is a gap between some of the different series of works. I like to revisit things I have not worked on for sometime.

How much does each piece within a series, or each series within the body of your work, function discretely of one another?

Works such as the Folded a1/3 are shown in series and only really function in that series. But in most series there are stand out moments that can become singular and epitomise the series such as UNIT Drawing 51.

The UNIT sculptures seem to hover between design, artwork, object and furniture. Coming from a technical background in engineering, is their a relation to the idea of the total work of art as espoused by the Bauhaus school, which sought to bring together different disciplines, within your work?

UNIT is an exploration of the process of design and production, as I understand it, a personal approach to the problem of what to do. I would not want to claim UNIT operates as a total art work (Gesamtkunstwerk) in the grand tradition of the Bauhaus, but there are similarities in the way I work with and treat the materials I select. I am very much interested in Joseph Albers teaching methods whilst at the Bauhaus and how influential these have become. My previous training in engineering gives me a familiarity with a variety of practical processes I am able to draw upon within my work.

Ontological Exceptions takes the form of a 'constellation' of sculptural objects. As a group they could contain a pattern, a rule or a thread that runs between them suggesting a relationship. I wondered, in terms of thinking about the possible organising principles by which someone might delineate a 'collection', how much their works investigate the way in which we create meaning through categorization or pattern building between referential objects?

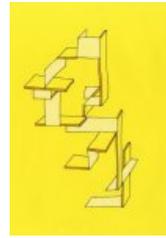
Most of the works before UNIT operated in this manner attempting to bounce off of each other hoping to create more meaning through their relational arrangement. Since UNIT the works relationship to each other is more obvious and incremental. The idea of a collection is interesting, I think almost everybody collects something and this fulfils a very human need to order and condense the world.

Your piece IAO which won the Marmite painting prize was described as 'made up of three vowels'. Like some of your other works, IAO does seem to have a visual relation to the structure of a language; the creation of meaning through the accumulative process of making variations on a theme. Is your process of production, which creates a series of

works (such as the folded paper paintings and Quest, which take the form of geometric compositions through a methodical process) a search for meaning?

The work over the last 5 years has very much been produced through an accumulative process, I was trying to make the work very transparent, obvious. I have always been interested in the point where abstraction takes on meaning, where shapes become symbols, many of these works hover at this point. Rather than a search for meaning it could be seen as an attempt at understanding why we need meaning.

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