

**Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art
Project Space:
Littlewhitehead**

Exhibition dates: 4 May – 26 June 2010



'Universal Sidereal' 2010

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Littlewhitehead are Glasgow-based artists Craig Little and Blake Whitehead. Littlewhitehead's sculptures and installations are hyper-real places that are equally ominous and comic. Each work is a black comedy that elicits feelings of alarm or discomfort, where images that we expect to see in the mass media or in films are brought unflinchingly into our physical world.

Here, Littlewhitehead present a brand new work: a completely burnt-out room, in which every object has been ravaged by flames, leaving only the traces of a life. We can only view the room through a window, as though peering into a vignette from someone's else's life, now brought to ruins. It is as if we are encountering an image from the mass media that has come to life. In Littlewhitehead's world, the rules of fiction and fact become blurred.

The artists describe their projects as attacks on the comfort of received ideas: "we want to beat you up – visually". Their works are an assault on the senses, and an ethical challenge. Many of their works recall scenes that are part of our shared image bank: traumatic sights that are so routinely represented in the media, in cinema or on TV that they scarcely trouble us. Littlewhitehead makes us sharply aware of the effects of the media on our capacity to treat each other as equals. They dramatise the fact that, as Barack Obama argues, when reality is "played out on television... [and] sensationalized by the media" we collectively develop an "empathy deficit... an inability to recognize ourselves in one another".

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Teacher's Notes

Ideas for generating discussion with students:

Think about your favourite TV shows. What is the main subject matter? What about your family – what do they like watching?

Very often the subject of dramas is pain. Not just physical but also emotional pain. The most popular TV dramas, for example Eastenders or Coronation Street, feature storylines of people in anguish, often dealing with extremely emotionally painful situations. Think about the other popular types of shows on TV such as police and hospital dramas, these regularly show people in physical pain or inflicting pain on others. What is it that makes watching others in pain so interesting to us?

LittleWhitehead are interested in this idea and ask this question through their artwork.

The artists are also interested in the line between fact and fiction. If we were witnessing actual acts of violence or seeing a real car crash it would be horrific but because we know that the TV shows are fiction it is entertainment. The artwork created by LittleWhitehead are fictional creations which look real. They are particularly interested in moving images from 2 dimensions into 3, to make it more life-like, more real.

What was your first reaction when you walked into the space? Why do you think you felt that way?

The sculptures and installations of LittleWhitehead are methodically created to be as lifelike as possible. When making the work it is clear that they have an idea of who the characters are yet this is not revealed to us. The burnt room has objects which give clues to what it might have been used for, and the figure wears certain clothes. However, by not revealing any information about their own ideas the artists are allowing the viewer to create their own story and characters within the work. As a viewer we bring our own knowledge from news stories, TV and film and possibly our own experiences to the work. Each person who looks at the work can create their own story in their head.

Littlewhitehead



'Any Last Thoughts?' 2010

Look at the figure and ask yourself these questions:

- What does the title tell you about the work?
- How old is he?
- What nationality?
- Imagine the room that he's sitting in. What does it look like?
- Is he alone?
- Why is he there?
- What is he feeling?
- What is he thinking about?



Now look at *'Universal Sidereal'* the installation of the burnt room. Are there any details that can give you some clues to what it could have been used for before it burnt down.

Imagine that you are going to recreate all of the the work in this room. How would you go about it? What materials would you need? What would the process be?

Littlewhitehead used a variety of processes to create the artwork in this exhibition. For *'Any Last Thoughts'* the hands on the figure were cast in resin and covered in make-up to make them more lifelike. The body however, is make from making casts in plaster of a real person which creates a more solid structure and ensure that the clothes lie as they would on a real body.

For *'Universal Sidereal'* the room was built and then slowly burned over 20 hours with a flame thrower. This ensured that the walls are charred but the structure is still stable and in fact the back of the work isn't burnt. The objects in the room were completely burnt and therefore are very delicate. All of the works were made off-site and re-assembled in the gallery space

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Keywords:

Reality

Pain

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Conflict

Identity

Characterisation

Installation

Hyper-real

Ominous

Mass media

Vignette

Glossary:

Sidereal. A measurement of time used by astronomers to keep track of the stars. A 'sidereal day' is the time it takes for the earth to rotate: almost precisely twenty-four hours – though in actual fact, not quite.

More information about the artists is available at:

www.ngca.co.uk

www.littlewhitehead.com

www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/little_whitehead.htm

www.newcontemporaries.org.uk/artist_single.php?aid=1636