

Artist in Profile: Angela McHarrie

By Clare Peake (published in *tete-a-tete*, issue five 2010)

“Curiouser and curiouser!” cried Alice.”

Uncertainty influences most of our daily lives, underlying much of our decision making and understanding of the things around us. It drives us to seek information, test and evaluate our knowledge and can create possibilities that allow for the invention of new and imaginative worlds. It is in this state of uncertainty that things can occur that are both nonsensical and sensible at the same time, where the unpredictable can be tested and where Angela McHarrie’s work sits comfortably. Through McHarrie’s work one state transforms into another exploring the process of this occurrence. The work isn’t fussed about being fixed one way or the other but rather enjoys being neither.

McHarrie’s work, like understanding uncertainty, is not about leaving what you know at the door, but more about taking it with you, learning the rules and then learning their limits. Nothing is lost or disregarded, instead it’s found elsewhere. Like learning a new language, things are shifted and translated. Objects and words are translated into drawings, sculptures, paintings and coded systems through her process. It is by means of this action the work is built and demolished at the same time, but where one system starts and finishes is equally arbitrary.

In Lewis Carroll’s novel, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice while playing croquet in the garden observes that she is unable to figure out if there are any rules to the game and if there is, if anyone is abiding by them. This sentiment for me is pertinent when thinking about McHarrie’s work. Playing/not playing, progress/decline, win/lose, present/absent all become interchangeable and imaginary concepts addressed in her work. The original meaning of the words is not necessarily discarded, but like in Carroll’s novel they become imaginary concepts. Like ideas of time and measurement, these words are tested and used to develop our understanding of the way things are. It is perhaps through this process that a new meaning is found, a new concept that sits in between the dualities McHarrie presents in her work. However, as soon as you think you’ve got it, and grasped this new language, it has already shifted and moved elsewhere.

This unstable nature is also reflected in McHarrie’s scenarios of brightly coloured wooden text pieces and objects. McHarrie often translates these assemblages into other forms such as photographs and drawings, a process which allows a shift to occur from a three dimensional to a two dimensional space. The simple objects such as chairs, tables and balls are precariously balanced and often left to float in space with no reference point for the viewer to anchor and make sense of the objects. They supersede their predicted scale, weight or strength allowing McHarrie to distort our understanding and knowledge of the objects.

In her most recent works, McHarrie uses three-dimensional wood cut-outs of text as both a visual language and as a codified system to be translated. The difference between words such as “lost” and “found” or “something” and “nothing”, become interchangeable and nonsensical where one word can be used to describe the other. It reminds me of trying to learn a new language, when often several words in English might be used to describe the meaning of a single word in a different language and vice-versa. The word is described as concept rather than given a direct definition, a bit like saying something is pinky purple or

blue-ish green to form the basis of our perception, when the actual meaning is neither but is co-dependent on both. It is this space that McHarrie's work explores best; real and imagined at the same time.

The dynamic of the work is polished and meticulously crafted to the point of becoming almost diagrammatic. This aesthetic quality, its crispness, acts much like signage attracting and focusing the viewer. Solid blocks of flat colour and clean lines are used to direct the viewer without dictating their interpretation. McHarrie creates a curious and unsettling space for the viewer to negotiate.