

SHELF LIFE by Agnes So

My experience of reading this summer has changed due to the recent acquisition of an iPad. Apple's iBooks application has made it so I can carry a whole library with me wherever I go without adding much weight, mass or form to my bag. However, with this convenience comes a sacrifice. Gone are the times when I would reach for a novel, feel my way through a paper edge or judge how much I've read by the density of its pages.

Instead, each 'book' I purchase is digitally presented, flat and listless, on an illustrated three-dimensional shelf. This shelf has been painfully rendered to depict wooden grain, highlights and shadow. Such details are supposed to add to the language of depth and reality in my brain, initiating any previous memories that I've associated with the action of reading a physical book. The modestly tactile book encounter has now been replaced with a kind of mimesis, a simulation.

Technological critics have labeled this substitution as digital 'skeuomorphism'. Skeuomorphism occurs when something retains the aesthetic qualities of a previous iteration of an object, even when those qualities no longer have any proper function to the object now. For example, the books I purchase through iBooks technically do not need to 'sit' on any shelf at all, nor does the shelf itself really work as it would in the 'real world' (it's a two dimensional portrayal after all). But the designers of this application have decided that the visual cue of a bookshelf, executed with all the trimmings, might help paint an atmosphere that is as close as possible to the action of reading a real book. It helps to keep things natural, intuitive and everyday.

The history of art is also steeped in attempts to represent the everyday and for the Seventh Summer Residency, Eye Collective (Trudy Moore, Melanie Jayne Taylor and Stephanie Wilson) have unintentionally focused on, what I consider, a kind of 'art skeuomorphism'. The gallery's uneven walls, corners, doors and windows became the catalyst by which the Collective produced work over the last few weeks. Their co-existence with these unnoticed, and often very awkward fragments of Seventh's architecture naturally resulted in a type of imitation in the artwork the Collective created.

An example of this can be seen through the unoccupied (real-world) shelves, relics of the Seventh Super Sell Out Show. The shelf is conventionally considered as a flat, horizontal plane, by which we display, store and order objects. However, the surfaces in this gallery are empty, no longer functioning as they may have done so in a previous life. Their own nullity is even exaggerated through various interventions by the artists. Stephanie Wilson's careful painting of the shadows cast outlines the edge of a previous utili-

ty that has now faded through time and space. Likewise, Trudy Moore's rubbings pay homage to the geometry and gravity of the shelf, but the flimsy drawings can barely hold their own weight, let alone that of a displayed object. By overstating the vacancy of these surfaces, Eye Collective draws out an uncanny nature from the object itself. The shelves become about nothingness, pregnant with the anticipation for potential use. This forces us to notice its physicality within the space, more so than ever before.

The artworks in this exhibition then act as dysfunctional negatives, alluding to all the formal and ornamental details of the space (such as the shelves), but stripped of any usefulness or function. Much like how the skeuomorphism of iBooks is a design tool for drawing out innate action by using real world metaphors, Eye Collective have used everyday, formal relationships such as shape, line and colour to jog the viewer's sense of noticing and recollection. This is especially evident in the Collective's manipulation of a lone power box, an eyesore that has, in the past, been painted white in an effort to camouflage and remain unseen. Instead, a very particular photograph by Melanie Jayne Taylor hangs next to it, the frame of which precisely echoes the edge of the power box itself. The sharpness of the frame is repeated again through Taylor's use of built storage boxes placed upon the floor of the gallery. These highly deliberate decisions intervene on our perception of space, giving a sense of déjà vu, and help to extract the architectural white noise that we often drive to the back of our subconscious. In this case the power box starts to regain its visibility, reminding the viewer to become more aware of his or her own surroundings. If you look around, the gallery is filled with numerous skeuomorphs, nagging at our intuition, asking us to remember. Eye Collective have used mimicry and repetition as a means by which to map both structural and psychological space. What other details have been overlooked? Forgotten? Disregarded?

Here is an environment where we can exercise our muscles of acuity and awareness. The artists simply ask us as the viewer how can we apply these skills, not just at the location of Seventh, but also in our everyday passage through the world.

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