

Nicolas Beaumelle and Clément Laigle are concerned with the ways in which matter permeates our existence. Following different routes, they attempt to deconstruct the language of forms, exploring the ways in which the materials with which we surround ourselves – ceramic, steel, plastic, paper, glass, etc – contain and enclose us, directing our behaviour both physically and mentally.

Taken together the impact of the two artists' work is both visceral and disconcerting. The gallery dominated by Laigle's totem like "study for a wall"(2009) become an uncertain, potentially unsafe space. The viewer circles tentatively, uncertain how to approach the works. Shadows and vertices cross and intersect in the spaces between the pieces. The heat from the halogen lamps of Laigle's "between the Furniture and the building" (2009) both draws us and repels us. As the sun rises and sets above the gallery the shadows make up a shifting, asymmetric matrix. We are trapped between ley-lines; overwhelmed by visible and invisible line of power.

Then, coming across a miniature ironing board set in the middle of the space, we suddenly realise that there is something off kilter.

Things are not being taken seriously or, perhaps, something serious is being subverted. Like Beaumelle's jaunty series "separator (2009), which lies dotted around Laigle's monolithic structure, the absurd lingers at the edge of our consciousness. Beaumelle's work represents laughter without words, the ghost of a deflated balloon which hangs in the corners of the gallery.

Both artists explore the ineluctable logic of forms, interrogating the ideological and physical matrices by which we map out our existence. This is most immediately evident in Laigle's work, which walks the boundary between architecture, sculpture and installation. Laigle uses architectural materials to create structures which trouble our relationship to the built environment. His work explores the arbitrariness of architectural forms by creating structures which are constructed around an internal logic instead of the logic of use. Rather than subsuming form to utility or to conventional aesthetics, Laigle explores how the materials themselves dictate the forms which they take. In a way which is almost ritualistic, he surrenders himself to the laws of symmetry, of balance, of weight.

The materials which Laigle uses in "Between the furniture and the building" have a certain symbolic authority. They suggest steel and spotlights, bringing to mind construction, sites and corporate architecture. The form which they take in the artwork, however, undermines this authority. The corrugated iron wall goes nowhere. Demarcating nothing, it hugs itself, wrapping itself in a circle. The warmth of the light inside is like a campfire and like children playing at camping, we huddle inside. Claiming the space, we designate ourselves as "inside"; the gallery, and everything external to it is "outside". As we explore Laigle's work our relation to it shifts. We realise that seemingly immovable positions are malleable and permeable, and that structures are often meaningless without ideological consent.

"Between..." exists in an interesting relation to the piece adjacent to it. "Study for a wall" is a paper and ink study based on the traditional architectural technique of half-timbering. Laigle seems to me to be two things in this piece. On one level, he is exploring the ways in which the monolithic can become obsolete. What was once the familiar signifier of a well-built home, the seat of power and authority, is now nothing more a decorative pattern divested of its ability to signify. Ultimately, ideology gives way to geometry. On a second level, Laigle is exploring the relationship between geometry and ornamentation. Looking at the piece, we notice that the limits of the wall painting which surround the study are dictated not by aesthetic considerations, but by physical exigencies: the distance between the light switch on one side, and the fire alarm on the other. Because of this, the borders of the piece are permeable. Rather than ending with the painting, the pattern is relayed through invisible symmetries across the walls

of the gallery. The study shows us how hidden lines and geometric patterns intersect our spaces, making them, for an instant, visible.

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essay by Phillida Cheetham, may 2009