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Desire: Greg Forrest, Lauren Schaffer, Colleen Wolstenholme

We want what we want: could it be any more clear?

There are few things in life that any of us can state with certainty, fewer still that others will agree are certain. We can say, “things are.” Whatever they may be, however they may be, there are things, of that we have no doubt. It’s the *what* and the *how* of things that gets complicated.

The obstinate “thereness” of things. . . our thinking eye construes shadows of familiarity, of signifying sequence, out of nonsense verse, out of concrete writing and apparently random play. Some finality of realism, of socially sanctioned reproduction, is, so far as literature and the plastic arts go, not so much a free option as it is an inescapable fact.¹

Here at the advent of the twenty-first century, it often seems as if everything in our environment, both built and natural, is merely another cog in the vast consumer machine that passes for our culture. The West, the most affluent society that has ever burdened the planet, consumes at a rate that must soon exhaust the planet’s resources, forcibly returning us to the pre-technological revolution’s state of grace. In the service of this machine, our instrumental society has reduced almost everything to a tool. While the way ahead seems fraught with danger, our consumer culture blithely hums along, confident that technology will save the day, either painlessly reforming us, or coming up with means that ensure that such drastic action is unnecessary. Whether the forces of technology can really pull us out of the fire is anyone’s guess, but given our recent history it’s probably unwise to bet against the ability of science and “progress” to save the day. Or at least that’s what we tell ourselves, on the way to the mall, cyber or otherwise.

The only way to fashion a consumer culture is to have things to consume, and our culture has been brutally efficient in turning virtually everything into such objects. The modern age is an instrumental one, with its roots in the scientific objectification of the world. There is a theory in

¹ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 202.

paleontology that defines humans by their ability to make tools — essentially claiming that it is the tools that make us human, which separate us from animals, even from the world. Tools are a particular type of object, demarcated from other objects by their use-value. The computer that I am using to write this piece is a tool, as is the book from which you are reading it. The gallery that housed the work in the exhibition, *Desire*, is another tool, as is the bridge that the work was carried over to get it to the gallery.

In a tool-culture, it is a challenge to find something that isn't a tool or can't be treated as one. We are surrounded by objects that are obviously tools, such as our telephones, televisions, appliances, books and so on. Is a river a tool, though? Or a beach? What about an ocean? A look at the tourism marketing for Prince Edward Island could lead one to believe that they were. While such features of the natural world are hardly constructed by humans for their consumption through use, they are treated as such within the various systems and organizations that profit from them. Marketed, managed, exploited in countless ways, a Prince Edward Island beach is indeed a tool. It's debatable whether humans are able to deal with the world in any other way.

Tool-culture is so pervasive that it can't really be avoided. We can't even talk about the notion without objectifying the world, using it as an example to prove a point. Instrumental culture is our culture, we are implicated within it every time we act upon anything. Thus the question is: are we doomed to be consumers? Is there any other way, for us, of being in the world?

In a tool-culture, everything is treated as an object to be consumed, something available for use. In our version of a tool-culture, the operating concept is money -- we pay, either outright or obliquely, to use objects. I bought the computer I'm writing on, but not the St. John River, which is powering my lap-top. The river has several dams along its length, and the electricity I buy is generated by the force of the river turning turbines. The river, obviously part of the natural world, is being used. By damming it, in fact, the Atlantic salmon that used to define this river have been driven to the brink of extinction. Where once millions of fish annually swam up river, now the number is more like dozens. Our society has chosen to use the river differently, not as an integral part of the natural world, but as merely an engine for our constructed one.

Consumption is so ingrained in our culture that we can't do without it; even those who choose to resist tool-culture can only do so from a position within the culture itself. Everything is a tool, even resistance.

This is a pretty harsh view of our culture, admittedly. Martin Heidegger, in his seminal essay on art, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” hesitated to be so sweeping in his description of use-value:

Only a stone, a clod of earth, a piece of wood are for us mere things. Lifeless beings of nature and objects of use. Natural things and utensils are the things commonly so called.²

Heidegger was coming from a certain tradition, and a certain time. Where he hesitates, present times force one to be bold. “Natural things and utensils.” Is there anything else?

But if everything is a tool, an instrument to be used and consumed, then where does that leave art? How do you use a work of art, or does art resist its consumption through use?

Desire is a loaded term in such a context, signifying often conflicting drives: the urge to consume, the need to earn, the demand for more, the resolution to resist. The work in *Desire: Greg Forrest, Lauren Schaffer, Colleen Wolstenholme* defies the instrumental bent of our culture, defies the utilitarian by being stubbornly and resolutely non-instrumental, inutile, but not exactly useless. Tools these works may well be, they certainly may be treated as such, but their resoluteness in the face of tool-culture grants them a certain dignity, an otherness that lends a certain subversive punch to their presence.

Sculpture is the most chameleon-like of art forms, occupying the same space as the viewer, sitting on the floor like furniture or luggage. Unlike such manifestly useful items, however, sculpture won't provide any respite from gravity or useful overflow storage for one's personal belongings. Rather, sculpture mocks such prosaic items. It haughtily demands the viewer's attention, insinuating itself into one's mind, undercutting cherished -- and no doubt useful -- habits and beliefs, all through the active fact of its presence.

The three sculptors in *Desire* share a strategy of representation, making works that appear to be familiar, items that occupy the everyday world of their viewers: mirror balls, light standards, wigs, pills, jewels. However these objects are not what they seem. Rather, they call into question the very familiarity that they so strongly evoke. Greg Forrest's hair-pieces are manifestly not hair, Lauren Schaffer's diamonds are neither “big as the Ritz,” nor carbon crystals, and Colleen Wolstenholme's pills are certainly not pharmaceuticals.

² Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, David Farrell Krell, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 152.

The Greek philosopher Plato would have thrown the artists out of his perfect society, distrusting their reliance on images rather than things. In Plato's world view, the things of the world are themselves shadows; a table is only an image of the form of a table, a copy of the "idea" that permits its conception and even perception. A painting of a table is thus a shadow of a shadow, a truly confusing thing and one that the *Republic* would be better off without.

"Then here is the point for you to consider. With what object has the painting been made in each case; has it been made to imitate the real thing as it is, or appearance as it appears; is it imitation of appearance or of truth?"

"Appearance," he said.

"Then imitative art is a long way from truth, and, as it seems, that is why it reproduces everything, because it touched only a little part of each, and even that an image."³

Of course we don't live in the *Republic*, and are surrounded by such images of images. In *Desire*, we aren't faced with such shadowy forms, but with something else all together. These artists aren't practising mimesis for its own sake, rather they are engaged in creating something new out of the forms of other things. Their source isn't just the way things *look*, but the way things *are* in our world — which is a much less refined place than that one envisioned by Plato. As poet Wallace Stevens wrote, "let be finale of seem."⁴ The artists in *Desire* make works that examine how things *seem*, on the way to articulating how things *are*.

Desire is about the presencing of things, about objects that point to a different way of being in the world, an antidote to the limiting view that all things must somehow be either used or used up — the mantra of the modern age.

George Steiner, in his book *Real Presences*, spoke directly to the stubborn reality of artworks:

I believe that the making into being by the poet, artist and, in a way yet to be defined, by the composer, is *counter-creation*. The pulse of motive which relates the begetting of meaningful forms to the first act of creation, to the coming into being of being. . . is not mimetic in any neutral or obeissant sense. It is radically agonistic. It is rival. In all substantive art-acts there beats an angry gaiety. The

³ Plato, *The Republic*, Book X, *Great Dialogues of Plato*, W.H.D. Rouse, trans. (New York: New American Library, 1956), p. 397.

⁴ Wallace Stevens, "The Emperor of Ice Cream," in *20th Century Poetry and Poetics*, Gary Geddes ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 115.

source is that of loving rage. The human maker rages at his coming *after*, at being, forever, second to the original and originating mystery of the forming of form.⁵

Further along in the same essay, Steiner cuts to the heart of the matter: “Mimesis is repossession.”⁶

Forrest, Schaffer and Wolstenholme treat tools as fit subjects for art, transforming quotidian, though contextually rich, objects through a deceptively simple process of mimesis. However, *pace* Plato, these works aren’t shadows of anything. Rather, they are new beings, forcing a rethinking of their source material, even as we have to make room for them in our world views.

Our particular case is interesting enough: we have produced a conception in order to be able to live in a world, in order to perceive just enough to endure it — ⁷

Texts, postmodern theory (taking a cue from Nietzsche) tells us, are infinitely malleable, able to be interpreted in “vastly different and deeply incompatible ways.”⁸ What’s true for a text is equally true for the world, especially that constructed part of it we call our culture. In a world we have made, can there ever be anything but interpretation?

Reality is not something behind appearance but simply the totality of these various arrangements. The very notion, therefore, of a ‘merely’ apparent world is a fiction.”⁹

Fictional it may be, but we so want it to be real.

If mimesis is a kind of repossession, then Greg Forrest has been an active ‘repo-man’ for several years. Forrest has lived and worked in Halifax for over a decade, and in that time has filled almost every role possible in the visual arts in that city: artist, undergraduate student, gallery employee, graduate student, artist-run centre board member, art school instructor and art gallery administrator.

His meticulous copies of consumables such as glasses of Guinness, or consumer items such as stereo speakers and bicycles, are rooted in autobiography and steeped in humour. These works developed from an earlier series that used the gallery space as its source material. Forrest was interested in the behind-the-scenes action of the gallery, the messy reality that sustains the illusion of the white

5 George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 204.

6 *ibid.*, p. 206

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Kaufmann and Hollingdale, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), #568, p. 306.

8 Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 3

9 *ibid.*, p. 45-46.

cube. He made several versions of gallery rooms, seeming models that were able to contain the look of the gallery, but also the feel, the context, as it were — at least the context as seen through the sardonic eyes of one artist.

The gallery pieces addressed the spaces in which Forrest was exhibiting. For an undergraduate show at the Anna Leonowens Gallery,¹⁰ he constructed a simplified model of the gallery in a large bay window facing a pedestrian mall. He walled off the window from inside the exhibition space, leaving only a small rectangular opening. From the outside the viewer saw a roughly constructed box, supported by sawhorses, and garlanded with the electrical wiring for light fixtures affixed to the roof of the box. From inside the gallery the rectangular opening glowed brightly, and it was unclear just what one was looking at until one moved closer to the piece. The bulbs gave off a significant amount of heat, which radiated out from the wall, so that one was aware of that force before one could actually see all the way into the box.

Forrest's humorous take on the gallery as a place of uncomfortable scrutiny exactly fit the context of the show: students showing at their school's gallery. In later shows he made versions of the OO Gallery and the art gallery at Mount St. Vincent University, carefully loading each piece with a cargo of irony and cool detachment.

Those works developed into a series of pieces that were, ostensibly, the kind of throwaway objects that are part and parcel of the 'backstage' of any gallery: crates, pallets and sawhorses. The difference was that these objects were made with fine woods (oak, walnut and mahogany) and finished with all the considerable wood-working skill that Forrest could muster. These objects transcended their origins as disposable items through the deceptively simple expedient of increasing their perceived value through Forrest's choice of materials.

Still later, Forrest began a series based on consumer items. In need of new stereo speakers¹¹, Forrest constructed two sculptures that still sit in his Halifax living room. Made from plywood and veneered with oak, these 'speakers' feature woofers and tweeters turned from fine wood on a lathe. Mute, these objects become something else all together, a kind of guerrilla sculpture that sneaks up on the viewer.

10 Hardened Arteries, curated by Glen MacKinnon, Anna Leonowens Gallery 2, Jan. 17 - 21, 1989 (see Arts Atlantic #35, review by Ray Cronin).

11 In conversation with the artist, 1999.

The first of his three works in *Desire* shifts focus somewhat, speaking to the currency of celebrity with the kind of cutting humour found in all of Forrest's sculptures. "One Dozen Men's Hairstyles of the 20th Century," aluminum sculptures that replicate the famous haircuts of such diverse figures as James Dean, Josef Stalin and Bruce Lee, play with the recognition we feel upon seeing such signifiers for fame. The hairstyles stand in for dead celebrities — and they must be dead, as living stars change their hairstyles. These styles are fixed, and not just because they are in metal. Rather than depicting any aspect of a real person, Forrest's hairstyles are aspects of media constructs, just as much consumer items as any other object we buy. Forrest acknowledges this in the material presence of these works. Cast from aluminum, each of the twelve pieces are painted with different colours of automobile paint, shades that reflect a careful study of consumer tastes and fashions.

With "Algoma" Forrest has turned his eye back towards the high-end consumer products he addressed in his speaker sculptures. However, the mimetic impulse seems to have been scrambled in this work, as if multiple impressions of the same object have been overlaid. For "Algoma", Forrest started with the notion of a bicycle frame, crafted from steel after expensive mountain bikes from a cycling magazine. A sculptor of Forrest's sensibility can't make a painted steel sculpture without some recognition of the history of his medium. "Algoma" is only true to its source in pieces, looking like a bicycle undergoing a slow dissolution. A cross between a bicycle frame and an Anthony Caro sculpture, "Algoma" mixes its messages to telling effect.

Forrest's final contribution to *Desire*, "Ecstasy Molecule", continues his mixture of high art references with popular culture. His chromed steel mirror balls reference the disco-balls of dance clubs and 1970s movies, but also pay a visit, if not homage, to the legacies of such 20th century sculptors as David Smith and Constantin Brancusi. Far from "The Beginning of the World",¹² "Ecstasy Molecule" is more like the millennial hang-over from the world as we know it declining to end.

Forrest's appropriation of the look of mass-produced culture carries with it an appropriation, that of mass-produced art history. Not the art history of actual objects, but that of images in books and on slides, the only way most of us will ever see the majority of 'great works' that any university art education makes so familiar. It's debatable if the actual works can ever live up to the weight of the

12 A series of sculptures by Constantin Brancusi, each in the form of an egg, either in marble or bronze. i.e. The Beginning of the World, 1916, 33.89 cm long, collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

mental and verbal constructs that surround them. Forrest spoke to this directly in an earlier work, “Version 7,” a response in part to a Marcel Duchamp exhibition at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia in Halifax.¹³ Duchamp’s influence on conceptual art was profound, but seeing a series of ready-mades (replicas made in the 1960s) was anti-climactic. For such important events in art history, the actual works seem slight. Forrest’s “Version 7,” a witty re-making of Duchamp’s 1913 “Bicycle Wheel,” updated the ready-made using the studded tire of a mountain bike and bicycle forks, complete with a suspension.

Forrest remakes that which his culture tells him he should want, subverting the pervasive desire that so effectively drives our consumer culture. His works don’t just remake the things of that culture, but the contexts as well. Forrest’s attention tends to deflate its objects: fame becomes funny in “One Dozen Men’s Hairstyles of the 20th Century,” while the art gallery was both celebrated and lampooned in several of Forrest’s pieces. Wanting what we want is a complex thing.

Lauren Schaffer is currently a Toronto-based sculptor, though that description may not be accurate much longer. Like many artists of her generation, she tends to move around. Schaffer received her undergraduate degree from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, and her graduate degree from Concordia University in her native Montreal. She taught at the University of Victoria in the late 1990s and will follow such work where it takes her.

Much of Schaffer’s sculpture is large, one might almost say environmental, and it expands to take up the available space in a room. No matter that she may begin with small objects, such as porcelain casts of auto parts or, as in certain works-in-progress, bobby pins; the end results seem to seep throughout a room, taking over space and rerouting the viewer. That rerouting is both physical and mental, a redirection that lends a certain sharpness to her works, an impression that surprises given its apparent soft edges. A case in point: “The Casing Series, Part One.” This work, the aforementioned porcelain auto parts, uses a mutable web of black rubber to articulate the piece throughout various spaces. The soft, almost blurry edges of the porcelain, in conjunction with the literally soft, light-absorbing black rubber, lend a certain comfort to this work. Or it would, if it was not for the persistent feeling that something more was lurking behind the work.

13 Marcel Duchamp: Dustballs and Readymades, organized by the National Gallery of Canada, 1997.

Schaffer has made less of a project of replication than have Forrest or Colleen Wolstenholme, although her sculpture is “realist” in certain senses. She makes objects that refer to other objects, but her sense of materials is much less classic than Wolstenholme’s and less overtly humorous than Forrest’s. Her material choice is idiosyncratic, often odd. In “RRR,” an installation she showed in *Sculpture Expo ‘94*,¹⁴ Schaffer fashioned a model of a Halifax city block. Three conference tables, arranged in a “U” shape, held works that referred to buildings of the former Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired, a series of apartment buildings that served as married quarters for the Department of National Defense, and a Quonset hut that was rented out to a gymnastics organization. The six forms recalling the married quarters were modeled from cement fondue, the school building was depicted in gelatin (which decayed throughout the duration of the exhibition), and the Quonset hut was recalled by a rough-hewn block of lignum vitae, an extremely hard wood. Schaffer’s choice of materials ensured that the work would not be read merely as models, and it kept the work from simply being read as formalism. It also kept the viewer at a disadvantage, creating a sense of unease with the work.

Resolutely not a model, it also was not aesthetic in any familiar sense, as Schaffer eschewed beautiful materials for workmanlike concrete, unfinished wood and out-of-context gelatin.

Taking materials out of context has been a strategy Schaffer has employed often, either in constructing works or in her use of existing objects. The interest in architecture evident in “RRR” and other works continued in a series of sculptures that evoked architecture in their scale and composition. In “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home by Now, Part 1,” for instance, she used surplus office dividers to create a maze-like form that filled an entire room. There is no right way to negotiate this passage, the four winding passages end at the centre of the circular arrangement of curved dividers. A neat allusion to bureaucracy, especially given the site of the exhibition: Pier 21 in Halifax, former entry point for prospective immigrants to Canada. With an appearance akin to a poor man’s “”, especially in the black and white photographs that accompanied Robin Peck’s article on the exhibition where the piece was first shown,¹⁵ “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home By Now, Part 1” (the title is drawn from a common real estate pitch) is monumental without the material showmanship of a Serra. The accompanying work

14 *Sculpture Expo ‘94*, organized by St. Mary’s University Art Gallery, 1994, Oct. 3 - 22 at City Centre Atlantic, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

15 Robin Peck, “Ghosts: Sculpture Photographed at Pier 21”, *C Magazine #41* (Spring 1994), photos by Marion Bryson: pp. 18 - 25.

also filled a room. “If You Lived Here You’d Be Home by Now, Part 2” was a huge wheel of 14 matching office chairs, attached at the legs with metal brackets. Schaffer returns to that sort of scale with “Space is the Place,” included in *Desire*.

“Space is the Place” is massive: two forms that are over four metres high with six radiating arms that are each almost two metres long, accurately detailed replicas of a type of light standard that Schaffer observed in a parking lot in Victoria, British Columbia. For all its size, “Space is the Place” is actually much reduced in scale. Painstakingly hand-crafted, Schaffer made positives for all of the pieces and then used those to make multi-part molds. The work is made from fiberglass which Schaffer has left its normal colour. The lights, for these are functioning lamps, illuminate the whole light fixture, even travelling a slight way down each amber-coloured arm. This light trickle conveys a certain warmth to the work, in direct contrast to the cold metal source material. These works end up with a vaguely anthropomorphic appearance, though it is hard to precisely figure out why.

Figure 1: Diamond as Big as the Ritz

“A Diamond as Big as the Ritz” consists of twelve porcelain diamonds, as large as the toilet bowls the factory that fabricated them normally produces. Displayed on two sets of industrial, metal shelving, the work is as much out of scale as “Space is the Place,” albeit scaled up rather than down. The soft edges of the porcelain belie the diamond source material, as does the gentle slumping apparent in the forms, a result of the casting process. There is a certain autobiographical strain in these works, as with Forrest’s and Wolstenholme’s. These artists integrate their work into their lives, both through their choice of materials and subject matter. Thus Schaffer decided to base “Space is the Place” on light standards she drove by every day on her way to work. “Diamond as Big as the Ritz” has an even more direct corollary: her father is a jeweler. But that isn’t what the piece is about, any more than any other scrap of context could sum up these pieces.

“Mimesis is a form of repossession,” and possession is a means of taking control. We live in a society where, increasingly, we have little or no connection with the things that clutter up our lives. By remaking such objects, the artist strives for a modicum of control over the products of seemingly anonymous technological processes. With many such things, we are too often unaware of where they came from, how they’re made, often even of what they’re for despite our desire for them.

These days, control often seems to come by prescription. For Colleen Wolstenholme, our culture’s predilection to take a pill for a problem has been an area of intense interest for the past several

years. While few would argue the net benefits of the revolution in pharmacology since the advent of antibiotics, at least for those lucky enough to have access to drug plans, it is also of little dispute that there have been excesses in our reliance on pills. It is, perhaps, in the area of marketing that these excesses are the most outrageous. Witness the advertisements that are starting to be common in Canadian media, encouraging consumers to ask their doctors about new treatments for everything from impotence to baldness. Taking control in the new millennium seems too often to be code for “take out your wallet.” Drugs such as Prozac, Valium, Xanax, Paxil and a host of others create islands of peace in chaotic lives. Can you buy happiness, then? It’s certainly what the drug companies seem to be selling — equilibrium in convenient pill form (mother’s little helpers. . .).

Colleen Wolstenholme’s questions are couched in the forms of large plaster pills, realistic renditions on a gargantuan scale of sedatives and anti-depressants. These pristine white forms, so reminiscent of classical sculpture, speak to the desire to buy peace of mind, and to the corporate culture that has spawned so much of that need.

The loss of control is a bitter pill to swallow, and the abdication of control to a drug is no less bitter. For Wolstenholme, who herself was prescribed some of the drugs she has rendered, the prevalence of pills in our culture is something to take seriously, though not without a certain wry humour.

These sculptures were preceded by jewelry, direct casts in silver of many of the pills depicted in the large plasters. One could argue that the jewelry is no less sculpture than these large pills.¹⁶ In fact Wolstenholme’s newest works recreate, on a larger scale, many of the forms first worked out in the jewelry. That jewelry attracted much attention to the sculptor, not all of it welcome. She was profiled in such diverse magazines as *C Magazine*, *Psychology Today*, *Style*, *Newsweek* and *People*. “Wearing these pieces is about being honest as a society,” she told *Psychology Today*, “and about being ‘out’ sexually, emotionally, and otherwise.”¹⁷ That theme of control is consistent with Wolstenholme’s comments on the jewelry. “It’s like a charm,” she told *Newsweek*, “Some people think that if they wear it, they won’t have to take it.”¹⁸ Sympathetic magic aside, there is a kernel of truth to such an assertion — too often, pills stand in for change. If your life is out of control, it’s easier to take a pill to control the symptoms of

16 As Robin Peck does in “Scattered Across the Floor,” *C Magazine*, # 61 (1999); p. 8 - 13.

17 *Psychology Today*, January / February (1998): p. 24.

18 *Newsweek*, Oct. 6, 1997: p. 8.

stress or depression, much harder to change the factors that are leading to such problems. We live in a society that values coping over changing, and as such pills can be vital to the smooth functioning of our lives. Expected to work on only a few hours sleep? “Get on with it,” we’re told, while we’re also sold products to help us get through it: coffee, pills, sugar. In a market economy that treats people as tools, products to enhance the performance of those tools are highly prized. They’re also protected: Wolstenholme was threatened with several lawsuits by different drug manufacturers, although those threats seem to have been abandoned. “We abhor the use of our trademark in a frivolous manner,” an Eli Lilly representative told *Style Magazine*, “it trivializes mental illness.”¹⁹ One could argue about just who is engaged in trivializing mental illness, for Wolstenholme certainly is not.

Robin Peck, in writing of this work for *C Magazine*, described the sculptures as, “by turns satirical and melancholic, at once comically utopian and hopelessly pessimistic.”²⁰ Peck proposes that Wolstenholme’s project is, in part, “an alternative healing process,”²¹ and he situates her work solidly within the gendered discourse of “traditionally female pre-capitalist domestic crafts.”²² Wolstenholme’s elegant, labour-intensive sculptures are at once wry commentaries on the drug industry and signposts towards another kind of equilibrium, the soothing reality of things.

The needlework that accompanies these plasters certainly points in that direction, serving notice that these are not to be seen as simply formal sculptures in the tradition of early twentieth century work. These works are indeed gendered, and they insist on a different way of seeing sculpture within the larger discourse of art history. These works have about them a kind of classic modernism, rooted in functionality and aesthetics. These are designed objects, the designs all the more apparent given Wolstenholme’s appropriation of them.

“Socially sanctioned reproduction” is an inescapable fact of the visual and literary arts George Steiner argued;²³ even the most non-objective of forms will be read as if there is some representation at play. In Wolstenholme’s work we definitely get representation, though it is not exactly “socially sanctioned.” By representing trademarked material critically, Wolstenholme pushes the limits of what

¹⁹ *Style Magazine*, 1998, #7.

²⁰ Robin Peck, “Scattered Across the Floor,” *C Magazine*, issue 61, 1999, p. 8 - 13

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 202.

society has sanctioned. She uses a popular strategy for postmodern artists, one that attempts to wrest control of how contexts are presented away from those who are selling them. As with Forrest's and Schaffer's practices, Wolstenholme's project is a complex one, rooted in many discourses, including those of art history, gender and psychology.

Wolstenholme's pills hug the floor, scattered about as if the result of a spill. Human in scale, they are vaguely torso-like in presence. Monumental and bathetic at once, these works suggest a repossessed history, supplanting their sources in pharmacology and art history to create new beings, beings that are images no longer. Perhaps the pills are now images of these.

CONCLUSION

In a world where everything is treated as a tool, sometimes the only way to make sense is to confuse the issue. Tool-culture is limited by use-value just as consumer culture is limited by cash flow. Objects that have no clear function beyond their presence undermine the belief system that lets us treat the world as merely a thing. Isn't the desire to possess a frustrated desire to know? But can mere possession bring with it any knowledge? What do you learn from a mere light fixture, hairstyle or pill? By re-making tools Forrest, Schaffer and Wolstenholme add something new into the mix, adding complexity to the context, depth to the interpretation. Never images, these sculptures are ideas — closer to Plato's ideal forms than ever were their source materials.

Consumer culture is fuelled by a frustrated craving, never sated by the mere things we acquire. Tool-culture is driven by desire, by the belief that we can fashion a world over which we have control. Art is all of this, and none. It's all about desire. What do you want?