

a timeline of Beshty's year through not only the objects but also the ground materials, which mingle world events of newspaper headlines with detritus from daily life relating to travel, health care and communication. As in 'Constructing Worlds', the installation speaks of constantly shifting terrains, the merging of the personal with the political and the beauty to be found in our surroundings, both chaotic and mundane. ■

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Tom Dale: Terminal Blue

John Hansard Gallery Southampton 9 December to 7 February

In Tom Dale's solo exhibition at Southampton's John Hansard Gallery a cast of curious and contradictory objects populates the gallery's four spaces. The artist's breadth and ambition are abundantly on show here as myriad concerns coalesce with numerous possible points of entry or departure.

Several key themes are immediately found at work in the show's title piece *Terminal Blue* (all works 2014). An oversized decorator's swatch rendered as an aeroplane tail-flag guides us through shades from soft steel grey to the titular terminal blue. Its intended final site is a fly-around over the skies of Southampton: a chance to compare its blues and greys to that of the sky. Adorning the gallery's curved wall as it does gives the swatch a panoramic grandeur. Terminal here suggests endpoints, limits, death; a blue to be cast in contrast with the infinite blue of the sky. The piece also makes something banal very funny, indicative of the playful and slightly dark humour we find throughout the exhibition.

In *The Conservatory*, whose hulking mass and creosote aroma dominate the first space, the use of the definite article alludes to domesticity and familiarity ('The' conservatory, our conservatory) while the inside-outside formation of this architectural feature is somewhat more *unheimlich*. We walk around the structure – daubed brown, portals stuffed with books – to see if we can enter, before it dawns on us that through a kind of a Deleuzian folding the outside and inside have become one and the same.

Shifts in scales of space, time and duration occur while moves towards the infinite are set against demarcations of finitude and presentness. The materials used for launching these philosophical flights remain workaday, unremarkable. Aeroplane flights aside, these works seem more slight than in Dale's previous outings, less

concerned with spectacle and more comfortable with speaking quietly or saying little.

The objects here feel conscious of their own objecthood. In particular, *Rock on Standby* seems to be propositioning us, deflecting us with the dumbness of its form while daring us to think it is something more. A meeting point between nature, humanity and technology, timescales and speeds collapse: geological slow-time, human time, inert time, waiting time, a perpetual potential. And architectural time and scale: in *Buffer Point Derivatives*, a series of digital photo collages, the artist subtly manipulates our sense of space and proportion, shifting vanishing points and horizon lines, discontinuing the continuities of part-built living spaces in remote landscapes.

Frequently self-contradictory or self-effacing, the works have a Duchampian sense of mischief and a surrealist delight in absurdity. *Exit Strategy*, a copper pipe looped with a tap in the centre, either erases its own validity and possibility of functioning (eating its own tail like Ouroboros) or, depending on how you look at it, escapes the network of contingency entirely, becoming its own free agent. In *Infinity Wall* a camera photographs a gallery wall every three minutes, and prints the image instantly for display before shredding it as the next photograph replaces it. A constant effacement of the present with a new present, which is past as soon as it is perceptible, pregnant with the virtual possibility of the next image.

Though undeniably witty, these works can at times feel like one-liners that give over everything they have in a single look. At the farthest end of the gallery, however, two video works alternate. The first of these proves to be one of the most engrossing moments in the show, perhaps primarily because it resists easy reading. *After London* shows the artist clad in an old-fashioned flight helmet and long leather coat walking backwards through peripheral urban spaces and ending up amid neoclassical ruins. A voiceover recites a script from a bus tour of London's major landmarks. Intermittently, we see a hand on the artist's shoulder, and the video pauses while a melancholy text lingers briefly on screen: 'UNDELIVERED POST CARDS' reads one, 'PHOTOGRAPHS NOT TAKEN' another. The work has a contemplative quality that extends the artist's sense of the uncanny into more ponderous form than the other works. Alternating with this, *Leaf Blower* sees a public park-worker standing in for Sisyphus, the pair of works ruminating on the kind of absurdity that troubled Albert Camus.

The exhibition guide points us towards the artist's far-reaching philosophical concerns: phenomenology, epistemology, virtuality, the digital, our changing sense of the interior and exterior. It risks tipping over into nebulosity, but perhaps making perfect sense would run counter-intuitive to the spirit of the work here. This is a body of work that makes the familiar strange and challenges us to see the everyday anew. ■

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Stuart Middleton: Sad Sketches

Piper Keys London 6 December to 25 January

For 'Sad Sketches', Stuart Middleton converted Piper Keys's usually clean-cut gallery – a white cube built into a large warehouse living space – into a murky, rose-hued drunk tank. The walls were treated to a rough wash of pink, referring to a particular shade of paint (Baker-Miller Pink or Schauss pink) that has been used experimentally in jail cells as an emotional pacifier to try to calm intoxicated offenders, while thick strips of rubber sheeting covered

Tom Dale
'Terminal Blue'
installation view

