

The Matter of Material at Turner Contemporary

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Medium (un)specificity as material agency – the productive indeterminacy of matter/material.

In this paper I consider some of the debates brought to the fore by *Entangled: Threads and Making* and embodied through my recent doctoral research; namely the tension between a continued allegiance to medium specific conventions and the richness, hybridity and heterogeneity afforded by the post medium condition of contemporary art. Implicit within this are two further considerations concerning the relationship between aesthetic/extra-aesthetic contexts and the creative tensions between subjective/material agency that arise in negotiating these positions.

Through a new body of sculptural and installational practice I propose a 'constellatory opening up of textile' in which the medium specific can be (re)mapped in a fluid and fragmentary way; where boundaries become blurred, meaning is unable to settle and fundamental categorical divisions between subject and object are destabilised.

Drawing particular reference from Adorno's notion of mimetic comportment, this model of practice involves a mode of behaviour that actively opens up to alterity and returns authority to the productive indeterminacy of matter/material. This is manifest through a range of practice strategies - 'thingness', 'staging' and the play between 'sensuous immediacy and corporeal containment' - which give rise to a precarious experiential encounter that continually oscillates between subjective attachment and detachment.

Acknowledging the critical currency afforded to textile through feminist and poststructuralist critique, my new work moves away from a rhetoric of negative opposition and established interpretive frameworks, privileging affective intensity, aesthetic artifice, complicit formalism and the ambiguous resonances of an abstract sculptural language over more overt strategies of representation.

Offering a reinscription of medium specificity in terms of material agency, I suggest that we might usefully adopt Adorno's term 'material particularity' in recognition of the properties that are distinctive to the material world; properties that mobilise a constellation of sensuous and semantic correspondences yet at the same time continually elude conceptual synthesis.