

Restless Terrain: Sculpture from the Anthropocene. New Work by Andrea Gregson.

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'Sometimes we find ourselves in the presence of a form that guides and endorses our earliest dreams...Have facts really the value that memory gives them? Distant memory only recalls them by giving them a value, a halo, of happiness. But let this value be effaced, and the facts cease to exist. Did they ever exist? Something unreal seeps into the reality of the recollections that are on the borderline between our own personal history and an indefinite pre-history...Thus on the threshold of our space, before the era of our own time, we hover between an awareness of being and loss of being. And the entire reality of memory becomes spectral'.

Gaston Bachelard *The Poetics of Space* (1958).

Flints and fossils, discarded toothpaste tube caps and chewed-up bubble wrap, languishing besides scrap metals and used waste from the old Beckton Gas Light and Coke Company, these leftovers from previous decades form some of the materials of Andrea Gregson's sculptural work. As she excavates the waste from an area fronting the Thames bounded by Barking Creek close by the Royal Albert Dock, the detritus is given and accrues altered significance as newly consecrated art objects. Coming out of the sediment of what was once the site of the largest coking plant in Europe, the waterside works, closed down in 1969, held a grandeur that spoke of the entrepreneurial spirit and commercial might of Victorian London. The Beckton gas works were a marvel of British industrial manufacture. And as the main estate of New Beckton, built in 1881 after the opening of the dock took shape, it became known as Cyprus commemorating the British capture of that island in 1878. Just as commerce and empire colluded to mark, map and remake the East End's geography, so even more human waste was added to London's environment over layering its inherited geology and impacting upon its fragile eco-systems in the period of the Anthropocene.

And yet as Bachelard wonders, does the knowledge of this local history of place and time tell us all we need to know about our past? Overlain with memories of eras long ago, Gregson's new works are at once poignant and personal, yet obscure and evasive. We remain at a loss to fully evaluate their relevance as these remnants from the past re-emerging into the present, compress time and flatten geology into fragile sedimentary layers with little distinction between decades long gone and just last week. Signalling the evolving impact of man upon the environment, Gregson's works in their choice of materials, shape and form evoke this sense of an endlessly restless terrain. Moreover, the artist's transformation of bracket fungus into porcelain, eroded geotextile into bronze and waste matter into art invests her approach with

relevance beyond the purely geographical or historical. Rather like intricate palimpsests, the discarded objects now selected, refigured and recast as sculpture by the artist, provoke a heightened awareness of the unnatural; of how the layering of fact and memory with the fictions of the present and the self dislocate. They delineate a poignant sense of the fractured and seeping borderlines that exist between our personal histories, our landscapes and our pre-history: between us and our fictions of ourselves. When confronted in the gallery space with Gregson's cast metal sculptures, archaeology, geographies and past histories collide and once distinct geo- and eco-systems seemingly merge. And at this poetic moment, as Bachelard reminds us somewhat disconcertingly, in thinking about past and present we 'hover between an awareness of being and loss of being. And the entire reality of memory becomes spectral'.