



**Rebecca Geldard** *What we leave behind:  
some notes on the work of Andrea Gregson*

Rebecca Geldard is a writer, editor and curator based in Powys, Wales. Her writing has appeared in publications such as *Art Review*, *Guardian* online, *MAP*, *Modern Painters*, *Time Out*, and *Kaleidoscope*. A member of AICA, Geldard's recent essays include: observations on two works by Swiss-Italian artist Vittorio Santoro for his mid-career monograph *EXPERIENCE IMPLIES MOVEMENT*, Hatje Kantz, 2021 and 'Exquisite Weirdness' on the painting of Richard Wathen for *New Eyes Every Time*, Distanz, 2021. She is the creator and editor of *appleandhat.com* and in October this year curated *SUPERFICE* (Chris Hanlon, Daniel Karrer, Selma Parlour) on abstract painting and its acknowledgement of the surface at Coleman Project Space, London.

*We know that the universe is infinite, expanding and strangely complete, that it lacks nothing we need, but in spite of that knowledge, the tragic paradigm of human life is lack, loss, finality, a primitive doomsaying that has not been repealed by technology or medical science. The arts stand in the way of this doomsaying. Art objects. The nouns become an active force not a collector's item. Art objects.*

– Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*.

Writing on her practice, Andrea Gregson refers to the lack of markers in contemporary life for orienting ourselves as part of a constantly evolving timeline. The digital age is moving us ever further from the natural-world processes on which our understanding of lived time is based, if possibly closer to the meta nature of experience. With Gregson's object practice of parts, she situates us firmly in analogue territory, providing sensory reminders of our organic-architectural and art-object heritage. She encourages the viewer to find their interpretive footing through manipulation of the key, familiar sculptural tenets, if all the while signposting us to a variety of pressing real-world issues and more fanciful destinations.

For there is something almost Sci-Fi about the forms she appears drawn to, in nature and the built environment. Shiny satellites, alien cocoons with stickish shuttle legs are engineered in ways that elicit a sense of incredulity we might have at the rare oddness of ordinary and endangered things and the fact of having happened upon them. Certainly, we are made aware of the physicality involved in the production of these works – through the visceral evidence of marks and moulding and the incorporation of domestic ephemera – as well as the historical development of



**Andrea Gregson** *Flagrant Matter* 2016  
bronze and plastic 56 x 56 x 60cm

technology as an extension of the body. Gregson's, at times almost absurdist, play with the human scale of matter serves to facilitate a renegotiation of the terms we associate with manufacture: passive, active, natural, use, efficient, domestic, real, labour, replica, authentic.

Like many sculptors before her, Gregson appears sensitive to the rightness of materials for particular jobs and working with this 'truth', if pushing their associative potential to the limits. This might be acknowledged through the casting process, or in the combination of found and hand-made elements in installation: the accidental ergonomics of found flint, for example, how its roundness might sit in the hand; or the way grog naturally breaks up into fortune-cookie rubble. She cites the significant influence of Moore on her practice, while her interest in collecting and working with pre-existing objects ushers in thoughts of Cornelia Parker's careful choreographing of perfunctory matter into extraordinary displays. Meanwhile, the cheeky, biomimetic performativity sometimes present in Gregson's compositional approach can bring welcome reminders of Helen Chadwick.

Talking to Gregson, many delicious autobiographical snippets provide clues as to her relationships with things and places. Born in Lancashire, the artist grew up surrounded by evidence of the region's industrial past in cotton and wool production. The coastline and waterways appear to provide much in the way of historical finds and influence over the shape of her chosen motifs and material experiments. Gregson's hybrid forms also speak of the territorial shifts that occur over time between urban centres, or man-made structures and the rural landscapes that envelop them. Exploring ideas of progress and obsolescence, she will often cast spaces reminiscent of caves and military bunkers; lost sites more familiar, perhaps, as anthropological motifs in the collective cultural

memory than actual places visited.

While most of us, certainly in Gen Z, can recall games played with familial keepsakes and foreign objects – possibly as a result of being bored – Gregson had the run of her grandmother's shop in Heysham, Morecambe Bay. It sounds like the start of a gripping children's novel, a new *Tom's Midnight Garden* or *The Neverending Story*. Working in this cornucopia of curious clutter, she also became temporary custodian, free to organise its contents and seek out innumerable treasures. The artist mentions how the more active her grandmother's local political activity, the less organisational sense there was to the stock and its placement. The cuckoo-clock weight reconfigured in *Soft Scales* (2012), for example, is a shop find, taken from a job lot that once harboured there.

By exploring these facets of her own history, if always with a narratively light touch and from an appropriate thematic distance, Gregson reveals that thingly sense of connection with stuff that might be triggered in us all, if alive to the possibility. With everything she makes, regardless of its conceptual sophistication, it is possible to discern that childlike sense of curiosity and magpie desire to own and organise precious things. For while Gregson works with high-value materials, her artwork ingredient list is positively meritocratic in its acknowledgement of what might be considered essential. However formally presented, the test-bed nature of her configurations also evokes memories of early-life enquiry: the possibility of forming relationships with things before fully understanding them, utilising their properties in abstract ways for the purposes of play.

The inside-out nature of the casting process allows for the experience of space in object

form. With bronze works *Flagrant Matter* (2016), *Lacuna* (2013) and *Gorged* (2012) a sense of time collapse is manifested in the idea of each object as site, in the process of simultaneous reconstruction and excavation. With their lava-, cave- and bell-like forms, resting on scaffolded and plastic feet, they appear at once ancient and modern. Abstract palimpsests forever frozen into a once-molten substance reveal both the beautiful braille history of a geological surface and Gregson's own manipulations of these clues into sculptural suggestion. Holes drilled and filled become stalactites in small-scale bronze chambers; dents and depressions refer to a previous life of, possibly violent, physical activity inside. Hovering between abstract-art and set-like objectivity, our viewing role consistently switches between that of purveyor and inhabitant.

Gregson's hybrid sculpture series *Objectships* – a fusion of artefactual matter and found objects – also plays with the idea of historical time encapsulated. The associative points of which, if plotted from the evidence, might reveal possibly stranger shapes than the physical blueprints of these cabinet curiosities. Discarded or obsolete parts – a squirty cream lid, an industrial bobbin reel fished out of the Rochdale canal – are cast in bronze or brought in, as they are, to fulfil a particular sculptural need or satisfy an aesthetic itch. With *Spectre* (2019), on the other hand, Gregson appears to present us with actual replicas of ancient fossils. In fact, they are porcelain casts of bracket fungus, the museological nature of their display and fine materials elevating our expectations, offering a lenticular segue between classical formalism and age-old biological growths.

In and amongst Gregson's objects one might experience a feeling of resistance: between the much-mythicised notion of the artist as creator

(or the miraculousness of natural-world processes), and the no-nonsense toil required for making and growth. She reminds us there is labour in the production of all things. Her combinations of rarefied and commonplace processes and objects disrupt the balance of our desire to experience wonderment, something beyond ourselves, and to 'know', given the fact there is now very little we can't find out about, instantly. Beyond the data-rich borders of empirical understanding there are always new ways to approach and be informed by matter and sites to locate a sense of self or derive personal meaning. The things we leave behind, whether physical landmarks or portable, collectable effects and irrespective of their perceived value, will always function as experiential props in the finite play of our days.

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Cover: **Andrea Gregson** *Flagrant Matter* (inside detail) 2016  
bronze and plastic 56 x 56 x 60cm

Andrea Gregson *AFTER (life of) OBJECTS*  
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