

Matthew Darbyshire: An Exhibition for Modern Living
Manchester Art Gallery
★★★★★



Photo: Michael Pollard

An article in the *Independent on Sunday*, found in a glass-fronted notice board in the entrance to Matthew Darbyshire's *An Exhibition for Modern Living*, states that the artist's work "surveys the way we live – and curate – our lives."

For his largest solo show to date, Darbyshire presents ten room-like installations, variably called 'sculptures,' 'environments' and 'curatorial adventures' in the exhibition catalogue, installed in a grid formation across the two gallery floors for browsing efficiency.

In the first of these, *Oak Effect*, a seemingly arbitrary selection of hand-crafted wooden objects from the gallery's permanent collection – complete with archival tags – are displayed in a unit constructed from contemporary flat-pack furniture.

In others, high-end design items are displayed among high-street commodities, curating and visual merchandising are understood as interchangeable terms and art and non-art are presented as equivalent. How does Darbyshire's approach to filtering and re-framing objects differ from that of the contemporary pop curator?

Firstly, we might say that the latter selects according to subjective criteria – a theme, an 'aesthetic' or an aura. This form of curating is a form of branding, of amassing and repackaging. To curate a collection of objects is to impart value beyond the value each object implicitly holds.

While some of the works in the exhibition have been fabricated with a fictional client in mind (*Blades House*, for example, is a mock-up apartment for "a 30-something first-time buyer and bachelor working for a news agency in London"), Darbyshire selects objects according to objective values – their material, form, colour.

The objects are presented in their matter-of-factness; the process of collecting and arranging them becomes a kind of visual choreography which in turn strips them of their usefulness or (exchange) value. That the resulting collections might relate to a lifestyle is incidental and reveals the extent to which identity is engrained in the objects we amass.

But perhaps the easiest way of answering the question about Darbyshire's difference from other pop curators is to pass the work off as satire. Certainly, it is difficult to imagine Darbyshire celebrating the array of cheap homewares that make up *An Exhibition for Modern Living*, but it is also difficult to say that the work amounts to an outright condemnation of them. For what would he be condemning? Poor taste? [Daniel McMillan]

Until 10 Jan 2016

manchesterartgallery.org/exhibitions-and-events/exhibition/matthew-darbyshire-an-exhibition-for-modern-living/

Safe HOME
★★★★★



Photo: Mark Leeming

The resounding question: "Are you allergic to the 21st century?"

HOME has responded to Todd Haynes' thought-provoking 1995 film, *Safe*, providing artistic interpretations of the unstable marriage between the psychological and the physical. *Safe* is the first of many responsive exhibitions HOME aims to promote in the coming months. Taking a traditional or prominent film as inspiration, the concept aims to formulate conversation around principal, ageless subjects.

Featuring moving image, sculpture, installation, photography and print, the exhibition includes existing artworks from Jala Wahid, Michael Dean, Sunil Gupta and Laura Morrison combined with new commissions from 2014 Turner Prize nominee James Richards, as well as Camilla Wills, Chris Paul Daniels, Claire Makhoulf Carter and Yoshua Okón – providing nine interpretations of the notions of self-help, sexual politics, alienation and paranoia.

The layout in the main gallery allows for the traditional airy atmosphere to house the majority of the work, while the two moving-image pieces are more intimately located. There's even a sofa to sit on and a carpet comforting your feet while you enjoy Yoshua Okón's masterful *Fridge-Freezer*.

You are greeted with Chris Paul Daniels' *An Audio Guide*, which I found refreshingly inimitable. It is certainly not what it seems – it's confusing, unseemly, yet appropriately fitting. A kind of self-help product. Elsewhere, Jala Wahid's photographic print, titled *Mallow*, acts as the seductively inviting image at the forefront of the exhibition and as *Safe*'s promotional force. It is essentially an intentional, alluring response to physical wounds and a personal interpretation of the use of objects – such as food – in order to create an evocative and questionable message.

Todd Haynes' film asks whether Julianne Moore's character, Carol White, is either simply reluctant or entirely incapable of battling her accumulating state. What appears to be responsible? Is it her mind or her body? However puzzling, wonderful, abstract or disconcerting, this exhibition takes its audience on an immersive journey, similar to that of Carol's, which digs deeper than the average gallery experience.

Because the moving-image pieces are most definitely worth watching, it's important to visit when you're not in a mad rush. Also, do not forget to hang your coat in the cloakroom upon entering. Expect the unexpected. [Emma Orgill]

Until 3 Jan 2016

homemcr.org/exhibition/safe



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