

‘Weak thoughts, weak desires:
he felt their force.’
—Maurice Blanchot



Katie Cuddon



Cover: *Untitled Sculpture 2009*
Plaster, pencil on paper
© Fernando Maquieira and the artist

Camden Arts Centre / November 2010 — August 2011
File Note #64 **Katie Cuddon** *Ceramics Fellowship*

Richard Dyer

Lost for Words: Manifesting the Ineffable in the Work of Katie Cuddon



"I no longer know what the money is" / Installation view, Alma Enterprises 2010 / Painted ceramic / Courtesy the artist and Alma Enterprises, London © Fernando Maquieira and artist

Katie Cuddon studio view
Ceramics Fellowship Camden Arts Centre, 2011
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How to figure feeling into form? The sculptures Katie Cuddon creates, thumb by thumb, inhabit a space between memory and feeling, after experience and before language. It is because of our intuitive associations about what it is that clay signifies as a material that makes Cuddon's art so emotionally potent. Although the pieces are empty on the inside they are full of content on their surface. This skin of the sculpture clotted with the accumulated trace of the artist's fingers, maps a transference of emotion from the pre-linguistic into the physical world; the pummelling and cajoling of the clay transforms it into a sculptural surface of disclosure. The emptiness at the heart of the work functions as a vacuum and like a physical one, once it is breached air rushes in to fill it, or in this case, emotional and psychical content. Awkward, insolent, difficult, manic, provocative, neurotic; the works almost beg for a hug, a cuddle, a stroke. It is this manifest vulnerability, this nakedness, this tacit exposure of pain, which allows the viewer entrance into a private universe.

The works arise from an image relating to an emotion or a memory; the trace of a personal and deeply felt experience. It is not the narrative of an experience, not the transcription of a series of actions and reactions, nor a snapshot of a frozen moment in the trajectory of a traumatic episode, but the embodiment of that which is beyond language – our emotional response to the world. When we attempt to interpret or analyse the work we are immediately applying the wrong indexical syntax to an artistic practice which is literally lost for words; as with the experience of an event which is so harrowing, ecstatic or ineffable that we are unable to translate it into language.



Previous to this body of work Cuddon would complete works by painting them a uniform matt white, a seeming attempt to neutralise the visceral, hysterical surface of the work. The blank emulsion acts as a cloak in order for the work to be allowed to be seen at such close proximity, desensitising or filtering its emotive and intimate intensity. The new surfaces, sometimes velvety, sometimes metallic or patinated, distance the viewer from a naked encounter with the surface of the work; distracting the gaze from the unmediated disclosure of each finger-print, each pushed and prodded facet of the surface. This brings the objects, albeit three-dimensional, into the realm of painting. In fact even though they exist as seemingly solid objects, they function more as two-dimensional paintings wrapped into three-dimensional space.

The works are allusive almost fleeting, their meaning hovering at the periphery of our comprehension. If it were possible to explain exactly what a particular piece signified then the fabrication of the work would be rendered unnecessary. When we are attempting the embodiment of states beyond the capability of language to express, modelling in clay is one of the most fundamental and intuitive forms of expression. As Cuddon has stated 'I really don't like saying very much. I find it really risky... it's so direct.'

One could almost posit Cuddon's practice as a visual aphasia, the damaged ability to process language, and by embracing this ablation of language, turning away from the literal and narrative, she deploys a keener methodology of expression; because it does not have recourse to language, earths directly to the primary emotion.

Cuddon's works are challenging precisely because they challenge the notion that contemporary art should be challenging. Eschewing the slick and oft-repeated gesture of the found object and the conventional minimalism of industrially manufactured product art; Cuddon returns to a direct and unmediated means of making. The act of making itself is loaded with performative associations, the object in the gallery evoking the body of the artist in the workshop in the act of making the piece we are looking at. It is as if the piece is a trace, a shell, a discarded costume left over after the enactment of an unknown ritual or a wordless play.

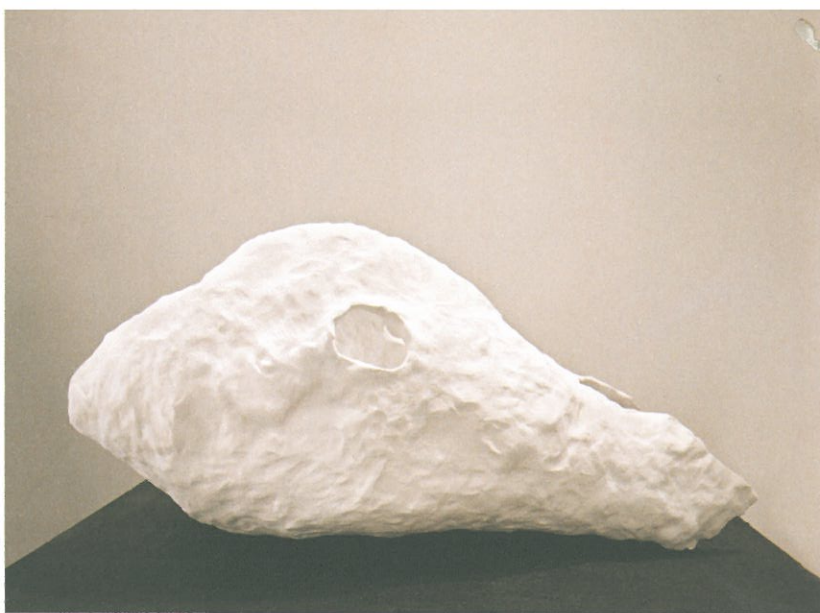
Richard Dyer is a writer.

Hunger Woman 2007
Painted ceramic and wood / Courtesy the artist and Globe
Gallery, Newcastle / © Colin Davison and artist



M 2011
Painted ceramic and plaster / Courtesy the artist
and Camden Arts Centre, London © the artist





The Difficulty of a Shadow 2010
Painted ceramic and wood / Courtesy the artist
and Simon Oldfield Gallery, London © Fernando
Maquieira and artist



You must be able to act independently 2011
Red and black clay / Private collection, courtesy the artist
and Camden Arts Centre, London © the artist

Design: James Goggin & Sara De Bondt studio
Print: Xtraprint, London

Katie Cuddon was born in England in 1979. She completed her BA at Glasgow School of Art (1999–2002) and an MPhil also at Glasgow School of Art (2002–2003). She received an MA from the Royal College of Art (2004–2006). She has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally including *New Symphony*, Simon Oldfield Gallery, London (2010); *"I no longer know what the money is"*, Alma Enterprises, London (2010); *Present Volume*, The Space – Deutsche Bank, London (2008); *Overshoot and Collapse*, Globe Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne (2008); *Stick Stamp Fly* with a performance of *Common Fish*, Gasworks, London (2007); *Comfort Zones*, Oriel Davies Gallery national touring exhibition (2007); *Drawing Breath*, The Jerwood Foundation international touring exhibition (2006); *Telelust*, Kunsthalle Lophem/Centre for Contemporary Art, Belgium (2006). She was the Sainsbury Scholar in Sculpture and Drawing at The British School of Rome (2008–2009) and the Norma Lipman Research Fellow in Sculpture at Newcastle University (2007–2008). She has also received a number of awards including second prize Jerwood Drawing Prize (2005); Deutsche Bank Pyramid Award (2002). She is a lecturer in Fine Art at Newcastle University.

Reading/Viewing/Listening

- Robert Bresson (Dir) *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966)
- Michelangelo Antonioni (Dir) *La Notte* (1961)
- Bunuel (Dir) *Exterminating Angel* (1962)
- Benjamin Britten *Now until the break of day*
(Act 3 finale from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) (1960)
- Joan La Barbara *Signing Alphabet* Sesame Street (1977)
- Burl Ives *Wrap Me Up In My Tarpaulin Jacket*
(from the album *Down to the Sea in Ships*, Brunswick, 1956)
- Joni Mitchell *Amelia* (From the album *Herija*, Electra, 1976)
- Peter Handke *Kaspar* Methuen Drama (1972)
- Lydia Davis *Outing* from *The Collected Stories*
of Lydia Davis, Penguin (2011)
- Joan Didion *Play it as it Lays* Farrar Straus & Giroux (1970)
- Hermann Hesse *Narziss and Goldmund*, Penguin Modern Classics
new edition (1971)
- Edward Grierson *The Companion Guide to Northumbria*,
HarperCollins Publishers Ltd (1976)

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