

Press Release

Ricky Swallow

14 January – 19 February

Modern Art is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Ricky Swallow. This will be Swallow's second solo show with Modern Art, and his first in London for four years.

Ricky Swallow's meticulously crafted sculpture is imprinted with the passage of time onto objects, and in doing so transforms elemental material into conceptual medium. Swallow draws on the inherent narrative of objects and their associations, tapping the capacity of possessions to give shape and meaning to a life, even as and when they outlast their owners. He 'salvages' objects that have lived, that have a history, and memorialises a sense of embedded narrative and accumulated time by fixing their forms in sculpture. Swallow alters the nature of his subjects by remaking them as a recognisable idea of themselves – and in the process, creates a new position of meaning, displacing their sense of time in a state of permanent obsolescence.

Working within the traditional and intensively manual methods of carving and casting, Swallow creates a wide-reaching oeuvre of immediately identifiable forms that convey their identity with an uncanny presence and sense of tactility. Earlier bodies of work have been meticulously carved from blocks of wood, using the elemental core of the medium as a tool with which to imagine and create a piece. Recognisable objects such as balloons, discarded shoes, and a bicycle helmet have been combined with skulls, snakes and other insignias of art history that transcend their everyday use and are repropounded as vessels for larger ideas. Their recognition derives not from the experience of what Swallow physically presents to us, but from an idea of something represented by it. The ostensible forms of Swallow's sculptures betray an illusion of representation as a container for ideas.

Swallow's new exhibition at Modern Art presents a mature and dramatic new body of work. These new sculptures form a cohesive family of cast bronze objects, repeating and reorganising a particular set of material phrases in built representations of vessels, masks, and panels.

Almost all these works are created from archery targets that Swallow has salvaged at the end of the day from a practice range near his studio in Los Angeles. These cardboard targets, randomly shot through with a day's worth of arrows, are then used to make a group of cast bronze objects presented both on plinths and on the wall. This process of making, sees a more expedient, and provocative development in Swallow's practice. From cut pieces of found cardboard archery targets, Swallow has fashioned evocative objects that recall the forms of folk, craft and studio ceramics. The process of collaging together found fragments into new shapes constructs unexpected yet freshly intelligible, singular forms.

Swallow's evocative objects present themselves as the introduction or precursor to narrative and external references. As ever, Swallow is informed by the influences of art history – however in this new body of work we see a synthesis of his own distinctive manner brought to a reading of Californian modernism, British modern ceramics, and a wider recollection of vessel forms in painting and sculpture as the basis for both abstract and figurative gestures.

The accumulation not only of pieces from which objects are formed, but of sets of objects themselves, reveals a collector's logic: of making sense of things through the meticulous accumulation, placement and reorganisation of parts. The improvised forms of these new sculptures continue Swallow's engagement with the still life tradition, arranging and preserving a concentration of forms. The ever-present dynamic of verisimilitude in Swallow's sculpture is further complicated in these new pieces as his emphasis shifts to building a sculptural idea of a vessel, for example, from fragments, embedding the process of replication more deeply within the act of making. Form here is a container not only for ideas, but for the expression of the idea of forms themselves.

Ricky Swallow was born in San Remo, Australia in 1974. Since 2006 he has lived and worked in Los Angeles, USA. Ricky Swallow represented Australia at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005, and in 2009 his work was the subject of the solo retrospective exhibition *Ricky Swallow: The Bricoleur*, at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Recent museum shows include *Ricky Swallow, Watercolours*, University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane, Australia, touring to Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand (2009); *Douglas Hyde Gallery*, Dublin, Ireland (2007); *Kunsthalle Vienna*, Vienna, Austria (2007); and *PS1/MoMA*, New York, USA (2006).