



## *Some Thoughts on Plastic and Concrete*

So how about Sweden's NATO membership application? I wonder what'll be in the welcome pack, if and when it arrives. Obviously a t-shirt, or a lapel pin maybe. Some coupons. Definitely a copy of the latest club magazine. But I'd hope there'd be a miniature desk ornament of the sculpture that sits out front of the headquarters. You know, the one that looks like a steampunked tyre spike. No one knows who the artist was. But the leaders of NATO members' countries should all have one on their desks as a reminder that the wind needs to be taken out of nefarious ambition. I'm speaking facetiously of course.

Yet the notion of the unknown creative hand fascinates me. Like the NATO sculpture, the work in this show is derived from the unaccredited creative work of the members of corporate design teams. The companies not only own the designs, but the designers too. We are all owned in one way or another.

Far from being a conceptually cohesive body of work, the concrete pieces in this show represent one aspect of studio activity that has had different points of reference over the space of about 8 years. The work was initially inspired by the sheer quantity of concrete being poured during the upgrade to the Great Western Highway in the Blue Mountains, where I lived for a period of time. I had also recently visited Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater house in the US. I was fascinated with its classic cantilevered forms, but also by the amount of constant, complicated restoration work that had to be done as a result of the lack of understanding of this building technique in circ. 1935, when it was conceived. This, along with the view now that much of the reinforced concrete infrastructure the developed world is built from only has a lifespan of 100 years or so, compelled me to begin working with a material many of us take to be "permanent".

In this exhibition I have chosen to showcase the work that specifically relates to food packaging, mostly. Food in general has a very short lifespan, and contrarily, the plastic packaging we use, in most cases, has a long lifespan and is unlikely to fully degrade.

30 years ago I started tapping out artspeak on a keyboard, similar to what I'm writing here, with the text miraculously appearing in bright green on a black screen. That computer was a hand-me-down, which I acquired from my mother when she upgraded to an early Mac. It was an IBM personal computer, and it had a real stick-shift feel about it, being probably a good 10 years old at the time. There was no mouse or graphic interface. All commands had to be typed out in code. Curiously, the model code number, 5150, shared the same numerical designation as the California police code allowing for a mentally ill person to be detained for 72 hours. But that's a tangent, surely.

Since that time, as we all know, this technology has advanced at such a pace as to fool us into thinking that personal computing is much older than it actually is. The work in this show is like an ode to this feeling. The disposable plastic packaging I have been using to make concrete casts from are made with computer-assisted processes that have incredibly fine tolerances in their design and manufacture. Although injection molded plastic has been in use for decades, it's the very designed, detailed, and decorative qualities that amaze me when it comes to disposable food packaging. Hardly anyone looks at it, and it gets discarded almost as soon as it's opened.

Many jurisdictions are now banning this kind of single-use plastic. In reality, this should have happened long ago. One of the problems I think is that many people, myself included, assumed these plastics were being recycled if we all just diligently put them in the appropriate bin. It turns out that market forces rather than government policy was ensuring this wasn't happening in the way we thought it was.

So the work in this show, spanning 2016 through to the present, is almost to panegryrize these unfortunate forms. Some of the works pay particular homage to the IBM 5150. Casting these forms in concrete and applying paint gives these plastic entities an archaic, monumental, even dead, status before they've even actually died — *they are still being manufactured!*

Daniel Argyle, 2023