

Wild Interior. Catalogue essay for solo show at Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London, May-June 2014.

Related images can be found here: <http://www.sukybest.com/>

Suky Best has a long-running fascination with the clash occasioned by encounters between well-groomed domestic interiors and nature run wild. In *The Journey Home* (1999) she 'wanted to make an image as if the room was being menaced by vegetation...Trees might burst through windows to claim back their own'. She is also inspired by specific buildings, as in *Walking Meditation* (2000) made in and for Cleeve Abbey, a C13 Cistercian ruin in Somerset. A third concern is with the way the simplification of an image can disturb perception. This is achieved in the video series *Wild West* (2005), made in collaboration with Rory Hamilton, in which a group of cowboys on horses riding across the plain is reduced to a shimmering volatile block of colour from which all other information has been removed.

These various interests and strategies are evident in the work shown here in *Wild Interior*, the latter most notably in *An Observation of Flight* (2010), in which a Peregrine Falcon's movements, seen in silhouette, are tracked against a rotating latticework cage across and within which it flies. Reduced to a ragged white blur, the bird sometimes resembles a clutch of falling leaves or even paint dripping from a brush. The rotating grid pattern imposes a malleable three-dimensionality that clashes with the two dimensionality of the bird. Such clashes, or interplay, structure all the work seen here, which can be thought of as hybrid: time-based collages that combine non-temporal photo-reproduced elements, populated by cutout loops of footage of real birds, energized and animated by a virtual camera.

*Alwyn Park House*, (6', 2011) is modeled on the form of the toy theatre, with its stack of printed cardboard flats that recede from the eye and between which figures can emerge and disappear. The house is a composite, constructed from

stock photos of furniture and household effects found in stately home catalogues. Thus the objects represented in the film exist, but not in the configuration in which we see them here. The walls have been removed so that the remaining furniture comes to define the space it occupies as provisional. Doors have been made semi-transparent (and given thickened edges, since they are only paper-thin) in order to create a complex vista of succeeding spaces through which a virtual camera can fly. The work was partially inspired by Beatrix Potter's wonderfully subversive *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, in which the eponymous characters furiously smash up the food in a doll's house into which they have trespassed, when they find it to be made of Plaster of Paris.

The first birds we encounter in the piece are crows. Best chose these birds because they live in proximity to man, are easy to film in parks and live in societies. They are also considered to be one of the most intelligent animals in the World, capable not only of using tools but of making them too. Thus while we tend to experience as despoiling their nonchalant pecking, perhaps they are in some sense entitled to occupy such an elevated environment. Yet, in the light-sucking blackness of their plumage, which contrasts with the pastel delicacy of lace tablecloths and pale yellow cake stands, they constitute a rude intrusion, evoking the trope of the *unhomely* that was elaborated with such shocking force in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. In this pale setting the crows themselves become silhouettes, reappearing later in a room full of mirrors that have become apertures through which they are fleetingly visible as they fly past. These apertures transform the space into a kind of sieve, emphasizing the self-conscious process of making-transparent that Best employs through the film.

In *At Betty's House* (2012) the quantity of information is further reduced, so that an environment somewhere between a room and its plan and elevation is realised. The spaces are constructed from a combination of images of real and dolls' houses. With the floor beneath the carpet in the first shot removed, the latter seems to take on mass, projecting assertively into the void that separates it from the viewer, and throughout the piece the removal of information, combined with the way we fly through the spaces and between objects, generates multiple

ambiguities and conflicts of scale: after leaving a large room we encounter a set of coffee and tea pots, beyond which lies a group of lemons. The way these elements are disposed was inspired in part by the still lives of the C16-17 Spanish painter Juan Sanchez de Cotán, whose invariably front or top-lit subjects; melons, cabbages, quinces, similarly hang in impenetrably dark spaces.

As Betty's pots are approached their cut-out nature becomes blatantly visible, followed by the lemons, which resolve into the matrices of their constituent colours; cyan, magenta, yellow. Thus we are shifted from one kind of seeing to another, one level of matter to another, from the image of a thing to its material constitution, in a single continuous sweep. Simultaneously our scale has shrunk from human sized to miniature as the lemons loom over us. There is perhaps a link back here to Best's enthusiasm for cowboy iconography, in that the sensation evoked is reminiscent of the common scenario in Western movies where a group of riders pass through a narrowing defile (just before the Indians attack).

For Best the work 'refers to the interior spaces of computer games and their first person point of view', and although the piece is structured loosely round alternating views of corridors and object groupings, the whole is constructed as a continuous fly-through. The camera finds a path between all these contrasting elements, unifying everything it encounters into a sequence of surfaces to be negotiated. But this unifying process also generates the many anomalies of scale and texture that reveal the nature of the work's construction. Here, perhaps, one might think of the way the inexperienced gamer finds himself bumping against the pixillated boundary wall of the game's universe. But although gaming environments are often hostile and dangerous, they are never uncanny, as they are in Betty's house, which the humans have abandoned, leaving an eerily empty scene reminiscent of that described in the story of the *Mary Celeste*.

