



# CRAFTS



explains) to a person's 'sense of self' – the understanding they have of who they are. The small drawings are too many to comprehend in a single glance. Only when you spend time with the work do you gather a sense of who this person might be, their likes and dislikes and the experiences they might have endured. It's imbued with sentiment, but never sentimental.

On the work's reverse side, Minney has inked a grid of stark black squares, each one containing a single rectangular mark. Indeed, so precise and symmetrical is the pattern, it is only afterwards that I discover these were also rendered by hand. On three of them, you can spot a small knot of red thread, like a bullet wound. They are stitched through to the other side, emerging at random among the illustrations. These blemishes stand for the three 'switches' (as Minney has conceived of them) at the centre of Tunbridge's research, which aims to shed light on their influence on brain function and psychotic illness.

Around the gallery's walls are a sequence of smaller, framed works by the artist, as well as several that resulted

from workshops with patients from the National Psychosis Unit at the Bethlem Royal Hospital, including a poignant series of collages that reflect on personality and identity. It adds a compelling sense of how detached a scientific paper might be from its subject's lived experience.

Though smaller in size than the central work, Minney's other pieces in the show telescope in on concepts no less complex. Here, we are firmly in the terrain of science where the vocabulary and interpretive frameworks elude all but the specialists among us. Minney's response through her art is not to simplify – she refuses the role of illustrator making difficult subject matter intelligible; instead, she introduces a kind of emotional charge to the information and the human presence generally exempt from datasets and diagrams.

In *Layer II ATCG* she employs tracing paper to overlay a grid of letters (ATCG – the four chemical bases of our DNA) above a series of hand drawings of cells and chromosomes, as well as embroiderers' tools like scissors and needles, which refer to the processes of snipping and stitching that take place at a molecular level as we are formed. *Calcium channels* translates the flow of calcium to the brain and heart into an untidy network of red threads and cut-up periodic symbols. The result is a map to which we have no key. *Test sample garden*, meanwhile, moves further still into metaphor, recasting the self as a garden in which growing conditions might vary with potentially seismic effects.

Though none is crude, the works Minney presents at the Bethlem Gallery are not remarkable for their technical sophistication. They are evidently constructed with immense care, but left unpolished: edges of her textile works are slightly wonky, and her stitching is neat but inexpert. She experiments with an array of materials, but confines herself to a humble palette – plain calico, ink, thread, wadding and old books for collaging. Fortuitously so: in their makeshift character, we get the truest idea of a mind making sense of a world that is vital to us all and yet so remarkably foreign and detached.

When we engage creatively with the science underpinning our identity, we grope towards something that is both greater than ourselves and always slightly out of view. Sometimes it is the most modest artworks that know and say this best.

*Imogen Greenhalgh is a freelance arts journalist*



Above: installation view of *Blow Up*

## The eye, a cave called home

### Blow Up

Friedman Benda, New York,  
10 January – 16 February 2019

Reviewed by Pierre Alexandre de Looz

I found myself in a twist at *Blow Up*, a magical curio of a design exhibition, guest-curated by Felix Burrichter at Friedman Benda, the New York gallery specialising in both covetable 20th-century design and new work. I couldn't tell if the show was a demand or an offer. It roiled me. Maybe it was both, like this lyric I prize from The Blow's 2017 album, *Brand New Abyss*: 'When the heat starts creeping, and you're hiding inside, I'll be a cool cave, maybe you could live in my eyes.' When does anyone extend the doormat of love like that?

Burrichter, *PIN-UP* magazine's creative director, calls *Blow Up* a thematic sister to his 2015 exhibition at the Swiss Institute in New York. While *Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau: A 21st Century Show Home* forecast the collective euphoria of digital fabrication, new materials and virtual social environments, *Blow Up* recast, in his words, a psychically charged eye on nostalgia. Both shows used the home as a conceptual frame.







One year in the making, the exhibition enlisted an unpredictable menagerie of original furniture and objects by contemporary makers, some for a debut run. Of note, a pair of small and large cupboards in humble MDF by Peter Marigold, with textured fronts, a CNC-routed magnification of the artist's skin and that of his sons; an oversized cutlery set in a ghostly, high-density polyethylene by Chen Chen & Kai Williams; a geometric take on the 'jump seat' in chunky natural white spruce by BNAG; and a mechanised 'dancing' crib of wavy walnut spindles by Saša Stucin and Nicholas Gardner.

Burrichter congregated these alongside more and less historic gems from the Friedman Benda archive by Wendell Castle, Shiro Kuramata, Gaetano Pesce and the Campana brothers. Interests in clashing purist geometry with chance or grotesque forms, traditional with synthetic materials and mnemonic shapes with modern-day uses and associations seemed to be shared across the older and new work. If it's too soon to understand how and why Postmodern aesthetics have resurfaced, in this show Burrichter begins to stitch together a plausible story, as enigmatic as it may seem, that will interest future historians.

The exhibition shares its title with the Julio Cortázar short story, as well as its nearly criminal obsession with detail: a tufted throw pillow, cathode-ray TV, a hand saw and much more had

transformed a white cube space into a walking illustration of a patrician home, all cut from cardboard and layered with printed vinyl. It was like an ideal set for a community theatre production of a Noel Coward play. If theatricality thrives in Minimalism's shadow, as the critic Michael Fried implied in 1967, then *Blow Up* replayed that in reverse. Created with designers Charlap Hyman & Herrero, the set was Instagram Shangri-la.

Adam Charlap Hyman's fascination with doll's houses (as well as his recent maquettes of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé's lushly appointed grand salon before and after the historic 2009 estate sale, a project completed with partner Andre Herrero for the Chicago Design Biennial) had led Burrichter in this direction. At Friedman Benda, the

**Above and below:**  
installation views of  
*Blow Up* at Friedman  
Benda, New York



designers devised walls of extra thick corrugated cardboard and punched-out doors, to hang like pontoons from the gallery ceiling and divide the space into domestic scenes, including a kitchen, a parlour and a nursery. Burrichter insisted that the walls float off the floor, a way of actualising the dreamwork of a child's roving imagination, perhaps. Visitors complained of feeling nauseous from the sway. Stability, like adulthood, may simply be a matter of perspective.

A onesie by New York fashion designer Telfar Clemens, a glazed ceramic in the form of a poultry carcass by artist Larry Randolph and the precision geometry of a table by Milan architect Luca Cipelletti, all shared a roof under this curatorial concept. What is it about a moment in culture when a painting on metal by Sarah Ortmeier, a goopy-framed mirror by Misha Kahn and steel mesh couches by Shiro Kuramata, unite plausibly together? It's good that the question can even come into focus. *Blow Up* recalls the *First Papers of Surrealism*, the surrealist art exhibit staged in 1942 in the parlour of a New York town house where Marcel Duchamp famously entangled the entire show in a mile of string, making it very hard to see the works clearly. At the opening ceremony, Duchamp created even more consternation by inviting children to play ball and hopscotch among the string.

The theme of the playground lurked on almost every wall in *Blow Up*: each of the faux frames decorating the fantasy apartment at Friedman Benda depicted elements of playgrounds designed by Isamu Noguchi, in this case lovingly rendered by Charlap Hyman as Modernist pastiches, à la Paul Klee, Matisse, Miró and others. Works lost their workaday histories and commercial narratives, and could have totally disappeared into the tangle of the show's curatorial wild. But, in some uncanny way, the pieces popped and collectively sizzled, thanks to the set's playfulness.

After *Blow Up*, I was less concerned whether Gaetano Pesce was Postmodern, or interested by chance processes and ignoble materials. Rather, I wanted to know why his felt cabinet on display looked like a dirty Band-Aid and felt like an erogenous cavity. *Blow Up* fingered a hole in the back of my imagination, patted around a mental sanctum that's sensitive to touch, a cave for love of design or what's most true about design as a story – not of objects but of persons. Love of what's complicated, incongruous, capricious, and in desperate need of attention sometimes. *Pierre Alexandre de Looz is a writer and architect based in New York*

BLOW UP: ALL IMAGES COURTESY FRIEDMAN BENDA, PHOTOS BY TIMOTHY DOYON