Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Olivier Cornet Gallery. I've been kindly invited here today to say a few words to open Annika Berglund's show **Materiality**. The pieces you see here represent something of a new direction for Annika and I think we can possibly start with a round of applause.

A colleague from the States sent me a very short quote yesterday from a novel she's reading:

> "'We think they're walls' replied Max, his face lighting up in the way that archaeologists have when they are about to bore the pants off you." (Elly Griffiths, *The Janus Stone*).

Well, I hope my face isn't lighting up too much.

I usually have a lot to say then on the confluence of the visual arts and archaeological praxis, but this afternoon I'll stick to a few thoughts that came together after I'd seen the pieces on Friday as they were being arranged on the walls, indeed as you see them here today.

Field archaeologists and visual artists have a lot in common when it comes to the materiality of our career choices. Both generally end the working day requiring a good wash; indeed neither career is well known for the financial dividend afforded after long hours of labour and mental torture. Yet, this is not why we do it. The thrill of discovery is often cited as a reason why people get into archaeology and talking to Annika on Friday, I got the impression that a similar thought process informed the evolution of her practice from the production of the finer pieces she has fashioned in the past to the rougher, more textured objects we see here today. And there's another analogy here I'll come to in a while, as we consider that very moment of discovery.

The process of the creation of art, always tactile, always hands-on, is of course analogous with the creation of archaeology, the very things left behind, the materiality of past human existence on the planet. It's also analogous with the scientific recreation of those past lives and landscapes: the archaeological process after all is one fundamentally to do with the careful recording of the process of excavation as we go along, stripping off the later occupation layers first to get down to the undisturbed subsoil that existed prior to human interaction with the landscape.

In Annika's case the material used in about 75% of the pieces here is clay, the remainder being in bronze and glass. The clay element is one we archaeologists are probably most familiar with: when it's waterlogged it provides the maximum potential to preserve the organic finds left there in the past. When it's dry, it's easier to dig, but in most cases the dry clay is what we call redeposited – that's the boulder clay, the subsoil that's been dug up as, for example, the upcast of a ditch to form a defensive bank, which over time or circumstance collapses and levels out, leaving a faint trace on the archaeological record. This clay is generally sterile: it doesn't contain any finds because it was originally excavated from previously undisturbed soil.

The redeposited clay can be problematic if, for example, you excavate a site that's had as an early formation process a levelling up of the ground. It may seem that you've hit the bottom, the virgin subsoil, where there's no more archaeology. Yet this deposit of sterile clay may mask further earlier layers sealed below and hidden. You never know you're finished until you excavate what we call a *sondage*, a hole through the material.

Sometimes though this can work to your advantage. I excavated the first flint crystal production site in Dublin (and possibly in these islands) in Haymarket just off Smithfield. This was an important site on a number of levels: the alchemist who discovered the formula for crystal glass which wouldn't decay in the atmosphere, John Odacio Formica, had come to Dublin perhaps in the late 1660s originally from Altare in today's northern Italy, via Nijmegen, a city not yet in the Dutch Republic, bringing the formula and the new technology with him. The glass produced in Smithfield was of the highest quality and destined for export to the New World. The chemical composition of the glass, along with a certain stylistic fingerprint, unambiguously places the production site in Dublin, yet most of the excavated glass has come from places like Fort Royal in Jamaica, which was destroyed in an earthquake in 1692. We have very little of this material from Dublin.

We were close to Formica's glasshouse as Christmas approached towards the end of 2003. When we returned to site after the break we discovered that the developer (or his agents) had removed over a metre of ground, leaving us with what we thought (and indeed what the machine driver thought) was the upper surface of the undisturbed boulder clay.

Well it wasn't. He'd stopped at the material dug out to create the cellars of the second round of leases on the Haymarket properties in the 1720s, leaving us with much of the evidence for the earlier glasshouse sealed below. From the material preserved in Formica's latrine pit, we were able to put together something of his original process, thus establishing something of the significance of the site in an international context.

The moment of discovery came sometime afterwards when two English glass experts came over to examine the waste material we'd excavated. A single sherd of milk white glass was given to me to hold up to the sun. All of a sudden it took on a deep ruby red hue and one could appreciate immediately how these late seventeenth-century glassmakers were seen as alchemists, holders of arcane secrets and closely guarded formulae. In fact, glass making was kept in the family and the fact that many of them died, either by toxic poisoning of glasshouse explosions meant that it stayed that way.

In this case though, I was looking at something else. I was looking at a technique used by the Romans, one that had been lost over time, to be rediscovered by a refugee glassmaker in Dublin several centuries later. What's really significant though is that the process appears to have died with him, to be rediscovered towards the start of the nineteenth century, when, as the Romans had discovered, gold was introduced to the mix and brought to the pots.

The introduction of gold answered another question we had. Towards the bottom of Formica's latrine pit we'd recovered a gold coin, a *Louis d'Or* from 1655 which we'd initially thought had been accidentally lost by the glassmaker, an expensive loss at that. But the fact that it was found within the pit among the pieces of cullet, the glass waste that was valuable insofar as it could be melted down and reused again, gave the coin a new significance. Nothing is really as it seems.

Looking at some of Annika's pieces here today, one is immediately reminded of what leather or human skin looks like when it's exposed in waterlogged clay. But other thoughts and memories

emerge. One piece to me resembles the interior of a human cranium. Other pieces evoke LiDAR panels, where the 3D landscape images on a computer monitor emerge as ceramic tiles. But nothing remains really as it seems. And that's perhaps how it should be.

Many's the time we come across something from the earth and say: what the *fuck* is that? Some of the objects here (in the very nicest sense) evoke that feeling, the idea that you might have found something new, something previously undiscovered or unrecognised. The connection with excavated objects, which I think influences Annika's process, is obvious to me as a field archaeologist. Like all good art, they evoke a sense of wonder and perhaps an element of confusion where you ask yourself, what are you actually looking at?

Archaeology is never finished: the site may be excavated, the finds catalogued, the report written and an academic paper or article perhaps published, yet there's always more to do, more to think about, more to reconsider and revise.

In my experience this happens too in the creation of art. As a process, it's never finished. The artist has to return time and time again to the process that brings them to a moment such as this, the opening of an exhibition of their work. I look forward to seeing what Annika does after this and how her process will evolve in the future.

Franc Myles

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