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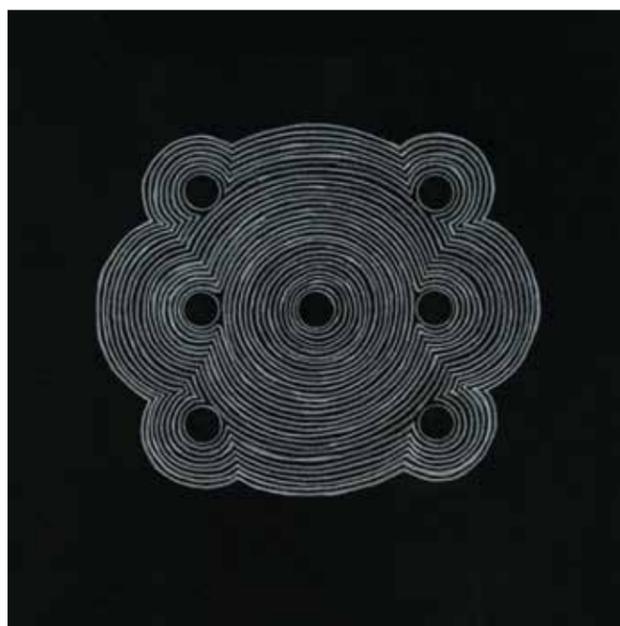
her paintings are enigmatically *particular*, formed from their own quite hermetic realm of artistic consciousness, and so they are, Morton suggests, ‘simply themselves – the only shape, size, texture and colour they could ever be.’¹) What’s more, as the poised exhibition layout demonstrates, the ‘completed’ pieces also then become points in a follow-on process of further, focused organisation — an ongoing effort of persistent addition and insistent emplacement — the sculptures, in particular, crucially entering into another ‘order’: symmetrically grouped as spacious grids, and presented within sealed, unadorned, quasi-minimalist boxes. (And so, then, there is an unproblematic, strictly maintained ‘running order’ to the extended process: construct; arrange; secure; display.) De Buitléar has talked about the distinct (and distinctive) hand-made sculptural pieces coming together as a ‘family’ of related forms; and yet if so, it is a family that could be viewed as products of a strict upbringing, with the separate ‘siblings’ kept in tense relation to each other according to sternly applied household rules. Everything seems in its proper place — which is to say in its pre-determined, planned place. Everything appears to be *in order*.

As is arguably the case with all families, nevertheless, even the strictest regulation can have unintended, uncontainable consequences. Indeed, we might also conceivably view these works by de Buitléar as not so much ‘out of order’ in themselves — as collections of things that fail in a purpose or falter in their progression or are confused in their arrangement — but rather as the uncertain, plural products of a certain type of ordered creative method, as art objects that *arise* ‘out of order’ but that take unanticipated, idiosyncratic shapes. For despite the repetitions of the artistic process, despite the pronounced ‘family resemblances’ between the single works, and despite the overall impression of formal unity in the show’s staging, a prospect of potentially infinite diversity is also implicit here. Indeed, with a nod to Nietzsche, we may even be led by the title of the exhibition towards an inversion of the authoritarian aspiration that ‘out of chaos comes order’: add an ellipsis to the end of de Buitléar’s title and the words ‘out of order’ may begin to beg their opposite. Out of the seemingly stable, ordered systems that are applied in de Buitléar’s studio, and that are apparent in the clear-minded decisions about display, arises a sense of mounting multiplicity. What is in each case recognisable as the product of the same process is also a ‘singular’ result: a structure or shape with its own properties and visual associations (by saying ‘singular’ here, of course, it is worth stressing a dual sense of both one-of-a-kind and *strange*). And where there are identifiable differences in the visual and material characteristics of the individual manifestations of de Buitléar’s method — the white-on-black patterns of the drawings for instance are ‘grown’ around changing numbers of marked pivot-points, creating circular patterns that bulge and balance in many different ways — there are also, then, those other inevitable variations in what these artworks ‘are’ that emerge from our contact with them as viewers. De Buitléar has brought into the world forms that are neither quite abstract or at all representational — they are ‘simply themselves’ — and yet the



urge to make them legible through connection with other recognisable objects or images is impossible to resist. Among the monochrome drawings, in this way, we might think we see visual echoes of simple cellular organisms, mathematical symbols, mappings of space or plans for circular architectural structures. Despite being technically ‘wrong’, we might draw connections with historically-influential and culturally loaded modes of decorative pattern-making: to Buddhist mandalas, maybe, or to the layout and interlacing styles of Celtic crosses. Just as easily, if a good deal more lazily, these unnamed, uncertain shapes might appear to us, here and there, as rough draft cartoon heads, three-eyed space invaders, or whatever else pops into our heads in response to their eccentric prompting. Hints of high- and low-culture; connections by turns intriguing and forgettable; matters raised both meaningful and meaningless: these references appear, split, multiply and disappear like the basic cellular life-forms we might think we see. Similarly, the tidy arrangements of little black objects within the gleaming glass-covered cases directly allude to nothing that exists in the world already. But we bring to these polished, contained displays the extra layers of possibility and plurality that are formed from our own uncontrolled impressions, seeing here — who knows? — collections of mysterious ancient relics, or miniature encampments of imaginary dwellings, or models of geological formation.

The tightly fixed elements that determine the forms of these artworks thus create expansive space for the flux of improvisation; the ‘ordered’ elements being productive of discontinuity and doubt at various stages. De Buitléar returns again and again to a method, but discovers difference in repetition. So, where ‘repetition’ is to be valued as a core attribute of this process, we might choose to think of it in the sense captured by Giorgio Agamben who has (in response to the ‘four great thinkers of repetition in modernity: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gilles Deleuze’) spoken of how: ‘repetition is not the return of the identical; it is not the same as such that returns.’ Rather, he suggests ‘the force and grace of repetition, the novelty it brings us, is the return of the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew; it’s almost a paradox.’ ‘To repeat something’ Agamben argues, ‘is to make it possible anew.’² There is, perhaps, (if I may myself employ a repetition) something of this *possibility and plurality* in that fixed element of the exhibition with which we began here: the title ‘Out of Order’, a phrase which happened to linger in the mind as part of the process of reflecting on this exhibition, seeming to change shape each time it was re-stated. This phrase — this minor, manipulated fragment from everyday life — became an isolated, familiar thing that on inspection looked to be composed of several, compacted layers, and when thought of together these textual layers created something suddenly unfamiliar, confusing, contradictory. Such persistent *out-of-the-ordinary* transformations, and such concentrated piecing together and making strange of everyday things, are, of course, among the defining fixed and fluid characteristics of de Buitléar’s commendably consistent and reassuringly various art.



How should we best understand the title of Niall de Buitléar’s exhibition at the LAB? Under other circumstances, a sign saying ‘Out of Order’ would probably be an infuriating notice that something we need has stopped working, prompting us to move on. As a point of introduction, this is a title that potentially corresponds to a familiar modern moment of frustration and irked re-orientation. *Access denied. Service unavailable. Try again later.* The words ‘out of order’ could, therefore, bring us right away to a halt, bouncing us back as we begin our approach to de Buitléar’s art. Yet this speculative meaning sits oddly in relation to the crisply inscrutable content of the actual show, with its elegant combination of neat boxed-up rows of curious small black sculptures and an evolving, elliptical series of ever-similar but always-different multi-circular drawings. What is it about these perfectly produced things, or this expertly controlled exhibition, that could be, at this time, ‘out of order’? What could be *wrong* with these artworks? In what sense might they have ceased to ‘function’? And in any case, we might remind ourselves that from one powerful point of view at least, the prospect of encountering and contemplating *non-functioning* objects remains one of the primary opportunities afforded by these peculiar spaces in our society that we specially designate as art galleries: all art being ‘quite useless’, if we choose to believe Oscar Wilde.

But while there is a feasible allusion to ‘function’ in this title (providing an immediate connection to the exhibition that does not quite ‘work’), there is also an obvious association with form. For ‘out of order’ could also suggest the disturbance of a sequence, referring us, perhaps, to a confused arrangement in time or space: things are no longer in the correct order, a logical progression has been disrupted. Take the time, however, to look across the display space created by de Buitléar, and the evident principles of rigorous patterning and refined process that define the work might seem to contradict any more chaotic connotations carried by the title. Large white rectangular vitrines house the carefully composed collections of paper sculptures that are the show’s delicate centrepieces: these austere, pristine containers displaying objects that appear to have been crafted from a most methodical, *orderly*, procedure of layer-by-layer adding and folding. As with the accompanying drawings, these constructions emerge in the artist’s studio as simple, steady accumulations — respectively the images and objects represent linear and material ‘reverberations’ that are concentrically drawn or built up around specific combinations of fixed nodal points — and as such each is an individual outcome of what is surely an exacting, near-obsessive creative system. In a manner akin to key aspects of painter Tomma Abts’s work, for instance, there is a thoroughness to the serial materialisation or visualization of strategically warped and skilfully wrapped forms that seems sustained by the stubborn application of a very private and wholly independent logic, one not entirely related to orthodox, art-historically reliant practices of making and of *meaning-making*. (Tom Morton has said of Abts’s work that ‘this is art that exists not in terms of other art but in its own stubbornly fought-for right’;

Notes

1. Tom Morton, ‘Terminally New’, Frieze, March 2006
2. Giorgio Agamben, ‘Difference and Repetition: on Guy Debord’s films’, in Tanya Leighton (ed.) *Art and the Moving Image* (London: Tate, 2008) p.330

Images

Left: Installation view of ‘Out of Order’ showing untitled paper sculptures
Centre: *Untitled*, 2011, white pencil on paper,
Right: Installation view of ‘Out of Order’ showing untitled paper sculptures
Overleaf: *Untitled*, 2011, white pencil on paper

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