

SUPPORTING OBJECTS – VLATKA HORVAT

Vlatka Horvat's artistic practice crosses a variety of forms, from sculpture and installation to photography, performance, video and works on paper. Her work – which often involves gestures of rearranging and reconfiguring the physical space and the spatial and social relations at play in it – shows a keen interest in the precarious or contentious relationship between bodies, objects, materials and the built environment. Regardless of which form the artist may be working in at any given time, her activity in the frame of performance and experimental theatre directly affects how she tackles and researches other forms, as well as how she approaches the socio-political relations between the body, the object and the space.

In her first exhibition at Eastwards Prospectus, Horvat repeatedly re-works series of functional objects, parts of the human body and elements of the built environment, namely pillars, arches, doorways and bridges. At the heart of the exhibition is a new sculptural installation made up of several tables, each holding on its tabletop a discrete constellation of objects and materials that spatially “extend” the tables across the space. This site-responsive installation for the upper floor of the gallery connects its three rooms via a series of linking gestures that draw lines of movement, indicate trajectories and journeys through spaces, and at the same time separate and divide them. Horvat's re-imagined tables additionally “destabilise” the viewer's perception by creating situations which are stretched between something “real” and something on the edge of our recognition. The installation reinterprets the table – a functional, everyday object – by placing it in a dynamic relationship with space that is different than the one we are accustomed to, challenging what we might know about the object's use and function, how we might understand its material and physical properties, and its relation to memory and experience.

In *Supporting Objects* Horvat creates a dialogue between the new sculptural works and several series of works on paper, which include drawings made with feet travelling across the surface of the paper (*Along the Way*), photographs depicting the hand as a structure interacting with various materials (*Monuments*), and several abstract works in collage. By juxtaposing these works on paper – which can be seen as manifestation of acts that question the materiality of paper and other materials – with the sculptural installation, the upper floor of the gallery becomes a reminder that we are stretched between the material and immaterial consciousness.

The exhibition continues in the labyrinthine chambers of the gallery's basement, where the artist constructs several makeshift clusters of sculptural works, referencing dominant architectural elements existing in the basement. These new works made on site mirror – albeit imperfectly – particular features of the space they occupy, and they do so with an element of both failure and playful mischief.

Broadly speaking, all the works in the exhibition revolve around questions of balance and stability, challenging the idea of solidity and permanence of various structures, particularly structures which in their regular spatial economies serve some kind of a supporting function – to prop things up, to hold up other structures or objects, to stabilise and hold things in place. The artist approaches these structural supports as something temporary, provisional and precarious, constructing them – as she frequently does in her work – using decidedly inadequate, cheap materials such as sticks, cables, hoses, pipes and metal rods, which are combined here with concrete forms and pieces of modified, previously-functional objects.

At a glance, her gestures of dismantling, re-ordering, stacking, balancing, leaning, and otherwise destabilising solid objects and architectural elements might be understood as a play with the mannerism of forms. But when we consider how Horvat uses the body in the work, subtly implying parallels between these structural forms and the body, another set of readings opens up. The body in her work is evoked in multiple ways: represented in the form of traces, marks, residues it leaves upon surfaces, objects and spaces; suggested in the humanoid sculptural forms that titter between representation and abstraction; and activated through the presence of the viewer as she moves through the spaces. Horvat does not merely point at the physicality of the body, but treats it as a social and political subject, which experiences itself in relation to space, while in turn, the space is established through the body's experience, presence and movement. With that in mind, we can say that on one hand, the exhibition tackles the material reality and properties of space and objects; and on the other, it speaks to the current socio-political panorama, as a frame within and against which these works have to be read.