

Stephen Friedman Gallery

This Is Tomorrow
Holly Hendry: Wrot
Christopher Little
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this is tomorrow

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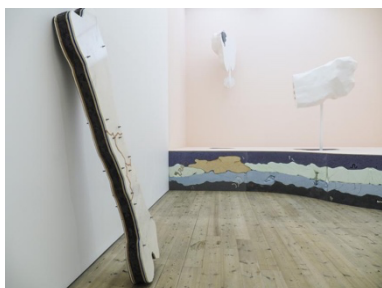


Image: Holly Hendry: Wrot, installation view at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, 2017. Photo: Mark Pinder/Meta-4

It is no exaggeration to say there are many layers to Holly Hendry's 'Wrot,' both literally and metaphorically. In her first major institutional exhibition, the emerging British artist presents an imaginative body of work that demonstrates her boldness and ingenuity. The towering space provided by BALTIC could have proved a daunting task to fill, but Hendry instead exploits the architecture, utilizing it to stage a grand diorama. It is one that makes the visitor feel as if they have been miniaturised as they explore and inspect an almost biological geology of curiosities.

A floor-based structure several feet in height has a pink surface that stretches out to meet three walls, from which point the colour climbs up to the ceiling. The cross-section of the structure that is exposed to the visitor reveals what looks like layers of gooey sedimentary rock. They ooze and roll over one another, each with their own pastel colour and characteristics. Artefacts and relics such as bones, screws, a plug and even a sock are entombed within. Hendry uses a range of materials to give each object and surface a different tactility, making everything either by hand herself or by having it cut using a water jet.

What lies above and below the surface is a concurrent theme that runs throughout, with Hendry also keen to explore that dichotomy in relation to the human body. The base structure could just as easily be biological tissue covered in pink skin, while there are gigantic bone fragments and teeth suspended high up over it. White poles keep these held in place, extending either out from the walls or from holes in the structure below, as if they had been extracted from the body itself. There is also a bone-shaped hole in the gallery's front wall, where you can see out in to the city beyond, a further play of interiority and exteriority.

Hendry may have drawn inspiration from medical journals, but her work is far from sterile. The surgical precision of her architectural cross-sections are offset by their caricaturesque form. From the quintessential dog bone buried within the structure to the exaggerated crack that runs through a huge bone resting against the wall, cartoon elements invigorate the exhibition with comic relief. Even the colours, which were used for their likeness to those found in the thermoplastics used for prosthetics, feel hyperreal. They twirl around logic and beguile the senses, their sugary appearance making Hendry's creations look almost edible.

However, a darker layer of meaning lurks beneath the confectionary-coloured strata. For concealed below the sweet hues is an exploration of rot, decay, and ultimately, death. By exposing what is out of sight, Hendry uses her creations to reveal the breakdown of things that hide below the surface: from the detritus under our feet, to the flesh and bones under our skin. 'Wrot' lays bare this process of deterioration and asks us to not only acknowledge its presence, but to also recognise it is inescapable. These themes undercut what could otherwise be a sugary-sweet aesthetic and, along with Hendry's playful style, create a multilayered experience that is full of intrigue and humour.