

Nicholas Brooks interviewed by Ellen Mara De Wachter on 26 October 2013

Ellen Mara De Wachter: Your videos often depict actions and objects which seem purposeful, and evoke a powerful sense of recognition or familiarity but which, in the end, refrain from giving the viewer any sense of clear narrative or explanation. How do you arrive at the elements in the videos and how do you begin to put them together in a sequence? Do you decide to avoid any narrative arc, or are you interested in any narrative that might be present appearing fragmented?

Nicholas Brooks: Actually, a lot of people do detect narratives where I might not have intended them and some of the pieces directly tackle a sort of narrative, but I am interested in narratives that don't have an arc; horizontal narratives that go beyond the duration of the film, temporally, and the limits of the screen, spatially. I think it also has to do with identifying with things that appear in films on the level of the image. When all the elements I am interested in have been articulated, I stop and sometimes that means the ending is before the ostensible conclusion of events as we might identify them. Likewise, the film might begin after the point at which we want to see things initiated. It's in the editing process, which takes place afterwards, that I get rid of things I don't consider necessary.

EMDW: This installation comprises a video element and a large table-like sculpture with works resting on it. A table is a standard display device, a convention of exhibition furniture, typically serving its purpose without calling attention to itself or having aesthetic value in its own right (although there are stylistic conventions in terms of how they are made). In your sculpture the table is part of the work and as such, it has a privileged position compared to most gallery supports. What has led you to make the work in this way and turn this functional element into an artistic one?

NB: It's something I think I've been holding off doing for some time, but it was becoming increasingly obvious that the work was suggesting it. Quite a few films I've made have taken place on a tabletop, in one way or another. And the scale of a lot of the objects I make belongs to the scale of the tabletop. More than that: in this work I am interested in the table as a space of occurrences, whereas other support structures like plinths are not such spaces. We can infer drama or different scenarios – and there is a certain familiarity – with the table. All sorts of casual juxtapositions take place, and we know tables as places in which things build up, and accrete, in ways that are not directly part of our negotiation with the world, but that are definitely remnants of those negotiations. The dynamic situation of a table, whether intended or not, is as much a subject of this work as the necessity of the content being as close to your face as I wanted it to be.

That's another thing about a table: it's a place where, more than most other venues, we are close to things, and we see them in detail. We may experience the juxtaposition of objects most vividly when we are sitting at a table. It's something to do with the scale of our scrutiny. We tend to direct our attention to what is directly in front of us, omitting things beyond. We are also used to doing this with the desktop of our computers. Some of the tile-like objects that appear on this table are perhaps crude iterations of virtual objects that might appear on a desktop.

EMDW: In a conversation we had a few months ago, you said 'I don't stand behind the things I've made, I just treat them as found', and you've referred to them as 'constructed remnants which are so brand new that they don't even have an origin.' For me, these statements imply on the one hand a strong affinity with disciplines such as

archaeology, in which people seek objects to explain the past, but on the other hand they suggest a quasi-spiritual respect for the objects, so rather than trying to understand or explain as an archaeologist would, we can treat them as autonomous or unconnected to any human agency or intention. Could you talk about your interest in investigative disciplines such as archaeology, and how they feed into your work?

NB: This is a strange moment, to find myself quoted back, because I don't really remember saying that. It's not that I wouldn't have said it, but not remembering it underlines the point, which is that some things I make are the result of very fleeting moments of insight, that I simply don't remember later. And looking back at them, they appear to me as quite enigmatic. That's something I welcome in the work. I'm also increasingly interested in a sort of wilful disregard in making, which comes out of drawing, where something revelatory comes out – not from somewhere else, or another time, but in the present and from very mundane materials, i.e. what's right in front of you and the tools you are using.

Archaeology is interesting, because it deals with the absolutely mundane, the most miserable fragment. It privileges obstinately material things, and considers them as part of a heterogeneous landscape of surfaces. So how much do you allow yourself to interpret or speculate? When there is something about the nature of a subject which completely exceeds the terms of your enquiry, this enquiry must adapt and shift in register but might also refrain from producing certain images. I find the pragmatism of archaeology useful as a mirror to the way I like to do things or see things. When I'm completely immersed in images and potential, this decision to refrain from speculation, and simply to

return to primary source material and to look is very familiar to me. There's an enjoyment in simply accepting the opacity of things. This is a sort of freedom in thinking that art allows.

EMDW: Jacquard weaving has an important place in the history of computing, because the cards used to control it operate on a binary system, which is the cornerstone of modern computing. In this work you depict an old factory and archival drawings related to jacquard designs. You've shot them with a high definition digital camera, so there is a clear line of filiation between the content of this work and its form, even though they might be perceived as unrelated. What led you to work with the subject matter of weaving?

NB: I came across a silk hand-weaving studio, and what interested me there was the mixture of technologies. There were very tactile wooden hand looms and beige 1970s style computers bolted onto the side of the looms, running programmes that affected the outcome of certain movements made with the body. I found the conjunction of these two moments of technology fascinating. This was like other works I have made, in which there were strange collisions of technological moments, seemingly distant in time, and this subject seemed to be asking for a similar treatment. From there I went to Gainsborough, a silk weaving factory in Suffolk, which still uses the jacquard system from the early 1800s, which runs on a punch card system. What they had there was an ark of machinery, a lot of it from the 1960s but made according to designs basically unchanged for over 100 years, running on a descendant of early computer systems. This system was being maintained by hand, the cards sewn together with string to feed into the machine. On a material level, it was incredible to witness and it really brought

to the fore the problem of what data might be, and what lengths we might have to go to in order to store it. There was something about the amount of physical data they had in this weaving factory that seemed to call into question what kind of labour we are involved in by making images and undertaking these acts of communication. The act of dissemination of one image here resembled the act of building a small house, the plans for which would entirely fill the garage.

I was caught by how the factory seemed to embody a certain moment in technological history that was prone and unstable, pointing to many different outcomes, some in which we might still be intimately involved in the materiality of data. Now this kind of materiality is almost completely sublimated by the digital.

Artist's presentation

Nicholas Brooks: Sunday 8 December, 3pm
Nicholas Brooks will screen video studies examining relationships between the machine and the body, followed by a discussion about ways in which the maker's experience might be encoded into manufactured objects.

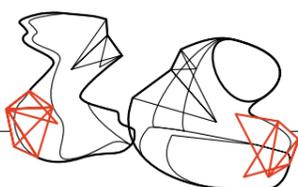
Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to presenting UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a commercial gallery. Taking the form of solo presentations, exhibitions will result from an open-ended invitation to exhibit new work.

Reverse: still from
end_stop_repeat_forget_series
stop_end_forget_series_repeat (2013)

176 Prince of Wales Road
London NW5 3PT
Opening times
Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm
Other times by appointment
FREE ENTRY

zabludowiczcollection.com

ZABLUDOWICZ
COLLECTION
LONDON
SARVISALO
NEW YORK



ZABLUDOWICZ
COLLECTION

Invites
NICHOLAS
BROOKS
7 NOVEMBER–
15 DECEMBER 2013