

only manifestation of Oiticica's radical conception of spectator participation took place outside the exhibition space, when Tate staged a workshop (last Bank Holiday Monday) in which visitors could make their own 'Parangolé' capes and dance around the Turbine Hall with samba dancers and a percussion band. The fact that so many people joined in who knew nothing of Oiticica's colour research raises a crucial question: can his work really be posthumously exhibited in traditional museum displays, and if so, how? 'I don't know what I am,' confessed Oiticica, hiding behind one of his 'Parangolé' capes in Cardoso's 1979 film. Don't listen to anyone who tries to tell you that they do. ■

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■ Christina Mackie

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As you round a large hedge and turn into Tate Britain's sculpture court, you are confronted by three large objects. Are they architecture or sculpture? It's not immediately clear. Parts of the forms are highly ambiguous and associative – is that a gazebo being held aloft by an upturned circus elephant? At first the forms appear baroque and surreal, but slowly the possibilities reduce and it becomes apparent what the shapes represent. These are small pavilions resting on amorphous, clay-like mounds that tilt at various angles, as if they have simply been tossed onto the court's raised slab of lawn.

The angle of the structures could have suggested the violent forces of natural disasters that hurl buildings into unstable poses, but they seem too playful for that. They are more like children's toys, and you half expect them to right themselves at any moment. Nevertheless, the lumpen blobs are disconcerting; they seem to pour upwards, contrarily lapping up over the bases of the pavilions, as if the objects were somehow made the other way up. While at first glance it may have seemed that the huts had been ripped out of the ground carrying large chunks of their earth foundations with them, there is no real evidence for this, and the more you look at them the clearer it becomes that these are purely fabricated objects.

The sculpture court at the front of Tate Britain is less grand than its name suggests. Nestled between the Thames-facing portico and the Clore Gallery entrance, it is a space that many visitors miss entirely. Being commissioned for a solo show at Tate Britain must be a thrill; being told it is in the sculpture court may take some of the shine away. Sculptures need to work hard to get any attention here.

For an artist such as Christina Mackie, whose work is often complex and fragile, such a commission provides an additional challenge, which she has responded to by shifting her working methods. Instead of her more recognisable assemblage constructions, here she has worked with a specialist production studio. The varied materiality of her usual practice is missing; gone are the nuanced shifts between artificial and natural materials, projections and constructions, found and personal items. Gone also are the makeshift cardboard-and-tape structures, the hand-formed lumps of modelling clay, the balanced rocks and make-do-and-mend construction techniques. These have been replaced by the fabricator's precision and a material deception.

While obviously alluding to an earthy clay, the physicality of the sculptures themselves is duplicitous. A surreptitious tap reveals the rigid, hollow echo of – most likely – fibreglass. The

surfaces have a light texture, presumably the result of a sprayed sand mixture, giving a consistent finish and homogeneity to the objects. Even the 'wooden' struts of the shelters and their tiled roofs have been sprayed; they are in disguise. This overriding synthetic quality gives the sculptures a weightlessness, an unreality that is heightened by their outdoor placement. Is this a side effect of a pragmatic decision about their construction, or an intentional conceptual inclusion? There are few clues to help the viewer resolve such questions.

Scale is another issue. The huts themselves are scaled-down versions of the sun shelters found on Gadani Beach in Pakistan (home to the largest ship-wrecking dock in the world during the 70s and 80s) near which Mackie worked in residency in 2006. Yet the lumpen bases appear to be scaled up – you can almost see the thumbprints where the shapes have been formed. In fact, these sculptures are enlargements of maquettes 20 times smaller; the huts were first made in miniature and then given bases of roughly modelled clay. Despite being collectively titled *The large huts*, the pavilions are too small for children, while the bases have been worked by giant's hands (and are reminiscent of Barry Flanagan's scaled-up 'Carvings' series from the early 80s that Tate holds in its collection). So these sculptures are twice-removed models of models.

The combination of these tricky changes – unconvincingly disguised materials, awkward shifts in scale – make the works incredibly slippery, as if they should be considered three-dimensional images rather than sculptures. And that's partly a clue as to why it is their placement, the way they are playfully scattered before the glowering stern classical façades of the gallery, that makes them work so well. The fact that the sculptures resemble some makeshift, improvised toys makes a mischievous kind of sense when you begin to notice all the eyes that look down on the sculpture court: the sphinx and winged-lion grotesques, the CCTV cameras (on the former site of a panopticon jail), the Gorgon's head that Perseus holds aloft in Henry C Fehr's 1893 bronze, *The Rescue of Andromeda*. These stiff gazes emphasise the fact that Mackie's work is not really to be experienced close up, but should be seen from a distance, and seen against the elements of its built surroundings, its *mise en scène*. The work is not three separate sculptures, but a tableau: visual echoes of both a wrecking beach where past industrial dreams were dismantled, and huts that shelter against a blazing light that London doesn't have, all joyfully haunting and taunting the eyes of the Victorian empire that look down upon it. ■

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Christina Mackie
The large huts 2007

