



Left: Christina Mackie, *Winter Pictures II* (detail), 2009, watercolor on paper, four parts, each 9 x 12 1/4".

Above: Christina Mackie, untitled work in progress, 2011-12, still from a color video, approx. 12 minutes. From *Painting the Weights*, 2012.

1000 WORDS

Christina Mackie

TALKS ABOUT *PAINTING THE WEIGHTS*, 2012
INTRODUCTION BY NICHOLAS CULLINAN



Left: Christina Mackie, *Figure 1*, 2007, polystyrene foam, Jesmonite, fiberglass matting, 49 1/2 x 98 1/2 x 48".

Right: Christina Mackie, *Sculpture of an idea of a painting of you*, 2009, plywood, paper, plastic, oil paint, fabric, board, watercolor, linen, magnet, dimensions variable.



WHY DO ATOMIC CLOUDS AND JELLYFISH LOOK ALIKE? One can imagine the London-based artist Christina Mackie posing this strange query to her viewers, because the unseen vectors of force—pressure, currents, gravity—behind such astonishing resemblances are the very stuff of her work. Take *suppression, repression, depression compression*, 1995, one of Mackie's best-known pieces. In this group of squashed polystyrene cups, which were compacted under increasing levels of air pressure in a laboratory and can be configured in a variety of ways, force is the true yet invisible medium. And while this is one of Mackie's more straightforward pieces, the cups become vessels through which to explore the larger sociopolitical resonances of physical phenomena. For Mackie, artistic genre and formal convention are largely irrelevant. She traffics instead in shape-shifting states of matter and energy—the categories of solid, liquid, and gas seeming far more important to her work than those of sculpture, painting, and video.

The result is a kind of metamorphosis in which images are fugitive, utterly dependent on their material support. For example, the artist sees watercolor, that most antiquated of mediums, not as a means of painting but rather as “particulate sculpture”: a mix of animal, vegetable, and mineral particles suspended in water. Which is exactly what it is, when you think about it. In the process, Mackie's watercolors manage to eke the marvelous out of the banal, as in her wall-mounted paper silhouettes *Shadow*, 2008. These derive in part from the use of *componimento inculto*, a painterly technique that embraces chance by detecting fully formed images in random shadows or stains on a wall.

Mackie also makes painted objects where the support is as important as the image to which it plays host. *Sculpture of an idea of a painting of you*, 2009, is a painting that can be unpacked from its “sculptural” box, forming a convertible spin on a Robert Rauschenberg Combine—albeit one in which Leo Steinberg's formulation of the “flatbed picture plane” is updated for the flat-pack era. *My depression*, 2003, is an amorphous painted mound resembling a polychrome gesso boulder, surmounted by droopy black leather petals and topped with a crystal ball, conjuring Mackie's frequent play between organic and inorganic, artificial and real. And *Figure 1*, 2007, is a nearly life-size polystyrene hippopotamus covered in dark blue Jesmonite resin that appears to be dripping onto the floor, as if the

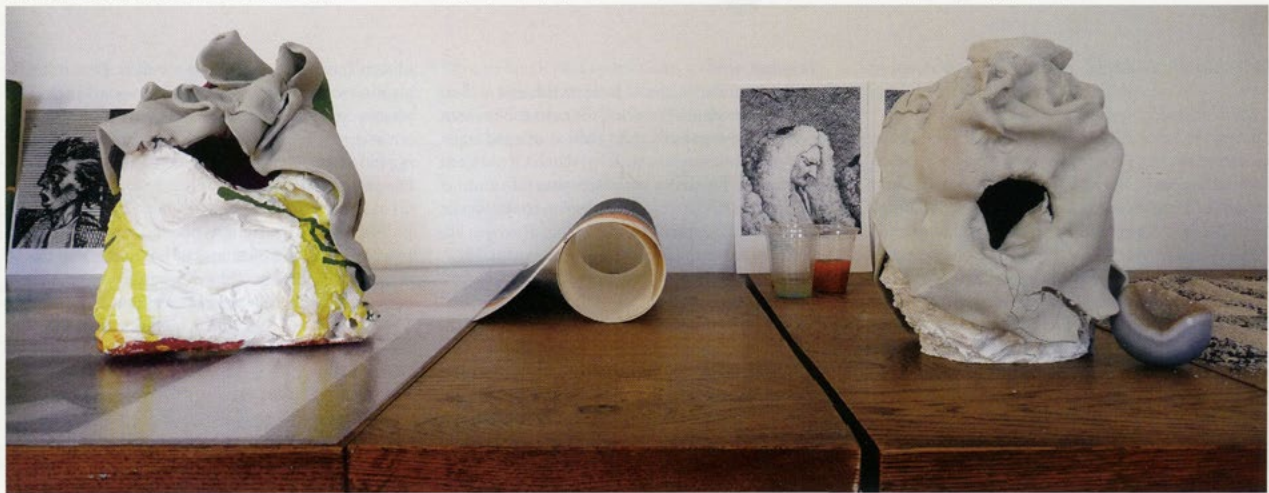
sculpture were dissolving into liquid form before our eyes, literally leaking away from any stable verisimilitude. This commutability is precisely the point: Mackie's images all occupy three dimensions, pushing painting into full objecthood just as sculpture may evaporate into the pictorial. Even her videos are sometimes embellished by rotoscope drawing, merging the hand-drafted with the digitally manipulated, or else grafting the analog onto the digital, as in *Breughel boots*, 1999, a melancholic meditation on the number of people who die each year on the London tube, their anonymous feet shuffling off to uncertain fates.

Recently, Mackie has pursued an even denser admixture of videos, things, and images. Her new exhibition “Painting the Weights” at Chisenhale Gallery, London, which travels to the Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, takes its title from a computer-animation technique that enhances realistic rendering of mass and movement. Fittingly, the show—which comprises one sprawling installation—promises a scientific and phenomenological probing of the disembodied digital world we live in, one that skewers the notion of the objective image. The project's architectural scaffolding adopts the form and function of an artist's studio, displaying works that explore how natural and man-made phenomena chime with one another. Volcanoes meet nuclear explosions and shadows cast in late afternoon light in a series of ink-jet prints. The physical shapes adopted by forces emerge in all their guises. One video features CGI objects falling through virtual space; another dwells on large-scale geologic formations, such as the interlocking basalt columns in Northern Ireland dubbed the Giant's Causeway. In this, Mackie's new work builds on her recent panoramic installation *The Judges*, 2010, a “Mnemosyne Atlas”—meets—carpenter's worktable that includes surfaces strewn with photographs, barely touched biomorphic clay mounds, and semiprecious stones such as agate and coral, all of which jostle for attention alongside videos and watercolors.

In lieu of an interview, Mackie here provides a diaristic text in which she evocatively mirrors the experiences and thought processes that, in turn, shape the physical stuff of her new work. Just as in her nuanced and recalcitrant tableaux, artifacts and meanings migrate from mind to thing, assemblage to assemblage, category to category.

—Nicholas Cullinan

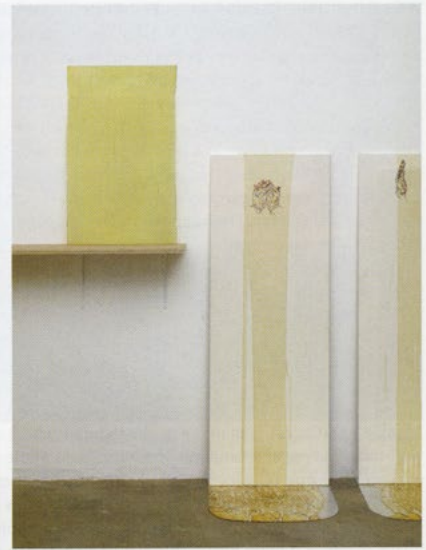
Christina Mackie, *The Judges* (detail), 2010, clay, plaster, papier-mâché, HD video, agate, coral, ink-jet prints, watercolor, carborundum, varnish, canvas, wood, gesso, plastics, photographs, steel, dimensions variable.





Above: Christina Mackie, *Us*, 2010–12, steel, fabric prints, magnets, glass, ink-jet prints, photocopies, picture frame, chairs, beer crates. From *Painting the Weights*, 2012. Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2012. Photo: Andy Keate.

I have put off bringing these substances together for so long it is hard to stay calm and quiet.



Left: Christina Mackie, untitled work in progress, 2011–12, still from a color video, approx. 3 minutes. From *Painting the Weights*, 2012.

Above: Christina Mackie, *Painting the Weights* (detail), 2012, glass, gesso, watercolor, marine varnish, Perspex. Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, London. Photo: Andy Keate.

CHRISTINA MACKIE

Monday

Things happened. Bridges were burned. Last year I set off looking for the reason. On my travels, I followed a valley down to a beautiful remote bay in New Zealand. At the back of the beach a piece of rusty equipment was propped up, with a notice identifying it as part of a boiler used to render ten thousand sheep a year into fat to be shipped out to sea. The old San Juan Island salmon cannery, long tables running with seawater and fish continually being sliced into slabs and forced into cans. You should pretend not to hear, refuse to see, and you better keep your mouth shut. I've been painting my hands in those gestures. Bodily scale is a problem—where am I? On which plane?

Tuesday

A scroll. There are images of bell jellyfish and nuclear tests, the forms similarly tracing the outline of a force, the shape of things here. And photos of aged trees, framed-up new houses on birds' wetland. Of old stone sculptures and big stones with faces shut into another dimension in time. Sheets of glass lean in front—flecks, waves, occluded, darkened—the roiling. Then one like honey. Like the varnish poured over the paintings.

Wednesday

As soon as you've spoken, the words move into the past. I will try again: from the left, light glass pictures paintings varnish mirrors; heads heads rocks sand minerals. Two monitors showing flyover/fly-through. The scale problem again—those minerals shot in macro—how small would we be, how big are we? How fast our passing? Turbulent thoughts.

Sculptures, then objects. Things in twos, pairs of

objects back-to-back. Two eyes each. Dark photographs of us tower dwellers hang on steel. On the phone, on the Internet: present but absent. The modernist dream in steel and glass, yet materiality leaching out of life, leaving scraps, temporary belongings. People leaving.

Thursday

I went out to the hinterland of the city to buy wood to make supports for the tables. Anxious gathering of materials. Can't breathe. The glass: THE GLASS. The wood: THE WOOD. I have put off bringing these substances together for so long it is hard to stay calm and quiet.

Friday

Climbing a triangle, the ever-receding top of the cone, steeply up the sharp gray shingle on all fours, a yellow crust and noxious fumes at the top. The volcanologist

Below: Christina Mackie, untitled work in progress, 2011–12, still from a color video, approx. 12 minutes. From *Painting the Weights*, 2012.

Right: Christina Mackie, *Judges 2*, 2010, sketch, ceramic, watercolor, minerals, inkjet print. From *Painting the Weights*, 2012. Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2012. Photo: Andy Keate.



spent his research life alone on lava flows, thinking about the similarity in the flow pattern of lava and the low waves of dust billowing out along the ground from the base of nuclear explosions.

Sheets of handmade glass lean in front of image sets. Images are the real materials. Nuclear fusion is the shape of all reaction. A breath, the sun, even the shape of water taken on by a being moving through it. Scientific illustrations of jellyfish from 1850 and 1950. An advertising image from the 1970s using the scientific style of that era, precision ink dots. The unbiased image shifts.

Images printed on a long scroll.

Saturday

Byzantine wall paintings made with patches of green earth, red clay, ocher, with lines of lampblack and cinabar dots. My hands painted that way look blotchy, pressed to my head to stop my senses responding. You

have to break past restrictions, to be in the world.

It is possible to see a face in anything. Test this by making “anything”: Without ego, throw the material together, controlling just the force used. Put it in the fire.

A mahogany slab, its surface rippled with a sharp gouge.

Monday

In the corner of the gallery sit crates, chairs, and photos. Work happened, our lives happened.

Monitors sit under the mahogany: On one, objects move, rendered as shadow or line. Some are things present in the room, some are not. They are falling and being acted on by forces. On the other monitor, starting with a detailed view of minerals on a shelf nearby in the room, the rock turns, becomes a landscape, and the viewer shrinks to the size of a fingernail. The action moves to a geologic site where large crystals—each one

foot across—emerge from the sea, as though we did indeed enter that crystalline landscape.

On other tables lie objects made of elements that have been gathering in the studio, some of them for years: the bottom of a drawer, gear wheels, door furniture, cedar shakes, odd hinges, moped lights—embodiments of all that time being stored and dusty and dented. A rotating beacon, a chrysanthemum, a pomegranate.

Hanging on steel, views of a city seen from the seventeenth floor. Are the other residents visiting workers like me? We are at the computer most of the time. The world is beer crates and camping chairs.

Different versions of the studio are presented: Inside the monitors, implied space and edited time; on the trestle tables, the clay sketches and composite objects of the workshop; on a shelf, image resources document traveling and reading. Around everything, materials accumulate. □