

Leslie

**Tim Creaves**

*Roses Like Manure, Roses Like Manure*

Opening: 09.03.2018

Exhibition: 10.03. – 13.04.2018

Tim Creaves isn't sure if he wants his parents to see this exhibition. Drawing together a host of contradictory impulses and reference-points, the show presents a new body of work that simultaneously longs for and sneers at a particular form of English traditionalism metaphorically bound-up with the "heritage"-brick textures of the artist's own childhood in the Chilterns.

Not that Creaves isn't highly appreciative of that world, with its lovely landscapes and picturesque villages, elegant mansions and gardens, and tasteful modern-day architectural interventions built in strict accordance with the ideals of an imagined past. He loves too those particularly English inflections of modernism that arose unexpectedly from within it, from the pastoral surreal of Paul Nash to the organic abstractions of Barbara Hepworth to the anguished geometry of Francis Bacon.

The aesthetic of the works themselves, however – sculptural arrangements of carefully-fashioned polystyrene forms adorned with garish colours on makeshift plinths, subtly-distressed coffee-cups and Altbau-style imitation stone cornices reclaimed from the streets of Berlin, kitschy flashing CIFs – have less to do with the specificities of Englishness than a catch-all cosmopolitanism; the allusions here are to scruffy hipster bars, provisionalist gallery installations and ironic Memphis-style BVC sneakers, along with the artist's own excitement at finding a 1980s rattan plant-stand abandoned on a side-street of his adopted home.

Creaves' practice is driven by a fascination with materials and processes, often encompassing an "earnest labour" motivated by a genuine longing for authenticity. Yet the process thrives on its own contradictions: rigorously applying a "truth-to-materials" approach to a piece of a stone facade that's actually made of polystyrene before embellishing it with colours opportunistically marketed by high-end paint manufacturers using names alluding to a bye-gone age such as "Air-Force Blue" and "Manor House Grey". Nevertheless, the works are realised with a degree of skill, refinement and attention to detail that belies their origins in the throwaway or the thrown-away.

Underpinning the work's interweaving aesthetic is a delicate tension between criticality and seduction. Creaves readily acknowledges that the work reflects his own desires: he savours its references and takes pleasure in their playful appropriation. But he's also wary of their superficiality, suspicious that it might all be a bit fabricated and, as he puts it, "window-dressy": their allure remains something of a guilty pleasure.

Creaves is torn between wanting us to despise all this stuff and wanting us to love it. The memory of those Chilterns bricks is borne out of such an ambivalence, reflected in the final line of The Rebel's snarling punk skewering of national pride, *Your English*:

In England we are driven against our good desires,  
driven to become a race of fucking liars.  
[...] Stop feeling guilty, stop feeling insecure;  
be fragile, warm and gentle –  
roses like manure, roses like manure.

Dave Ball