

DOMINIQUE REY

FOYER GALLERY, SURREY INSTITUTE OF ART AND DESIGN

Dominique Rey
trans-parent



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Luminous and serene, Dominique Rey's 'glasshouse' asserts its presence through layers of shimmering ambiguity. The solidity of the structure is juxtaposed with water, constantly flowing, and the ephemerality of sugar crystals which slowly dissolve. Constant movement interplays with a sense of stillness; fragility co-exists with a yearning for permanence, for the eternal. The passing of time is evoked in the work by the regular dripping of water. As the water is continuously recycled, by means of a pump, the notion of time portrayed becomes cyclical rather than linear.

The inscription of wallpaper patterns onto the glass panels is a curious act of both concealment and revelation. While wallpapering usually connotes a covering over of what existed before, here the existing glass surface is still visible and one can look through the wallpaper to an intimate interior space. Dominique has used the wallpaper motif in earlier works, symbolising both domesticity and the layering of histories and memories. Here, intricate and decorative, the frosted patterns seem to connote lace curtains or perhaps a veil, and make reference to both English and Islamic traditions.

This work was made after the artist's first visit to Iran where she spent time with relatives, and evokes her encounter with a culture both familiar and strange. The glass panels are further embellished with silhouetted images taken from

photographs, and with depictions of various forms of vessel, both ancient and modern, whose symbolic potency Dominique became aware of as she travelled through Iran. The large pieces of crystallised sugar allude to the heightened sweetness of flavours she tasted while she was there. Sugar, salt and oil, materials encountered in abundance, are all incorporated into the texture of the work. With its shimmering and reflective layers of glass, silver leaf and stencilled imagery, this elaborately decorated and domed glasshouse resonates with numerous references. The work simultaneously evokes the tranquil authority of a religious monument, the intimacy of a personal shrine, and the sensuous pleasures of a decorative formal garden.

Dominique has suggested that this work, while still alluding to the personal, marks a more explicit engagement with universal themes. Various pathways can be traced between the different bodies of work. Many take the form of boxes or containers. A series of lightboxes exists as a collection of personal histories and memories. Containing photographs and various items of ephemera, they are like little studies, the imagined precursors to more precise portrayals. Dominique is intrigued by the obsolete, the forgotten or abandoned, and at how elements which are at once familiar can be made to seem strange, sinister even. She has made a number of works which incorporate kitchen utensils; a cheese

grater, for example, takes on the appearance of a grille or screen. There is a poignancy about the teapot lids which embellish various works. Without the teapot, the lid is useless, an obsolete form which has been rescued by the artist and given new meaning.

Many of the objects Dominique employs seem to inhabit an in-between space, where meanings and definitions are not fixed but seem to be in transition. She has made a series of works which are casts of Baby Belling ovens. While the oven is a universal symbol of comfort and hospitality there is something eerily lonesome about these works, a suggestion of things being out of place. The ovens become containers for mementoes, photographs, memories - they are curiously transformed, disassociated from their traditional use. They are somehow precious, as if the objects contained within are being carefully preserved, waiting to be rediscovered and reclaimed.

Dominique places a lot of importance on the materials she uses. Often richly textured and worn, they seem to be inscribed with their own complex histories. While her earlier work resonates with feelings of displacement and tangled narratives contained within boxes, her current work seems to be more optimistic, perhaps even celebratory. The 'container' has been opened up into a transparent glass structure whose interior, although veiled

by various decorative layers, is accessible. A desire for transparency and clarity was fundamental to the development of this work. One of the reasons for Dominique's visit to Iran was to see beyond the smokescreen of media representations and political agendas to discover a truer, more open narrative. Another motivation for her journey was to visit relatives she had never met. This dual desire is expressed through the play on words in the title **trans-parent**; a search for clarity is combined with a tracing and crossing of relatives from different cultural backgrounds.

Central to the work is a concern with the resilience and strength of the seemingly fragile. In the face of adversity and historical upheaval, the rhythms of individual lives assert their presence. The lyrical and the sensuous co-exist with the monumental. Yet, while there is in the work a celebration of fluidity and individuality, there exists simultaneously an almost fatalistic acceptance of the relentless passage of time over which we have no control. Through the subtle interplay of light and shadow, the delicate threading of the translucent with the opaque, Dominique Rey has constructed a powerful space of intersections resonant with numerous meanings and associations.

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