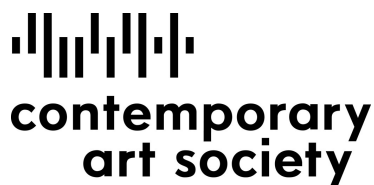


THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Douglas, Caroline. 'Michael Landy: Scaled Down at Thomas Dane Gallery'. *Contemporary Art Society Online*. 19 October 2018



Michael Landy: Scaled Down at Thomas Dane Gallery



Installation view of Michael Landy: Scaled Down at Thomas Dane Gallery. Photographer: Ben Westoby

Interviewed by the BBC about the burning of excess stock by British fashion house Burberry, Tim Jackson, Head of the British School of Fashion pinpointed the dilemma faced by the successful multi-national brand: "...to satisfy shareholders, they have to keep expanding even if that risks diluting their identity and creating excess stock." The raw commercial realities of the fashion business are a million miles away from the carefully created image of a venerable company that got a bit hip. Until the wanton destruction of products designed to inspire retail lust provoked a howl of outrage. Then, suddenly the whole idea of value is thrown into question.

In his new exhibition Michael Landy has effectively destroyed his own inventory. Works from the last decade and more have been thrown into an industrial compacter and emerged, cubed, seemingly ready for landfill. In the gallery, a field array of the cubes is neatly arranged, the smallest nearest to the entrance, the largest at the back. As with his famous Market exhibition at Building One in 1990, the work borrows the formal language of American minimalism and the grid layouts of artists such as Donald Judd and Sol Lewitt.

Here, each cube is composed from a single work, or body of work, so that they put one in mind of the thumbnail images in the back of a catalogue raisonnée. As in those images, work is referenced but is finally inaccessible – one is thrown back on the memory of other exhibitions, other bodies of work. Drawings for the project for London Underground in 2010 Acts of Kindness have gone into the compacter and make a pitifully small cube. From the same year, remnants of the Jean Tinguely-inspired project Homage to New York produce a lumpier result. Original drawings from various iterations of the Breaking News series – New York and London – become crisper red and white forms. Sculpture and collages on canvas from the Saints Alive project for the National Gallery do not escape either.

Michael Landy has long been fascinated by the processes of production, trade and disposal. His most famous work remains Breakdown, what writer Richard Shone referred to as a single "annihilating vision", in which the artist destroyed every last thing that he owned. At the heart of the act of destruction were the notions of labour and value.

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It was paradoxically a huge and exhausting task to undertake the systematic atomisation of all his worldly belongings; Landy's practice has been characterised throughout by intense and often highly repetitive labour. In *Scaled Down* he takes years of work – physical and intellectual – and violently transforms it into mere matter. The work of art fetishised as precious object, as trace of the hand of the artist genius, as commodity, is sardonically lampooned. Landy's work has always had a strong political dimension so, far from prompting a melancholic contemplation of ruin, *Scaled Down* seems to comment sharply on the ability of art to effect change in the world.

And then of course the timing and positioning of this new exhibition are very precisely judged: one imagines that Landy's long-time dealer Thomas Dane may have raised an elegant eyebrow when he first heard the details of the show. Of course the artist is aware that he is inextricably connected to the market but to open at the beginning of Frieze week created the perfect context for the complex of issues that this new work raises. If one were feeling cynical, then the art fair and all its satellite events and activity, might legitimately make one think about consumption and over-supply in the marketplace.

Scaled Down shows Landy at his most caustically, brilliantly witty. It is a breathtakingly unsentimental gesture that perfectly encapsulates the issues that have exercised him for three decades. The artist's voice is literally present in the show, emanating from the remains of *Closing Down Sale*, 1992-2016, that you may remember seeing only very recently in the RA Summer Exhibition. Landy mimics the relentless patter of the costermonger haranguing the public to buy at knock-down prices. The original work was a shopping trolley piled with neon coloured bargain signs, teddy bears and other random, assorted goods, and there is something hilarious about the fact that Landy continues to shout at us, post-compacter. As he says: "Walk in 'ere sad, send you out smilin'".

Nothing short of brilliant.

Caroline Douglas
Director



Installation view of Michael Landy: *Scaled Down* at Thomas Dane Gallery. Photographer: Ben Westoby

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<http://www.contemporaryartsociety.org/news/friday-dispatch-news/michael-landy-scaled-thomas-dane-gallery/>

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