

## THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Hettie Judah, 'In London, Art That Transforms — While It's on View', *The New York Times Style Magazine*, 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017



*An installation view of Anya Gallaccio's "Beautiful Minds," 2017. Credit: Thomas Dane Gallery, London*

This month in London, two gallery exhibitions are offering very different experiences each time you return: One artwork is being left to build itself, while another invites its own destruction. The latter, Urs Fischer's "The Kiss," is an outsized white Plasticine model of Rodin's masterpiece, which Fischer has asked visitors to pick apart and reshape over the course of its month-long exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ. Meanwhile, for her show "Beautiful Minds," showing at neighboring Thomas Dane Gallery, the artist Anya Gallaccio has built a custom 3D ceramic printer and programmed it to construct a clay model of Devils Tower, Wyo. The end result will look like a giant extruded coil pot.

Visiting the Fischer work just before the show opened last week, "The Kiss" was pristine, and even plausibly marble-like. Gallery staffers pointed out the solidity of the sculpture: Due to the weightiness of its material (Plasticine is most often used as modeling clay by children), the work had to be shown on a plinth to protect the floor. The material was so densely packed that they suggested visitors would be hard-pressed to leave more than a nail mark.

At first, all was civilized as the show opened for a private preview — but as beer flowed and inhibitions fell away, visitors' engagement with the Plasticine became more involved. Extremities were eventually removed from the sculpture, a face was remodeled, and homunculi emerged from a variety of body parts. Over coming days, successive waves of visitors have followed differing impulses. From the hands of some came attempts to patch the sculpture back together; others dispersed the material still further, reshaping it into slogans and simple shapes licking across the walls and onto the front window.

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Gallaccio's "Beautiful Minds," for all its comparative mess and noise, has instead been met with reverent fascination. As gallery assistants feed wet clay into the pumping vat, visitors watch, enthralled, as the printer makes its more or less messy procession around a network of hexagonal grids that echo the basalt columns of Devils Tower. Previous works by Gallaccio have involved irreversible transformation: salt melting a route through ice, flowers and fruit decaying. As with Fischer's "Kiss," all have involved the artist establishing a scenario and then stepping away from it. "You set these things in play and then see what happens — I don't interfere if it goes wrong," Gallaccio says. "If the clay starts pouring on the floor, then that's what is happening."

Fischer sees his "Kiss" as an ongoing collaboration: an artwork constantly being remade, or maybe a series of temporary artworks. Unlike his melting candle sculptures, which burn and disappear, the transformation of Rodin's lovers will continue throughout the running time of the exhibition. However extreme or conservative the visitors' response, Fischer sees their remodeling of the Plasticine as having equal status to the form it commenced in. And when the month is over, the work will be, too.

"Beautiful Minds" will likewise end as the structure it builds is completed. The clay pumped into it is destined to be broken up and recycled: the structure is too big to leave the gallery in one piece, too pocked with bubbles to endure firing. "I like the absurdity, that we build this mountain and then it has to be destroyed," Gallaccio says. For her, the combination of computer-guided machine, ancient material and hands-off making begs the question of where her act of creation begins and ends: "What is the object," she asks, "and what is the artwork?"

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/06/t-magazine/art/urs-fischer-anya-gallaccio-sculpture.html?\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/06/t-magazine/art/urs-fischer-anya-gallaccio-sculpture.html?_r=1)