



Art | Ian Kiaer: *Tooth House* – challenging canonised standards of how we view Art



This spring the Henry Moore institute presents Ian Kiaer's *Tooth House*, an insight into the surreal world of Kiaer as he subtly challenges the art institutions canonised standards of how we view Art. Having previously exhibited at the international Venice and Berlin Biennale Kiaer has established himself as a notable voice in the contemporary art world. His medium is repurposed objects that are rarely manipulated from the 'moment' they initialise interest to when they are exhibited. By giving the objects a new lease of life Kiaer asserts a new identity to them that is distant to the identity prefabricated by society. For example, *Black Tulip, offset, stain* is a table top from his studio that is presented in a traditionalist sense by being hung upon the gallery wall. Kiaer spoke of objects being 'in a state of becoming' until that 'as if' moment. He realised when working on other art works upon the table that it was actually the table top that contained the most creative interest. He realises the creative potential in objects that were previously regarded as mundane.

By repurposing objects Kiaer attests the classical standards that are previously given in painting and sculpture. Gone are the days of chronologically organised art hung upon the gallery wall. In *Tooth House: plinth*, 'a plinth that was possible for him,' Kiaer has abbreviated his personal interpretation of classical sculpture. It consists of a plinth, complete with a gold sculpture atop. The only difference is the plinth is a previously discarded piece of polystyrene and the sculpture is a modest piece of crumpled gold foil. It fools the viewer's expectations in the language of the title. The exhibition is humorous in this approach as Kiaer plays upon the previous notions of 'What art is' and with what knowledge do we approach it?

More drastic challenges to these notions are apparent and some works demand an encounter that can be far more challenging. *Tooth House: Shadow* is the bladder of a ball that has been appropriated to look alike to a building or model cast in shadow. It's so small in comparison to the gallery space you could easily trip up over it, and yet it holds its space because it demands a question of relationality from the viewer. What is it? What is its purpose in this space? Why is it there?

Kiaer does relieve the viewer of these challenges by occasionally harking back to Art in the traditionalist sense. Having his roots as a painter it seems integral to him as an artist to do so. Certain pieces are hung upon the gallery wall in a classical style and an empty paint hook makes up a component to one of the works. Though this is raising awareness to the idea of 'the painting' it is also deliberating an absence of the classical form. Finally, my favourite piece of the exhibition was *a.r.nef, verticle*. Consisting of a plastic sheet dispersed with silver leaf, the piece was hung from the sky light ceiling of the gallery and reached to the floor in a cascading manner. The work ultimately offers the classical notion of the Beautiful to the viewer and is easily one of the most aesthetically pleasing works in the exhibition.

Entitled after a project by architect and designer Frederick Kiesler's (1890-1965) *Tooth House* was originally a surrealist architectural work. It was showcased at a landmark exhibition *Art of This Century*, in 1942 at the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery. Renowned for his Utopian concepts, the work strove to unify the architectural elements of the wall, floor and ceiling that had been segregated by previous architectural standards. Inspired by the structure of the human tooth, Kiesler wanted to combat the segregation and create a 'total environment' for experiencing art instead. I can only assume influences such as these are due to Kiaer's educational background, having studied at The Royal College of Art and London's Slade. He comes across as very well read and it is influences such as Kiesler's that have led to the interdisciplinary nature of his art work.

Tooth House presents the surreal world of Ian Kiaer that seemingly contests our previously learnt knowledge of how we approach the art object. Though I personally loved it, the prowess of Kiaer's work is based upon the implicit meaning of the individual encounter to his art work, demonstrated in the banal titles of his work which, generally, don't impose any presupposed meaning upon the viewer through language. So, all I can do is firmly suggest you pop down to the Henry Moore Institute before the end of June to gain your experience of Kiaer's brilliant work.

Tooth House is showing at the Henry Moore Institute from 20th March – 22nd June 2014.

Image: © Ian Kiaer, Photo: Jerry Hardman-Jones