

transmogrify with successive generations. The evolution of representation itself is also inferred, as a series of abstracted geometric forms – which, in the Preacher's slide show represent various human sufferings – deteriorate and atrophy with each repetition. In this way, Thomas's surreal dystopia ostensibly repudiates any possibility of redemption.

The theme of mutation continues in the second chamber, where, circumscribed by a curtain of glistening purple strips, stands an abstracted version of the tree of knowledge seen in the film. Speakers concealed in its branches broadcast a hushed and distorted reading of the original tract, which at times is barely audible against the overspill of sounds from the adjacent chamber. Also here is the Preacher's slide show screen, onto which is projected an elaborate version of the hypnotic test card seen earlier. Despite being enjoyably kooky, compared with the force of the film the content of this second chamber feels largely superfluous.

To find an artist willing to tackle the elephant in the room is extremely refreshing; nevertheless, unlike *Return of the Black Tower*, whose strength lay in its subtleties, Thomas's treatment of the issues in *All Suffering* is somewhat heavy-handed. Watchtower rhetoric may be an easy target, but Thomas's satire is arguably at times as emotive and prescriptive as the material she is critiquing. The artist's disdain for religion is clear, but should disagreeable dogmas (however dubious or odious) really be expunged by beating them over the head with a proverbial spade?

Who has the right to rule, and whose rule is right? This is the question that is left ringing in our ears. ■

DAVID TRIGG is a writer and critic based in Bristol.

■ Angela de la Cruz: *After* Anna Maria Maiolino: *Continuous* Camden Arts Centre London 1 April to 30 May

Camden Arts Centre's simultaneous hosting of solo shows by the Italian-born Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino (b1942) and the London-based Spaniard Angela de la Cruz (b1965) is exhilarating and playful. The surprising objects brought together in the two exhibitions raucously parade their excessive objecthood in very different ways. 'After' and 'Continuous' indicate the concern both artists have with time. Both experiment with the temporal experience of materials and categories, working in series. One way to distinguish between their approaches would be to say that Maiolino stages the compulsive continuity of our desire for objects and for artistic labour, while de la Cruz reworks the traumatic aftermath of the collapse of modernist medium specificity. But there can be no straightforward opposition here. De la Cruz also explores the continual mutations of myriad situated encounters, and Maiolino's installation is also an 'after'-site, a cemetery of accumulated physical labour. The artists work through the legacies



Anna Maria Maiolino
Continuous 2010

of post-minimalism and neo-concretism, weaving these histories into fresh forms. Both make what could be called sub-objects: de la Cruz's works theatrically apologise for this condition; Maiolino's don't.

Maiolino's installation *Continuous* is unapologetic. We enter a room in which thousands of clay *orecchiette* cling like molluscs to chicken wire on the walls, listening for our reaction with bated breath. We are entering a store-room of Maiolino's (collaborative) labour. There, organised in neat rows, provoking associations ranging from the window-display of a bakery to a basement full of stock-piled weapons, we find hundreds of clay sausage and crescent shapes, slices and balls. These and other indecently moist excremental forms lie innocently arranged upon the upper shelf of a series of work surfaces. The lower shelves house an underclass of more unruly or perturbing forms, a teeming undercurrent vying for our attention: fat sausages and petrified snaking loops. Despite their base associations and their lack of finish, the forms have a homely appeal. We want to touch them. We imagine the pleasurable sensation – the natural process – of rolling the clay ourselves. Matter-of-factly arranged according to a logic of their own, awaiting unspeakable consumption, the specimens successfully defy linguistic categorisation. Natural material

parades its legitimacy: it will turn to dust and be recycled.

De la Cruz's objects are more post-industrial, although their scale gives them that sense of bodily address that Michael Fried notoriously found 'theatrical' in Minimalism. De la Cruz's objects are broken and awkward. Their expressive qualities are more bound up with language but their titles betray rather than ennoble them. Rather than the lofty associations of the sort we might find in, for example, a Howard Hodgkin painting such as *Venice Evening*, de la Cruz's titles condemn the objects they designate to serve as sites of existential angst and its displacement. *Nothing*, 1998, is a black, crumpled heap of canvas, abandoned on the floor near the entrance; *Homeless*, 1996, is broken and off-yellow, installed awkwardly in a corner; *Flat*, 2009, has collapsed, the metal legs of the orange plastic chair splayed out beneath it. While such gestures of deflation may resonate with the 'soft sculpture' of Claes Oldenburg, what sets these objects apart from such predecessors is their failure even to be cool or deadpan. They also fail to be beautiful, unlike, say, Rauschenberg's 'Gluts', 1986-95. De la Cruz's titles are too emotive – the objects are still yearning to represent something more than what they are. But her recycled filing cabinets seem less resurrected than martyred, their gallery installation marking a second death. As such, her objects invite our pity, and, perhaps, our self-pity.

Two adult-sized one-man wardrobes, like crucified coffins, form *T-Piece*, 2010. No amount of lurid oil paint or acrylic would succeed in sprucing them up. Instead, they appear pinned to the wall, 'sprawling on a pin'. They materialise the condition described in TS Elliot's *Lovesong of J Alfred Prufrock*: 'The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase / And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, / Then how should I begin / To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways? / And how should I presume?' How

should I presume, the objects seems to ask, as we fix them with a stare.

If minimalist objects pointed out that the business of gallery going entailed a 'performance of viewing', as Alex Potts put it, the installations at Camden Arts Centre invite us to analyse and to consider our physical (Maiolino) and emotional (de la Cruz) investments in looking. These objects suggest that at some point in the future it may even be legitimate – once more – to reconfigure the experience of viewing in relation to the matrix of emotion, rather than having always to navigate the discursive apparatus of 'affect'. How do we *feel* about being part of a perverse mechanism via which we instantly understand that if an object is labelled 'nothing' it has transcended the condition of nothingness? Here, at least, is an army of what Boris Arvatov might have referred to as 'comrade objects', to enlist in such existential and conceptual quandaries.

There are also some unforgettable short films by Maiolino in the side room. These are succinct, filmic dissections, evoking the mouth as a cannibalising orifice in the classic *INOUT*, shot on Super 8 in 1973, to the intensity of an egg contest in *+ - = -*, 1976, to carefree domesticity in *QUAQUARAQUAQUA*, 1999/2009. Several films include experimental scores that are, in themselves, worth the trip to the gallery. ■

KLARA KEMP-WELCH is Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at The Courtauld Institute of Art.

■ Art Sheffield Life: A User's Manual

various venues Sheffield 6 March to 1 May

Angela de la Cruz
Super Clutter 2006



Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum is a coalition formed to raise the city's profile as a locus for contemporary art, to build audiences for art and to provide opportunities for artists based in the city. During the past decade, SCAF has organised a series of biennale-style exhibition projects. These now comprise a single exhibition spread across civic, independent and artist-run exhibition spaces, in which artists with an international profile are shown with, and unsegregated from, Sheffield-based artists. Sometimes they are the same artists. Part of the distinctive experience of viewing Art Sheffield is the act of perambulating between the six city-centre exhibition spaces within which it happens, venturing away from the shops and into Sheffield's hidden post-industrial hinterland.

In 2008 the internationally peripatetic art critic Jan Verwoert was invited to provide a framing commentary for the event, collaborating on its realisation with SCAF and the artists. The mind-tickling text he wrote provoked considerably more interest than hitherto. He also introduced a retrospective element, interestingly positioning within the exhibition examples of East European conceptual art from the 1970s. This idea has been perpetuated by the 2010 Netherlands-based co-curators Frederique Bergholtz and Annie Fletcher. One outcome of their interest in examining the legacies of feminism is the interpolation within their selection, amongst other things, of Susan Hiller's analytical study of 305 picture postcards, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists*, 1976. It was Hiller's installation, in fact, which was the starting point for this whole project. Otherwise