

## Veneer

Lyell Bary, Anne Harry, Katie Moore, Steven Rendall & Constanze Zikos

Curated by Christine Morrow

Blindside

21 October – 6 November 2004

### UnMagazine

Veneer is a fake take on nature, a covering that is all surface and doesn't hold solid. Something you might use to camouflage something else, or to make it appear as other than it is. Mimicking the look of wood, it's not the real thing – stuff leaks from behind or under, the veneer cracks. With few pretensions to resemblance or deception, veneer is an iteration in low-tech from real to artificial. Manufactured to delight us with its deliberately decorative quality, veneer is non-eventful to the point of being almost invisible. Rigorous in its looseness, it is a kind of ornamentation tempered by restraint.

In this exhibition, curated by Christine Morrow, artists Lyell Bary, Anne Harry, Katie Moore, Steven Rendall and Constanze Zikos incorporate wood grain in their work. It appears in various guises – actual and simulated – as vinyl, laminate, veneer, hand-painted wood grain and plywood.

In Katie Moore's life-sized *Bench* and *Shears & Stones*, ordinary things suggestive of some kind of usage are transposed to the gallery site. You might for a moment consider sitting on the bench but then you understand that the foam seat would collapse; the clippers cannot be plied or sharpened; the stones are ringed with pale wood grain. Alluding to a sense of time and organic formation, these artifacts – like wood – contain their own history. There is a sensual delight in the intrinsic nature of the forms and materials, and a sense of slowness due to process. Joins and cuts in the *Contact* are obvious. With no attempt at disguise, Moore proposes 'mimicry without deception'.<sup>1</sup>

Constanze Zikos' installation *Joy in Kleptomani*a is reminiscent of a looted church interior where painted flecks mimic cool marble. A self-conscious translation, Zikos's veneer is a vertical patterning in foil vinyl that imitates the vocabulary of masonry. The intimate grandeur of this piece is devotional. Two open-ended columns border the window in runs of silver and grain, while the window frames a view of the city's cultural sites – museum, station, river and shrine. A mock temple – perhaps a sacrament to everyday living and our devotion to cultural edification, this work refers to the processes by which culture is reiterated across different contexts and histories.

Lyell Bary and Anne Harry engage with the suggestive quality of 'natural' wood grain by effacing it. In Bary's *Cuckoo II* the intersection between an Ellsworth Kelly drawing and the lines of wood grain in the plywood support offers a basis for composition that is unique and random. Crossings are rearticulated as flowing stencil-like shapes in purples and black that resemble parts of the body, leaves or flowers. Working with beech veneer in an ornamental grid formation, Anne Harry scorches the surface to submerge the grain. This blackness loosens the formula. Subtle shifts in the lie of the veneer, along with circular modulations pressed randomly into some of the tiles, allow for a delicate play of variation and repetition.

The deliberate slap-dash sketchiness of Steven Rendall's work defies hierarchical distinctions between real and fake. Like Moore, Rendall's works confuse their referents: part-painting, part-sculpture, *Caulfield #4* is an ashtray made from assorted combustible materials, a humorous memorial to the passing of time. A veneer shadow falls on a mock shelf and crawls up the wall behind like smoke. The cigarette filters made with cork effect contact add faux to faux. The title alludes to the artist's interest in formalism, transposition and artistic lineage.

The camouflage effect is disturbing in Rendall's paintings of imitation wood grain. *F.A.* is a painterly collage of an artist's studio where the subject is 'grained-out' against the gridded studio space to become a veneer simulacrum peeled away from the canvas, revealing the underside. This visual confusion between painted world and wood grain relates to the equivalent nature of adhesive laminate.<sup>2</sup> In *Tears, Abuse and Accusations of Subterfuge* veneer acts as counterfeit, obliterating the subject – a man with two dogs standing in an unidentified location whose very image renders him invisible. *Monkey Painter* presents the artist as 'ape', mechanically replicating veneer on a roll, toying with ideas of representation, iteration and the natural.

Playful in its upending and refusal of traditional hierarchies, *Veneer* is not about illusion or immersion. It is not about an orchestrated emotional response. It unravels. All of the works speak of a kind of archaeology of memory. Any trickery is deliberate and transparent. A grotesque structural vocabulary in many of the works lends an arbitrary logic to the way in which strategies and processes transpose and carry private meanings and predilection. Low-tech methods of construction and materials point to the conventions that define everyday living and to the space where mistranslation is possible and creative.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Morrow, *Veneer*, exhibition catalogue, Blindside Editions 2004

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.