

Catherine Bertola

Unseen by all but me alone

10th October – 7th November 2009
Tuesday - Saturday, 11am -5pm
(or by appointment)
Preview: Friday 9th October, 6-9pm



Workplace Gallery is pleased to present *Unseen by all but me alone* our first solo exhibition of work by Catherine Bertola.

The exhibition reveals a constant theme within Bertola's work by drawing on the historic role of women and craft production. Through a collection of new and existing works Bertola celebrates the skill and beauty prevalent to historical genres of craft and the decorative arts, and draws upon a legacy of collective struggle of women; and the presence of personal triumph and liberation that is often overlooked by history.

Unseen by all but me alone consists of a series of delicate handmade golden cobwebs that infiltrate the nooks and crannies of the bare and empty gallery space. With its roots in the origins of female labour the title is taken from a song, sung by Habetrot (a mythological figure in Anglo-Celtic folklore associated with spinning and healing and symbolised by the spinning wheel, wool, and the spiders web) in the story of *Habetrot and the Scantlie Mab*, a pagan tale that uses spinning as a metaphor and measure for a woman's virtue. Bertola's delicately spun webs reclaim space from the absence of human activity, and through their material value announce both a relationship with organic creation associated with neglect and the passing of time, and a celebration of luxury and silent splendour.

Bluestockings is series of drawings of the artists' own lace tights and draws motivation from the Bluestocking Society, a group of largely forgotten, wealthy 17th Century women who through informal social networks were patrons to women's art and education at a time when intellectual excellence was seen as a detriment to the female. Each drawing is named after one of the original members of the 'circle' but focuses on the material object of occupied lace stockings. Looking at the reality and complexities within the relationship between this pioneering circle at the forefront of women's liberation and their working class contemporaries: the working women, who were producing their undergarments; the series builds upon Bertola's ongoing body of works investigating lace production and the political and social culture surrounding it.

Killing Time is a series of 3 subtle video installations in which the artist occupies black and white found photographs taken of empty regal interiors from English country houses that no longer exist. The irregular and overt grandeur of each carefully chosen space is accentuated by the stillness of Bertola's presence, performing the solitary indulgent act of drinking tea and suggesting a stifling female existence within the walls of these extraordinary and overpowering rooms. These new works reference the Georgian period and the absurdity of inaction as a desirable quality for daily living and the historical entrapment of women through a social stigma toward female academics.

Thought for the week is an ongoing series of embroidered text drawings taken from a series of inspirational quotes emailed to the artist weekly from a life coaching website. These delicately laboured objects reference needlepoint projects traditionally published in women's magazines. *Thought for the week* illuminates the process of endeavour for self-improvement as a domesticated female; while the action of labouring over these hopeful statements implies a sense of clinging to prevalent moral and social structures such as the nuclear family.

Catherine Bertola was born in Rugby in 1976; she studied Fine Art at Newcastle University, and currently lives and works in Gateshead, UK. Recent exhibitions and commissions have included the *Artist/Object/Project*, National Museum Wales, Cardiff, *Out of the Ordinary* Victoria and Albert Museum, London, *Shake before Using*, Artium, Vitoria Gastiez, Spain, *The Intertwining Line*, Cornerhouse, Manchester, The Government Art Collection, Millennium Gallery, Sheffield and Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire.

To celebrate the opening of *Unseen by all but me alone* there is an Afterparty at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art which follows the preview from 9pm onwards, with special guest DJ's and drinks promotions.



LOTTERY FUNDED

For more information please contact Paul Moss or Miles Thurlow
Email: info@workplacegallery.co.uk
Telephone: +44 (0)191 477 2200

WORKPLACEGALLERY The Old Post Office, 19-21 West Street, Gateshead, NE8 1AD, UK
www.workplacegallery.co.uk