

Take a conceptual journey

VISUAL ARTS

Formative (Tom Freeman) and In the Shadow of the Past, this World Knots Tight (Kate McMillan)

Venn Gallery

REVIEW LAETITIA WILSON

Freshly opened at Venn Gallery are two new exhibitions, Formative, by Tom Freeman and In the Shadow of the Past, this World Knots Tight, by Kate McMillan. Both shows are of a similar sensibility, with an emphasis on rawness, process, concept and psychological implications.

Freeman's show occupies the main space, while McMillan has two works in an adjoining room.

Since graduating in 2007, Freeman has developed a style that is well in tune with the process-led practice popular in contemporary art. This approach privileges process over product as one consequence of the breakdown of the traditional art categories associated with Modernism. There is less of a focus on art as commodity and less emphasis on maintaining illusions as to origins of the resulting object — if an object is created at all. This is also a type of practice not shackled to aesthetics and not afraid to be ugly, mediocre or abject.

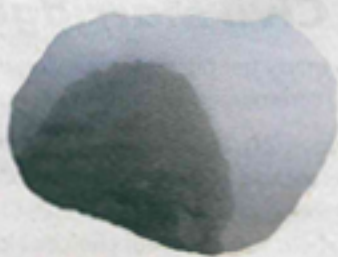
Freeman's exhibition unfolds as a series of 22 oil paintings on small squares of pine board that inform an assortment of sculptural objects on tables and shelving opposite.

What we see in this array is a clear attention to materials, including plaster, beeswax, acrylic paint, felt and plasticine. The process in question is materials-focused.

There is attention given to texture, form, colour, tone and



Formative: Tom Freeman, Kettering Library 3 (2) 2012.

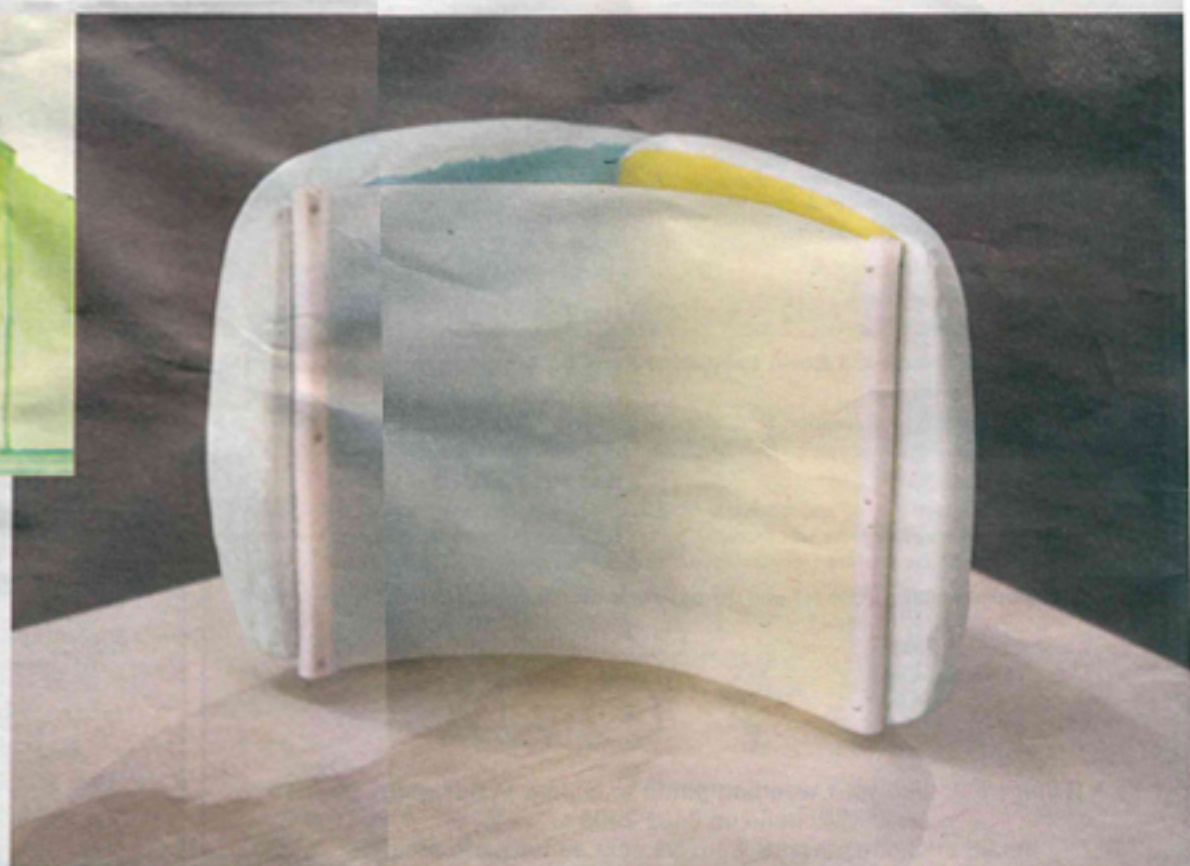


Raw: Kate McMillan presents recognisable forms that are askew.

techniques such as casting, moulding and glazing.

The objects are abstract but suggestive. At first glance they appear to be architectural models, but on closer inspection their inversions, extrusions and combined geometries are more like fragments of construction than finished prototypes.

The aesthetic cohesiveness of the show is grounded in crudeness and an overall anti-refinement, unfinished appearance to the works. If we look toward other meanings here, we could turn to the inspiration behind the works being the Kettering Library in the UK and the librarian trade of



Abstract but suggestive: Tom Freeman's Kettering Library Once Removed 11, 2013.

Freeman's grandfather within. The library recalls the title of the show as a formative space, not solely in architectural terms, but also psychologically — a space of personal revelation, of secret whispers and furtive glances. The works are an investigation of the place and its various resonances — personal, historical and architectural.

Turning now to the work of McMillan, there is a similar aesthetic at play that coheres with Freeman at the level of evidence of time spent tinkering with materials in the studio and an inherent rawness to the final articulation of the works.

The works of McMillan include abstract painting and recognisable forms. The known forms of an armchair and a Swiss mountainscape are presented askew and so their original meanings are dislodged.

The armchair has an arm bandaged in plastic and string and the mountain photographs are torn into vignettes with the scenes on their side, hovering over a gold-toned, philosopher's stone-like clump on a shelf below.

Both of McMillan's works invite one to look away, invite free-association by puzzling the viewer in their conceptual obscurity. The armchair becomes the symbol of

such contemplation and the elements of landscape although about the external world, are suggestive of interiority, shadowy histories, faraway places and memory.

Conceptual and process-led art practice might speak volumes to the art world but at the same time it often perplexes the more traditional art audiences.

If you are an art viewer of more traditional leanings, perhaps it pays to consider that old adage that it is more about the journey and the doing than the destination or the outcome.

■ Both exhibitions run until May 10.