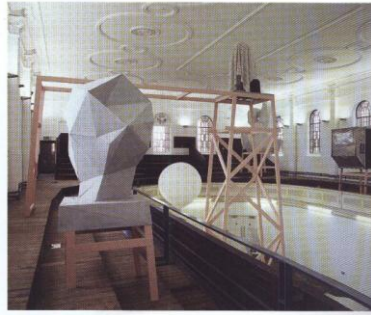


Toby Ziegler

176, London, UK

Ornate geometrical landscapes and skyscapes, Toby Ziegler's earlier works were the result of a system in which objects went through a process of technological dematerialization. This often involved creating angular, computer-based versions of real-world scenes, which he would reproduce by hand, allowing gestural imperfections to offset the digital image's rigid geometric zoning. Leaves become free-floating heptagonal approximations; grass and earth dissolve into vast nexuses of interconnected stars or circles. Beyond this formal preoccupation with kaleidoscopic virtual reality lies an interest in craft and physical labour, though this was sometimes drowned out by the beautiful hyper-reality of the paintings' surfaces.

Titled 'The Alienation of Objects', the London-based artist's recent exhibition at 176 replaced the dazzling array of colour and shape with a stark sculptural asceticism. The show comprised five sculptures each of which was made using a similar process to his earlier works: images of classical and Modernist art objects found on the Internet were rendered, via a computer, as basic three-dimensional models. These pre-skinned polygonal shapes were constructed from oxidized aluminium panels, creating hollow and colourless industrial abstractions that offer little in the way of aesthetic gratification. What they do invite, however, is the impulse to decipher the original image obscured: they apparently include an Iberian stone head (stolen from the Louvre and acquired by Picasso), a sculpture of a panther by Theodor Erdmann Kalide, Staffordshire pottery dogs, a Venus and a Hellenic sculpture. The narratives at play in their



individual histories are hinted at, but never revealed. This obfuscation of each object's origin, and the disregard for assigned usage in the case of each readymade, is where Ziegler's process of alienation by abstraction comes in.

The exhibition made good use of 176's converted chapel space, the ground floor of which is overlooked by a curved balcony. Bridging the gap between these two levels were two large wooden platforms which extended over the first-floor ledge and were held in place by wooden supports. On top of the largest of these constructions was a mechanical bull covered by a large tablecloth; fixed at its slowest setting and bucking sluggishly back and forth, the machine provided a steady, whirring soundtrack. The second platform carried one of Ziegler's abstractions, a flowing shape which I took to be the Hellenic sculpture. The positioning of these two platforms divided the space into areas of foreground and background, polarizing the placement of works on either a right or left line. It was here that the compositional similarities, between Ziegler's two-dimensional paintings and this three-dimensional realization, were revealed. From this vantage point, 'The Alienation of Objects' could be experienced as another kind of landscape. There was a considerable amount of arch humour at work here too: aside from the mechanical bull, a large white balloon, tethered to a string, sat in mid-air – a floating booby-trap to be avoided as you entered.

These may not be the most laugh-out-loud sculptural interventions, but there was an underlying positivity to be found in the interplay between Ziegler's sculptures and readymades. Something in the draft-like stasis of his polygonal abstractions brings R. Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes to mind. (Fuller maintained that the majority of structures in the world – organic or otherwise – could be reduced to the essential constituent parts of interconnecting polygons.) Through his computer-aided process of subtraction, Ziegler's abstractions become studies in essentializing physical form. While not necessarily as Utopian as Fuller's vision, there is a definite optimism to this newfound asceticism.

Morgan Quaintance