

Bronwyn Holloway-Smith

Whispers down the lane, 2012, mixed media

Bronwyn Holloway-Smith uses the occasion of this exhibition to challenge the boundaries of sculpture, especially its willingness to step into the new expanded field offered by digital cultures and communities. Her project functions as a model for new ways of digitally making and disseminating sculpture, while attempting to bring those sculptures more firmly rooted in the physical world along with her. With echoes of the Pied Piper, Holloway-Smith calls to some of the other artists in this exhibition, negotiating to make digital replicas of their work. The project is ongoing, with the cast of replicas growing through the three-month cycle of the exhibition.

The small, intricate replicas on display work on purely sculptural terms, beguiling with their material qualities and provoking questions around process, about how they are made. First, digital files are created in a CAD programme based on measurements and photographs or drawings of the sculptures. Different fabrication technologies are then employed in the making of these objects. The first method takes a file and prints it three-dimensionally using a RepRap printer, which builds the object up by laying down successive layers of PLA plastic. A second approach uses a high-power laser to cut a pattern for a multi-layered object, which is then assembled by hand. Holloway-Smith's two processes are a digital echo of that old sculptural battle between carving and modelling.

Yet for all their wonder and beauty, these objects are really just surrogates for their digital existence as freely downloadable files that can be saved, altered and built on by users through a Creative Commons licence. This process offers sculpture a radical new way of entering the public realm, but in doing so challenges many core values of the medium, especially around the primacy of physical encounter, a heavy investment in the original, and a strong adherence to traditional models of ownership. Control is taken away from the artist, the collector and the gallery, and placed in the hands of the user. Gallery restrictions on even taking photographs of artwork, based on protecting the copyright of the artist and preserving the role of the gallery as the authentic site to experience art, start to look archaic and self-serving. Holloway-Smith's project is more interested in issues around the democratisation and control of culture than with the making of the objects for display.

The project delights in the difficulties that sculpture poses for these new technologies. Some sculptures in the exhibition resist the process of replication through their scale, complex materiality or the tension between multiple parts. The title of this project nods to Holloway-Smith's interest in mistranslation, with what gets lost or altered through the process of replication and the intervening hand of the artist. New technologies may offer perfect tools for replication, but those mysteries and vagaries of cultural transmission and exchange will or must endure.