

Kevin Chin's installations often involve several discrete works keenly selected for their many subtle, intricate connections. *A hole in the roof* continues this pattern with an assembly of quiet logic that demands intimate consideration.

Materials like wool, porcelain and oil paint re-emerge across Kevin's exhibitions, where strategies of absence and retrieval are employed to make works intrinsically responsive to memories or existing spaces. In a previous Melbourne installation the artist stuffed single strands of wool inside selected cracks in the walls and floor, perhaps to make their thin jagged spaces somehow more cosy or protected. Yet, compressed wool acted as an imperfect solution for rectifying their fractured nature. With their normally hollow interiority highlighted by puffy thread, each crack's presence appeared almost cruelly incidental against the solidity and cohesion of the surrounding surface.

This intervention reactivated the overlooked. Ideas of the relevance of the past, the cracks steadily remaining like an unexhausted memory, seem central to Kevin's recurring fixation on the textural. These specific attentions evoke a material return of a past event, creating new relics.

There is exceptional fluency between Kevin's installations- each is resolved through site-responsiveness and selectivity, with works also loosely weaving themselves together across the time and space of their separate presentations. The porcelain work *Swept to the side* (2008) in this exhibition echoes with my memory of the wool embedded in the fractured plaster walls. Both works align tensions of density with pockets of emptiness to acutely express hollow and solidified space.

In making *Swept to the side* autumn leaves were coated in viscous ceramic that smothers and stills their forms. In the kiln firing process the porcelain coatings become all that remains, hardened yet emptied as the concealed autumn leaves are burnt out of existence. A permanent protective vessel is created, yet there is nothing left for it to hold except the memory of each external crease and vein of the leaf, now mapped against the porcelain's interior planes.

I try to peer in through the thin fissure, yet the detail of the interstitial space eludes me. This incomplete visibility references the inherent imperfections of a process where memory is made material. The inherent breakability of the extrinsic remains echoes this. Ceramic solidified around the perfectly rendered space the leaves once occupied as an inverse crystallisation, yet the space left by each leaf weakens this testament to its existence.

I picked up one of these emptied encasings and felt the surprising weight pressing against my palm. Returning it to the floor I accidentally disrupted and tore apart these new brittle remains, as the thin armour gave away from the slightest pressure. Even the pressure of a person's weight on the nearby floor creates subtle shifts that cause the porcelain to clink lightly as it slowly and almost imperceptibly breaks. Details captured at the core of the porcelain will never be released unharmed.

Sharing this quality of irretrievability is the terracotta relief *A hole in the roof* (2008). The carving process allowed for only minimal exactness, as the clay exaggerated each mark, engulfing detail. The "image is embedded in there somewhere, but a bit lost."¹ The most concrete articulation of the carved rooftops is found not from frontal viewing but through oblique angles. This partial clarity mirrors the non-locatability of the place depicted, specific provenance absorbed in the uniformly gingerbread hues.

¹ statement by the artist

The artist carved *A hole in the roof* with flexible acceptance of an unassured outcome, that created an oddly honest process. Where, despite the potential ease of erasure, each mark made remained. Without any later reworking the process demanded both prior consideration and acceptance of each line. Kevin explained, “I used skills learnt in Grade 3. It’s the same thing, of using a toothbrush to make the clay slip.”

His multi-tiled approach references childhood school projects that resulted in slabs created by different small hands with differing abilities, all mortared together as a paving of enthusiastically mutilated bricks. Accepting the limitations of the clay imprint, returned the artist to this secure environment of the Grade 3 procedure where he could comfortably work with the self-defeating clay that simultaneously concealed and revealed his intentions.

Many artists adopt ironic imperfectionism as a means of escaping or challenging a hard-edge aesthetic of perfection that remains for many the default mode of working. Yet, Kevin uses his ‘soft edge’ aesthetic with unusual sincerity and care to undertake exercises of textural recollection, creating works of layered complexity that refuse to be slickly and summarily described.

The oil painting *Woollens* (2008) explores tactility summonsed and articulated from memory, “as I draw it’s as if I have to figure out what it is, how it feels.”² The softness of the trees is the imprecision of blended impressions we have all experienced walking through nature. The enigmatic posture of the figure, a singular moment of captured concentration. Significance is often not in a moment, but in its sustainability as a memory. Intense events can be subject to corrosion whilst milder moments, like the feeling of adjusting a woollen hat with slippery mittened hands, can escape interrogation and be imprinted as clear recollection.

Rather than simply generating an image, the painting becomes a partial return of sensation; where inaccessibility made conscious in missing segments is punctured by areas of precise immediacy. Details in certain segments are forfeited, heightening the specific textural depictions in built up areas. In *Woollens* it is the brightly coloured patterns of the hat and gloves that feel burnt into the painter’s memory and now linger on the canvas.

As my eyes are lead along the archetypal path, my vision vanishes into the engulfing white at the end of its visibility. The white space exposes the material of the canvas as a tactile entity, yet it equally suggests in its blankness like an overexposed photo, all that simply disappears beyond our recollections. Against this whiteness is the scene that I can’t help but visually return to. The details that manage to hold us somehow keep us here.

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² statement by the artist