

Brutal Object, 2015,

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Text for spoken narrative

*The site manager thinks we are going to get him into trouble. Despite this feeling he finds himself back in his house drawing up his own inventory of materials and objects claimed from demolition sites over the last fourteen years. He's no longer thinking about the pieces as unique, collectable or saleable, only how he has acquired them and assigned them new functions for use in his house. As he begins his list singular objects from the outside world are breaking loose, collecting and locating themselves in this new and unexpected context.*

- An oak desk top from the reception at the Old Ushers Brewery, Trowbridge;
- A piece of seven-by-four inch pitch pine from Puckleworth prison;
- Roof boards from P Shed at Avonmouth Docks;
- Bricks from the old bus station now Curry's on Winterstoke Road;
- Cast iron radiators from an old cinema in Swindon;
- A piece of marble now machined into a top for a butcher's block table.

*As the Site manager arranges his collection a number of significant objects come to mind – the ones that escaped his collection. They start to assert their form, geometry and material sensuality him and threaten to usurp the other objects from the list.*

- Ceiling roses each of an eagle's claw clasping a dome, fitted with a lighting element from an office block on the Pithay;
- Six acorns of liquid brass adorning a stair balustrade in the old Cadbury's head office;
- Two stone columns borrowed from the classical orders of architecture elevating the main entrance doors leading to the same staircase. As it turned out they were made of poured concrete, hollow inside and scantily clad in stone. They shattered as they were lifted out.

*Words disperse like objects in a room. The conversation continues in the Red Lodge Museum. We travel through a series of oak panelled rooms from the most public, that of the Great Oak Room to the most intimate and private, those of the Small Oak Room and the Bedroom. The invigilator finally catches up with us in the Small Oak Room eager to tell us we are in one of three Tudor rooms originally constructed between 1579 to 1580 as a guest house and entertainment pavilion to the Great House. As the room is of such historical importance we solicit the invigilator's help and construct an inventory of the Small Oak Room at 10.28am on Monday 26th in case of any accident to the Red Lodge Museum.*

- Forty seven square metres of oak panelling;
- Thirty pine floor boards of varying sizes;

- Two fresh saw marks;
- Thirty two brass screws;
- Ninety six panes of glass covered in transparent film;
- Two cream calico blinds half drawn;
- Two Rentokil insect packets;
- A spider in a corner;
- A brown plastic motion detector;
- A surveillance camera;
- A smoke alarm;
- A high ceiling painted dark blue;
- A steel pendant light with four candle-shaped electric bulbs - one bulb not functioning;
- An oil painting of Sarah Duchess of Marlborough in a gilded picture frame;
- A copper bell for sounding a curfew;
- A weight of concrete;
- Dust;
- Two hundred and forty eight fire bricks;
- A concrete fire surround;
- Two iron fire dogs;
- A terminated radiator point;
- An electric heater and socket concealed by a wood framed metal grille;
- An oak chest with one ornately carved face;
- An octagonal oak table with one leaf hinged and folded;
- An oak model of a stripped Brutalist tower;
- Two doors, each with a pair of brass hinges, a polished brass door handle, escutcheon, keyhole and bolt lock;
- A carved and inlaid oak sideboard with a compartment for a plate of food.

*Of course the site manager thinks the weight of concrete in the Small Oak Room looks uncanny but is perhaps a fortuitous encounter between an object and a space. He agrees, it was in danger of getting lost but always wanting to be found amongst the heap of broken concrete floor slabs, lying discarded at the base of the eighteen storey, Brutalist tower. Its displacement to the museum and the Small Oak Room momentarily re-imagines its value in the world. Flaunting itself as monumental and mundane, refusing the typical categories of beautiful or functional, reflecting a built environment in a state of flux, the presence of the concrete tests the meaning of architectural value within the museum space. Its raw and unpretentious honesty breaks the reverential hush.*

*The curator enters. She is startled at the sight of the concrete and by its encroachment on the Small Oak Room. Increasingly distressed the curator circles the obtuse object. There is no possible doubt in her mind – the concrete is intrusive, too much of a trespass on the Small Oak Room. She is aware its presence is awakening an unruliness within the space. Hastily she reminds us that the concrete's fate within the museum collection is precarious, as is the fate of the Brutalist tower itself, seen in the midst of the city skyline, framed by the windows of the Small Oak Room. Opened in 1968 the Bristol and West headquarters was one of the city's first high-rise office blocks. A brochure from the time extols the virtues of its repeated modular elements, its functionality and*

*frank expression of materiality, its modern air conditioning system, its graceful cantilevered staircase...*

*The site manager considers the scale of his appointed task to strip the tower of its Brutalist credentials, to remove the concrete panelling and reduce it to its bare concrete frame. The artist and the architect are aware of the city's desire to rework the tower as a glass skyscraper and erase a Brutal moment from our collective memory. We all bid a final farewell to this historic twentieth century structure.*

*With his passion for demolition and dismantlement the site manager rehearses the careful and selective reduction of the towers architecture. Somewhere in this sequence are singular objects redirected to his home.*

- Planed mahogany from the lift entrances on each of eighteen floors, for fabrication of a cabinet to display his collection of demolition vehicles, now scaled down and in model form;
- Panels of white Italian marble extracted from the boardroom bathroom on the top floor;
- Two of fourteen hundred steel 'L' brackets used to fix the concrete facade panels to the concrete frame, cleaned, polished and re-commissioned as book ends in his son's bedroom

*As the listing progresses the artist and the architect begin to reflect on the meticulous practice of demolition, reclamation and reclassification executed on the tower and simultaneously on the practice of preservation and conservation enacted on the Small Oak Room. The angular contours of the concrete touch the oak floorboards and formulate a small and temporary crisis. The curator, alarmed by the unexpected turn in the narrative goes out for help. Now the curator has gone the site manager's hand glides across the surface of the oak chest. He sees for the first time the model of the concrete Brutalist tower crafted in oak. His eye scans down the eighteen storey structure. The site manager agrees with the artist and the architect that the oak model standing in for the concrete frame tower, in all its nakedness, stages the Brutalist building within the Tudor setting as a subject for recovery and as an object as aesthetically rarefied as the collection of rooms and objects of the Red Lodge Museum.*

*The curator returns with the health and safety committee. It seems unimaginable to them that the world of the Brutalist tower, moving ferociously forward in time could touch the world of the museum. With renewed purpose the site manager, the artist and the architect leave the curator and committee in the Small Oak Room as they try to grasp the instability of its narrative space.*

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house, how, in, in, in, into, inventory, last, list, locating, longer, loose, manager, materials, new, new, no, objects, objects, of, only, or, outside, over, own, pieces, saleable, singular, site, sites, the, the, the, the, them, them, themselves, thinking, thinks, this, this, to, trouble, unexpected, unique, up, use, we, world, years.

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