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'A BURIED GEM ANALOGY'

Of all the things that might be said about the amalgam that is *Glamourie* (a curatorial project which offers multiple entry points through both individual artworks and their juxtapositions), I wish to offer a brief footnote on a particularly understated work by Richard Rigg, titled *Parallel, delay* (2011). Having been invited by curator-artist David Steans on a guided tour soon after the exhibition preview, I was pleased to be let in on a number of

behind-the-scenes narratives, details and decisions that came together in the shape of both a concept and an exhibition. Of this I am sure others will have much to say (and indeed, the context within which many works were made or adapted adds a rich and valuable dimension to *Glamourie*), but in this instance I would like to focus on a single work, and the associations that it evoked for me at the time.

Firstly, I must confess that I was only made aware of Rigg's work during my second visit to the exhibition, when Steans kindly pointed it out to me. In the crowded context of the preview and under the influence of a glass (or two) of wine, I had completely overlooked the small and very unassuming piece. Absorbed in the usual chatter and commentary, and distracted by the hurdy gurdy music of Joseph Lewes' medieval slab grave covers in middleton church teedale, and the persistent and increasingly frantic thud of the electric jigsaw hidden in Simeon Barclay's kitchen cupboard (*Everyone has upped their game* [2010]), I failed to notice the 'jade pendant' referred to in the exhibition guide, which rested on the floor only inches away from my feet. The symbol-based floorplan that accompanied the show presented far too great a challenge amidst the hubbub, and I was not in the exploratory spirit that might have inspired me to search out such subtleties.

Rigg's piece, very unassumingly placed in an unmarked corner and without a wall label (in accordance with the wider curatorial ethos), looks like a battered pebble or rock, and bears little if no resemblance to a jade pendant. This is because its original jewelled appearance has been significantly altered, roughly pared down by hand using what appears to have been a switchblade knife. The result is a vaguely round, unexceptional stone a centimeter or so in diameter, with a scratched opaqueness that only hints at the green hue beneath. The smooth translucency and cut edges of the gemstone is suggested by title only, which is also the only clue given to the viewer with which to find and identify the work. The crudity of its form, complete with scrapes and gouges, can either be seen as evidence of the pendant's destruction, or, conversely, as an intriguing metaphor for a return to its mineralogical origins.

This little gem got me thinking about crystals, although truthfully I had already been preoccupied with the subject in the preceding months, as it relates to my own research. When reading up on the history of crystallography or mineralogy (sub-groups of geology that deal with the fragments or smaller bits of rock bodies), one inevitably comes across the writings of writer-antiquarian John Ruskin (1819-1900), who had what you might call an unusual and rather unhealthy obsession with minerals. He kept an impressive collection of specimens and wrote extensively on the subject. For Ruskin, crystals acted as a way of understanding human nature. With their varied and unpredictable growth patterns, they took on anthropomorphic meaning, reflecting either the deceitfulness (irregularity, clouded features, etc.) or dignity (symmetry, clarity, etc.) of a person or culture. Despite his gendered and ethnocentric readings of the mineral world, he maintained that crystals should be left exactly how they were found, and was against the idea of cutting, polishing or refining them, for this destroyed their natural beauty. There is something of a forced return to such natural origins in Rigg's pendant, while its presentation on the concrete floor of the gallery verifies the impossibility of such a return.

I asked Steans why he chose to display *Parallel, delay* in such a cursory fashion, as many would surely walk past it without a second glance, just as I had. His response was somewhat defiant, as he and the artist had decided together that this was the best way for viewers to encounter the work (or not). The artwork was there, if you cared to look for it. Fair enough, I thought. Rigg raises some interesting questions with this work, if one chooses to ponder over a scruffy bit of rock in the corner - which is precisely the point. The established protocol for presenting conceptual art can be infuriatingly didactic, with reductionist explanations and gallery blurbs over-determining the nature of audience encounters. Discovering Rigg's strategically placed gem is like solving a puzzle or finding an unlikely treasure, at which point one is correspondingly surprised, disappointed or confused by the experience. In failing to find it, or missing it altogether, it is alternatively possible for a would-be viewer to hear about it later (perhaps in this publication), and muse over the buried gems of the art world.