

Sawdust and Threads

Date : March 1, 2015

Laurie Ingram, Material And Visual Culture, UCL

Sawdust and Threads is a residency and exhibitions programmes that takes de-accessioned museum objects as its material. Artist Caroline Wright has undertaken residencies at three different museum collections and selected objects that have been de-accessioned. For Sawdust and Threads, Caroline has made detailed drawings of each of these objects that are then carefully and painstakingly deconstructed. The drawings as well as the objects from the different collections accompany the artist in the space where the process of deconstruction unfolds. The project poses questions around the nature of museum collections. Who owns these objects and how is the value of an object defined? Is value being removed or re-ascribed during this process of deconstruction? The project was conceived by artist Caroline Wright and [Norwich Castle](#) in partnership with the [Polar Museum](#) in Cambridge and [UCL Museums and Collections](#). (exhibition blurb).



Material World

A Global Hub for Thinking About Things
<http://www.materialworldblog.com>



Material World

A Global Hub for Thinking About Things

<http://www.materialworldblog.com>



From their primary use, to museum display, to storage, some objects eventually find themselves

fated to become de-accessioned for one reason or another. A fascinating approach by the 'Sawdust and Threads' exhibition has posited another stage to this process of disposal. This new stage extends the value of unwanted objects, which are recorded in pencil sketches before being carefully disassembled by hand and displayed in their own disarray. This process can reveal new or lost information about these objects, showing how objects can illuminate their own histories.



Norwich Castle curator Harriet Loffler (right) and artist Caroline Wright (left) talking about their project

Members of the UCL Material & Visual Culture MA had the opportunity to meet and talk with the artist and curator of this exhibition, which could also be described as an art performance. Walking into the exhibit, a large ball made of woven wicker covered with chipping black paint dominates the space. It's in the process of being taken apart by the artist, Caroline Wright, who explains the story that exists within this object. This wicker ball would have been placed on a ship and, when raised on a mast, would have signalled danger. The black paint itself suggests that the ball could have belonged to a ship made for polar expedition, as its colour would contrast with the white surroundings. Caroline has begun to dismantle the ball, with strands of wicker lying in wavy circles beneath her desk.

As well as this, she demonstrates an object in its final stage of dismantling - a wooden medical box that has been taken apart and sanded down to reveal beautifully red sawdust that, once bagged, has become soft enough to lay a head on. Using only hand-tools, Caroline's physical efforts have illuminated these new material properties of the wooden box. It is a treasure to discover that the

sawdust retains such vibrant colour, suggesting that it was not just varnish after all, but the substance of the wood itself.

Before disassembling, Caroline pencil-draws the objects in their final moments of wholeness, and explains that this allows her greater insight into the lives of these disused objects. The visual medium of drawing allows for a certain personal connection to the object that photography alone can miss. The close observation and attention to form allows the artist to explore the object in an intimate way. For example, her sketching has revealed the subtle creases on a deflated rubber bedpan; alluding to how this object may have once been stored, perhaps folded away in a drawer.

This thought-provoking exhibition reveals a hidden step in the life of museum objects. While museums take great care in de-accessioning objects, 'Sawdust and Threads' demonstrates that even objects reasoned no longer necessary still have much to tell us about themselves. Despite encountering these objects with little information, by exploring their material form through artistic expression it becomes possible to redeem qualities of value that could have otherwise been overlooked. The deconstruction of these objects, while irreversible, becomes a part of a creative process that further pieces together their pasts and fleshes out the narratives of their lives.