

Flaw: An exhibition by Kate Davis

Presented by A-M-G5 at 20 Albert Road, Glasgow, G42 8DN

Exhibition open 11th-27th June 2021, Wednesday-Sunday 12-5pm

Also by appointment - contact: mail@a-m-g5.co.uk

Staring

*I don't have to know what it's all about.
That's not what I'm trying to know.
It's the looking that matters,
The being prepared to see what there is to see.
Staring has to be done...*

Margaret Tait, 'Seeing's Believing and Believing's Seeing' (1958)

That's the crux of *FLAW* - a chance to stare. To stare at dust on a floor. Or at dust on paper.

I began with a postcard. A postcard of a Roman mosaic titled *The Unswept Floor*. The mosaic creates the illusion that the remnants of a lavish feast have been strewn upon it. This image and title offered me a cue to adopt the notion of the unswept floor—the neglect of domestic labour—as a feminist approach to make work. I began drawing the dirt and crumbs from our kitchen floor (not the scraps from a banquet but the everyday matter that constantly gathers, out of place and unwanted, on a floor, or a cooker hob). Abandoning housework to make artwork.

In her 1931 lecture 'Professions for Women', Virginia Woolf termed it '*killing the Angel*' - overcoming the figure of the woman as divine care-giver / unpaid cleaner in order to pursue her literary work. Not that she saw this as the only challenge to be faced. Woolf writes:

'These were two of the adventures of my professional life. The first - killing the Angel in the House - I think I solved. She died. But the second, telling the truth about my own experiences as a body, I do not think I solved. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet. The obstacles against her are still immensely powerful - and yet they are very difficult to define.'¹

Ninety years on, and whilst Woolf's gender-specific focus is outdated, the obstacles and phantoms continue to loom and obstruct many bodies. It might seem mad to stare at grime, but labouring over drawings of domestic dirt became my way of reckoning with some of the ghosts Woolf describes.

Making *FLAW*, I was also thinking about Maria Sibylla Merian (1647 - 1717), the German-born artist, adventurer and one of the earliest entomologists. Sibylla Merian was as interested in painting the life cycle of a slug as she was in depicting an alluring butterfly. It is her exquisite studies of the flora and fauna that don't normally take centre stage that I am most drawn to. Focusing on that which should literally be brushed under the carpet, *FLAW* is an attempt to render this lowly material with the same acute intensity that Sibylla Merian's studies have - treating grease on the hob as if it is a scientific specimen. I am interested in the routine, repetitive, yet essential aspects of life that you have to do to get to the work—interested in these aspects *becoming* the work. Being prepared to see what there is to see. Staring has to be done.

Kate Davis, 2021

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Professions for Women,' in *Killing The Angel in The House: Seven Essays*, (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 1-10.