



Estelle Ihász *No Artificial Flavours*

CACSA Project Space 7 September–14 October 2007.

First exhibited at Bus gallery, Melbourne, 17 Oct–4 Nov 2006; and Peloton, Sydney, 24 Jan–17 Feb 2007.

List of works

Smartie 2007 wall drawing in acrylic paint 145 x 260cm

No Artificial Flavours 2006-7 selection of 96 Perspex shapes, aluminium shelving 78 x 200cm

The Eclectic Kandy-Coloured Fractal Test

The installation by Estelle Ihász, *No Artificial Flavours* comes as a bit of a surprise, given the title. It certainly doesn't look natural. You may find yourself shielding your eyes or reaching for the sunglasses – this work is visually saccharine: it does to your eyes what sugar does to your teeth.

Narrow shelves, painted glossy white, run in even parallels on the wall. Upon these shelves, some free standing, some leaning back against the wall, are a collection of flat Perspex panels in differing bright colours, shapes and sizes. The forms of these panels echo the shape of an urban plan or the map of a continent, with their rigid geometric lines and abstract composition. Some shapes are repeated, some seem to be unique one-offs and some appear to be morphed together from others, like mutants of the DNA strain from which they all spring.

The colours of the Perspex shapes ranges from fluorescent pink to acid lime green with many lurid tones in between. Their scale ranges from the mundane to the minute; there is even one miniscule little shape piggy-backing on a slightly larger one – two for the price of one? Certain forms stand out amongst all the jagged geometry sprawling before us, some because of their comparative size, but one that keeps catching my eye is a white disc. This round form might be a red herring, a brief glimpse of actual perfection amongst all the promises.

No Artificial Flavours makes you feel like a bewildered child in an austere candy store that sells only fluorescent, geometric Rorschach tests. It's as if I'm having a nightmare after watching *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *2001* consecutively. I find myself playing games with the shapes—there's a chicken, an egg; oh, and that's some kind of machine from *Star Wars*...and a hundred other pop-culture references that bubble slowly through the gooey muck of the brain to the surface. If I listed all the things I recognize amongst all this, Rorschach would have a field day.

By presenting these shapes as the ambiguous currency of an invisible trade (we could be standing in a chic perfumery; all white with brightly packaged vapours displayed upon the shelves) Ihász calls to question the nature of consumer mentality. When we encounter something we feel that we may want, our subconscious and imaginations are projected onto that thing, recreating it as something desirable, if not irresistible. As the title purports, this product contains 'no artificial flavours', it is all-natural. But the objects are plastic, I can see that much; perhaps the 'natural' here is our symptomatic and routine response to the objects we amass as modern consumers.

I think about Guy Debord's drawing for the *Naked City*. Ihász's flat, yet sculptural forms are reminiscent of the fragments of Paris that the Situationists mapped out 'psycho-geographically'. Perhaps the psycho-geography of today's city is a virtual one, and the kind of ambience that moved Debord to wander through certain parts of the city now lures unsuspecting city-dwellers into maze-like department stores, leaving them to drift amongst the tantalizingly displayed merchandise. The plastic shards presented before us, if viewed as fragments of a larger map, are certainly suggestive of the way in which humans may consume space, and the absurd idea that space may be possessed.

One thing that seems certain is that the work is about consumption. The title is an assurance that the product is genuine, but genuine what? And can I actually buy one, or are they for display only? The precariousness with which they seem to be perched on the shelf would suggest that it is a 'look but don't touch' situation. These goods sit coolly, quietly mocking my unachievable desire to touch them, to possess them. They seem destined to play out their infinite existence – Perspex doesn't decompose, does it? – in perpetual commercial stasis. But it's probably just as well; none of those colours would match my furniture...

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Andy Hutson is a Melbourne-based visual artist. He completed a Masters of Visual Art at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2007.