



Hamish Pearch, *Near Earth Objects*, 2022

Interview with Hamish Pearch

Picture a bundle of roots clutching into a chair with flowery outgrowths, a match stuck on chewed gum stuck on a snail shell, a floor covered with trays full of tillandsia and two impossibly stacked bronze cups balancing almonds on the rims. You'd be walking into Hamish Pearch's latest show, *IF THINGS WERE DIFFERENT*, in Galeria Mascota, Mexico City (2022). It is a strange environment summoning archetypal impressions remembered not with the eye but with the body: the pervading sense of 'house' sprouting in snails, tortoises and chairs; or the impression of 'growth' present in flowers, upright matches and mushrooms. As if sensations, which usually guide the expression of emotion, were in this work a language of mind used to trace how being is translated into thinking.

Yet Hamish is quick to rebuff the authority of words to talk about his artwork when I meet him at his London studio on a sunny October morning. Soft-spoken, he sports block colours as if plucked out of a playful 2000s tv show and exudes an inviting warmth evident when he hangs his sentences in expectant silence, waiting for you to fill them. Hamish is young, not even thirty. He graduated from the Royal Academy of Art three years ago and has produced a steady stream of shows since, including *NIGHTS*, London (2019), *AMYGDALA LOST AND FOUND*, Paris (2021) and *ALL SEASON SANCTUARY*, Amsterdam (2022).

He takes me up to a reconverted Victorian warehouse with big windows on adjacent walls and a door that opens into outside space. It gives the room an air of suspended reality that fits well with the dreamy objects lying around. A thin column of dust floats by a sofa on the right hand corner. 'My girlfriend comes here sometimes', he says. 'She'll just sleep there while I work'.

Dreams are a difficult medium for a sculptor. Most artists seem a tad too keen to express their auras, and there is a long history of surrealism adding weight to the subject. Still, Hamish's sculptures seem to resist being elaborated into a deliberate aesthetic. "You need to have a starting point to then let yourself let go" Hamish tells me, as if saying that passivity is for him a form of searching, that to arrive somewhere you first need to get lost. It is in this space of contradiction where Hamish has found a way not to make sense of some implicit meaning but to reveal it.

Q The dream-like quality in your work imbues it with a sense of psychology which at times can seem autobiographical. Would you say your work can be traced back to particular events your personal life?

A Yes and no. Sometimes I'll put things in works that will be specific about a relationship or a feeling... perhaps as a way to exorcise it. Inevitably, things come from me, so I'm not going to say no.

I do, however, get very emotional toward a show. I invest a lot in it, time, money... In Mexico I got really ill before the show. I arrived, I finished the work, I wasn't sleeping. The gallery wasn't finished so it was really dusty. What tipped me over the edge was that one day I was upstairs and stalling with noise cancelling headphones. I stood up and felt a bit dizzy, but then I realised that I wasn't dizzy – I looked out the window and the other building was shaking. I ran downstairs and there

was a huge earthquake. The next day my body just shut down. I went to the Doctor and got injections in the bum and some Valium to sleep. Weirdly once the opening happened, I got better. I work on these things and when the show happens, then they are not mine anymore. I look back and there are works which I care about and am emotionally attached to, but I have moved on. I disown them.

Q Speaking of the Mexico show, *IF THINGS WERE DIFFERENT*, there was a dialogue marked by the time of day written over two spreads of paper hung on the wall. As a writer I am really interested in the relationship between text and sculpture in your work. What was the purpose of introducing text in the exhibition?

A It was maybe a way to talk about the show without being didactic. I feel like a lot of what I do in the studio is about creating a logic. The text was the same thing. It allowed me to embody the show and generate more meaning for it without explaining it. Does that make sense? To use the text as something complementary as opposed to explanatory of the show.

I try to do that quite a bit, such as in the shows *NIGHTS* (2019) and *I'M GOOD BECAUSE I FEEL GOOD* (2021). The latter was in a sculpture park and there was a morning when two other artists came and wanted us to talk about the work. I didn't want to talk about the making of it. Although making it is a big part of what I do, I didn't want to describe it. So, I wrote this text, which was an expansion on the title. Almost like a long poem that I read out. And it touched on things which I was thinking about with the work, but it wasn't the work, it was something else. Because to describe the work would be to kill it in some sense.

Q Isn't thinking about the artwork, which entails intellectualising it to some degree, inevitable?

A I think we must intellectualise and try to figure out what something is doing. That's not a bad thing. But you need to allow space for that to be wrong, or to be true.

It's funny what a show is at the time when you do it versus what perspective takes over when you look back or forward to something. I can see how all my work is linked in different ways. All these things are like sentences or words within a growing paragraph. But then looking back on things, the word or the sentence for what I thought it meant will change. These things aren't fixed. We tend to intellectualise and pinpoint what something is doing or saying, but we have to be open to the possibility for that to change.

Q To make it malleable. There is this video of... do you know Luis Bunuel? He was a surrealist filmmaker. There is a video of him where he gets asked what he thinks of Toledo and he answers 'its absolutely shit, it smells like piss', yet later that evening he says 'I love Toledo, it's a marvellous city'. I love how comfortable he was with contradicting himself.

Q Coming back to the relationship between text and object, do you write text first and the imagery that comes to you then provides a starting point to start making physical work? Or is it the opposite, where you make sculptures and then you want to create some sort of verbal environment in which those things can exist?

Q What was the process of putting the show together like?

A That's really nice, isn't it?

A The process tends to be sculptural first. For example, the text you mentioned in the show *IF THINGS WERE DIFFERENT* is a dialogue between the two tortoises in the top floor, Rose and Walt. Hang on I'll show you (Hamish takes out a scruffy telephone notepad). I'll have things lying around in the studio, and from that I'll do little drawings and they'll often have text underneath, often just one word (he shows me a drawing of two tortoises). The drawing was a way to expand on what I was thinking about, and the text came from that. This was the starting point of knowing that I wanted this relationship between them.

I will often work with a creative writer or write text myself. For this text, I wrote to my girlfriend on WhatsApp and we imagined that we were the tortoises having a conversation. I think we were quite nervous about beginning the chat and it took me being drunk at an opening for us to start talking. Again, it's about creating a logic, one where the tortoises had been around since the beginning of time and were grumpy and a couple and annoyed. The conversation happened over a span of time and we cut lots of bits out because we were just bickering. In the end, it made sense to just have two sheets in the show. It almost became like a sculpture.

A For *IF THINGS WERE DIFFERENT*, the gallery moved space midway through my making of the show. Initially, the show was going to be in three interconnected rooms, then it changed to two spaces across two floors. I was in Mexico in March when I made the initial work, the waxes for the black chair sculptures that ended up in the lower

floor of the exhibition. Back then, I was thinking about how those objects could fit spatially in the three rooms. If the gallery hadn't moved spaces, then I wouldn't have thought of the objects in the upstairs room. I wouldn't have got the flowers; I wouldn't have shown the tortoises... maybe but maybe not... Later, because I knew the show was going to be two spaces across floors, I thought about the rooms being psychological. Above, this garden where two intellectual beings are discussing and things are growing, like consciousness. Below, a subconsciousness of things happening in spite of the room above, where things are black and dead.

That's the way I framed it, but that is almost a post-intellectualization because the work downstairs had already been made. Often it is because of a deadline that I figure out what stories I want to tell. That is why making a show is great. I have all this shit lying around but it doesn't mean anything, it's just on a shelf. Like the Rose of Jericho. I've had them for years. A show provides a space for it to occur, and then, coming back to the first question, I'm like, I've got to write text, because having a conversation is just like expanding this world.

Q Seeing the rooms almost as psychological suggests how the sculpture exists in an environment where the boundaries between the two become blurred. It reminds me of the book you recommended in a recent interview, *HYPEROBJECTS* by Timothy Morton. In it, they put forward the idea of us being inside hyperobjects too big to grasp at once, like climate change. This makes our impressions not merely personal, but somehow a footprint or mental translation of other entities. You explored this idea in *VAPOUR TRAIL* (2020), where you presented an abandoned factory as a found object where you walked in and almost became part of the artwork. Is considering the environment as an object something you are interested in?

A I was on a residency when I did *VAPOUR TRAIL* in rural France. We were being asked questions at the start of the residency as a fun exercise and one of them was 'if you could put in a time capsule any object, what would it be?' I was like, I'd like to put in Lambeth Bridge, because it was at the end of 2020 and during COVID I lived there. I used to go to Lambeth Bridge a lot, run the bridge and sit there, just watch London go by. So the question was, why should the object be small? Why do we have to define something that would fit in our pocket? It could be anything. Why limit by scale?

Same with the factory that appears in *VAPOUR TRAIL*. The residency was out in the middle of nowhere. It was around this time of year and getting darker. My grandma was really ill at the time and then she died. I was with these two other artists and I just, I just really didn't... So, I started going on long walks and found this abandoned building. When I walked in, it was just like a found object.

Almost like the Rose of Jericho. The light was so beautiful. This abandoned building was material like anything. The scale didn't matter. Why can't this be a head? It happens in CGI. What's that film... with Timothee Chalamet... I hated it. *DUNE*, that's it. It was too imaginative for me. We have these spaces which are so imaginative. Why can't normal reality be as imaginative? You don't have to go to the cinema to create a world.

Q Certain imagery appears throughout periods of your work that contribute to this sense of world-making. I noticed you have increasingly made use of lemons in your sculptures. What is their significance?

A I collect lots of stuff. I kept these lemons in the studio and they were shrivelling up. For the work *I'M GOOD BECAUSE I FEEL GOOD*, (2021) I was thinking for a long time about what should go on the desk on top of the head. I was putting a barn on it, trying different things. Then I just put the lemons on... This is a really bad answer, but I put them on the desk and it just felt right. Because then I thought about the lemon being like the tiny pathetic brain of the head, trying to do loads of work but not working. It then became about undermining the work. How can I fuck with this a bit? How can I make it not epic, but pathetic?

Q How did the lemon imagery then spread to later artworks?

A Rather than casting one lemon, I made a mould of eight to get the right size. I'll show you. (Hamish takes out a foam mould with the negative space of 8 lemons). I'll first make half of the mould in clay with a lemon in. I will then build a wall and pour the rubber on to it. Then I will flip it over, take the clay off, rub Vaseline so that it doesn't stick, and then pour the second half of rubber. By the end you get the negative of the lemons, almost like an ice cube tray.

I made lots of different types of lemons and they ended up in the show *AMYGDALA LOST AND FOUND*, (2021). This was the first time I thought about making a sculpture of time. They are titled after the times of day I made them, like *15:11*. I almost see them as sculptural photographs. If that minute was to pass, then it would fall apart. But also, they are just fun to do... If I'm bored in the studio, I'll think 'OK now put the lemons together'. They are almost distractions sculptures for me so that I can get into a space which is like what I really want to make, but I don't know I want to make it. You need to have a starting point to then let yourself let go.