



**ANNABETH ROSEN: CONTINGENCY**

FLEISHER OLLMAN GALLERY, PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, USA  
31 MARCH-1 MAY 2010

The title of Annabeth Rosen's solo exhibition *Contingency* suggests a future event that's likely to occur which may influence a present action, an implication which offers ideas about revision, uncertainty, and change that are evident in her work on many levels. Rosen's large-scale assemblage sculptures suggest powerfully solid three-dimensionality and yet each work is composed of heaps and stacks of small-scale components bound together by wire, and most are balanced slightly perilously on small trolleys. The sense of a secure mass is therefore an illusion, one that's entirely appropriate, given the practical material qualities of making and firing clay components, while the potential for mobility provides metaphorical associations of migration, of movement encumbered by many objects, of the homeless, the disenfranchised and the dispossessed as they haul their worldly belongings across time in search of some stability. The large stacks even include a domestic item or two, which may help along the way to nurture and ease the journey, although most components are abstract in form, bound tightly together with black cables and netting, remnants of cages and industrial detritus, creating a tension that is paradoxically both fragile and secure. The repetition reminds us of the multitude and the large amounts of stuff in the world. The shapes echo both the bones of the assuary in Prague or toys and dumbbells painted in bright colours and patterns which might lift us from a sense of doom to one of fairground fun, potential and hope. These collections and multiples of industrial and human detritus pile up towards a search for cultural identity within our contemporary multi-layered societies and our global village, where migration is no longer just a matter of adapting and leaving cultural identity behind but of survival, the need to move from one place to another, a need which is both burdensome but at the same time, set on those sturdy wheels, offers a possibility for the future.

In his essay accompanying the exhibition, Ian MacDonald suggests a parallel process between Rosen's *bricolage*, where objects are constantly reworked and revised into ever-changing complexes, and the 'cobbling together' of information technology, an archival process where ultimately the physicality of ceramic material will outlast the electronic overload. Revisiting the work through my own digital reminders, I still experience a more powerful physical lure in these large objects than anything a non-tactile medium can offer. Repetition and regularity may figure in the way Rosen makes her components but the power of the final composition lies in a more intuitive process of assemblage where the sense of 're-stacking and re-organising', the contrast between colour and plainness, the tension between forms and wire and the fine balance between stability and instability gives the viewer an overall sensation that we have engaged with a large and animated creature, one that can redistribute itself or propel itself unaided through the space. The overall effect of this encounter is both startling to the eye and enriching to the mind.

**Christie Brown**

**1** Ian MacDonald, *Bric and Brac*, exhibition essay, Fleisher Ollman Gallery, 2008 **2** MacDonald, 2008