

JANE EDDEN HUNTER GATHERER



Sheep 2009, Plaster cast in a reclaimed boxes from the Economic Botany collection, Kew Gardens, 20.5 x 15 x 5 cm

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FOR GENERAL RELEASE

A few years ago I came across some empty boxes in an antique dealer. They had once belonged to the Economic Botany Collection at Kew Gardens and, although empty, had labels that told of curious objects and plants. The contents had been collected approximately a century ago, and ranged from the familiar plants of everyday life to things and plants totally unknown to me.

The labels documented fragments of our historical reliance on plants, providing the provocation and framework for (hi)stories still to come.

The decision to represent the missing contents of the boxes with an impression came with a realisation that the original boxes must remain 'empty' in spirit. Inspired by the labels, I wanted to interpret their descriptions but also to maintain a sense of absence; to capture within the boxes the combined sense of discovery and loss I felt on reclaiming them as repositories of meaning.

My choice of material – fine white plaster – allowed me to cast delicate inverse forms, impressions that I polished back to allow them rest within a paper smooth surface. The forms produced in this process allude to the absent-presence of objects left on a sandy shore, washed over by the tide of centuries. The age of the boxes is betrayed by their condition. Bubbles and imperfections punctuate the glass, which varies slightly in hue, and the paper that covers the boxes has in some areas had to be replaced. I have used archival materials to carry out these restorations, believing the original fabric of the boxes to be integral to their capacity for future storytelling.

As I researched the labels, and I found an additional collection beginning to accumulate, comprising of the objects utilised in casting the plaster impressions, or acquired for this purpose but then deemed unsuitable, and units of information. Facts that, like the contents of the Economic Botany Collection, were so varied and wide-ranging that I felt they needed to be classified, verified, checked, filed and ordered in some way.

I decided to file this new collection in boxes, which has acted in many respects to bring the project full circle. These reference works will be displayed alongside my casts, in a cabinet used at the original Kew Museum of Economic Botany, kindly lent to me by Kew. Exhibited in this way, the relationship between old and new falls into cyclical accord, a symmetry that seems appropriate in the year that Kew celebrates its 250th anniversary.

Jane Edden, September 2009

Jane Edden has made commissioned work in both the US and UK and has exhibited internationally. Since 2002, she has been awarded residencies by Wysing Arts (Cambridge), Robert Flemming (Arbroath, Scotland), Sculpture Space (New York), Sonic Arts Network (Plymouth, UK) and BAC (Bedford, UK). This is the third solo exhibition of her work at Flowers.

With thanks to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

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