

## THE OTHER IN SYMPATHY

A site-specific installation by **Laura Porter**  
Lobby Project Space, London, March 2017

*"If we're not anxious, if we're okay with things, we're not trying to explore or figure anything out. So, anxiety is the mood par excellence of ethicacy."*

Avital Ronell, Examined Life

*"If the relationship with the other involves more than relationships with mystery, it is because one has accosted the other in everyday life where the solitude and fundamental alterity of the other are already veiled by decency. One is for the other what the other is for oneself; there is no exceptional place for the subject. The other is known through sympathy."*

Emmanuel Levinas, Time and the Other

*The Other in Sympathy* is a site-specific installation comprising 30, child-sized, chairs, which have all undergone the same systematic series of treatments. The installation explores psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan's 'mirror stage' theory, married with Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of 'The Other' and 'The Face'.

In the 'mirror stage', a child begins to see themselves from outside their body, metaphorically and physically as a reflection, and begins to understand how others view them. The child witnesses their body as separate, and experiences it in a different way to how they've previously experienced it from within. The function of the body begins to change to object, the ego begins to develop as they question how they wish to be seen by others, and they begin to realise that they are a person external from themselves, within society.

*The Other in Sympathy* incorporates Lacan's idea of the 'mirror stage' with Levinas' idea that in our face-to-face interactions with one another, we have an innate sense of responsibility and, although we may ignore it and choose not act upon this responsibility, such a face-to-face encounter 'orders and ordains' us into 'giving and serving' the Other. *"The face, in its nudity and defencelessness signifies, 'Do not kill me.' This defenceless nudity is therefore a passive resistance to the desire that is my freedom"* (Levinas).

Both Lacan and Levinas use an unspoken language to describe how we interact with the Other, one to describe our relationship with someone that could be a complete stranger, the other to describe the experience of viewing ourselves externally in our early stages of development, and in the artwork the unspoken language is between the chair and the viewer; our interaction with the clothing and the chair is alien, but feels familiar. The work plays off the functionality of the attic-like space, in which the work is exhibited, combined with the timeless sense of waiting left by the mound of chairs, which fill the space in a disruptive yet still manner. With entangled limbs, the body of the chairs resting on one another suggests a kind of co-dependency, an intimacy. The clothing conforms to the shape of the chair, sandwiched between the paint and varnish, irreparably, irreversibly manipulated, and given a new purpose, a new life, a new body to encase, and arouses the idea that whilst unique, we are all the same and have a responsibility to others who are a reflection of ourselves.

Using clothing as a proxy for the body, Porter's practice addresses ideas of social responsibility. Throughout her sculptural and installation works, the simultaneous absence and presence of the bodily form arouses feelings of anxiety and loss. By utilising the familiar and everyday, she creates environments of uneasy comfort. Through repetitive processes, she manipulates material, combining industrial substances with those that once had an intimate relationship with the body. Her work frequently addresses and disrupts notions of functionality, by incorporating objects marked by the traces of human interaction and form. These ideas come to life in the form of large-scale, interactive works that initiate new relationships. Unity and diversity; the individual versus the mass; and the bizarre yet mundane are all recurring themes, married within the consuming and tactile nature of Porter's practice.

Graduating from the BA Fine Art programme at Middlesex University in 2014, Porter has since had a number of solo exhibitions, including Curious Projects, Eastbourne and Unit10, Bristol. She has been shortlisted for several awards, including the Collyer Bristow Graduate Award and The Bentliff Art Prize. She is currently shortlisted for the Broomhill National Sculpture Prize 2016.