

# Meekyoung Shin's Cabinet of Curiosities

26 July - 2 November 2014

## The Artist

London and Seoul-based Korean artist Meekyoung Shin (b.1967) is internationally renowned for her sculptures that probe the mis- and re-translations that often emerge when objects of distinct cultural and historical specificity are dislocated from their origins. Made from soap, her work replicates artefacts and works of art, from Asian porcelain vases to Greek and Roman sculptures, translating between continents, cultures and centuries in the process.

Shin is recognised for her iconic Translation Series (2004-ongoing) and Toilet Series, installations of usable soap sculptures in public bathrooms, which are subsequently exhibited in the gallery context in their eroded form.

Meekyoung Shin was born in South Korea and completed her BFA and MFA at Seoul National University. In 1995, she moved to London to obtain her MFA at the Slade School of Art, University College London and was nominated for the Korean Artist Prize 2013. Shin has held solo exhibitions internationally including Haunch of Venison, London (2010) and the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London (2013) and now here at The National Centre for Craft and Design. She has participated in numerous group shows including the Museum of Art and Design, New York, and the 2013 Asian Art Biennial in Taiwan. Her works are found in collections all over the world, including the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the National Museum Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea.

## The Toilet Project



Shin's ongoing public participation project sees soap replicas of statues such as Greek or Roman busts and Buddhist figurines placed into public toilets where the public are asked to become involved in the process of creating the artwork by using the soap statues to wash their hands. The result are eroded figures, with the look of ancient artifacts weathered over many years when in reality the material means that this process has in fact happened over just weeks. These objects are then taken from their temporary homes and displayed within the gallery setting, transforming them from functional to art objects.

The NCCD is once again taking part in the creation of this series and you can too by visiting and using the soaps currently residing in our toilets on the ground floor.

## Translation - Ghost Series



Shin's 'Ghost Series' is a collection of translucent and seemingly fragile soap vases resembling glass, that are in fact modelled on Asian porcelain. Created in 16th - 17th Centuries, the porcelain on which shin's works are modelled were imported to the west and are in fact not typical of true Asian style at the time, just a representation of a western perception. In contrast to the stone-like Toilet Project 'Ghost Series' are crafted in striking colours, stripping back the high decoration of the inaccurate originals. Ethereal in nature, they appear almost weightless, partially transparent they comment on ambiguous translations which occur between cultures.

### **Translation - Vase Series**



Shin developed the concept for her 'Translation Series' after moving Europe, a move which saw her experience transplantation between east and west first hand, not only in language but in culture, understanding and aesthetic appreciation.

This experience led Shin to contemplate the shift in the understanding of an object, such as many in the British Museum, when it is taken out of the culture that it is originally created in and transplanted into that of another.

The honesty of presenting the collection on the packing crates in which they arrived at the gallery further emphasises notions of the transport and commodity of transplanted objects.

### **Translation - Painting Series**



Shin's aim with this brand new series of work is to subvert the traditional hierarchy of painting by creating painting through sculpture, enhanced by frames selected by the artist and akin to those which adorn important masterpieces in art history.

Shin's Painting Series are of course not paintings at all. In replacing the once present oil paintings with the inexpensive and commonplace material of soap Shin comments on the value of an artwork. Oil paint as a material is associated with priceless and untouchable masterpieces, soap on the other hand is cheap, familiar and a material that, by its very purpose, it tactile and expendable.

By erasing subject matter and the gestures of the painter, Shin eliminates any preconceptions of culture or meaning within the work, much like the stripped back forms of her 'Ghost Series'. In removing all trace of the original in exchange for a sparse surface, Shin prompts the viewer to reconsider their impulse to judge or analyse a painting. It's meaning, it's supposed worth and its origins are all in question.