
Stofer finds meaning in the unwanted

Hans Stofer: Walk the Line
Gallery S O, 92 Brick Lane, London E1
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Reviewed by Fiona Rattray

Anyone drawn to the solitary pleasures and barmy potterings associated with the humble garden shed will find much to enjoy in this exhibition, at this exciting space on London's Brick Lane. Hans Stofer's own shed is a souped-up, fold-out, walk-through structure full of the kind of makeshift solutions beloved of dyed-in-the-wool shed-dwellers: the DIY tea-strainer, the handle-less mug, the frankfurter-can candlestick. Except that here they are artworks/design objects by this Swiss-born, London-based artist, who also happens to be Professor of Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewellery at the RCA.

Stofer has long been adept at transforming the fortunes of seemingly unpromising materials – smashed china shards clumsily glued into a delicate new bowl for example – and in *Walk the Line* you sense his enduring desire to tease out something new and meaningful from the old and unwanted. It's exhilarating being

Right: installation view of *Walk the Line*, Hans Stofer, 2010
 Below right: *The Nightingale and the Rose*, Hans Stofer, 2010



in such company – here’s someone whose hands are never stilled. And here too are objects of great (if off-beat) beauty. *Stofer’s Mug (Voodoo)* is an ornate shape roughly rendered in unpolished silver, studded with rusty screws, as alluring as it is forbidding. The juxtaposition of a pair of jugs in *Skin and Bone*, one dainty white porcelain, the other roughly beaten copper, enhances both. Some pieces have subtle meanings; *Website* is an intricate spider’s web strung across the shed door, its epicentre a gold ring, suggesting marriage is a trap; *Hunting Chain* is a jewellery piece strung with door keys, their tips sawn off and replaced by silver rose thorns.

Not everything comes off this beautifully. At the entrance sit three open cardboard boxes. Inside, beneath a protective sheet of glass, is a bunch of found objects wrapped in aluminium tape

– but the aluminium, which is meant to imply shiny added value, misses the mark. The boxes are a trifle mundane, the ‘vitrines’ a little awkward. There’s a charming stainless steel cup engraved with the word ‘Drek’. This means ‘worthless crap’ in Yiddish but nothing tells you this here. Stofer’s satirically titled *Badges of Honour* – embroidered skull and crossbones sew-on patches – suggest emblems earned for military kills, but the imagery is so pop-culturally over-exposed they might be something bought from London’s Camden market.

Nevertheless, elsewhere the installation is witty and mesmerising. Dried-up mandarin peel is one of the least prepossessing materials on earth, but Stofer ekes out every scrap of personality by twisting it into animal faces, then skewering them, trophy-like, onto plates. And at the far end of the atmospheric,