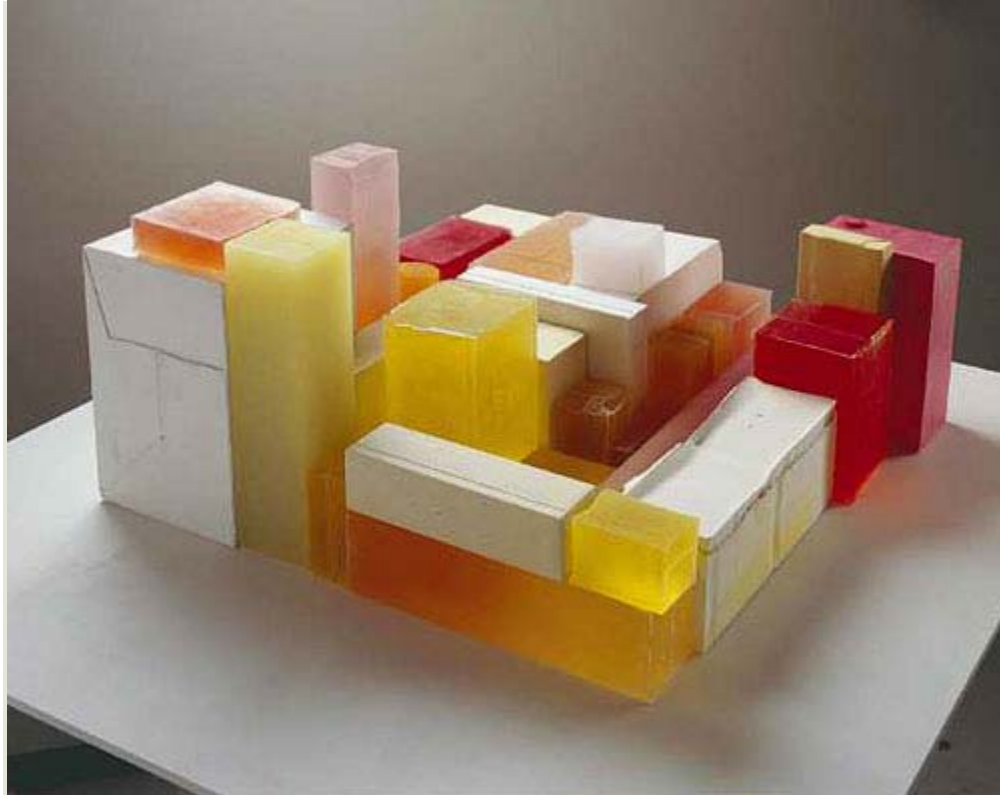


## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Los Angeles Times

AROUND THE GALLERIES

### Rachel Whiteread at Gagosian Gallery



Mike Bruce / Gagosian Gallery

**SCULPTURES:** Rachel Whiteread's first solo show in L.A. is at Gagosian Gallery.

By Leah Ollman  
November 14, 2008

Even on its grandest scale -- the size of a house -- **Rachel Whiteread's** work has a deeply affecting humility. It is, after all, based on absence. The British artist, who lives and works in London, has made casts (in plaster, concrete, resin and other materials) of the interior of a room, a house, a water tower, the underside of a staircase, the space beneath a chair. Her work is not just a matter of coy reversal, turning negative space into palpable volume, but an ongoing meditation on containment, memory, place, form, density and touch.

**456 NORTH CAMDEN DRIVE BEVERLY HILLS CA 90210 T. 310.271.9400 F. 310.271.9420**

**INF@GAGOSIAN.COM WWW.GAGOSIAN.COM**

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Whiteread's first solo show in L.A., at Gagosian, extends that investigation while bringing it down to its most intimate level yet. The 25 sculptures have a modesty about them but also an unflagging integrity -- a tender, abject beauty and even a bit of playfulness. The show is a tremendous opportunity to see an artist of established profundity stretch and shift and experiment.

Whiteread trained initially as a painter, and that background resurfaces here with a thrilling vengeance. A series of sculptural arrangements on eye-level shelves resonates mightily with Giorgio Morandi's humble, poetic still lifes. Morandi created his compositions from a variety of vases, boxes and pitchers in his studio -- ordinary objects that he grouped in small clusters, often evoking a sense of vulnerability.

Whiteread builds her shelf pieces from casts she's made of assorted packing materials -- cardboard tubes, polystyrene corners, boxes -- in pigmented plaster and resin as well as bronze. She stacks the objects, lines them up in rows, leans them into one another. As in Morandi's quiet visions, Whiteread's arrangements generate a subtle synergy.

The matte, chalky plaster objects offset the luminous, translucent pieces cast in resin (and looking, variously, like glycerin soap, wax or rubber). Pale, dilute, smoky colors edge up against buzzing, vibrant hues. A painterly sense of internal motion, of colors and shapes receding and coming forward, animates the compositions. So does a musical sense of rhythm and interval, tension and release.

In "Colours," six small buff-colored box forms and three cylindrical tubes (dusty mauve, rosy gray, ocher) rest atop a concrete-colored slab. The objects all lean slightly, as if in italics. The casts made of castoffs align, as if just for the moment, into a neat, tight little formal poem.

The 18 squat cylindrical forms in "Line Up" stretch across their shelf like jaunty misfits, exuberantly flaunting their imperfections, their crusty edges and mismatched height. This is Morandi carbonated -- still modest, still intimate, but with a fizzier sense of joy.

One of the enduring threads through Whiteread's work has been a building-block quality of construction. The shelf sculptures were born of such serious play and provisionality, as were several other sculptural groupings, the cityscape-like "Untitled (Mix)" and the humble stack, "Cairn." So too were a series of works on paper, but to far slighter effect. For these, Whiteread paired collaged reproductions of antique glass cups, goblets, vases and bowls with painted, overlapping rectangles of color. The pieces hint at the lyrical but lack the gorgeous tactility and emotional resonance of her sculptural work.

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Whiteread has paid homage to Bruce Nauman's early castings, but from the start her sensibility has reflected her idiosyncratic mix of interests in the indexical, the physical trace, the empty and the full. One of the most powerful works in this remarkable show is "Ghost, Ghost," a polyurethane cast of a dollhouse. Whiteread collects old, handmade dollhouses and recently has begun to exhibit them in hauntingly lighted, village-like installations.

"Ghost, Ghost" refers back to "Ghost," her 1990 plaster cast of an entire room, and to the echoes that lived experience sends through time and space. An old dollhouse packs a nostalgic charge to begin with. Whiteread's cast of it amplifies that charge exquisitely. The structure is translucent as ice, and decorative surface patterns and an interior staircase whisper from within.

Whiteread, who made a significant Holocaust memorial in Vienna in 2000, has created a domestic memorial in "Ghost, Ghost" -- a spectral relic, a powerful presence that conjures its own absence, an object suffused with loss.

**Gagosian Gallery**, 456 N. Camden Drive, Beverly Hills, (310) 271-9400, through Dec. 20. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.gagosian.com](http://www.gagosian.com).

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