

I Would Prefer Not To
Louise Manifold, 'Death and Fiction'
Siamsa Tire, Tralee, February 2013



In Samuel Beckett's short story *The Calmative*, the narrator wanders the streets of the city in search of contacts, acknowledgements that he is not in fact dead. He collects memories of his few brief encounters – his 'spoils' – as so many precious proofs of his uncertain existence.

In Louise Manifold's work, people, creatures and things never seem quite sure what realm they belong to: the animate or the inanimate, organic or mechanical, human or animal, living or dead. A taxidermic monkey blinks, a piano practices his scales, a chandelier softly sighs, Zograscopes await the spectacle they no longer provide, a melancholy woman is becoming wolf and that man is convinced to be dead; stirring from their designated place, they resist assignment.

In his essay on Herman Melville's story *Bartleby*, Gilles Deleuze describes its protagonist's signature formula 'i would prefer not to':

...its abrupt termination, not to, which leaves what it rejects undetermined, confers upon it the character of a radical, a kind of limit-function [...] Murmured in a soft, flat, and patient voice, it attains to the irremissible, by forming an inarticulate block, a single breath. [1]

Gently stubborn, Manifold's objects refuse to be done away too easily. These horses legs, these roe deer skulls, have been meticulously washed and smoothed down to be covered in black flock: transposed somewhere between the ossuary and the jewellery box the bones are at once adorned – made precious – and disappeared – the black flock absorbing the light they become shadows.

Exquisitely macabre, her objects aspire to the condition of metaphors, like these books that once took flight and are now a lens one sees life through, to the end. Literally.

Michaële Cutaya 2013

[1] Gilles Deleuze 'Bartleby; or, The Formula' in *essays critical and clinical* University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p.68