

ART REVIEWS: MARIANA CASTILLO DEBALL | NICOLAS PARTY | ELLA KRUGLYANSKAYA

BRITISH explorer Alfred Maudslay was one of the first Europeans to study Mayan sites in Mexico and Guatemala in the late 19th century.

Mariana Castillo Deball: What we caught we threw away, what we didn't catch we kept CCA, Glasgow

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Nicolas Party: Still life oil paintings and landscape watercolours Modern Institute, Glasgow

Ella Kruglyanskaya: Double-crossed Kendall Koppe, Glasgow

He developed an important technique for making lightweight replicas of the monuments and carvings he found known as the paper squeeze or paper trap, a light cast in papier mâché which, once shipped carefully back to Britain, could be used to make a plaster cast of the object itself.

There is no shortage of reasons why Maudslay's paper squeezes would interest Mexican artist Mariana Castillo Deball. Her chief interest is in objects, what they communicate, how they come to be preserved. These are fascinating both as objects and as sculptures, tactile, fragile, the sculptural equivalent of a photographer's negative.

This largely new body of work which debuts at CCA is the result of a period of research in the British Museum and two spells of residency at Cove Park in Argyll. It is informed by Maudslay, the paper squeeze, Eduardo Paolozzi (an artist with his own interest in anthropological artefacts and paper squeezes) and the anthropologist Alfred Gell, among other things. We know all this from the 32-page illustrated booklet given to each visitor. Conceptual art has been known to over-explain itself.

One of the questions to which Deball keeps returning is what we choose to preserve and why. Is an object artistic or anthropological, is it scientific or telling a story? What difference does this make? Ironically, Maudslay had a hard time persuading museums to preserve his paper moulds though they now form an important records of artefacts some of which have now been lost. Paolozzi, on the other hand, presented his "archive" to the National Galleries of Scotland, including 53 boxes of largely worthless ephemera preserved because of its connection to him. He called it "the metamorphosis of rubbish".

Having set the scene so thoroughly, the artist must still create work with visual impact. It is not enough to explore the past, we need to know why we are looking at this object now, what does it have to say to us? Deball's attempts to convince us on this score are muddled at best.

Predictably, she has made her own paper squeezes. As important Mayan carvings were sometimes found locked in the roots of trees, she has made casts of tree roots in Mexico, Costa Rica, Berlin and Scotland. While Maudslay's casts were about preserving ancient hieroglyphs so they could be studied and decoded in order to give us information about the vanished past, hers are simply roots and branches. They don't work as a metaphor or take

us on a journey, or give us anything further to think about.

The most interesting work here is Imprint Zoomorph P, in which Deball has made a replica of an important 8th-century Mayan carving from Quirigua, Guatemala, in briar wood and used it to make a series of woodcut prints. They are mysterious, fragmented and rather beautiful, pinned to the walls of one of the smaller rooms so they look almost like cave paintings. They aren't readable to us, but they go some way to evoking the ancient, distant world where the symbols originated.

At the Modern Institute, the paintings of Nicolas Party set up their own connections to the past. Party is Swiss but is now based in Glasgow having studied on the MFA course at Glasgow School of Art, and this is his first major solo show in Scotland. A show of still lifes and landscape paintings seems anachronistic in the Modern Institute, and this one comes heavily laced with irony, but Party is in the business of making paintings nonetheless.

There are two distinct bodies of work here. The still lifes are meticulous collections of objects – jugs, bowls, coffee pots, fruit – usually in bright hues. They are almost reduced to shapes and colours. He plays with ideas of scale (the huge pear, the tiny olive, the over-elongated tulip vase), experiments with ideas of planes and surfaces, and with how colours balance one another – or don't. All this puts him, to a greater or lesser extent, in a lineage of more than a century of still life painters.

His paintings are highly structured and well executed, if a little strange. His determination at staying with them – spending several months on a single painting – is reminiscent of Giorgio Morandi, who almost a century earlier painted the same bottles and jars over and over. But while Party's still lifes are meticulous to the point of obsessiveness, his landscapes are more free-form: collections of set-piece bushes and trees in garish, improbable shades. They look like fantasy landscapes from children's storybooks, as though Puff the Magic Dragon might appear at any moment, hand in hand with the Teletubbies. Unlike the still lifes, they don't appear to be a serious engagement with paint, or with anything very much.

The most interesting thing about this show is why a former graffiti artist with impeccable contemporary art credentials is making work that seems so traditional in form. Yet this, too, is a matter of context. At the Modern Institute, it's intriguing. Among submissions for the RGI or RSA, it would cause little more than a raised eyebrow. At least, the still lifes would. The landscapes would be in danger of being laughed out of town.

Party has said that painting is "a silent and motionless language", and it is certainly true of his paintings, though there would be plenty of artists who would contest it. The paintings of New York-based artist Ella Kruglyanskaya, who has her first solo show in Europe with Kendall Koppe in Dixon Street downstairs from Mary Mary, are neither still nor silent. The women in them are animated, bitchy, challenging, scrutinising, trying to out-dress one another.

Her inspiration for this show is Dolly Parton, an icon of femininity who is open and frank about how manufactured her own image is. Despite her cleavage and big hair, Dolly is a very postmodern celebrity. There is much double-crossing in the representation of the female, and there are ironies and doubling throughout this show. In the history of painting, women were beautified for the male gaze, but also, through different types of representation, found a kind of liberation. All this Kruglyanskaya knows, but her contribution is characterised by playfulness.

As paintings, they are variable. Some are rough and cartoonish, drawn rather than painted, sometimes a character is crudely crossed out, but two in particular stand out. Reading Bather and Mustache Beach switch medium to egg tempera, and the change of medium seems to create a more serious, contemplative mood. Here she works with colour, figure and pattern, blurring the two in a vibe which recalls the painting of the 1920s and 30s. They are properly intriguing, and remind us that there is a lot of skill here, even if at times Kruglyanskaya

ya prefers to throw away the rule book.

- Mariana Castillo Deball until 18 May; Nicolas Party until 8 May; Ella Kruglyanskaya until 11 May.