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Art Review Asia
"Tromarama: One Park West, Liverpool 9–31 July"

Tromarama

One Park West, Liverpool 9–31 July

I've always wanted to visit a haunted house. For its first UK exhibition, Indonesian collective Tromarama takes on the role of a naughty poltergeist by animating various household objects. The resulting installation – in addition to its studied reflection of the repetitive tasks of domesticity, the 'stuff', sentimental or not, that we hoard, and the similar, everyday objects bought and stored on shelves and under beds across the world – is tremendous fun. Febie Babyrose, Herbert Hans and Ruddy Hatumena have invaded a real, inhabited new-build apartment, installing their DIY-esque video-works throughout. Stop-motion animations made from HD photographs of toy trains and Russian dolls twirl on the living-room TV screen (*Pilgrimage*, 2011); an assortment of table lamps have a party (*Watt??!*, 2010) on a screen in the washing-machine cupboard. The exhibition is largely silent, except for some occasionally heard and very merrily hummed tunes coming from a film and attached headphones in the hall.

The exhibition has been staged concurrently with Liverpool Biennial and the apartment is open to visitors who book hourly tours at the nearby Open Eye Gallery (who present the show, curated by Ying Tan, alongside Hong Kong's Edouard Malingue Gallery). From there, we are escorted to the apartment, which is situated on the Liverpool waterfront. Taking the lift up

six floors, and politely replacing shoes with slippers in the hallway, one enters an unassuming, rather bland flat: white walls, black leather sofas and wooden floors; this could be anywhere.

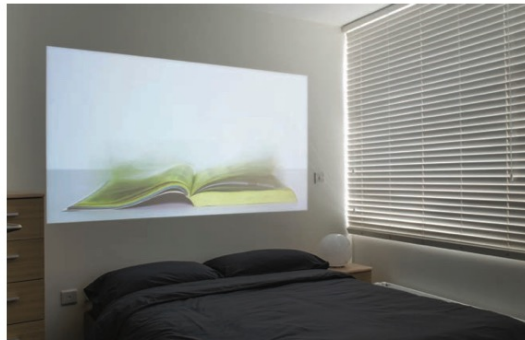
I'm told that we are only allowed access while the homeowner is at work, from where he returns in the early evening. As I creep from room to room, anxious that the owner of the flat might return, the saying 'while the car's away, the mice will play' comes to mind. Tromarama has anthropomorphised unremarkable objects, transforming them into sweet characters that come alive when their human cohabitant is absent. The artists have also made us into voyeurs; not just of someone's private space, which is a powerful experience in itself, but also, and unexpectedly, of the mass-produced, mundane things we all buy for our homes, no matter what country we live in (Ikea items feature prominently). We watch them play, and we also, quietly, admire their form and function.

In the bedroom, *Intercourse* (2015), a brazenly titled live-action video, is shown on two flat-screen TVs positioned at either end of the bed. An electric fan features on the first screen, seemingly blowing air at a series of objects on the second: tickling napkins, the pages of a Yellow Pages directory and sheets of bubble wrap so that they quiver. When the fan stops on one

screen, the objects cease moving on the other. Their prominent placement in this personal space – we're forced to stand a little too close to the bed – affirms the odd feeling of intrusion. The filmed objects are, after all, presented as if they are enjoying a private moment.

Back to the living-room, and *Unsettled* (2015) and *Living Room* (2015) hang on the walls: two large, iPhone-ratio photographs overlaid with fairly emotionless, noncommittal text that, thanks to the lenticular print technique used here, changes according to where you are standing. Take a few steps and 'I see what you see' becomes 'I feel what I feel'. Employing this holographic, old-fashioned media set into a recognisable, smartphone shape, these last works seem to watch us: moving slightly as we move, distant and artificial in tone, and to all appearances echoing a presence in the space. Which, one could say, is what objects do. TVs, tablets, laptops – things created in response to human need and behaviour, scattered around the home and assimilated into every part of life. Some of our most relied-upon possessions have integrated cameras, meaning there is the real possibility of being watched. Tromarama has successfully, via a clever combination of animism and setting, gently switched the perspective from our owning objects to objects owning us.

Laura Robertson



Intercourse (detail), 2015, two-channel video, sound, 4 min 10 sec. Courtesy the artists