

**B
E
S T A T E S
W
E
E
N**

Hannah Hughes's work occupies multiple states at once, hovering between photograph and sculpture, still life and assemblage, the material and immaterial. At times her modernist-looking forms resemble celestial bodies, floating untethered in space; at others they seem to be dancing in and out of formation. It's as if they refuse to be confined to the two-dimensional parameters of the photograph. Coming from a practice rooted in collage, Hughes had an epiphany a few years back on discovering a book of Brancusi's photographs of his studio: the space around his sculptures solidified, becoming an active presence in addition to the objects themselves. "That's when I realised how much photography could be a tool of sculpture to transform essentially immaterial matter into a sculptural element," she says. That realisation underpins her practice to this day.

In the works presented here from her Mirror Image and Tuck series, the artist uses sculptural strategies to convey a sense of mass, volume and even physical sensation. With titles like Pivot, Root, Tuck and Core, her sculptural photographs engage in a dialogue with the body. That there is a corporal connection to these forms is not haphazard. They begin life as the overlooked negative spaces between people or objects in fashion and auction catalogues like, say, the crook of an arm or the gap between two legs. For her Flatlands series, which forms the bedrock of her recent work, Hughes cut out these negative forms and reassembled them into dynamic collages, creating a tension between the appearance of solidity and the flatness of the surface. Existing hierarchies of value are thus inverted,

turning the marginalised lacunae or fragments around objects into positive forms that take centre stage.

The Mirror Image series takes this process of abstracting form a step further. Using her archive of cut-out negative spaces as props, Hughes creates new forms from their shadows by projecting light onto diverse backdrops. The negative form becomes a sort of double negative as the shadow is made material. Hughes arranges these shadow forms into new configurations as collages which share the rhythmic structure and volumetric feel of the Flatlands series yet have a strange shape-shifting quality. Forms advance and recede; mysterious shadows don't always correspond to the forms casting them. Take the image Stasis, for instance, which is anything but immobile. The incongruous shadow to the right suggests the pink cone is teetering on the point of collapse, held in check only by the pull of the grey-white half-orb which acts as a ballast. Pivot II has a similar sense of imminent movement, as if the white marble-like form appears poised to spin away any minute. Other more architectural works, such as Arcade I and II, hint at columns with the greatest possible economy of elements. Stripped of contextual information to anchor them in time and space, the forms confound the viewer's perceptions; they might be monumental monoliths or paper-thin assemblages; Hughes gives nothing away.

For her Tuck series, the artist has introduced an intriguing perceptual complication; through a painstaking process Hughes has added – or tucked - a physical collage element into the photograph itself. The internal structure of the original collages is revealed through magnification, yet the eye struggles to distinguish between the physical edge and the boundaries of the other shapes within the photograph. The ordering of the forms seems to be constantly in play, as if they are engaged in a game of musical statues. In Tuck X the linear forms seem to be trying to prevent the unruly curvy shapes sandwiched between them from spilling out; in Tuck VIII the forms seem to jostle for pole position at the front of the picture plane. The artist breathes life into these stagey *mise en scènes*, their flirtation with relief inviting us to imagine a world where we might see the forms in the round.

Within the liminal zone between photography and sculpture, Hughes has invented a language of her own with a distinctive vocabulary of glyphic forms, varied textures and subtle colours. She shows us the thrill of the

unnoticed: fragments, gaps, edges and negative spaces become worthy subjects. These elements are incorporated into her meticulous process of deconstruction and reconstruction until a chemistry emerges between her forms. As Hughes explains, “it's that in-between space where suddenly everything feels more activated.