



left: Richard Caldicott, New Work,
Untitled 31, 2008, courtesy of
Hamiltons Gallery

THE THINGS THEY ARE

Derek Horton discusses Richard Caldicott's series, Untitled 2008

Richard Caldicott's new series of works, *Untitled 2008*, is at once both a return and a new departure: the series marks a return to the object, but with a new found assertiveness in the sheer visual presence of the object's centrality that is essentially sculptural. The constructed nature of all Caldicott's previous photographs means, of course, that the object has never really gone away: even in the architecturally inspired compositions of 2003 or the geometric abstractions of the *Loop* series of 2005 or the *Script* series of 2006, the images are always dependent on the objective manipulation of physical material. But not since the works employing Tupperware, made mostly during the 1990s, has the photographed object been so evidently visible. Though this return to a means of construction wherein the component objects utilised in the

photographs remain recognisable is only a part of what distinguishes this new series from Caldicott's other recent work.

The everyday plastic objects from which the images are made are transformed into resonant new columnar objects that read simultaneously as iconic sculptural forms and as the central focus of photographs in which the dense black ground against which they are seen takes on an equally weighty presence. The repeated motif is a kind of Twenty-First Century nod to Brancusi's *Endless Column* that forms the Newman-like stripe or Flavin-like strip down the centre of a minimalist rectilinear composition. A less obvious but equally pertinent comparison is with the patterns of repeated pictorial elements in the 1960s *Composites* photographs of Ray K Metzker.¹

right top Richard Caldicott, New Work, Untitled 23, 2008, courtesy of Hamiltons Gallery

right bottom Richard Caldicott, New Work, Untitled 20, 2008, courtesy of Hamiltons Gallery

One of the characteristics of the kinds of plastics from which the mass-produced things utilised in these photographs are made is that their colour is embodied in their material, so that colour and form become indivisible. The difference between a thing that is coloured and a thing to which colour has been applied is immediately recognisable and perceptually very significant (think for instance of the difference between the painted planes and bars of a Rietveld chair and the moulded plastic ‘colourform’ of an Eames plastic chair). The objective unity of colour and form inherent in the material production of this series is central to its object-like sculptural qualities that are unique in Caldicott’s recent work. This characteristic of coloured plastic means that even when the material is transparent enough to allow light through, it retains its colour and consequently affects the colour of the light. Photography is, of course, a light-based medium but the particular use of light in these works exploits the varying densities of the plastics and their colourings in a play between opaque and transparent forms. This reinforces the instability of spatial divisions and an ambiguity between flatness and depth. Given the way that the mundane functional origins of the things from which these photographs are made remain visible even as they are transformed into objects of contemplation, this play between opaque and transparent forms is paralleled by a play between the literal world and abstract form.

It may seem at odds with the abstract and formalist nature of Caldicott’s oeuvre to quote a documentary street photographer in relation to his work, but Gary Winogrand’s assertion that he took photographs “to find out what things will look like photographed” is relevant here.² And, crucially, what Caldicott finds out is that they can look very different to the things they are. Winogrand also said, speaking of Walker Evans, that “his photographs are about how what is photographed is changed by being photographed and how things exist in photographs”.³ This is very much the case in relation to the mundane things used by Caldicott, but if his photographs are ‘about’ anything, as opposed to being the things they are themselves, they are about the power of the imagination to transform the material world of objects that surrounds us and create sensuous, elegant and pristinely new things from it.

A photographer perhaps closer to Caldicott’s sensibilities, Aaron Siskind, has said, “When I make a photograph I want it to be an altogether new object, complete and self-contained, whose basic condition is order, unlike the world of events and actions, whose permanent condition is change and disorder”.⁴ The order in these self-contained new objects of Caldicott’s is one that derives from his usual discipline and restraint, a minimalist aesthetic that works within the constraints of the simplest of structures and forms whilst imbuing them with a sensual richness that borders on decadence. Like a kind of alchemy, the production of these works uses technological processes



to transform uniform components that are themselves the products of industrialised manufacture into singular objects that generate a separate existence from a mass of copies. Varying between densely coloured opacity, translucence and reflective brilliance, their surfaces generate a seductive richness that belies both the austerity of their origins and the simplicity of their form. In this they are the epitome of ‘cool’, in the sense that it has been defined by Dave Hickey as “minimalism redeemed with eros and atmosphere”.⁵

¹ Relevant examples of Ray K Metzker's Composites include Philly Walk (1965), Car and Street Lamp (1966), Yikes (1966) and Stairburst (1969).

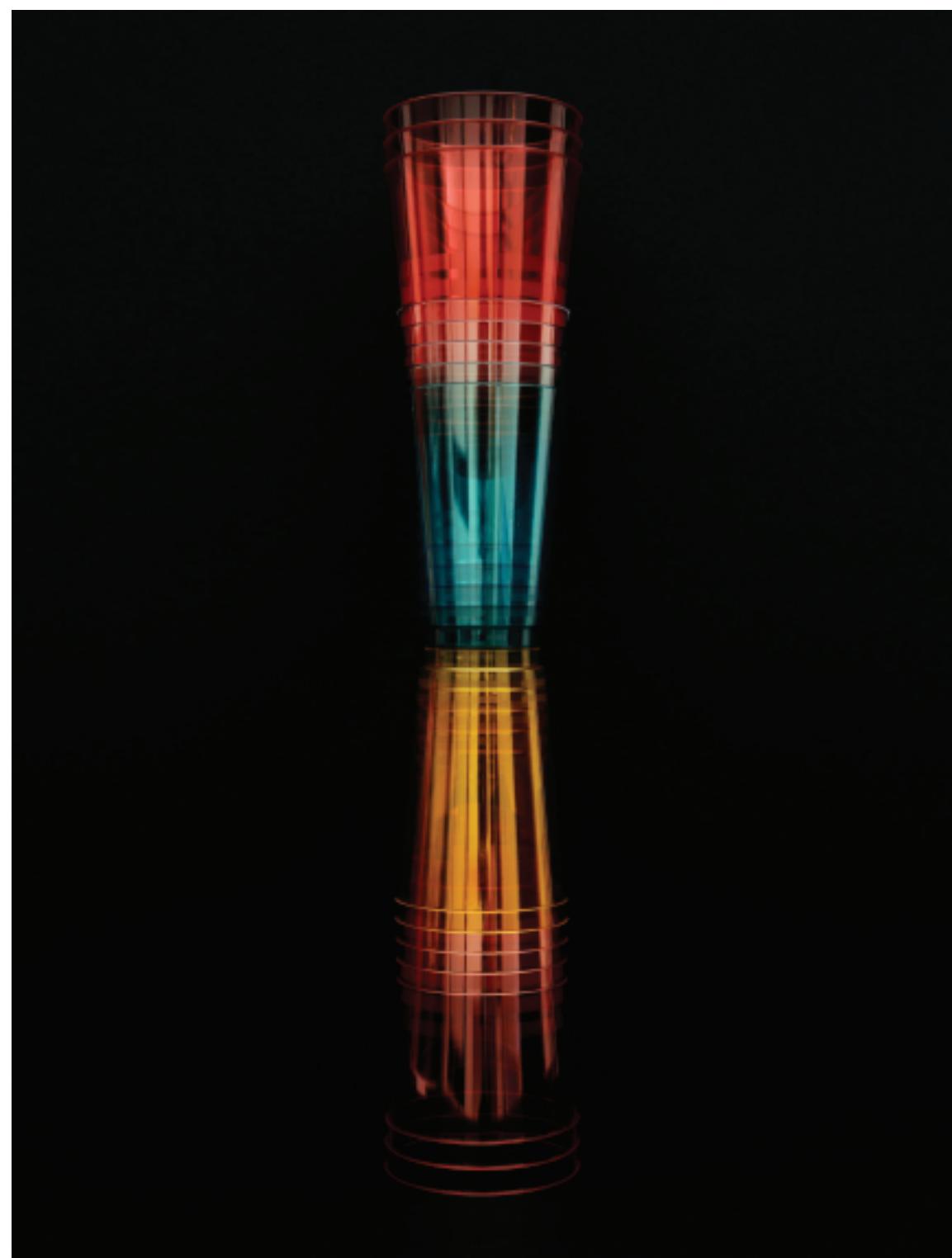
² Garry Winogrand, 'Monkeys Make the Problem More Difficult': A Collective Interview with Garry Winogrand, transcribed by Dennis Longwell, in Peninah R. Petrucci [ed.], *The Camera Viewed: Writings on Twentieth Century Photography*, Vol.II, New York: Dutton, 1979 (p.127)

³ Garry Winogrand in Walker Evans, *The Hungry Eye*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1993 (p.12)

⁴ Aaron Siskind in Brooks Johnson [ed.], *Photography Speaks*, New York: Aperture, 2004 (p.184)

⁵ Dave Hickey, Cool on Cool: William Claxton and the Way the Music Looked, in Elizabeth Armstrong [ed.], *Birth of the Cool: California Art, Design and Culture at Mid-century*, Newport Beach California: Orange County Museum of Art and Prestel Publishing, 2007 (p.137)

NEW WORK by Richard Coldicott runs 21 January – 21 February 2009 at Hamiltons Gallery, 13 Carlos Place, London, W1K 2EU. Telephone: +44 (0) 207 499 9493.
www.hamiltonsgallery.com



left Richard Coldicott, *New Work*, Untitled 3, 2008, courtesy of Hamiltons Gallery

Each image is an edition of 15, and each image size is 50 x 40 inches.