

Rachel Whiteread, Tate Britain, London, U.K.

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Rachel Whiteread

← *Untitled (Room 101)*, 2003.

Photo : © Tate

↑ *Untitled (One Hundred Spaces)*, 1995.

Photo : © Tate (Seraphina Neville and Andrew Dunkley)

Rachel Whiteread

A sink that is not a sink; a bathtub that is not a bathtub. Or not quite a bathtub because even though it looks like it could hold water, and is stained like a bathtub, with rusty sloping sides and base, its fixtures are all inside out. The bathtub is not made of one coherent material; its form is defined by the space around it, cast in concrete blocks—positives in negatives, the fulsome emptiness that surrounds every object, precious and mundane. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, wrote Magritte, over the image of a pipe. *Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself*, wrote Wallace Stevens, of the host of associations that surrounds any discrete moment.

A door that is not a door; a window that will never open; stairs that lead nowhere; a room that cannot be entered; the space under a chair. British sculptor Rachel Whiteread's world of objects is one of inversions: casting and recasting different lights and shapes and spaces around that which often passes unnoticed. A retrospective at Tate Britain brings together a vast body of the artist's work that ranges in scale from the very tender *Torso* works—casts of hot water bottles that appear as anthropomorphic, bodily shapes—to *Room 101*, the plasticized plaster cast of a room in the BBC's Broadcasting House, which inspired George Orwell's chamber of horror in his dystopian novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Whiteread is well known for her numerous international public commissions—from *Monument* for the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square (2001) to the *Holocaust Memorial* in Vienna (2000); and perhaps most notably, *House* (1993), a cast of the entire interior of a residence in East London that was slated to be demolished. It is this latter project, commissioned by the not-for-profit Artangel, for which Whiteread won the Turner prize, making her both the youngest and the first female recipient. Earlier works—casts from beneath chairs and tables, details of architectural features that repeat (windows, doors)—highlight aspects of the artist's nuanced

approach to making, as well as her position alongside other movements such as minimalism. Whiteread's touch is firm but slight, casual, familiar, knowing, and considered. The ordinary quality of each object to which she turns her attention, perfectly reproduced in muted tones, is rendered not quite itself, imbued with the care bestowed by curiosity, attention, and labour.

Gathered together in a large open plan exhibition space, Whiteread's body of work is both striking and disorienting. Each individual piece is a master work in casting, an engagement with the lives of inert, domestically scaled objects and spaces—even entire flights of stairs are based on actual homes, things traversed on a 1:1 ratio. At Tate Britain, the room yawns around them, giving ample space to see an immense range of Whiteread's impressive, varied oeuvre. However, a smaller, more intimate environment might have allowed these works to thrive as idiosyncratic objects—each with a life of its own, so deeply considered by the artist—rather than the slightly whitewashed impression that they are part of a medium-specific body of work.

Emily LaBarge

Tate Britain, London, U.K.

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