

# Sugarwalls

**Curator/Contributor:**

Moline, Katherine

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Sugar Walls  
Katherine Moline  
Yuill Crowley  
April 2005

Just seven monochrome works make up Katherine Moline's 'Sugar Walls' show. Each choreographs various intensities and vicissitudes of black, counter-pointed with the white walls of the gallery. Some are presented as single units, others as couplets (*Soft Light [flying]*), others, such as *Untitled (culture vultures)* as multiples. Six of the seven works are sculptural constructions affixed to the wall, which are fabricated from sheets of a composite of aluminium and polyethaline. With its perfectly flat and untextured surface, this high-tech architectural material is normally used to clad the walls of buildings. It's the kind of barely-there industrial skin that echoes a contemporary design penchant for the thinnest and lightest of electronic consumables, whether computers, mobile phones or television sets. As critic Andrea Codrington has observed, the flattening of three-dimensional electronic products into near two-dimensional surfaces has become a feature of recent design innovation. Yet, here Moline has commissioned a specialist to cut out both regular and irregular geometric shapes that are then folded or bent into three-dimensional structures. The paper-thin ethereality of the aluminium composite is creased and curved to form shapes that jut out from the wall, as wings, points, razor thin edges, or sloping shelves. The double orientation towards two and three-dimensional formats echoes the alternate modalities of black applied to the aluminium composite. One side is lacquered with a glossy enamel paint that mirrors its surroundings, while the other is covered in a matt satin that absorbs rather than reflects light.

The one anomaly in terms of materials and method of construction is *5000 times (bristling with joy)*. Also brackish in hue, this piece is fashioned from a square of masonite board, perforated with around five thousand holes. Foliage from numerous dismantled plastic pot plants has been laboriously wired into the punched out eyelets. The result is a cross between a spiky monochrome painting, and a square of unruly artificial turf. *5000 times* drops a hint of DIY clunkiness in the midst of the aerodynamic sleekness of the other constructions. So, what are we to make of an abstract syntax that co-implicates heterogenous values and identities in this way? Monochrome painting formats transmute into sculptural construction, and reflective surfaces that activate environmental features unfurl into impervious surfaces suggestive of intimate interiors.

For many years, Katherine Moline's art has been in dialogue with the traditions, the turns and byways of geometric abstraction in both painting and sculpture. Her activation of artistic novelty therefore arises from within the repertoires of earlier art that are registered via the materials and recognisable forms she adopts. A number of different art historical moments are deposited in the current show. One might think of the intensive investigation of art's materialist ground in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Constructivism. Also insistently referenced are the reduced geometries, industrial materials and impersonal expression of the classic phase of Minimalism. Donald Judd famously situated the 'specific objects' of Minimalism in a liminal zone between painting and sculpture, and Moline's art continues to explore this truncated space. Yet, while early Minimalism aimed to strip the work of art off all symbolic or emotive significance, Moline articulates an intellectually cool and austere geometry alongside various metaphorical and anecdotal valences. Evidencing Moline's typical attentiveness to the titles of her works, *Untitled (Culture vultures)* amalgamates evacuated content and an all too familiar homily about the art world. On the one hand, this piece registers an austere abstract notation of twelve black units that straggle across the wall. On the other, it imparts vitalist metaphors of movement and flight, whether of a feathered or technologically assisted kind. One way of thinking about the works in this show, as a group or separately, through their striving to conjoin contradictory values. These values might include the abstract and the organic,

visual clarity and its passing away, the animate and the inanimate, objective form and subjective nuance. In short, this is an aesthetic characterised by a rigorously consistent, historically sensitive performance of inconsistency.

Toni Ross  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Art History and Art Education  
College of Fine Arts UNSW  
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