

Domestic

In the magical thinking of the child, inanimate objects have a life of their own. While this animistic view of the world gives way to the rational understanding of the adult, it persists in the emotions imbedded in seemingly ordinary domestic objects. In this exhibition, Sue Knight transforms humble items from around the home – the iron, the bread tag, the fleur-de-lys pattern from wallpaper and kitchen implements such as spatulas and tea strainers – into semi-abstract objects of mystery and wonder that hark back to memories of our earliest days.

Appropriately, given the preoccupation with the power of childhood memory, this exhibition has a retrospective quality, returning to methods and objects that have featured in earlier shows. Knight has long been drawn to the cyanotype which, as the original blueprint in architecture and engineering, draws on the modernist architectural credo of form following function, allowing her to explore the relationship between utility and beauty. The cyanotype's potency for Knight also derives from visits to her father's architectural office as a girl, where she would marvel over the blueprints of his designs.

Alert, however, to the potential confines of the domestic sphere and the rigidity of its rituals, Knight subverts the geometric precision of the architectural blueprint with an element of play and a deliberately haphazard quality. The cropped edges of her cyanotypes, which partly obscure some of the shapes, and the way they are toned with tea – that most domestic of drinks which is deplored as a stain when spilt – remind us that rules about order are made to be broken. This defiantly playful quality is also evident in the cartoonishness of the pigment prints of multiple kitchen implements that appear to be interacting with one another.

The domestic fetish for crisp clean lines and smooth planes is also expressed in the iron, a piece of technology that has changed little in design

since its invention. Material that would normally be regarded as detritus from around the house – dust and fabric residue from the dryer, hair and scraps of wool – loom from within Knight's wax irons like fossils in marble or insects preserved in amber. Instead of being an object that presses things into neat, manageable shapes, the iron becomes an item of pure aesthetic pleasure that challenges us to question our fear of disarray.

In the fluoro acrylic bread tags glowing as if radioactive and the colourful fleur-de-lys liberated from their normal context, we see the enchantment of the ordinary, like Cinderella's transformation when she is plucked from the kitchen cinders and dressed for the ball. Repeated and multiplied, these now abstract forms are quilted to create new shapes, just as the artist herself reconfigures the domestic world by melding the child's magical vision with the adult's hard won experience.

Fiona Capp 2014