

I was recently introduced to Rae's work through our mutual friend, Simon Richardson. Simon sent me a reproduction of one of Rae's still lifes, alongside works of Isabella Quintanella and Antonio Lopez Garcia, 'for a bit of inspiration,' he said. Of the works Simon sent, I was immediately struck by Rae's, messaging Simon back with something banal, like 'wow.' As I continue to look at Rae's paintings now, that 'wow' continues to stick. But as I return to that moment of first sighting Rae's work—with the hope of reigniting or recalibrating that initial response—I ask: what is so 'wow' about the work? What stood out for me in that painting—a still life made up of gas canisters, vintage fire extinguishers, a nitrous dispenser; vessels standing proud and carefully curated atop a Formica table—as I gazed at it through the dirty fingerprints on the screen of my phone?

The first place one might go in responding to Rae's *various objects* is to say something about the colour and composition of the paintings. They're bold and textured, enriched by shadows and variation of shape, and with a 'meticulous regard for truth of tone,' as Robert Hughes once wrote of Edward Hopper. There are lines for the eyes to travel through, that lead you at once into and out of the frame, only to circle back for more. They are nothing if not compelling. They want you to stay with them, to look and to look again. The consistency of perspective—always the same angle, the same frame—neutralises the viewing, so we feel we're effectively looking upon a setting: a painted film still or the objects boxed in by a window frame.

They are paintings of objects, but they are also paintings *as* object, as hinted to in the title of the show. We are invited to view the objects of Rae's gaze vis-à-vis her own meticulously curated act of objectification. To objectify, when regarding the human body, is degrading, taking away the humanity of the person, say, with the aim of *making object*. To objectify the object, however, is an act of inversion: Rae's curated gaze upon the object—her own act of objectification—brings subjectivity to the fore, both hers and ours. We're witness to her seeing and, in doing so, made aware of our own act of looking.

Where objectivity gives way to subjectivity, we enter the realm of self and other. Us looking at Rae seeing; we are witness to Rae's gaze. Is the object of our looking the same? Do we have a shared reality of these objects? Regardless, there's an attempt to hold us as she holds her own gaze, for us to try and meet in a shared reality, where the distance between self and other is minimised. And this act of holding is both figurative and literal: we're invited to look upon vessels that also have the potential to hold another object or a substance—a stalk of foliage, an unidentified gas, hot tea.

One step further and the idea of holding or containing leads to something more than these potential literal and figurative interpretations. The term 'holding' in relation to another, particularly the mother-child relationship, was coined by the British psychotherapist D. W. Winnicott and has become commonplace in psychoanalytic theory. Winnicott argued that holding is the 'space between the inner and outer world, which is also the space between people—the transitional space—that intimate relationships and creativity occur'. It is the 'holding environment' that enables the child to facilitate their own autonomy and grow into their own subjectivity. As we stare at these vessels, these other objects of holding, we might also meditate on the notion of the inner and the outer: the space between us and Rae as we gaze upon the paintings, and the way this holding might facilitate a level of intimacy between us and the painter herself. She invites us to be held by these paintings, just as the objects themselves hold, to look with her as she guides us in and around their 'truth of tone'.

Rae tells me she avoids giving her pieces titles, to avoid any 'narrative connotations'. This is not unlike the holding environment—it is without story, beyond a beginning, middle and end. In Rae's paintings, I suggest we are asked not to look for a *turn*, a *denouement* or a *climax*, or for them to tell us how to read them, if reading is an act *in priori*. Instead, we're made subject to a phenomenology of looking. In this looking, though Rae's own, we witness a holding whilst in turn being held, by the gaze and by our own subjectivity. To look *with* Rae is to be held by her, her painting as object, and the objects of her painting. This, for me, is the 'wow' of her work.