

AWARD WINNING ARTIST NIKOLAI ISHCHUK by Jared Thompson

Nikolai Ishchuk is a London-based artist working on the borders of photography and other media. He recently completed his MA in Fine Art at the Chelsea College of Art and Design.

“My work has a kind of split personality: it oscillates between the rather cerebral and theory-driven on the one hand, and the (seemingly) private on the other. To be honest, it depends a lot on my circumstances and access to facilities at any particular time. But perhaps this friction between thinking and making as modes of cognition is the long story arc of my practice, not necessarily playing out to the full extent within each individual body of work but between them. Still, they are all united by a strong formal tendency, one that tries to tease out a hidden order of things, however reliable or flawed. Maybe I’m a conflicted positivist.

“I would never call my work sentimental. Take *Offset* for example, the series for which I’m best known and which can currently be seen at the Jerwood Space in London until December 8 as part of the *Family Politics* exhibition:

“Because of the way the project has been publicized, many people don’t realize that the top image is only half the story. Although the two elements are not linked in fixed pairs, the series also contains black cutouts, like the one below, that anchor the work in a formal investigation.

“In the last two years, I’ve been developing the 3D and mixed-media strand, which is still rooted in photography and photographic theory along with a vestigial modernist sensibility. Exciting things are happening on this front right now, with young artists attacking, picking apart and just being plain irreverent to the medium from many different angles. The names that come to mind are Erin Shirreff, Jordan Tate, Matthew Brandt... I could go on. On the theoretical side, I must point to Fredric Jameson, a philosopher/critical theorist, and Walead Beshty, an artist and quite a prolific writer, as my guides.



Nikolai Ishchuk. *Indeterminate Object 12*. 2013. C-print, cyanotype, acrylic, polymer spray, cement. 16.5 x 23.5 x 16 cm.

“Mine end up being these awkward but alluring objects – people keep wanting to touch them – that are trying to escape from the image into form, surface and other sensuous but somewhat futile things. As a result they don’t really know where they belong, hence most of them are called *Indeterminate Objects*.

“My previous background is in social, economic and political science, and I hadn’t been to art school until I went to Chelsea College two years ago, to do a Postgraduate Diploma and then an MA in Fine Art. Art school was great, and different from ‘regular’ education. I met so many wonderful, generous, supportive people with whom I’m hoping to stay in touch for many years. It’s common to feel that one has achieved as much thanks to one’s alma mater as in spite of it, and I’m no exception. These are difficult times for arts education too. But it definitely allowed me to do things I wouldn’t have considered or for which I wouldn’t have mustered enough courage on my own. Embarking on another postgraduate course was a big decision, but it seems to be paying off: I’ve been steadily building my profile, graduated with distinction, gotten my work into the University collection, and given a seminar to the new intake of students. I’m looking forward to doing a bit more teaching. Right now, I am preparing for my first solo show in the US early next year... with Denny Gallery in New York who have been representing me since last spring. The gallery is also taking some of my work to the UNTITLED. art fair in Miami Beach this week.”