

# Art Review:

**Richard Hughes**

**Richard Hughes: *Where It All Happened Once***  
Tramway, Glasgow  
26 October – 16 December

In his 1997 book *Mind Invaders*, Stewart Home wrote of the way in which urban landscapes could be emotionally remapped as 'rebels and bohemians traverse cities, scattering signs, staging enigmas, leaving coded messages, usurping the territorial claims of priests and kinds by transforming the social perception of specific urban sites'. Richard Hughes's work operates in a similar fashion, bringing these signs, messages and transformations into the gallery space in monumental sculptural installations that neither celebrate nor condemn the dross-scapes and wastelands of British towns and cities.

The Failure of modernist ideals, depictions of abandoned, rundown architecture and the appropriation of modernist design are well-worn, even hackneyed themes in art of the last 15 years or so. In Theory and academia, too, these subjects continue to demand seemingly endless attention. Perhaps this is a reflection of "the state we are in", a collective memory of the recent past that now seems comparatively less austere or grim than it did. Unlike some of his contemporaries, however, Hughes avoids the obvious 'mourning and presenting a more nuanced, conflicted nostalgia for his teenage playgrounds. If anything, like Robert Smithson's photographic/map artwork *Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey* (1967), Hughes offers us a kind of skewed Ozymandias complex here, a cut-price version of 'ruin value'. The scale of his work alone brings with it a sense of absurdity and playfulness that mitigates against reading these sculptures as purely 'gritty' or 'realist'. *Community Fun Day* (2012), for example is the gargantuan centrepiece of the exhibition, a scaled down replica of a boarded-up, decaying community centre modelled on an existing early-1980s building. The entire mockup tilts on its side, as if it has been dropped carelessly into the space, or hurled across the city by a giant baby throwing toys out of a pram. The title, too, is a iconic as David Shrigley's *Leisure Centre* (1992), a photograph of a small cardboard box dumped in the middle of wasteland with the words "Leisure Centre" written on it. Likewise, the most fun we can imagine at Community Fun Day would undoubtedly take place behind the building, rather than within it.

The wit and humour of Hughes's work relies, to some extent, on an experiential understanding of such spaces, and the works aid this kind of associative response. The ability to laugh, even in the midst of our horror, at urban entropy and to use it to recall personal narratives is part of a broader, more sober



reflection on the shortsighted and/or oppressive sociopolitical ideologies that gave rise to such 'projects'. The anthropomorphism of objects such as *The Pedestrian* (2012), a cast of lamp-posts that appear to have come to life as a pair of running legs, or the deflated football fashioned into a sinister skull atop the sculpture *If socks aren't pulled up heads will roll* (2009), reinforce the surreal, defamiliarised or mythic properties we often ascribe to found or abandoned objects encountered or stumbled across in 'edgelands', as we wander, play or get lost on home turf.