

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy: A Passion for Detail

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There are people who take salt in their coffee. They say it gives it a tang, a savour, which is peculiar and fascinating. In the same way there are certain places, surrounded by a halo of romance, to which the inevitable disillusionment, which you must experience on seeing them gives a singular spice. You have expected something wholly beautiful and you get an impression, which is infinitely more complicated than any that beauty can give you. ¹

W. Somerset Maugham, Honolulu

I quote this passage from Somerset Maugham because it helps me to introduce a notion central to the artistic practice of Jennifer and Kevin McCoy: how an image comes to life. What determines the fact that our brain retains certain images in an almost photographic manner, yet forgets a million others? Throughout our lives we live not only in different physical spaces but different virtual spaces too, thanks to television, cinema, advertising and art. All these different spaces use different languages and communication codes. Some spaces are perceived as informal, like the street or a living room (to use a public and a private example). Other spaces are gestural, cool, almost unreal, or perhaps better described as cinematic. Jennifer and Kevin McCoy are playful researchers, and take inspiration from all the images that we are surrounded by in an attempt to define new possibilities and principles and understand better the multiple worlds that we inhabit simultaneously.

In many of Jennifer and Kevin McCoy's installations the viewer is confronted with a series of models as well as an index of images. The artists remake specific scenes in miniature, some taken from cinema (as is the case with *Soft Rains*, 2003), and others taken from everyday memories, images that actually 'belong' to their lives (as is the case with *Traffic*, 2004). A series of cameras records these images and a computer chooses the sequence of shots, acting as the director. Each of these scenarios operates like a film studio, giving the artists the opportunity to re-enact life and memory. Every one of these sets could be read as a potential 'laboratory' of life: they make us think about the way an image is produced, as well as its meaning. The fact that they are hand-made also adds an interesting element of fallibility to the reality on which they are based. The works recreate each scene in miniature, and in that sense every re-enacted image actualises the mechanical act of

¹ W. Somerset Maugham, *Collected Short Stories Volume I* (Vintage Classics) (Honolulu: Random House, 2000), p 86.

