

SUNNY SIDE UP / BUTTER POINT AT PALUDAL

As a child, as now, the only tongue twister that my round cheeks could manage was the butter one—*Betty boughta bitta butta but tha butta Betty bought was bitta so Betty boughta bit more butta to make the bittabuttabetta*—enunciation becoming soft with every repetition. There is something so pleasurable about the word butter that makes you want to say it again and again and again, a linguistic mimicry of the texture of the glossy yellow substance.

Same as the tongue twister, butter exists in multiples in Lucy Meyle's sculptural exhibition *Butter Point*. Hundreds of faux butter blocks are arranged on the gallery floor, in the hot and small gallery, as summer warms up. *Butter butter butter butter butter butter* my brain says for each block it encounters. Butter in heat develops a surface of sheen, slick and oily, and Meyle's butter blocks do have this shiny look about them. But, ah, this butter is not bitter, nor softening in the temperatures of December because this particular volume of butter references a cache deposited by an Antarctic exploration party for the return leg of their trek through unsparing conditions, with the intention of cooking seal meat in it for sustenance. The mass of butter left at these particular coordinates furnished the map of Antarctica with a new location, Butter Point, an ode to supplies and a hopeful return journey. This is the not-bitter-butter at hand in Meyle's work, butter kept good by the freezing Antarctic climate.

The butter is now a signifier for a return journey never completed. I think about this in terms of navigation and exploration, and through Meyle's installation, conceive of Butter Point as a place that can only be found once it has already been reached—somewhere that has already experienced an arrival and should be returned to in order to galvanise its existence at all. *Butter Point* is able to suggest a metaphysical experience of space and map-making where a place does not exist until a return journey is anticipated or expected. As such, Meyle's sculpture expands the activity of navigation from a mode of looking toward a mode of planning; here, anchored by multitudinous butter blocks.

Being oriented in place through an animal product is what arches between the *Butter Point* work and Meyle's cast of the Liver of Piacenza, a bronze replica of a sheep's liver. Myth and history describe the original liver as a tool of divination, etched with intersecting lines that form a haphazard grid across the artefact, dividing it into pieces to model the division of the cosmos, each segment ruled by a different deity. Meyle's liver sculpture, *The liver as a mirror to the universe*, is blank, though. The liver could be held in the palm of the hand, weighty, fresh bronze that glimmers, not yet dulled by patina. I think of the diviners of the original Liver of Piacenza following the signals from the inscriptions etched into the metallic body of the liver. How can we find direction through an object as vague and prospecting as *The liver as a mirror*? Like *Butter Point*, it reflects a kind of map-making that extends beyond earthly terroir. As such, its concerns are not merely of the spatial kind that we believe in when we read a map, but of temporal directions as well. In Meyle's evacuation of markings from the liver, the bestial sculpture that remains is something that cannot exist in alterity: it can only be read through an interdependency between beings.

The common animal characteristic of Meyle's references confirm a relationship of mysticism between humans and animals throughout recorded history. Here is detritus that we have buried, imitated, and ideologically invested in, to establish or confirm our identity in a certain place—a compulsion to reckon with the unknowns of time's passage through a solid object. Perhaps it is a hope that a species other than our own may host ways of knowing that we are not yet fully conscious of. Is this not the calibration occurring for the traveller to Antarctica, or for he who consults the weighty bronze liver? In *Butter Point*, the tendency to orient oneself with an animal byproduct as the compass, toward the planetary, proves often to be a viscous organ slipping through butterfingers.