

TimeOut

Becky Beasley - Three Notable Novellas

Laura Bartlett, West End

Review

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By Martin Herbert

Becky Beasley works a similar scam to Tom Elurr, Wade Guyton and several others, superimposing unlikely content on to the blank façades of minimalist aesthetics. Presented as sculptures and as faintly blurred, archival-looking monochrome photographs, the boxy objects in this show mimic the glacial obduracy of prime Judd and Serra – albeit often on a more modest scale. But the show is titled 'Three Notable American Novellas', and each work spins off from twentieth-century US literature. A shallow plywood box, reprised several times with variously positioned black Perspex insets apparently visualises a symbolic coffin in William Faulkner's 'As I Lay Dying', Herman Melville's 'Bartleby the Scrivener', meanwhile, features an image of a folding screen that inspired the large, striped, L-shaped screen in the large, moody photograph 'Malcontenta'. It has transgressed in the process, however, as have many of Beasley's artworks in the journey from page to plinth photograph.

Two wooden slipcases, similar to those that might house a book, contain tightly packed reams of green paper: the colours differ, but both reflect Beasley's request to Americans that they find her some copy paper coloured 'Prairie Green', a colour mentioned in Gilles Deleuze's analysis of the aforementioned Melville novella. Such moves corroborate Beasley's thoughtful approach to the nuances of representation, one that intermittently releases scents of nostalgia and loss as well as questions of how content might figure – and how deeply it might be embedded – in apparently mute objects. Sparser presentation would serve her better, but the ambition is unquestionable.