

ROULA PARTHENIOU: CHALK TO CHEESE

SEPTEMBER 3 TO OCTOBER 26, 2016

CURATED BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

The strange logic of looping back

BY JENNIFER MATOTEK, DIRECTOR/CURATOR

The objects in *Chalk to Cheese*, which stretch out before you on long plinths, have a particular progression. To read from left to right, like a book (this exhibition is in a library, after all), it starts with what appear to be: a domino, erasers, a rock, some candy. These objects then progress into other small constellations, spin-offs, formed to generate other associations – a container that looks like Pepto Bismol is placed near what looks like a pink eraser, positioned next to a constellation of what looks like cheeses and round fruits. Adjacent to the round fruits are representations of round balls. The erasers seem to follow a logical progression: next to the pink pencil eraser is a chalk eraser, and then a sponge – all objects of erasure, of rubbing away.

Immediately, I realize I have failed in my reading of this work. Despite my best efforts, I did not read the work perfectly

from left to right. I tried, but my mind resisted the logic of literacy. Visual literacy works differently. Your reading of the objects will unfold differently most likely, depending on how your eyes move, and how you understand objects, as parts and wholes.

My reading of the objects show how my eyes initially dart over the work, yielding smaller sub-connections between objects – details, really – before taking in a bigger picture. This is the way my brain tends to work, although I understand from reading neurobiology texts that it's uncommon. Most subjects, when asked to describe something, will note the big picture, what the larger thing is, first, and then progress to notable details. I tend to start with the small things, the details, things that tickle me or seem compelling or important. I only see and provide the bigger picture or larger context after prompting.

The objects in *Chalk to Cheese*, which stretch out before you on long plinths, resemble familiar everyday objects from far away. Up close, you see that they are art objects, hosts to decorative features designed to remind you of real, everyday objects. Resemblance is driven through form and shape, perfect tones of matte paint colour, and true-to-life scales (arguably in that order, in my mind, if I slow the thought process triggered by my desire to “recognize” the real items these art objects are meant to refer to). The pieces are not quite replicas, not quite ready-mades, but something else: vehicles for myriads of associations, triggers for memories and feelings. Their arrangement forces the viewer to read them, although that reading might start from any place, and move in any number of directions.

To continue reading the objects, your eyes and brain once again defy left-to-right literacy – the visual literacy of your brain forces the viewer to loop back to where you started, and begin again, to move through object series which radiate in another direction.

Many of the objects in *Chalk to Cheese*, which stretch out before you on long plinths are representations of things you might find at a party. I realize now that I could have started the essay with that observation. But that’s not how my brain works. Your reading of the objects

will unfold differently than mine, most likely, depending on which directions your eyes move, and how you receive and understand objects, as parts and wholes, as you move through memories and feelings looking at the objects, sometimes looping back to a place you started.

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Roula Partheniou has exhibited across Canada and internationally. Her work is held in numerous private, corporate, and institutional collections. She is a co-founder of Nothing Else Press and lives in Toronto. Partheniou is represented by MKG127, Toronto.



Roula Partheniou, *Balloon*, 2016, enamel on resin, string. Photo: Don Hall



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COVER IMAGE

Roula Partheniou, *Chalk to Cheese* (detail), 2016, acrylic on wood and MDF, polymer clay, flocked foam, plaster, marker on vellum, Slinky. Photo: Don Hall.



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