

Rebecca Coates, 'Hany Armanious' in *Uncanny Nature*, exhibition catalogue,
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Hany Armanious

Hany Armanious is part shaman, part 21st century alchemist. He turns every-day plastic to gold; a contemporary witch-doctor in a Western world he presents what shouldn't be there, what lies out of sight and out of mind, or exists wholly in our imagination. The flotsam and jetsam of every-day life used outside their normal functions collide to infuse Armanious' inventions, experiments and explorations, becoming in turn the artist's own reality - and subsequently ours. A series of hooks, recast and mounted on undulating edged glossy-black backing board, become more like a new form of decorative relief than fulfilling the utilitarian role for which they were designed. On closer inspection, *Intelligent design*, 2006, is a children's game, and the plastic horse's head, the door latch, and the odd, discarded piece of plastic like the pump-pack plastic nozzle, are game pieces which Armanious recasts and inverts to become new alternative life-forms.

Bubble jet earth works, 2005, is a machine that creates a sort of musical score or hieroglyphic writing on paper with bubbles and worm castings - a play on the old bubble jet printers, but which here uses a more natural form of ink and method of imprint. Glycerine, the solution used to blow the liquid onto the highly absorbent paper, is like printer ink a by-product of petroleum; in this case, the glycerine is mixed with the liquid-gold worm castings, the by-product of our own waste and biodegradable refuse. A can of Guinness - again, liquid-gold - forms part of the contraption: is this another food source? Is it feeding worms hidden deep in the machine? The answer is never revealed. In the corner of the room, the pile of crumpled paper with its random tracery of naturalistic signs, mounts into an ever-increasing pile of by-product.

The synthesis of the natural and the artificial is something that Armanious continues to explore in all of his work. One of the materials which highlights this dichotomy is the commercially produced synthetic latex, 'hotmelt'. Frequently used by Armanious in his installations, its appearance and inherent qualities highlight this disjunction between the natural and the refined. Petroleum, from which plastic is derived, comes from deep below the earth's crust, from the exhumed remains of ancient forests buried deep below the seething mass of earth's humanity. By filling and casting found objects and every-day items, using either 'hotmelt', or any other man-made, highly refined material, Armanious captures their normally unseen cavities and irregularities. Through repetition, the familiar becomes uncanny in its familiarity.

A French children's book of the late 60s, *Barbapapa*, has recently been rediscovered and again become something of a cult classic. It features a family of fantastical creatures able to morph themselves into various shapes and sizes, forms and functions. Together, they form a Utopian community keeping the evils of the modern world and pollution at bay, and creating ingenious solutions to the dilemmas of housing and nutrition at the same time. It all sounds sickly sweet, too perfect a world, but in the same way Armanious' oversized muffins tease the viewer with their delectability while their appearance hides a more disturbing reality. These are not wholesomely nutritious muffins, but are created from man-made chemical products, toxic in the extreme. The worlds of nature and created reality collide.

