



‘Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence.’

Tennessee Williams, ‘The Timeless World of a Play’, a preface to his play *The Rose Tattoo* first produced in 1951

Above Rachel Dein uses plaster-cast tiles to capture intricate details of wild rose plants.

Opposite Phoebe Cummings, *Triumph of the Immaterial*, (clay, water). Winner of the Woman’s Hour Craft Prize, Victoria & Albert Museum, 2017. Photo by Sylvain Deleu.

Rachel Dein

British artist

(xxxxx-)

Inspired by the historic tradition of nature printing, the artist Rachel Dein makes plaster casts of plants and flowers to reveal morphological features such as shape, form, pattern, tenacity and texture. In some such casts, she renders the image of a single stem on a small tile, in others a whole meadow of wildflowers and grasses on a large panel, citing pendulous bleeding hearts, the curly fiddleheads of ferns and delicate poppies as favourite muses. Naming influences such as Auguste Rodin and Andy Goldsworthy, Dein’s work certainly has a similarly sculptural feel, created by pouring plaster into moulds made by pressing flowers, leaves and other ephemeral plant matter into clay. Her botanical castings were brought even further to the fore via a series of works made with plants and flowers from Raymond Blanc’s restaurant Le Manoir Aux Quat’Saisons, in Oxford.

Phoebe Cummings

British artist

(1981-)

Themes of earthiness and ephemerality are also explored via the ceramic installations of British inter-disciplinary artist Phoebe Cummings. Working with raw, unfired clay to create temporary site-specific pieces, Cummings’ work responds to the natural world and lasts only for the duration of an exhibition. Thus, *Triumph of the Immaterial* (2017), a fountain-piece made over five weeks from layers of exquisitely sculpted, air-dried clay flowers and foliage that was subjected to a flow of water that gradually eroded it over a period of 24 hours. The absurdity of investing time and energy into something that will break back down into the raw material is not lost on Cummings, indeed, it’s all part of the performative mix – a response to a preoccupation with owning things and the emotions drawn from fleeting entities such as nature.

