

Ways in Analysis

Example

Rachel Whiteread
Closet, 1988

Miss Crowe October 2020

Rachel Whiteread - Closet, 1988

Personal

My first reactions to the work is that it is dark and haunting, almost like an old house or building because of the colour which is made from black felt covered over plaster. Also in real life it would be quite tall like a wardrobe, so for a small child I feel that it would be quite overpowering and intimidating.

The work reminds me of an old ornament in a Victorian house. Firstly because of the detail on the front with the wooden panel indents. Secondly, because I know that it is called *Closet* and Whiteread cast this from an old wooden wardrobe which reminded her of hiding in one as a child. It also makes me think of the Lion, with and the wardrobe where the children discover a world full of fantasy and dreams.

I can connect the work to memories of lost innocence and childhood because of how we were so little and small and being able to hide in places that adults were not able to. Also, in my Mum's closet she had lots of items of clothing and shoes that I would try on as a little girl and play dress up. I connect it to the way that we used to build and manufacture things of practical and impractical use-items were made by hand and the materials used were good quality, natural, and constructed well which made sure that they lasted a lifetime. Fifty years ago, people did not have the disposable income we have now so they would purchase something that would last them all their lives. It is quite the opposite to our disposable world of cheaply made items and keeping up with the fashion. Also, wardrobes now are usually quite boring in appearance and stuck to walls with mirrors on.

Subject

This is a cast (sculpture) of a closet (wardrobe) made of plaster covered in black felt. The work is about Whiteread's memories of hiding in the closet as a child. The black felt is a reminder of the fact that this is the cast of an interior—the dark space within a wardrobe.

I think the message here is that whilst we may think of wardrobes as purposely built objects to house our clothes and shoes etc. These are also objects that have memories and reminders of childhood and playing hiding games. Also, because it is a lone standing wardrobe, I think it is about the history of how things were made and how much care and skill were put into these objects that were only made to house other items that we took care of. They are a shell that protects the objects and items inside—made for practical purposes rather than beauty, which is often what the items inside are made for (clothes that we buy because we like the way they make us feel and how they look on us—high heels that we might only wear once as they are too impractical to wear on a daily basis).

Whiteread calls it *Closet* and I think this changes the way I see it from looking at it without knowing the title because it just looks like a concrete sculpture which is quite geometric, however, no reading the title, it becomes clearer to see what the work is of and why she may have made this piece.

Object

Whiteread uses black for this piece as it is a reminder of the interior of the closet/wardrobe and the darkness she experienced when hiding in it as a child.

The sculpture is quite rigid and rectangular with geometric shapes and form which makes a simplistic effect but almost overpowering and domineering as it is quite tall. If it was taller I think it would be even more powerful and quite intimidating, and if it was smaller, I do not think it would have such a large impact on the viewer.

The surface is quite smooth with a subtle velvet texture (because of the black felt) which makes it less intimidating and makes you want to touch it. There is also some wood shelving exposed which creates a contrast in the texture.

The work is made of plaster with felt covering. The plaster is an industrial type of material which is not common amongst art pieces (although it is becoming more common in contemporary art), which makes it a less traditional piece of work compared to a sculpture made from stone or cast in bronze.

The felt covering reminds me of my childhood, making art from felt and has an innocent quality about it, which is a welcoming material and contrasts with the hard, cold surface of the plaster.

I think the artist would have had to test out her idea many times to make sure that the cast was correct when creating the wardrobe. From construction images I have seen, I think that she uses another material as the bulk of the piece and plaster is poured around it so the work is not too heavy (even though plaster is light once completed dry). Whiteread would have had to make sure that the plaster was the right consistency and areas of the wardrobe were protected to enable the cast to be extracted. After, she would have had to use felt and carefully attach this to the plaster using a special type of glue. She may have had assistants to help her construct this piece.



Context

The work was made in the late 80s which was around the time when the Berlin Wall came down (1987) and also the famous Wall Street crash. The 80s was about consumerism, cheap imports from the far east and new materials being created (lots of plastics). At this time there were also new technologies within music, film and fashion. Trends were such like geometric shapes, solid colours clashing against each other and futurism. I think that Whiteread may have been influenced by the new materials available at this time and plaster and wanted to experiment with materials that were unconventional for making art.

Looking at this and other art by Whiteread, it could be that she is making a point about how we want new things all the time and history is being lost and old skills of the past is being overtaken by the new technology and machinery of the late 80s.

I think the work viewed today would have a different context to viewing it when Whiteread first made it as at the time sculptures were very literal and artists were not making lots of work like this. Nowadays I think that people would be more accepting of the work and see it almost like a piece of history because it has cast the interior shape of an old wardrobe which probably does not exist anymore.

Whiteread's work is displayed against white walls and simple backgrounds as this makes it stand out more and how it is displayed does not detract from the sculpture.