A spoonful weighs a ton

Summer-time exhibitions allow us to introduce to the museum notable works of art by contemporary artists whose practice we value highly. A spoonful weighs a ton brings together the work of seven artists: Stephen Bram, Michael Conole and Linda Marrinon from Melbourne; New Zealander, Saskia Leek, based in Auckland; Swiss collaborative artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss, based in Zürich; and Robert MacPherson, from Brisbane.

The title, A spoonful weighs a ton, taken from a 1999 Flaming Lips song title, is intended to initiate an abstract conversation about weight and density at a moment when contemporary attitudes play down the 'relative heaviness of art', concentrating instead on pictorial surfaces and the moving image. The exhibition's tone is set by Peter Fischli and David Weiss's 55-minute 1983 film, Der rechte Weg (The right way). It's the story of a rat and a bear, more or less alone at what might be the beginning of the world or its end, confronted with each other, their decisions and their environment. Each of the artworks in the exhibition balances what the artist has to 'say'—their theme or thesis—with its own total lingering density of presence. This enduring aspect of the work might be phenomenal, or the wait/weight of time or of history, a rational or metaphysical weight, or something of all of these.

What is of special interest here is the way the exhibiting artists alter the 'true' or 'original' weight of their materials (Conole's wood and Marrinon's plaster, for example) or conceptual sources (Leek's period houses and MacPherson's roadside boards) to create the new presence of a work of art. Linda Marrinon's figure sculptures, saturated in a Western aesthetic and technical heritage and centred in their materiality, embody a lightness and humour notwithstanding these notional burdens. And from the earliest days of his practice, Stephen Bram's two- and three-point perspective paintings have held matters in scale, each a balanced, slim condition of rational calm.