

## **Review by Anneka French for This is Tomorrow**

**Variously suspended, wedged, curved and grounded are a new body of sculptural works from Brian J Morrison. Shown at The Birley, a fledgling project space and artist studio complex in Preston, the exhibition 'Tension' sets out to develop a dialogue between works that are held together through tension, action and repetition.**

In the first and largest sculpture 'Untitled' (all works 2016), a tall, gently curving 3mm steel sheet is propped, buried within a shaft cut into the gallery's concrete floor. It slices through the space, at a dangerous, precarious angle and looms, just balanced. From its furthest corner, a soft sheet of bright yellow latex hangs limp, like a draped duster.

Latex calls to mind an array of connotations from childhood swimming caps and medical gloves to its various contraceptive and sexual uses. It is a curious, ambiguous and loaded material and it is significant that three of the four latex pieces used in Morrison's works are coloured resistance bands designed for stretching and strengthening the muscles of the body. Steel too, is semiotically rich, permeated by associations with industry, gender and strength. The compact sculpture 'Stacked' is formed from a steel block, around which is pulled a peach-coloured band printed with the words 'PRO-TONE® by BodyCore Fitness'. The band fits tightly against the metal, curiously securing it, measuring it, testing it.

In the other two of Morrison's sculptures (both 'Untitled'), it is the strength of the latex that supports the weight of the steel form. A resistance band is used to shape and support the curve of one fractionally thinner metal sheet. Another is hung from a hook using a band wrapped around its upper section like a hunk of meat for curing. In both, the sharp edges of the metal strain against the latex in a palpable threat to the integrity of both material and sculpture. At any moment these bands may snap, or so it seems.

Morrison has selected for his exhibition interpretation a fragment from John Cage's text 'Lecture on Nothing', first published in 1961 in Cage's collected writings 'Silence'. The text relays a conversation between four men, one of whom stands alone, above the others. Persistently asked why, the lone man replies, "I just stand." Though both artists' works are invested in the tropes of minimalism – tension, repetition, variation, self-reflexivity and nothingness – there are, of course, many 'things' at play and despite protests to the contrary,

nothing 'just' stands.

It is sorely tempting, indeed, to see these sculptures as body stand-ins.

Morrison has bent, propped and positioned the objects using performative actions that mimic the exercises for which the resistance bands were designed. The walls and floor of the gallery support the sculptures as they might a body undertaking particular conditioning exercises, striving to be stronger, more malleable and physically improved. Smudged finger marks and scratches across the surfaces of the steel make present the artist's own physical exertion in the construction of the works, testament to an examination of the properties and possibilities of material-form combinations and to the legacies of minimalism.