

## Nuha Saad: The Necessity of Ornament

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Nuha Saad's new exhibition continues her playful investigations into colour and form. Saad works in between assemblage, painting and sculpture, combining ready-made objects and colour in inventive configurations. Saad is drawn to objects with only half-formed associations, not quite hand-made, not quite mass manufactured, simultaneously open and resistant to manipulation. Her signature material has over recent years become the Victorian reproduction finials, architraves and cornices added to domestic interiors for decorative effect, although Saad's artistic project questions whether decoration is supplementary or integral to design. Saad singles out these elements that despite their ornamental intent are often overlooked, absorbed into the architecture and rarely distinguished by colour. Through cutting, arrangement and colour, the dormant beauty and sensuality of a turned timber finial or a moulded cornice come to life. And so do their buried narratives.

In *Velvet Nostalgia* (2010), Saad has created a poignant work through the striking contrast of sinuous, pastel balusters and a bright column of button-like forms. The contrast creates what could be a dialogue between the almost-there, diaphanous nature of memory, and the concrete insouciance of childhood. While here the architectural elements take on a figurative quality, the formal questions of the relationship between colour, form and narrative are still centre stage. This is also the case in *Spill*, where Saad tackles the assumptions behind the structure/ornament dichotomy. *Spill* reverses what is commonly assumed to be the role of cornices and architraves as 'superficial' addition: these elements instead provide essential structure to what appears to be bursts of thoughts figured by brightly coloured timber dowel. The work elegantly evokes the way domestic interiors act as vessels of personal memory, how a tiny detail of décor can catch one's attention and bring whole worlds thrumming back.

There is a convincing argument that within Western art and culture, Modernism included, there lurks a fear of colour's corrupting and contaminating effects, what British artist and critic David Batchelor calls 'chromophobia'. Batchelor argues that this fear of colour has led to it being demonized by association with degraded terms such as 'femininity', 'orientalism' and 'ornament', or dismissed as trivial and redundant. Through her choice of materials — architectural decorations and colour — Saad's work actively engages with this debate, offering playful and seductive evidence of the plasticity of colour and the necessity of ornament.