

SPRING PROJECTS

STRAW DOGS

Jason Brooks
Jake and Dinos Chapman
Karen Ryan
Hans Stofer

24th June to 30th July 2010

Opening hours: Tuesday to Wednesday 10am-5pm, Thursday- Friday 12pm – 7pm, Saturday 11am – 4pm

STRAW DOGS is a group exhibition which presents second hand objects in a new light. On entering the gallery, a collection of cast-off paintings, furniture and objects are displayed which have been mutated, mediated and embellished. Artists Jake and Dinos Chapman and Jason Brooks along with designers Hans Stofer and Karen Ryan examine the role these objects play, each providing a different conceptual and contextual approach. Taking its title from a John Gray book, the show examines our social progress, or lack thereof, as the artists feast on the myriad meanings and contradictions of making new from old. This is not a show about 'recycling', yet it is politically timely. Just as media images are adapted through retouching, STRAW DOGS reminds us to look beneath the surface. The exhibition forces us to examine our present day fascination with improving the look of our own image, surroundings and, ultimately, legacy.

Acclaimed artists Jake and Dinos Chapman present a selection of portrait paintings from their series 'One Day You Will No Longer Be Loved'. Taking anonymous Victorian portraits discovered in junk shops, the pair has meticulously reworked the paintings into both disturbing and humorous scenes. Each unknown aristocrat has been given some form of deformity or mask, commenting on the egotism and patrimony of traditional portraiture. These modifications have been seamlessly woven into each piece, blurring the line between the original and the alteration. With these works the Chapman brothers ridicule the classic portrait, while also challenging viewers to examine their own notions of immortality.

In a new body of work, Jason Brooks' pieces, by contrast, pay homage to twentieth century amateur paintings, found at various markets. He subtly changes their colour or scale. These landscapes, still lives and figurative works are painstakingly recreated, allowing something new to arise from the juncture between 'high and low' art. These are the classic subjects of painting, which were attempted with greater or lesser success by unknown artists. Translated from heavily impastoed oils to the smooth finish of an airbrush, the paintings achieve a playful, layered narrative. By subtly filtering and transposing the original brushstrokes, composition, tone and scale, Brooks also provides status through enlargement, technical prowess and re-contextualisation. Commenting on a culture where images are retouched to perfection, Brooks questions the roles of value, credibility and imagery.

In 'Custom Made in England: Vanity Series', designer Karen Ryan presents a new furniture collection. Known for her use of the discarded and found, Ryan uses these works to comment on the recent trend among designers to re-use as, "a testament to social conscience." For Ryan, the irony is that these concepts have become the luxuries of the middle class, but the necessity of the poor. The chairs and cabinet in this series are made from a blend of old wooden furniture, fur coats, unwanted mirrors and junk diamante brooches. While a narrative of absent lives is conjured in the found garments and chairs, this body of work aims to cancel out nostalgia. Instead of a vintage-inspired romance we have class war and anti-fashion: the fur coats she reuses, kept whole, are signifiers of the brutality of the fashion trade. By pointing to such metaphors for a darker material reality, Ryan wants to prick our collective conscience, as if to imply recycling is only skin deep and that it glosses over a global problem of poverty and need. Ryan, "inappropriately uses the old fur coats as a metaphor for careless vanity."

In the Final Touch Collection, Hans Stofer causes everyday objects to be, "reborn" by hand-wrapping them with a flawless skin of adhesive aluminum foil. STRAW DOGS raises issues of authorship and originality, but also examines the powerful aesthetic drive which filters and shifts our cultural and social views. This is the focus of Stofer's remade and represented objects. Choosing everyday items - from sordid ashtrays to used cups and domestic paraphernalia - he deliberately confuses our sense of values, elevating the apparently worthless to the status of 'art object'. His themes examine the way materials and objects are carriers of meaning, purpose and identity. The 'perfect skin' of aluminum foil which wraps Duck, is like a manifestation of the accumulating layers of manufacture, touch, use and time.

Biographies

Jake (b.1966) and Dinos (b.1962) Chapman both studied at the Royal College of Art before opening their joint London studio. Emerging under the label of Young British Artist in the 1990's, their art examines contemporary politics, religion and morality with searing wit and energy. They have exhibited extensively, including solo shows at Kestner Gesellschaft Hannover (2008), Tate Britain (2007), Tate Liverpool (2006), Kunsthaus Bregenz (2005), Museum Kunst Palast Düsseldorf (2003) and the PS1 Contemporary Art Center in New York (2000).

Jason Brooks (b. 1968) studied at Cheltenham College of Art and Chelsea College of Art, London. He was a prizewinner in John Moores 20 in 1997 and won the NatWest Art Prize in 1999. He exhibits regularly at Stellan Holm Gallery in New York and his work is part of the permanent collections of the Walker Art Gallery (Liverpool) and the Saatchi Collection (London).

Hans Stofer (b. 1957) is a professor and Department Head for Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewelry at the Royal College of Art. A selection of recent exhibitions includes SO Gallery 2010, Collect 06, V&A, London, represented by Galerie SO; Koru2 at the South Karelia Art Museum in Lappeenranta, Finland (2006); Breakers at PM Museum, London (2006) and Kruege at Galerie Handwerk, Munich (2005). His work has been acquired by various international collections including the V&A, the Crafts Council, the Munich Danner Stiftung and the Schweizerisches Landesmuseum, Zurich.

Karen Ryan (b.1968) lives and works in Portsmouth, England. Ryan graduated with a MA in Design Products at The Royal College of Art London 2001. Her recent exhibitions include 'Custom Made U.S.A' presented by Balloon Contemporary at the Next Chicago Art Fair (2010), Rabih Hage Gallery at Object Rotterdam (2010), Sketch popup cafe at The Royal Academy London (2009), 'Wish List' Li Edelkoort Exhibition and Auction at Pierre Berge, Brussels (2009), Work In Progress, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth (2009) and Designersblock, London (2008).

EDITORS NOTE: Spring Projects

Spring Projects was established in February 2008 in a custom-built 3000ft commercial gallery. Taking a broad cultural view, it provides a cross-disciplinary platform for innovative contemporary work encompassing the fields of art, design and fashion, where artists' work has become less constrained by the boundaries which define their activity.