

## ‘6 BRITISH ARTISTS’

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The works in this exhibition seem committed to a certain reserve, a willed withdrawal, a withholding, a holding back, in which very little is given away 'immediately'. Yet it is precisely this 'very little' which each artist hopes will be just enough to attract, goad, irritate, or otherwise engage the respondent long enough to open up a relation of restless provocation: unsettling reverie, puzzlement, distraction, loss, anger, return, sly humour, discomfiting pleasures - the play of uncoupled and uncoupling signifiers without conclusion. And all provoked too without recourse to 'expression', without yet another resuscitation of the 'expressive means' that have been such a stable feature of the search for artistic authenticity and immediacy within modernity. Indeed it seems to be precisely this 'immediacy', the works' 'presence' - each work's 'presence' as a 'singular whole' - which these works sacrifice in their exploration of alternative terms for relation. Eschewing singularity they want to lead, at the very least, a double life.

Potential respondents are invited not to lie back awash in the pleasures of each work, but rather to graft: to find ways of cutting up the work (and themselves) and of grafting themselves onto and into it-the ever open question being whether the work will 'take' or not. The possible life of these works, whether and how one takes to them, turns on finding ways of getting past their reserve and approaching that other realm which they are determined to withhold as long as possible.

And perhaps it has been the long, intense, personal (but communally supported) re-exploration of the founding concerns of their practice, encouraged and facilitated by the Goldsmiths' M.A. course, which has drawn each of the artists in their different ways to this withheld and withdrawing region. Each of them is engaged in a struggle to secure the terms of their practice; the emerging conviction about these terms is won through a continuous process of articulation and critically supportive response. Such hard won conviction begins to manifest itself in their works' uncompromising character. For what they have all discovered for themselves is that it is both necessary and possible to combine their absolutely specific artistic concerns with the need to manoeuvre, to make their practice (being beyond expression) a matter of self-conscious strategy. And, at the moment, the room for such manoeuvring may be very restricted. The artist's problem becomes that of reconciling personal desires, needs, skills, commitments, and creative resources, with the ways art is represented (framed, mythified, codified, institutionalised) in the surrounding culture.

This involves a very careful weighing up of what to give, however grudgingly, to that appropriating all-absorbing culture while trying to hang onto and secrete something for ones(elf)(elves): art as double bluff. The precarious and paradoxical works that result from this peculiar balancing act seem, both individually and collectively, to propose that art is very small in our culture - so small, in fact, that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recognise it amongst the surrounding simulations and representations of art. And it has become small because art's space (the room it makes to be excessive) diminishes as our late modern culture disperses art across a range of institutions which organise the terms of its containment and representation; after their appropriating work little remains to art of itself, of its difference, its excess. In the face of this reduction of art's life it is the artist's responsibility, these artists seem to hint, to find ways of protecting art's shrinking region. For them this protection seems dependent upon always temporary strategies which seek to keep the machineries of appropriation at bay for as long as possible. They want to affirm that art's principle value in our culture lies in its ability to avoid and undo commonsense, to stand outside, however fleetingly, the institutional representations of art.

When art itself is the prime object of this representation and recuperation (as it is in the 'artworld') the problem for the artist is acute. For the representation of art (the 'place' art is given within the textures of our daily lives) is now absolutely dependent upon complex social technologies and institutions whose own interests (self-maintenance) may be in direct conflict with the desires of the practising critically reflexive artist. In trying to rekindle sparks from the dying embers of a fast-fading heroic and optimistic modernity

these artists want to construct an interim site, a tiny site to one side of certainties, habits, and styles. From this uncertain site practice can test the virtues of modernity's celebratory explorations against its constant absorptive institutionalisation. And the works resulting from this confrontational practice can only live on as allegories of the tension between modernity and its transformation into something that cannot be named - a doubled practice that is both modern and the undoing of modernity's own histories.

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