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Post-Conceptual Art Practice: New Directions — Part Two
Introduction

Among the distinctive changes of the late 1980s and in the initial years of the decade which followed, was the shift towards the use of new curatorial and exhibition venues. What became the nucleus of the so-called ‘YBAs’ – the Young British Artists - whose work defined the cultural sensibility of an era, originated in the use of vacant, post-industrial dockland spaces. In the decade which followed, much of London’s gallery infrastructure re-located from the West to the capital’s East End, forced out by punitive rents and an art market which had begun to register the aftershocks of mass unemployment and social dislocation.

Over twenty years on, after a long bull market, a post-industrial UK again confronts economic recession. Faced with funding cuts to colleges, art schools and state patronage, artists have responded with innovation, flair and pragmatism. Some work in collectives or self-curate. The doubling or collectivising of artistic agency, demonstrated, for example, by Claire Fontaine, KennardPhillips, PFI and Galerie Kalfakast and SUPERFLEX, underlines a shift to more flexible, post-Fordist modes of cultural production.

William Henry and Angus Pryor’s latest exhibition of work has been installed at the Grange Tower Bridge Hotel. Their first, at the West Wintergarden, Canary Wharf (2010) was staged at the heart of London’s financial district. The deliberate choice of both venues signifies a broader constellation of linkages between cultural production and a more expansive engagement with audience and viewing communities for contemporary art. In the 1990s, the Situationist International coined the idea of ‘détournement’ to describe the use of urban spaces for appropriation and critique. A half century on, a post-conceptual generation of artists are exploring new locations for showing and situating their practice within a culture industry which has proven equally as responsive and resilient.

Dr Grant Poole FRSA, School of Arts, University of Kent

Foreword

Grange Hotels are very keen to showcase works of art and to provide an environment for new artists to show large and ambitious works in public spaces. We are pleased to support Plastic Propaganda’s initiative to display their work in our hotels, thereby providing the artists with an opportunity to reach mass audiences who would otherwise not see their works.

Displaying the art in an alternative space can often refocus the work by placing it in a different context. It also provides an unusual yet stimulating backdrop for hotel guests and corporate professional clientele using the hotel’s facilities. The essence of the hotel’s public spaces reproduces the large white cube environment of a gallery that reacts directly to the artwork being shown here.

The particular spaces chosen for the artworks give them the chance to breathe and to be contemplated at leisure. It is a surprise to encounter original contemporary art in this modern hotel arena. The cultural implication of the paintings and sculptures gives viewers an opportunity to escape from their expected activity into an existence outside the hotel environment and the everyday.

We want our guests to enjoy and be stimulated by these works of art and feel that their presence enriches the overall environment of the hotel.

Grange Hotels, March 2012

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William Henry: Perspectives on Practice

Interview by Grant Pooke. History & Philosophy of Art Dept., University of Kent, February 2012.

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WH: You've been making 3D work from the very beginning of my formal art education at the University of Kent in 2004. I remember the very first day - suddenly moving from a linear dimensional representation straight to expressing the same but in 3D. This provides the most natural world for me to live in. Suddenly I fell in and out of love and in control – making choices is perfect.

GP: How long have you been making work?

WH: Yes, definitely! I find comfort in sensuality and repetition – 3 brothers - the same age – all the same but very different in every way. Only the same is the same – a finger is a finger and an eye is an eye but each part is different and each is different – maybe better, maybe different - that's subjective - and that's the point I feel.

WH: More generally, with this exhibition, it seems to be a new dimension to your practice. How do you account for the shift?

WH: As you can see, the sculptures shown here at Grange Tower Bridge are about three dimensions. For example, Matta-Clark had his inside/outside buildings which changed perception of their relationship to the surrounding environment. Also, Grenville Davey enlarged everyday objects, but with the exception in confusion by creating identical everyday objects.

GP: Why the preference for three dimensions?

GP: Duchamp's readymades were noted for their apparent contingency. Many of the visual art they liked to musical composition are well known. Is this the case for you?

GP: Staying with this association, your sculptures are blow torched and collapsed in on itself. The casting process and the melting heat of the blowtorch, has made the object seem organic. Can you take us through the various technical processes involved in making these and similar pieces?

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WH: Yes very much so. The sculptures shown here at Grange Tower Bridge in recent years, repetition and permutation have been given a more formalist interpretation. For example, Matta-Clark has made the object seem organic. Can you take us through the various technical processes involved in making these and similar pieces?

WH: Yes, there is a degree of pre planning – there has to be. I've always been systematic and had to be in a former professional life. However through expressive means, I've let chance play a role in my work by creating an image through form.

WH: Is there any particular artist you identify with? Why?

WH: Kent, February 2012.

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WH: The instruments are objects of beauty which, in the wrong hands, can produce awful sounds. This is an area I want to continue to explore – a work of beauty which, in the wrong hands, can produce awful sounds. This is an area I want to continue to explore – a work of beauty which, in the wrong hands, can produce awful sounds. This is an area I want to continue to explore – a work of beauty which, in the wrong hands, can produce awful sounds. This is an area I wan...

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WH: Is there any particular artist you identify with? Why?
Charcoal, 2012, plaster

Three Trumpets, 2012, brass, copper and paint

Strung Out, 2010 ceramic and wire

Euphonium, 2012 brass and paint

French Horn, 2012 brass and paint

Knights Lounge

Knights Lounge

Knights Lounge

Unplugged, 2010 plaster
Interview by Mike Walker, Grange Tower Bridge Hotel, January 2012

Angus Pryor: Personal Narratives, Disguised Narratives

AP: I look at it as a jigt. I see history. In a postmodern age where people use culture instead of culture, I just refer to both. I see them as the same thing. I refer to them in the same way. So I dig the Venice or you use Venice and I refer to the city with the city reference to the city or the Mjor or the Mjor. I try and make these works to be all consultant. So it’s like seeing everything, all at once, all the time. That’s what I want to get through the paints. I’m not listening to music. I’m just looking to listen to the classical music when I’m making paintings. I also look at space and time. It’s a real recognized place and they’re getting so much natural light. I haven’t been looking round and that’s something that’s changing. I think of these new paintings since these from the paintings. In the restaurant they’re right away from you and they keep their clarity.

AP: They don’t have a big impact in them. When I was first showing the space I was in there and had a kind of mystical mood. My heart was sinking and I was thinking. ‘Am I doing it?’ but then I quite liked them.

AP: You can cope with people eating in front of them, then?

AP: They’re not my paintings. They’re not about them. I’m not thinking about it like that. They’re about being at the look at them. ‘The paintings are not about them. They’re about my own mind, my own thoughts. They’re about the paintings. They’re not about the space.’ And then they’re looking up at the space. It’s really a mood thing. They’re good people and creative. In a strong way the paintings look out of place for the hotel, so people wonder what’s going on.

AP: The paintings are only looking at it. You can’t look over at the hotel. How much do you think about space or the people in it?

AP: A lot of the time? So when I start a series of paintings I never start one at first but start thinking about multiples and the relationship between one painting to another, one image to another. There’s a kind of way that’s going on in the world that’s going on in space. Paintings are paintings and that’s my intellectual process of making, of how I think. So I use starting points, not end points. When I’m thinking about the paintings in the space I’m never sure what I’m doing with it and I enter into this kind of thought process, like a journey through the space. I keep thinking I’m going to make this perfect painting.

AP: ‘Disguised narrative’ your term for this or did it come from somebody else?

AP: I can’t remember. I see it as a Jigt, because I try to make it uncomfortable for me. I don’t make a painting to be something of beauty, so not about an experience that it’s the end. I’m actually trying to deal with subjects that are difficult, with paint, which is problematic. Some of these canvases I’ve made deliberately not to say that you physically and emotionally and mentally in the space and I just go in and work. You have to use the sticks and you have to work on the space to get to the other side! I do all those things. I feel the paintings and how they’re going to be put together. They’re not about where the floor is, they don’t need to be put above the floor, the floor, the stands the painting up and not recognising what I’ve done and start again. I paint them out because I can’t see what it is, in my head. I’ve mentioned this thing that is large or that I’m working in the space, but the space is actually not my concern. I’m constantly in painting and scribbling and starting again. It’s a long process.

AP: We’ve talked about Munich but it seems quite egocentric well something that you’ve talked about choosing your subjects I choose your subjects because you’re choosing them to suit your narratives. My paintings are about your paintings and you’ve used various kinds of phrases to suggest something unsupported under the same thing. I use this term for the space. It’s to try to psychopathology you. What’s the space that come from? ‘What’s working through there?’

AP: This came from my love of 80s and I was drawn in a kind of idea of the underbelly. Referring to Khan and David Lynch, this is where the thing is going and the world is going to change.

AP: The Duelling of Nox, the Deluge and the Crucifixion. The Deluge of Nox, the Shame, God Creating Light and Dark, Then Ever Being Created and The Exposition from the Garden of Eden. They’re both.

AP: In the Duelling of Nox, he’s been left, isn’t he? He finds himself in this shameful state and he’s there. So there’s a great family interest and shame that you’re being there in the duelling of Nox. In the other duelling of Nox, you talk earlier about the fact that there are bodies in here, imprints of bodies. So whether you were present or not, there’s something very in these paintings as well.

AP: Definitely, very intriguing! So they start with a kind of personal agenda, whether you’re meaning about paintings or literature or music or even my own life. So I’ve got a painting called The Marriage that is about my marriage and The Family is my family and Song is a personal commentary on relationships. So they’re all kind of universal themes that I’m working on the same way that the dark sides of things run through people.

AP: And obviously, the nature of disguise, there’s only going to be a certain amount of that which is plausible. Are there some paintings where you know you’re letting more of it through and others where you know very little of it is coming to light? I think you’re speaking about,”

AP: The paintings become a thing in itself. It almost doesn’t matter too much about the way you get it there.

AP: He’s not at all. The journey’s inbetween in terms of the narrative. When I look at them, and I think like that. It’s really important. It’s like a translation you’re making. It’s not just a translation but it’s also a translation of it. I can’ just remember what it means. So the thinking at the time I was going through something. It’s really important to me. It’s not important to me. It’s particularly personal. There someone else and it’s really twenty years later and they’re even more personal. They’re very personal. For example, there someone else and they’re really make the same thing – ‘An unimportant medium; and then when I go back – other people know the work better than I do. Can you remember when you did that? I just can’t. I’m working on ten paintings at once, so you know how it is. It’s really important to another – what’s in my head at the time. I don’t know and as soon as I think about it. So I look at them with fresh eyes of a little, that’s reassuring mark I wonder I made that? I don’t think they’re like me so quite odd as well.

Do you want to say a little bit about how you respond to?

AP: I thought, ‘I thought The Exhibition was very good and I love his writing. He does In very quickly so he knows what he’s doing. Mine are definitely paintings, I’m definitely doing something for me. I’m not churning things around and hoping that other forces will come into play, so I respond very well to.

Are you open to any point in your life that will ever influence your work?
MW: So it’s both phases—Expressionism and Non-Expressionism.

AP: Definitely, very definitely! I also do think there are pathways in art history that you respond to. There’s the Duchampian pathway—Duchamp through to Warhol to Pop Art—you can see that pathway very clearly and I don’t think I’m part of it. I think I’m part of a different pathway which is German Expressionism through to Abstract Expressionism through to Post-Conceptual painting. So I am in a very clear category and then, when you start to cross over, you start to have something new.

MW: And is it the Post-Conceptual part of that about the fact that you are using these readymades, these imperials?

AP: Yes, I’m challenging the Duchampian idealising that I’m surrounded by. So if you take a readymade and you paint with it, what is it? Is it a readymade? Is it a painting? What is painting? Is painting standing as an aural with a brush or is it paint on canvas? Is painting the end product or is it process?

MW: I’m not sure what it is. I was also thinking about Willem de Kooning.

AP: And Philip Guston. Both those two are interesting to me in the experimental nature of what they were doing and the challenges they took up. If you think of de Kooning going from those black and white paintings to figurative paintings and Guston going from abstraction to figuration—terrible jump—what’s a browse thing to do?

MW: Morton Feldman wouldn’t talk to Guston after he did that.

AP: No, I know. Horrible. People saying horrible things, but de Kooning wrote to him and said ‘Well done, mate’. There was a correspondence between them. They understood what they were doing. They were challenging themselves as well as the art world. I like that. The ability not to go with the norm and I’ve struggled with it. I’ve always been a person who doesn’t go on the path which is fashionable.

MW: Well, you’re a painter for a start. Some people never seem to quite get the sheer tactile pleasure and brilliance of painting. It’s not in the arena for them. All they see is the image as information.

AP: I think I’m a Modernist, you know. I think the tradition is Modernism, without question, and what’s wrong with that? I like it. This idea that it stopped at some point then postmodernism came in and then we’re into some other kind of phase. Those things run in parallel for tens of years.
The Deluge, 2007, oil & caulk on canvas, 2.4m x 2.4m
Love & Death, 2009, oil, caulk and plasticine on canvas, 2.4m x 4.8m
Venice, 2005, oil on canvas, 0.91m x 0.6m
Detail of The Marriage, 2007, oil & caulk on canvas, 2.4m x 2.4m

The Garden of Earthly Delights, 2011, oil, caulk, plasticine & readymade, 9m x 2.5m
Stack, 2009/2010, oil, caulk & plasticine, 14m x 3m

MAD, 2008, oil & caulk on canvas, 2.4m x 2.4m
The Marriage, 2007, oil & caulk on canvas, 2.4m x 2.4m
Canterbury Giant, 2008, oil & caulk on canvas, 2.4m x 2.4m

Detail from The Garden of Earthly Delights, 2011, oil, caulk, plasticine & readymade, 9m x 2.5m
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William Henry and Angus Pryor

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