

david buckley & james viscardi

october 20th - 10th november

www.hobbsmclaughlin.com

honey i'm home

This exhibition at Hobbs Mclaughlin is the second joint outing of David Buckley and James Viscardi. It is a pairing that appealed to us because of the friendships, frictions and humour that arise in the meeting of their work. Brought together, the particularities of their individual practices are foregrounded as two personalities; their respective objects and paintings become something of a double-act, each artist's body of work providing a foil for the other. We were excited, too, by the prospect of relationships arising with Hobbs Mclaughlin. For it too is a double act, existing simultaneously as an exhibition space and as our home.

Both James and David revel in a sense of camp or aesthetic fussiness. 'Display', a primary concern in each of their practices, is approached not only in terms of the formal and spatial, but embraced as a

rather conspicuous form of exhibitionism. In James' work, art historical tropes are assumed like costumes in a fancy dress box. His paintings see him playing mix and match with recognisable styles, accessorising Picasso with Ancient Greek pottery, or classical sculpture with gingham. His work has an infectious sense of humour; one gets the impression that he is getting away with all kinds of quotational sins. The prevailing sense of cheekiness in his practice belies his dexterity as a painter, for the simplicity of his phrasing is key to his work's humour and warmth. For all its apparent frivolity James' paintings are executed with exquisite - and perhaps unexpected - understatement.

Whether fussily positioning objects upon plinths, or toiling to create the perfectly 'imperfect' surface, David is a fastidious maker who is keen to pose his work with its best side forward. He goes to great lengths in the production of an artwork, engaging with labour intensive processes and materials. David instigates oppositions

within his work, whereby the proud history of a material, such as bronze, is confronted by one of ostensible poverty, such as MDF or plasticine. The status of a material or a mode of display is further tested by the often awkward and pernickety air of the objects that he makes, and their leaning towards the ornamental. David has expressed an interest in the architecture of Balfron Tower, where a contestation of status and hierarchy occurs organically. The brutal idealism of Erno Goldfinger's design is perverted by the aesthetic choices of the building's residents, a scene played out in the net curtains that hang in the windows of the estate's cuboid concrete social centre, and in the balconies cluttered with colourful possessions that disrupt the tower's regimented façade.

David and James' re-posturing of recognisable histories - whether approached through materials or styles - is a picking up of threads left unexplored, threads that might previously have been

rendered untenable or in poor taste. Their preoccupation with aesthetics – a point of intersection between their practices – is a tool with which to confront and caricature bravado. It is an approach particularly suited to the mid-century pomp of Balfron Tower. What does it mean to make cast metal bashful? What happens to aesthetic rigour when an artwork is subjected to preening? What of the male gaze, in a painting in which the nude figure of a woman is depicted from a un-possessive perspective? And what of the exhibition that favours the ornamental and the domestic to the clean autonomy offered by the conventional gallery setting?

In the run up to this show both David and James spoke of their interest in perversion and contamination, in terms of gallery space, materials and of art historical canons. Because Hobbs Mclaughlin is also the place in which we live, it is both a contamination of the conventional gallery format and a perversion of the home. Our daily routine

is aestheticised, and the contents of our exhibitions domesticated. Artworks are necessarily situated in the terrain between ornament and art object, between high and low-brow. It is a terrain that David and James embrace in their individual pursuits, and have begun to further map in their exhibitions together.

We hope that Hobbs Mclaughlin can provide their work with the ideal home.

melissa hobbs and rosanna mclaughlin

an email correspondence between david
buckley and james viscardi

James: Working within the context of a domestic space like Balfron Tower offers a unique set of problems, challenges, and familiarities. For one, domestic spaces are the spaces of comfort, relaxation, privacy, personal freedom. While on the other hand it is a physical embodiment of class distinctions, social and cultural standing/identity, and sexuality. I am especially interested in the domestic space as space of hyper-sexuality and perversion.

David: Yes, sexuality is definitively important. Also gender. You mentioned that you liked the idea of the flat being inhabited in an entirely feminine way. I had also been thinking about the phallic symbol, and of forms which might be read in contrast to that. I was thinking about the 'O' both from *The Story of O* and *The Story of the Eye*, as erotic counterpoints to the tower, and

the megalomaniacal architectural ideas of the block itself. I have also been thinking about the idea of text being bent somehow, of a way of reading the work of art being disrupted or distorted in the speaking or writing of it. That 'O' also has a spoken sound in the mouth. I also have this word Womon in my head, used instead of Woman – the way some hard-core feminists refuse to have the word man in their gender label.

I also agree with the idea that the associations of the Tower can be somewhat contradictory. A difficulty I first had with thinking through what the work might mean was the contrast between the glamour of 1960s modernist architecture/big ideas/big architectural statements and the physical and social situation of the east London tower block, grime, multiculturalism, and so on. The difference in tone between the inside and outside can be quite difficult to work through.

J: Yes, we were speaking of the distinction between the ideals inherent in modernism as

opposed to the realities of modern living. The idea of Balfron tower as the embodiment of the masculine ideal, the kind of over-bearing ego of modernism. I like to imagine its stark concrete vertical form as something akin to a phallus or middle finger...I know it's quite immature of me but what can I say...These kind of modernist monuments have such an air of...I "man" am here, I "man" birthed this, I "man" re-organized your life into my hermetic dream....

D: And these ideas are articulated physically. The grid is a totally non-queer organising principal. I always thought that the right angle was the fibre of the world in the same way that procreative heterosexuality was. There is a wonderful drawing by Eva Hesse from the 1970s in which she fills a side of gridded copybook paper with pencil drawn 'O's. The drawing seemed to act as a riposte to the manly, industrially fabricated minimalist work that was being produced around the same time. The outcome was that another grid

was created within the original grid, but one with flaws, and gave the appearance of something fluid, moving or undulating within a rigid frame. By using a copy page, there is a relationship with language too, so those 'O's are not just circles but also sounds, and therefore have a clear relation to the body. Gingham is really funny in the context of architecture or of minimalism. Gingham is basically a geometric grid, but it connects to an entirely different imaginative space.

J: This kind of masculine authorship is at once repellent yet also so physically alluring, attractive. For me this is where the work of art and the context of Balfron tower come closest to one another. It just makes so much sense that this would be the setting for a gallery.

I thought of the paintings as distinct spectacles, or histories of action; a theater within the theater of the home. I was very influenced by some recent re-reading of Adolf Loos essays. In them he describes

his motivations for framing views within the house, and creating plinths/stages for people to both inhabit and on which they would be on display to those around them. In this early modernist architectural thinking the people were the ornamentation adorning the space and no other ornamentation was necessary. The paintings and sculptures are remnants of this action and habitation, like the stain left on a table after a glass has been removed.

D: The stain is a good way to put it. There are lots of ways to contaminate an architectural space, and by extension destabilise an ideology. Loos is totally interesting because of the moment in which he was writing, the drive towards cleanness, in line, in surface and in material belies a way of thinking which led towards both the modern gallery and fascism. Loos was interested in the bodies of those who inhabited his spaces functioning as living ornaments, though I wonder would everybody have been appropriate. Beside that,

there is also the detritus of daily life which litter our surfaces, receipts, children's drawings, crumpled tissues. Not to mention souvenirs...

I think that in a domestic context, works of art can often function as symbols of taste, before they are recognised as works of art. Balfron Tower is interesting for me because it embodies ideas that mean it can inhabit a space which is somewhere between the gallery and the home. I think this ambiguity creates a tension through which we've been trying, individually, to work out the show.

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