

Alex Hubbard Exhibition: Eat Your Friends, at Simon Lee



The Alex Hubbard exhibition at Simon Lee Gallery, London, entitled *Eat Your Friends*, just six works, two of them being videos and the other four being paintings, is absolutely wonderful.

The “title track” is a video that I just cannot help but read as a moving painting with sound.

Montage-like, there are at least three camera views, two look down onto a table top or the floor and one looks forward, and as they overlap actions in one discreet space seem to be taking place also in another. Here it is quite possible to be in two places at once. The actions include spray painting the words “EAT YOUR FRIENDS”, constructing a tower with large cups of take-away coffee until it collapses spilling the contents, and moving a cuboid frame around, “building” some temporary structure the purpose of which seems to defy the logic of building.

The paintings more or less coloured monochromes, made with fibreglass, and found objects: plastic

bottles, syringes, broken bits of things, rubbish, the resin sticking the objects to the canvas and forming a high gloss surface over a stained acrylic base. I try to decide whether the objects are carefully placed or randomly scattered and I suspect it’s a bit of both. I study them and then wonder why I am studying them so carefully, what am I expecting to find? Yet I do keep looking, hesitating to admit that they are beautiful.



Finding beauty and being fascinated is my response to the paintings and also to the two videos. I watch them both a few times (they are only about 5 minutes in length). They have narrative of sorts,

something happens, and yet also nothing happens. *BOTTOM OF THE TOP*, like the first video, also uses text, this time not spray painted but possibly arrived at through cutting out the lettering and dropping it in place along the right hand edge of the frame (I so nearly wrote "painting") over the duration of the video. That's how it looked to me. And following what is being written, making sense of it yet it not making sense, is matched by the rest of the action, even whilst acknowledging some of the references, the most obvious one being Magritte's painting *Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe*, a pipe in the bottom left corner billows smoke across the picture plane throughout. In the top right an electric fan whirs and carnations are 'fed' through the mesh until, hitting the blades, they are scattered across the picture plane in the opposite direction to the smoke. This is what happens when the carnations hit the fan! Meanwhile the artist's head wrapped in bandages(?) which he paints blue appears at the bottom. We see only head and an arm placing a fish and an eel and flowers above his head, moving them around and eventually cutting the fish and placing the flowers inside it.



There's beauty here, amid lots of humour. I am reminded of some of those old black & white surrealist films but can't quite recall a specific one, and action painting, abstract expressionism, neo Dada, are all in here too, as are art-historical/art critical ideas of constructivism, all overness, and Leo Steinberg's "flatbed picture plane", in other words modernism, post modernism, and I want to say post-post modernism (Metamodernism even). For all its humour, this work never seems to me to be parody or irony, or of it is ironic I get the sense that it is post-modern irony itself that is being parodied.

The art works in this show seem to blur the distinction between sculpture, painting, performance, and video as well as the 'genres' of figuration, abstraction and surrealism, and delightfully question our ways of making sense of art, non-art and everything else.

Eat Your Friends is showing at Simon Lee Gallery, London until 4 April 2012.