

Art

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Berlin/Berlin

They liked it so much they named it twice

Destruction in Art

Gustav Metzger interviewed

Situation Vacant

Trafalgar Square's empty plinth

Aubrey Beardsley

He died young and stayed pretty



■ Accelerator

Southampton City Art Gallery October 30 to January 3

If the appeal of popular culture depended on the art that pays it homage, its popularity would plummet. The organisers of 'Accelerator' started with the concept of fashion but ended with a show about art's response to the fashionable. What happens when artists try to nail down the shimmering objects of fickle taste? They knock the life out of them. So why not leave well alone?

It is perplexing that what exists in the wild as a life-affirming kinaesthesia of everything gets whacked once inside the artist's studio. Obviously some kind of critical mediation is in order with art's makeover of popular culture, but why does it so often seem as if the art is produced by moonlighting undertakers?

The curators of 'Accelerator' are hardly to blame. It's a zeitgeist thing that young artists must trawl through vernacular waters looking for something to spread out on the gallery floor, where it gasps its last breath. Try to imagine a more deadening response to the intensity of clubbing than Hilary Lloyd's neo-documentaries of DJs hauling their record collections around. These slide projections from a carousel set close to the wall certainly underscore the humdrum routine of the nation's turntable magicians, but there is nothing here to make us care. In a larger installation involving hi-fi, cases, speakers and back-to-back monitors, Lloyd at least lets us hear the music that drives these DJs, and beautiful it is, too. Such a literal emphasis on hardware, so self-consciously laid out, and oh, such dull video footage ... and all to illustrate the metamorphosis of life into music? Why? If it's the music you like, just play it.

There are too many other artists in the show converting glitter into lead. Freddy Contreras has us step along a miniature catwalk triggering electronic flashes clustered in a corner. Jeremy Deller has installed a p.a. system at the building's entrance, playing sounds of ticket sales recorded outside London concert venues. Ako Sasao shows kimono-clad rag dolls of Patsy Kensit, Liam Gallagher, Björk and Goldie, all holding hands and entitled *Cool Britannia*. Suzy Spence shows paintings of a TV personality whose *Hello!* magazine lifestyle of ponies and four-poster beds is depicted in the clunky mode of international-naive – sort of Martin Maloney-massacres Karen Kilimnik.



With Kilimnik's drawings, 'Accelerator' starts to come to life. Here are sketchy renderings of effervescent young stars like Leonardo di Caprio, annotated with accompanying gushy captions, gently teasing out characteristics of the fleeting fashion scene: its luxury, vulnerability, sexiness and instantaneity. Confident without ostentation, these crayon drawings are reminiscent of Warhol's early work, effortlessly seductive, like a teenager's featherlight fantasies.

Though nothing else works this kind of magic, Sylvie Fleury comes close with her large wall painting in brown gloss on a high-keyed turquoise background. *Life Can Be Heavy*, *Mascara Shouldn't* uses a typeface you might find on a Formula One racer: italicised caps, with speed

Michael Bevilacqua
Screamadelica 1997



Ako Sasao
Rock 'n Roll Star 1995



Suzy Spence
Tori, Portrait of the
Artist IV 1996

marks streaking off the left uprights. It looks great, and strikes a note of pioneering irresponsibility that seems to be what the curators are after. Fleury dominates this show, which includes her seven-foot stainless steel sign *Be Amazing!* and, for obvious reasons, the video already seen in London of an expensively-heeled foot pressing down on a car accelerator.

It is harder to know what to make of Michael Bevilacqua's paintings, having the requisite emptiness and pop enthusiasm but flying awfully close to Gary Hume and Lari Pittman in lapidary decorativeness. The best is *Screamadelica* with its enlarged Matthew Barney centaur head, surrounded by logos of Pulp, MC Solar, *Trainspotting*, Oasis and other youth icons, and exuberantly co-opting devices from colour-field painting, appropriately all the rage again in America.

In a first major showing, Graham Dolphin's customised magazines stand out. Each on a plinth, these 20 lifestyle publications have been variously altered by bleaching, paint stripping, shredding, drilling and so on. Though not a fantastically original idea, it has been carried through with obsessiveness and style, occasionally recalling the gorgeous eccentricity of Lucas Samaras' early beaded boxes.

The catalogue succeeds where the installation falters. It has terrific allure and makes many of the artists look better than in the show. Best of all is a remarkable selection of quotations from Gramsci to Warhol, the Bible to Coco Chanel, highlighting the extreme transitoriness of fashion and the resourcefulness of its passionate consumers. Here, finally, is the life-restoring energy and brazenness that eludes most of these artists. With inspiring insensitivity, Jean Godfrey June in last August's *Elle* magazine shrilly encapsulates what could have been great about this exhibition: 'One other thing: I'm desperate for Maya Lin to design a commemorative wall for Hermes with the names of all the fabulous women patiently waiting for bags'. Sometimes popular culture is just perfect as it is. ■

The exhibition is touring to Arnolfini, Bristol from February 6 to March 28 and Oldham Art Gallery next Summer.

Mark Harris is an artist.

■ David Musgrave

Duncan Cargill Gallery London

October 16 to November 14

Snoopy, obviously. It takes us a few seconds – we mentally run through pictures of possible cartoon characters, trying to find a match – but it simply has to be Snoopy. The full-profile outline, coupled with the surface coloration, provide sufficient evidence for a positive identification.

This is *Animal*, a 21cm tall lump of cast polyurethane resin. Its form is that of Snoopy, or at least how he might look if Mr Hirst had his way. Snoopy has been bisected. So we are faced with the misshapen organs of a cartoon dog. A cursory examination allows us to conclude that cartoon creatures have highly developed mental capacities (and consequently a great potential for subconscious desires) since their outsized heads house equally outsized brains. Presumably this is in order to process the abundant information that streams in from their outsized eyes, nose, mouth and ears. Unfortunately for Snoopy though, he is top-heavy to an extraordinary degree; suffering from limited capacity in the bowel department. His torso's girth measures little more than his neck's. A biologist would conclude that, not only would Snoopy struggle to remain upright, but his digestive system would be unable to produce sufficient energy for his brain to survive. Poor Snoopy.

But we shouldn't worry. Snoopy was never meant to be anatomically correct; he's a cartoon. Musgrave knows this, of course, he's employing a bit of double irony in deliberately misunderstanding the joke. Schultz knew that this dog couldn't survive, and Musgrave knows that he knew it too. But this rationalisation is all part of Musgrave's larger project of attempting to reconcile image

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