

## Multiples

# Objets d'art or Knick-knacks?

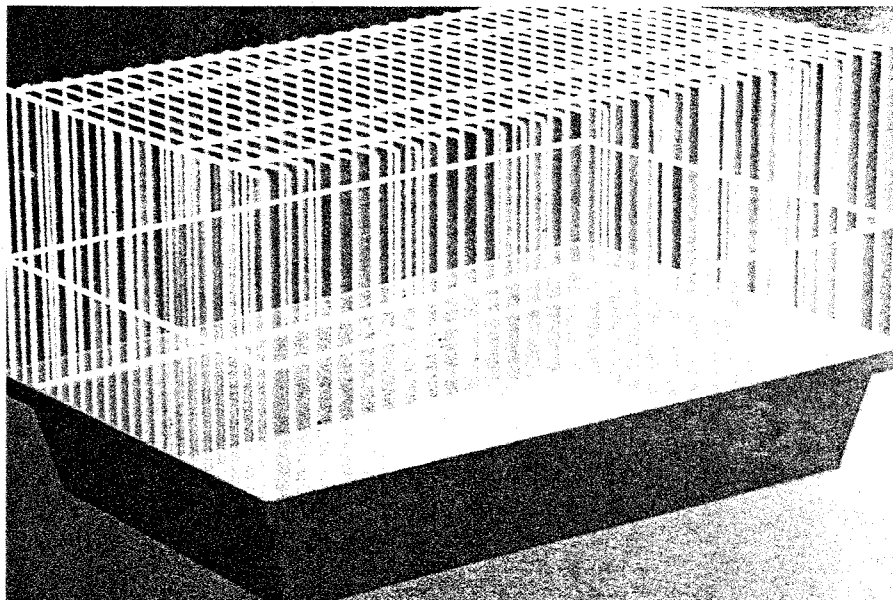
Mark Harris

In the 80s I had a Milanese friend who kept a moulded plastic multiple by Lucio Fontana in her shower. She explained this was possible because it was waterproof. Once ubiquitous and utopian in the buoyant art market and radical politics of the late 60s and early 70s, a decade later multiples became the amusing detritus of consumer fashions.

I looked up a piece on multiples I remembered from an old issue of *Studio International*. For Charles Spencer, writing in September 1973, the artform was about to die out. It had been 'destined to give artists a new social role, and art an egalitarian link with society ... The attraction of the multiple idea to those of us who wish to see art stripped of its elitist, materialistic connotations, lay precisely in the hope that as an expression of human experience of idealism, or even on a lesser, simpler, entertainment level, it would be possible to make direct contact with the kind of audiences who enjoy the theatre, cinema, music, ballet ...'

This is a curious belief that cheaper commodities would save us from the pernicious effects of more expensive ones. It's as if the spiritual qualities conferred by a plastic replica might be in just the right dosage to ward off those delusions of status enjoyed by art moguls. And for 1973 they weren't so cheap either. For a Larry Bell vacuum mirror thing, edition of 150, you had to lay out \$1000, while a Richard Artschwager 'wooden object', edition of 50, would have set you back \$350. Not exactly a ticket to the ballet, and given the massive projected net incomes, hard to disguise such profits under the claim of democratising access to art. Less than the case of a new market subverting the authority of an older one, than of a single market consolidating its reach by transferring allure from original to multiple.

The Multiple Store and HOAX are both two-year old London ventures which would expand access to art by selling more copies of it for less. Both depend on reciprocity



Dan Hays Sanctuary 2001

with a public institution for premises and wider audience. Sally Townsend and Nick Sharpe have set up The Multiple Store in a couple of small rooms in Central Saint Martins, getting some help through the college's research funding. Mark Bullus's HOAX runs as a concession at the Lux although he transfers shop occasionally (as over Christmas) to a storefront around the corner at 18 Kingsland Road. Townsend has produced more than a dozen well-fabricated small editions by an assortment of well-known London artists including Alison Wilding, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Dan Hays, Fiona Banner and Cornelia Parker. Bullus is more accommodating and gives space to both ephemeral and durable work by over 30 young artists, mostly local and unknown, and in some cases still at college. Unlike The Multiple Store, he doesn't commission work but takes what is brought into the Lux. HOAX has defined a role for itself as unorthodox community outlet and network. It offers free web space for local artists and runs band gigs on Kingsland Road. The shop also sells books by more unpredictable art publishers like Black Dog and Ellipsis. Bullus has set up the Lux store as an entertainment where the work has a borderline status between objet d'art and trashy knick-knack. At least this frees it from the pretensions of the 70s and declares its interests to lie with the lower denominations of conceptual art, so enthusiastically

Once ubiquitous and utopian in the buoyant art market and radical politics of the late 60s and early 70s, a decade later multiples became the amusing detritus of consumer fashions.

embraced by much recent British work. For £315 you could eat Sarah Hall's knickers, made of rice paper, or for 50p get one of John Hayward's machine-dispensed capsules containing aphorisms. In case I was in doubt, mine reassured me that 'an art buyer buys some art'. Designers called Proper have had fun making £28 embroidery kits which let you stitch an image, for example, of the Halifax Building Society logo, while Peter Liversidge has made an edition of 11 roughly-modelled snowballs for £120 each. In this market Liversidge is something of a crossover artist, whose deluxe *Interstate II* (\$250, edition of 100), produced by The Multiple Store, carefully replicates an American road sign with the unlikely inscription 'North Montana Plains'. This difference in production values really distinguishes the two enterprises. The Multiple Store researches fabrication processes, sources

## doggerfisher

**Jonathan Owen**

Saturday 12 May - Sunday 17 June 2001

**Janice McNab**

Saturday 23 June - Sunday 29 July 2001

**Lyn Löwenstein**

Thursday 9 August - Sunday 30 September 2001

11 gayfield square edinburgh eh1 3nt t/f +44 (0)131 558 7110 enquiries@doggerfisher.com www.doggerfisher.com opening times: thurs-sat 11am-6pm sun 2-5pm



Sarah Hall *Edible pants* 2001

materials and supervises prototypes for their selected artists. The resulting works are notably well-crafted in a manner intended to confer value. The deflating balloon of Piero Manzoni's *Artist's Breath* wouldn't get a look in here, where instead we have the likes of Langlands & Bell's *www* (£850, edition of 100) using Russian laser technology to etch flight paths into a perfect sphere within a solid glass cube, or Dan Hays' flat perspex panel *Sanctuary* (£450, edition 50), giving an alluring three-dimensional effect to his trademark hamster cage.

Is it some reflexive modernist perversion that prevents me appreciating such well-

crafted finesse? Isn't there enough Fluxus in my life already without requiring everything to look improvised and shoddy? Yet I really am unmoved by etched glass cubes, three-dimensional effect hamster cages, and simulacra of US road signs, however much craft-love pervades them. Just as well then that from the same collection one more intriguing multiple is Rose Finn-Kelcey's *House Rules* (£350, edition of 100), an LED brooch which for seven and a half minutes scrolls prohibitions: 'no malingering no spitting no molesting ...', interspersed every so often with a non-compliant 'fuck off' or 'hnnh?'. At least this stropky little accessory delivers some bile. Insofar as you can wear it outdoors, its aesthetic owes less to the galleries than the tourist traps of Charing Cross Road, as if any minute it will

Is it some reflexive modernist perversion that prevents me appreciating such well-crafted finesse? Isn't there enough Fluxus in my life already without requiring everything to look improvised and shoddy?

read 'My mom went to London and all I got was this lousy artwork'.

Which takes us back nicely to the low expectations of HOAX where Nick Sullivan's gleeful T-shirts (£28) declare 'popular, transient, expendable, low cost, mass-produced, young, witty ...' or Micky Tschur's best-selling *Vagina Virgins*, small £28 salt shakers, show the Madonna drawing back her cloak to reveal head-to-toe labia. One artist at HOAX who, like Liversidge, could succeed in both camps, is Nicole Polonsky whose quietly touching project *Plaques* (£225) involves replicating signs she has found in museums, shops, or best of all, at the zoo: 'This enclosure formerly housed orangutans' one plaque informs us. It occurs to me since they are made of laminated metal that they would work well in the shower. ■

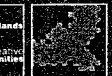
The Multiple Store was at The Shoreditch Gallery, London, April 2 to 28. Hoax is ongoing at the Lux, London.

Mark Harris is an artist.

## Showpiece 5TH MAY – 9TH JUNE Grizedale Artists' In Residence

ARTISTS INCLUDE SIMON BILL, JORDAN BASEMAN, CLAIRE TODD,  
MARCUS COATES, NINA POPE/KAREN GUTHRIE, CLAIRE SHOOSMITH AND SOPHY RICKETT

Q GALLERY 35/36 QUEEN STREET DERBY DE1 3DS T: 01332 295934  
OPENING TIMES WED – FRI 12PM – 4PM SAT 10AM – 4PM



## FORTY PART MOTET by Janet Cardiff

Information Line: 020 7720 2201

2001

26 May-10 June

Salisbury Festival

20 June-6 July

BALTIC, Gateshead

22 October-11 November

NOW Festival, Nottingham

7 December-13 January

The New Art Gallery, Walsall

*Forty Part Motet* by Janet Cardiff was commissioned by Field with the Arts Council of England, Canada House, the Salisbury Festival and the Salisbury Cathedral Choir, BALTIC, Gateshead, The New Art Gallery Walsall, and the NOW Festival Nottingham, with the assistance of Tascam UK and B&W Loudspeakers. Additional technical assistance from BALTIC, Gateshead.

## Rona Lee 'the encircling of a shadow' 12 May - 9 June

Talk by Rona Lee Saturday 26 May, 12noon

NEW ROAD, NEWLYN, PENZANCE, CORNWALL TR18 5PZ T 01736 363715 F 01736 331578 E newlyn@newlynartgallery.freemove.co.uk

## NEWLYN ART GALLERY

Gallery and Shop open: Monday-Saturday 10am-5pm