SMARK GUBB

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S MARK GUBB: HORROR, HISTORY, POLITICS AND THE PERIPHERY

ANDREW HUNT
2008

I first met S Mark Gubb in Birmingham in 2002 at the University of Central England (now Birmingham City University). During a half-hour tutorial we watched a number of his early video works, and our conversation got around to capitalism and horror, early zombie movies, together with the energy of Black Metal, youth culture and provincial enthusiasm. Two hours after our introduction, we were still talking; if you read the accompanying interview in this publication with Ross Sinclair you'll get a good idea of how Gubb's conversation can flit between unusual and conflicting subject matter.

Gubb's energetic concern for the fanatical has developed over the past five or six years; he has become interested in ideas surrounding re-enactment and history in a variety of incongruous ways, and what's true is how his work has also been directly influenced by his upbringing. Mark is originally from Herne Bay in Kent and this has given rise to a concern for a particular type of marginalia connected to seaside towns and estuary communities that inhabit areas close to London, yet which are culturally located a million miles away from the centre. If we are to see these places as embodying a mildly bi-polar entity – they are excessive and highly-strung in the summer (each seafront with its variety of arcades has an extreme visual volume between May and October), while in the off-season they are bleak, cold and wet – it's the winter that has proved most interesting for Gubb. Both periods are visually brash, yet it's the dark, mystical energy of the borders that has pushed his imagination.

Added to this is another fact that affects the artist's work. When Gubb was eight years old, his cousin introduced him to the heavy metal band Iron Maiden and video nasties, a particular brand of extreme horror film that was banned in the early 80s. Mark has been drawing on this cultural phenomenon, and the lineage and fusion of post-punk and thrash metal that formed outfits such as Napalm Death in late 80s. The result is a concern with the cross-generational anger of punk, the mysticism of metal and the slightly absurd and now antiquated government legislation against the more extreme elements of video. However, instead of looking to offend through his use of obscene content, dwell too much on a juvenile form of subject matter, or long for a youth that has disappeared, there's actually an ethical brand of melancholy in this work. What ends up being addressed is a reaction to, and a distain for the current climate where anything goes, a situation that results in a lack of tension in contemporary horror and music, where destruction is played out as a method, and death is simply represented as an equation or mechanical process.

Perhaps this unchallenged nihilism corresponds to a sense of failed utopianism. Either way, on the one hand Gubb seems to say 'it's all fucked and there's no possibility of redemption,' and on the other, his interest in films such as The Driller Killer and The Evil Dead – no matter how misplaced this sounds – contain an impossibly moral stance; they long for a past where a tension existed between alternative culture and the mainstream, and paradoxically where government action and moral guardianship reigned. This strange engagement with adolescent sub-culture and political history permeates most of Gubb's recent work.

Because most of his projects have taken place in UK towns or cities outside of London, this aspect of the artist's practice also becomes important in terms of debates around the local, the regional and the international, together with the marginal in artistic practice. On a practical level, peripheral areas still have the ability to contain subcultures with energy and desire, and this can map itself on to ideas of the scene, the event, and connects to local identity, desire, ambition and contemporary collaborative production.

Due to this and other reasons, Gubb's recent projects resonate in an interesting way. As part of a Grizedale Arts commission in 2003, he produced *The Church of the Greys*, a dilapidated shed built on a rambling route in Cumbria. The shed was constructed from unseasoned timber, and so over time it deteriorated to form the veneer of age; a theatrical rickety ghost-ride. Unwitting hikers subsequently stumbled across this highly theatrical haunted church in a natural environment. Gubb also hired local actors from a metal band to appear in a related video piece, while the same people helped the artist build the structure.

Similarly, *Everyone Knows This is Nowhere* (2007) is a collaborative work with Gordon Dalton that resulted in an exhibition at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, and stemmed





from a road trip that aimed to research the visual identity connected to American stunt legend Evel Knievel, together with the cultural aspiration that radiates out from the motorcyclist's extreme ambition. In various documentation we see graphic design and tailor made posters (produced by an original US poster company that have been screen printing promotional material for over 100 years), next to amusing images of the well-known Knievel wind-up 70s toy bike, which in one photograph faces the edge of the Snake River Canyon, as if it is about to attempt a jump that it will never succeed in making.

In other works such as *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow* (2007), an installation at The City Gallery, Leicester, and *Black as midnight on late evening moonless* (2004) at Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow, constructed environments played with various restrictions on the audience. In the former, visitors were only able to access a part of the room based on their height. If they were above five feet seven inches tall (the artist's own height), they only had access to half of the installation, while if they were below that height, they could only visit the opposite side. If discrimination within a council-run gallery aimed to antagonise the local authority and population, most people seemed to get the joke. Unusually, the only people to complain were white middle-class art goers, who were unlikely to have ever experienced discrimination of this kind before. In Gubb's 2004 Polish installation, a similar physical experience existed for the viewer. In the gallery, blank political placards were positioned facing a stage. The same room also contained an open microphone, together with marching soundtrack sections from tracks by Twisted Sister and The Sex Pistols. If anything, this environment proposed a dilemma of whether to make ones own protest in the insular, restrictive yet emotive confines of the gallery space.

Despite these confusing and slight interventions, if any recent work by Gubb has provoked a truly unusual response, it's without doubt *The Death of Peter Fechter* (2007). Here we can see a shift within the artist's practice, where horror and ethics, nihilism and the centre, together with the peripheral and contemporary art are combined with world history. Taking place almost as an anti-performance, this action created a straight historical representation of the moment in August 1962 when the teenager Peter Fechter was fatally injured in no man's land as he attempted to escape to the west over the Berlin Wall with his friend Helmut Kulbeik. While Kulbeik made it to safety, Fechter was shot in the back and abdomen. Famously left abandoned by guards on both sides of the divide as he cried for help, he eventually bled to death before being dragged away by East German guards.

The venue for Gubb's re-enactment was left undisclosed to the two coach loads of people that were shipped from central London to witness the event. Commissioned by Vivienne Gaskin of the ICA – who has been interested in performances of this kind for a number of years, having worked with Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard and other artists who have



celebrated moments in popular history – it was left unclear why the action was taking place, apart from the fact that it represented the forty-fifth anniversary of the original event. Gubb's work actually took place in the Thamesmead industrial estate, again, an estuary hinterland situated in its own no man's land between the capital and the regions. Similar to the original event, in Gubb's recreation, all of the action happened in the first five minutes. In the following fifty-five minutes, during which the fake 'Fechter' bled to death, the audience provided their own performance in its observance and reaction to the proceedings. Accompanied by real AK-47s and planted audience members who shouted at them to help Fechter, the guards corralled and pushed the 'real' audience who had been shipped to the secret location, and who protested and tried to intervene within the situation just as in the original event. Again, like Gubb's other works, everything conspired to leave visitors in an unresolved and uncertain state. Eventually the guards dragged Fechter's body from sight, while later, one dramatically appeared with a blood soaked hand. Again, a stalemate of historical accuracy was reached in much the same way as the original stand off between the US and DDR soldiers who left Fechter to die.

Gubb maintains that he is interested in the human element to stories such as these, and again a connection to the horrific form of blankness, futility and pointlessness that is sometimes attached to history and death. Similarly, perhaps this work is also a more critical comment on the emptiness of the re-enactment boom in contemporary art itself.

Either way, it's fair to say that *The Death of Peter Fechter* is S Mark Gubb's most poignant work to date. If we go back to the idea of borders, the regional and the peripheral, this work's incorrectness in terms of time and place also points to a vacuum in value, both within contemporary culture, art and politics. Fechter's attempted escape deliberately exists in the 'wrong' peripheral environment – there is no embodiment of world history in Thamesmead, simply a massive new housing development. Fechter isn't attempting to escape to the right side of town because there is no right or wrong side of town to escape to; he is doubly doomed to stay where he is: in a 'wasteland' miles from the official cultural centre. Yet, without sounding too unlikely, this is a wasteland that provides a strange hope through its isolation; through its relative autonomy from the centre contains the promise of redemption, while expectation and desire start to exist.

What we can be certain of is that, if mainstream culture and art is becoming increasingly unbearable and nihilistic through its massive proliferation, we should consider celebrating the peripheries of the UK through unlikely actions and unexpected performances. Instead of escaping to London, any self-respecting young artist should relinquish their ambition to move out, and stay where they are; remaining locked impossibly within the restrictive and narrow, yet untapped potential of their regional context. This'd make life far more interesting.

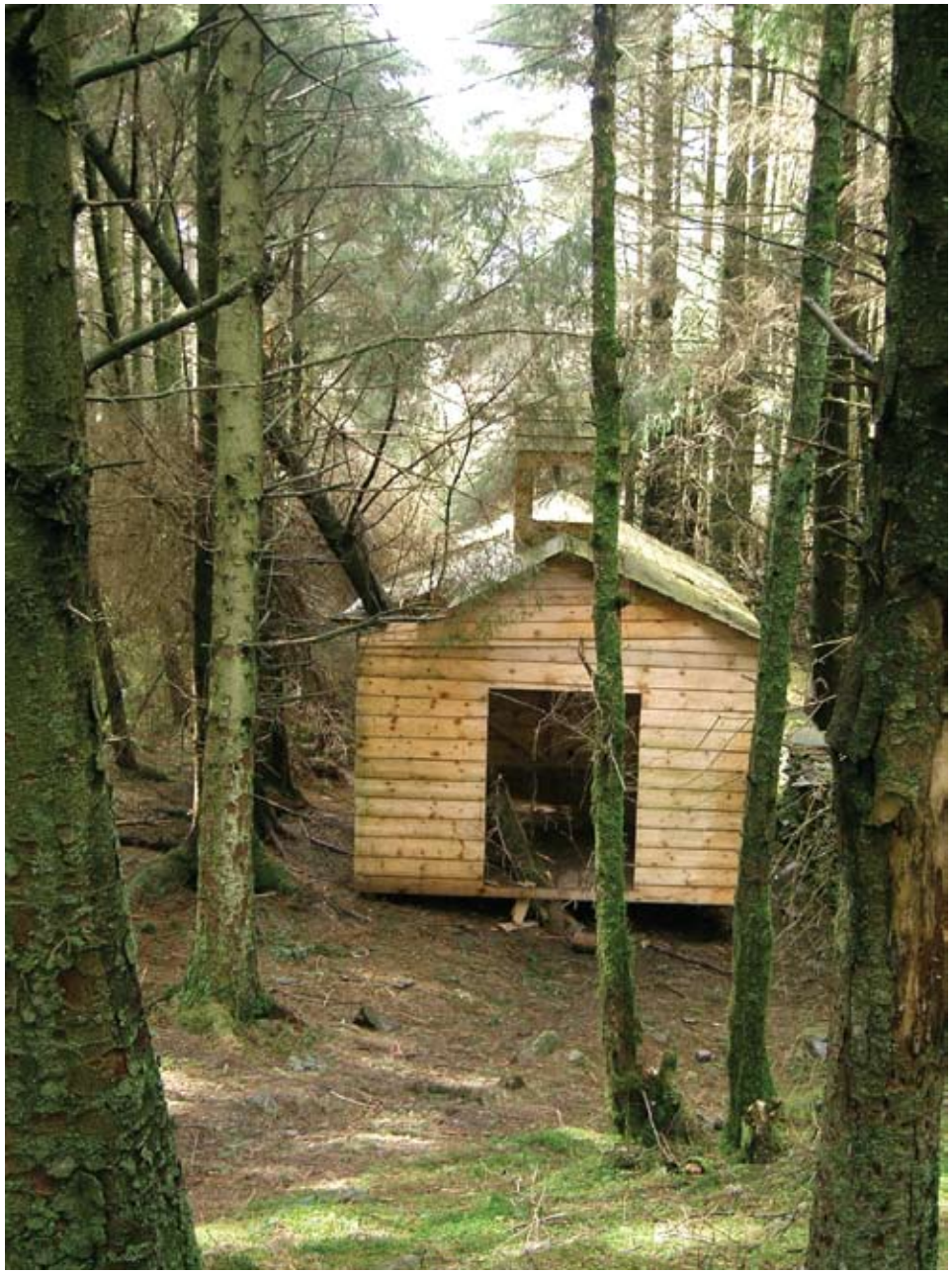
The Church of the Greys
Mixed Media Installation
Grizedale Arts, Cumbria
April 2003

Commissioned by Grizedale Arts. This was a two-part project; a permanent sculptural installation in the forest and a video work. The sculptural element took the form of a wooden chapel in the heart of the forest. This was built out of untreated wood, the intention being that it would quickly begin to decay and become dilapidated. This was positioned near to popular ramblers routes, offering the B-Movie experience of stumbling upon an old building in the middle of a forest and the 'should we go in or shouldn't we?' debate that ensues. The second part was the production of a short 16mm horror film based around a false history written for the church. For this, I worked with Zenolith, a young Death Metal band from Barrow-in-Furness who, along with their extended social and family networks, became the actors and crew in the films production. The film was never completed due to equipment failure and a three car smash on route to Grizedale from Barrow.

TONIGHT WE'RE GONNA PARTY LIKE IT'S 1999?

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN S MARK GUBB (SMG) & ROSS SINCLAIR (RS)

ROSS SINCLAIR: WHEN I WAS YOUNG YOU WERE INTO PUNK ROCK OR HEAVY METAL. PUNK WAS PRINCIPLED, SERIOUS, HEAVY, DEEP – IT SPOKE TO ME DIRECTLY, IT SET ME APART FROM MY PEERS, IT WAS MINE, BUT IT TAUGHT ME TO QUESTION EVERYTHING AND HELPED FORM MY VIEW OF THE WORLD. BUT YOU, MY FRIEND, WERE DIFFERENT, FOR YOU ANOTHER WORLD WAS OPENING UP – A WORLD OF FANTASY AND ESCAPISM, MAIDENS AND MYSTICISM – A WINDOW INTO A DIFFERENT PLACE.



The Church of the Greys
Installation view



The Church of the Greys
Detail



The Church of the Greys
Detail

ROSS SINCLAIR: A PUNK ROCK ADOLESCENCE MARKED MY PRACTICE AS AN ARTIST, HAS YOUR HEAVY ROCK HERITAGE SHAPED YOURS?

Welcome to Hell
UCE, Birmingham
September 2004

Exhibition marking the end of The Wheatley Fellowship at BIAD, Birmingham. A mixed show containing around sixteen separate works and a lo-fi, photocopied, exhibition plan, including text adapted from the 'Protect and Survive' manual of the late 70's. The works in the show weren't specifically linked, but their exhibition together alluded to a kind of 'end-of-days'; slightly apocalyptic and questioning, including references to music, comedy, the Cub Scouts, Protect and Survive and nationalism.

S MARK GUBB: MY COUSIN GOT ME INTO IRON MAIDEN WHEN I WAS EIGHT. PUNK WAS ABOUT THE URBAN, SUBURBAN AND REAL LIFE, THATCHER'S BRITAIN AND HOW SHIT EVERYTHING WAS, WHEREAS METAL WAS ALL MYSTICISM, CASTLES, BIG BOOBS AND BADLY VEILED PHALLIC REFERENCES, BUT IT WAS NEVER THAT SIDE OF THINGS I WAS IN TO. I LOVED THE EXTREME IMAGERY OF SKULLS AND THE DEVIL, BUT IT WAS THE NOISE, BRIGHT LIGHTS AND THE FIRE THAT I LIKED. I BECAME A HUGE THRASH METAL FAN – SLAYER, ANTHRAX, MEGADETH, METALLICA AND TESTAMENT. I WAS YOUNG ENOUGH TO FIND THE IDEA OF THE DEVIL FRIGHTENING AND THAT IT MIGHT SOMEHOW MANIFEST ITSELF THROUGH THIS MUSIC WAS EXHILARATING.



Educate to Liberate
Installation view



An Important Moment in Hi(ck)story, Nuclear Family (2004) and *Be Prepared*
Installation view



Jesus Saves and *Still We Stand Tall*
Installation view



Black as midnight on late evening moonless
Installation view

Black as midnight on late evening moonless
Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow, Poland
December 2004

An installation produced as a result of a residency hosted by Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow, Poland. This work was made in response to my time spent in Poland and, more specifically, a series of interviews and conversations with Krakow residents from a range of age groups, all of whom have lived through the massive shift in Poland's history from Communism to Democracy. The work consisted of a series of free-standing placards positioned so that, as you entered, you couldn't see what they said; you were joining the protest from the rear. At the front of the space was a microphone and PA, plugged in and switched on, so that if the viewer wished they could make their way through the placards and speak in to the microphone. By doing so, it would also be revealed to them that the placards were blank. A sound element to the work consisted of the sound of marching feet and a military style drumbeat; samples from 'Holidays in the Sun' and 'We're Not Gonna Take it' by The Sex Pistols and Twisted Sister, respectively.

RS: I REMEMBER THINKING THAT THE 12" RECORD WAS THE HEIGHT OF EMPATHETIC ENGAGEMENT WITH AN AUDIENCE, A BEAUTIFUL THING WITH ALL THIS EXCITING EXTRA STUFF (PATCHES, STICKERS), SOME KID WOULD BUY IT AND TAKE IT HOME TO THEIR BEDROOM, CAREFULLY UNWRAP IT, PORE OVER IT, INSPECT IT, TREASURE IT.



The Death of Peter Fechter
Documentation of performance

The Death of Peter Fechter
Live Performance
London
18th August 2007

Commissioned by the ICA, this was a re-enactment of the death of Peter Fechter; an 18 year old citizen of the DDR, shot and fatally wounded attempting to escape over the Berlin Wall on August 17th, 1962. After being fired upon and hit in the back and abdomen, Peter fell back in to the no man's land on the DDR side of the wall and lay calling for help for 50 minutes whilst he slowly bled to death. Neither the DDR nor GI guards stepped in to help him, despite pleas from a large group of West Berliner's who gathered having heard the shots. This project was a straight re-enactment of this hour in Peter's life and death, staged at a secret location in London. Two coaches of audience were bussed there from the ICA with no knowledge of where they were going. Integral to the performance was the use of live-firing AK-47 machine guns by the DDR guards (firing blank ammunition), providing a very real and physical experience for the audience. Planted among the audience were performers who took the role of the West Berliner's once the performance was under way, in an attempt to blur the line between audience, performer and performance.

RS: HOW DO YOU THINK OF THE AUDIENCE? WHAT ABOUT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE WORK IS MADE – THIS SEEMS IMPORTANT FOR YOU?



The Death of Peter Fechter
Documentation of performance

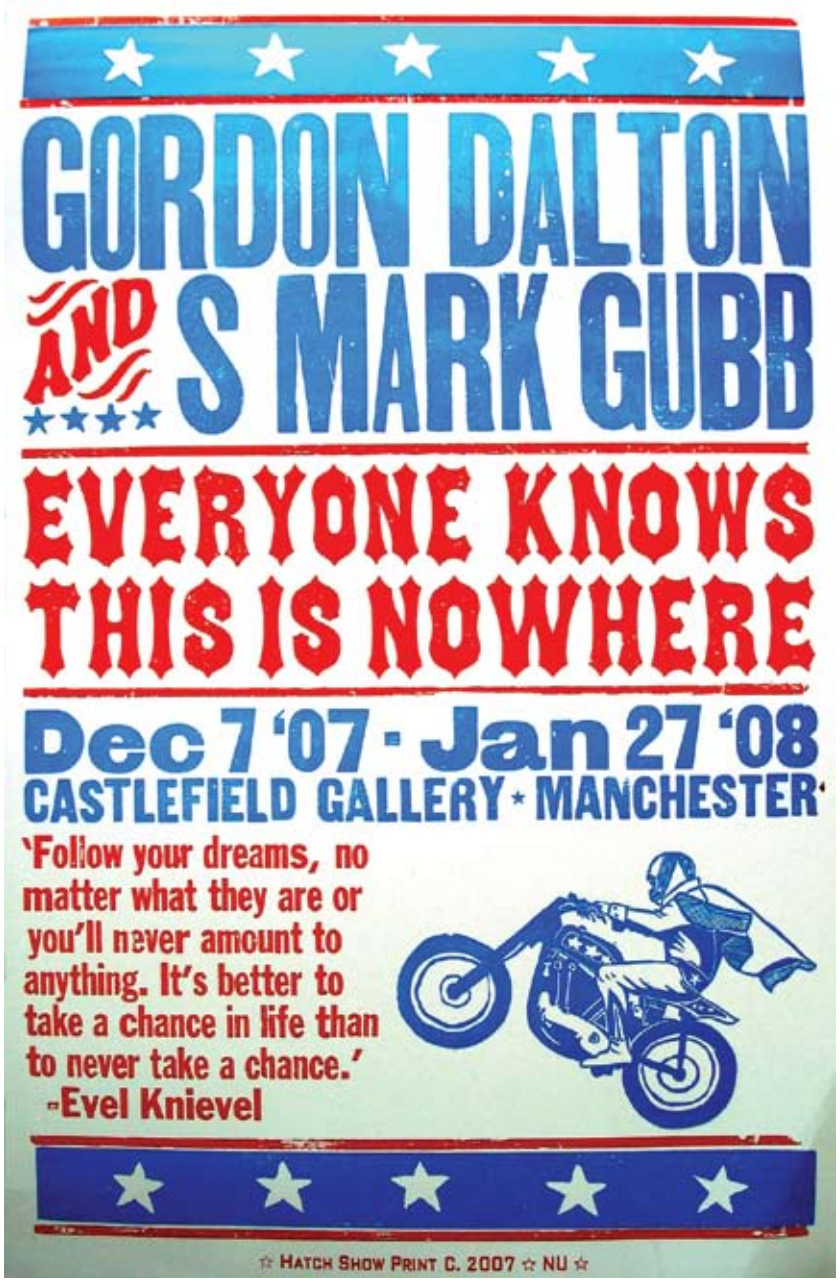


The Death of Peter Fechter
Documentation of performance

Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere
Mixed Media Installation
Castlefield Gallery, Manchester
December 2007

A collaborative project with Gordon Dalton, this exhibition was based around a road trip we made from Los Angeles to Snake River Canyon in Twin Falls, Idaho, in an attempt to track down the site of Evel Knievel's failed 'Snake River Canyon Jump'. The exhibition took the form of an installation in the gallery including large-scale bleachers (American stadium style seating), projected video, fly-posters and a promotional poster produced by Hatch Show Print of Nashville, Tennessee; Hatch are America's oldest working print shop having been established in 1879. Their look and style are synonymous with the art and culture of the American South and has become as famous as the people they have produced posters for; the likes of Johnny Cash, Elvis and The Grand Ole Opry. The exhibition was very much a sum of its parts; the nostalgia, the futility, the trip in to the Wild West, the posters, the bleachers, the film, the stunts. It becomes a dialogue around our positioning to American cultural and political history; both the culture and politics of today and the aspirational, superstar culture of our youth. A ridiculous pilgrimage to engage with an impossible dream and the inevitable crash down to earth that this entails, both physically and aspirationally.

SMG: AUDIENCE AND CONTEXT ARE IMPERATIVE. TAKE MY A REAL ROCK ARCHIVE PROJECT, WHERE I STAGED AN EVENT AT THE BOAT CLUB IN NOTTINGHAM, AND INTERVIEWED TWO GUYS CALLED GEOFF LUCAS AND PHIL MYATT LIVE ON STAGE. GEOFF USED TO BE BLACK SABBATH'S ROADIE AND TOUR MANAGER AND PHIL USED TO RUN A CLUB IN BIRMINGHAM CALLED MOTHERS.



Promotional poster designed and printed by Hatch Show Print, Nashville, USA



Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere
Installation view



Everyone Knows This Is Nowhere
Installation view

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow
Mixed Media Installation
The City Gallery, Leicester
March 2008

A solo show drawing together various themes and interests running through my practice. The gallery space was divided in two by a roughly fabricated wall of wooden boards. These spaces were fenced off and a process of discrimination used on the visiting audience to decide which half of the gallery space they were allowed to enter; this was a token and arbitrary process based around height – if the visitor was over 5' 7" they were allowed in the left hand space, if they were under that height they were allowed in the right hand space and if they were exactly 5' 7" (the same height as myself) they were allowed in both. This was enforced by someone I employed by placing an advert in the local job centre. The exhibition was aiming to draw discussion around political/social/moral structures, religion's role within these structures, political apathy, the human desire for change and each persons (in)ability to achieve this.

SMG: *WHAT YOU'VE SAID ABOUT THE RECORD AND POSTERS AND PATCHES, AND THE RELATIONSHIP IT HAS WITH ITS AUDIENCE IS TRUE. THERE'S THAT ETERNAL QUESTION HOW DO YOU DO THAT WITH ART?! I'M ALWAYS REALLY CONSCIOUS NOT TO SAY 'THIS IS THE WAY IT IS' THROUGH MY WORK, I WANT THE WORK TO BE A DISCUSSION, ALTHOUGH AS AN ARTIST YOU'RE RARELY AROUND TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION.*



Promotional poster designed and printed by Hatch Show Print, Nashville, USA



Here Today, Gone Tomorrow
Installation view



You Suffer...
From the *...all in the name of* series

RS: THE AUDIENCE IS ALL OVER YOUR WORK LIKE A RASH. FOR EXAMPLE HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW AT LEICESTER, TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT?



Somewhere Over the Rainbow
Detail

I'M INTERESTED IN GIVING THE AUDIENCE A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE, IN THE SPECTACLE, AND IN ATTEMPTING TO BRING OUT AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE...

SMG: I WANTED TO CONTROL THE AUDIENCES EXPERIENCE IN THE SPACE, SO DIVIDED THE GALLERY DOWN THE MIDDLE, WITH DIFFERENT WORKS ON EITHER SIDE, CAGED OFF ACROSS THE FRONT AND A GALLERY ATTENDANT PRESENT TO DETERMINE WHICH SIDE OF THE GALLERY THEY WERE ALLOWED IN. I CAME UP WITH AN ARBITRARY SYSTEM BASED ON MY HEIGHT. I'M 5' 7," SO IF PEOPLE WERE OVER THAT HEIGHT THEY WERE ALLOWED IN THE RIGHT SIDE, IF THEY WERE UNDER THEY WERE ALLOWED IN THE LEFT AND IF THEY WERE EXACTLY THAT HEIGHT, THEY WERE ALLOWED IN BOTH, THE CHOSEN ONES. THE ATTENDANT I HAD DIVIDING THE AUDIENCE WAS SOMEONE I'D FOUND BY PUTTING AN ADVERT IN THE LOCAL JOB CENTRE.

THE INDIVIDUAL WORKS THEMSELVES ALLUDED TO VARIOUS THINGS – RELIGION, POLITICS, ASPIRATION, DISCRIMINATION, APATHY, DIVISION, MUSIC. I GOT REGULAR FEEDBACK FROM THE PERSON I'D EMPLOYED, A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP TO THE ONE I WOULD HAVE HAD WITH A GALLERY ATTENDANT. THEY WOULD TEXT ME DIFFERENT PEOPLE'S REACTIONS AND LET ME KNOW ABOUT CONVERSATIONS THEY'D HAD. ONLY A COUPLE OF PEOPLE COMPLAINED ABOUT THE HEIGHT THING AND IT WAS INTERESTING TO NOTE THEY WERE WHITE, MIDDLE-CLASS; EXACTLY THE KIND OF DEMOGRAPHIC WHO ARE LEAST LIKELY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED ANY REAL KIND OF DISCRIMINATION IN THEIR LIVES.

I'M INTERESTED IN WORK GIVING THE AUDIENCE A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE, IN THE SPECTACLE, AND IN ATTEMPTING TO BRING OUT AN EMOTIONAL RESPONSE. THAT COMES BACK TO MUSIC; THE POWER OF THE CONCERT, THE VOLUME, THE SHOW, BUT HOW UNDER-PINNING ALL THAT SPECTACLE, THE MUSIC IS TRYING TO CONVEY SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT AND TO TAP IN TO SOMETHING DEEPER THAN A VISUAL EXPERIENCE; SOMETHING I THINK I'VE ACHIEVED BEST WITH MY RE-ENACTMENT PIECE, THE DEATH OF PETER FECHTER.

RS: I REALLY IDENTIFY WITH THAT IDEA OF THE AUDIENCE'S PHYSICALITY. I THINK OF THE AUDIENCE LIKE ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE WORK, AS IMPORTANT AS A PHYSICAL DIMENSION – ANOTHER MORE FLUID, CHANGEABLE BUT CORPOREAL CHARACTERISTIC. I FIND IT HARD TO DEVELOP WORK SOMETIMES IF IT'S NOT FOR A PARTICULAR SHOW, SPACE, IDEA OR AUDIENCE. I LIKE TO IMAGINE THE PUNTERS COMING IN TO THE SPACE, HOW THEY ENTER, WHAT THEY SEE FIRST, HOW THE WORK PUSHES THEM AROUND – NOT IN A CARSTEN HOLLER KIND OF WAY, MORE IN SOME KIND OF INSANE URBAN PLANNING WAY.

SO TELL ME MORE ABOUT PETER FECHTER – THAT WORK SEEMS TO TAKE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH AUDIENCE SOMEWHERE ELSE ALTOGETHER?

SMG: WHILST I'VE MADE WORK THAT HAS A PERFORMATIVE ELEMENT, I'D NEVER MADE AN OUTRIGHT PERFORMANCE WORK, AND THIS WAS ALSO REALLY FLIRTING WITH THEATRE.

ALL THE 'ACTION' HAPPENED IN THE FIRST 5 MINUTES AND THE OTHER 55 MINUTES WAS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WATCHING AN INDIVIDUAL SLOWLY BLEED TO DEATH WHICH, IN TERMS OF A THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE, ISN'T THAT INTERESTING.

THE PERFORMANCE WAS UNDERWAY BEFORE THE AUDIENCE ARRIVED ON SITE, THE GUARDS WERE ALREADY 'ON DUTY' AND THERE WAS NO ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE END, THE GUARDS JUST MOVED AROUND THE SITE USHERING PEOPLE AWAY IN A TYPICAL 'NOTHING TO SEE HERE' MANNER. WE USED REAL AK-47 MACHINE GUNS. I WAS INTERESTED IN WHAT PROCESS WOULD BE INVOLVED TO BRING REAL MACHINE GUNS TO A LONDON SUBURB AND FIRE THEM. IT'S SURPRISINGLY EASY TO GET THE PERMISSIONS YOU NEED. I WANTED REALISM BUT ALSO A WARHOLIAN NOTION THAT WE HAVE BECOME DESENSITIZED. I'D NEVER BEEN AROUND A REAL AK-47 BEFORE AND SO FIGURED MOST OF THE AUDIENCE PROBABLY HADN'T. THE ONLY WAY TO DESCRIBE THOSE THINGS WHEN THEY GO OFF IS AWESOME, TRULY TERRIFYING. WHEN THE ACTORS STARTED FIRING, AUDIENCE MEMBERS WERE LITERALLY DIVING OUT OF THE WAY, WHICH I GUESS IS A GOOD REFLEX RESPONSE TO HAVE.

I'D NEVER BEEN AROUND A REAL AK-47 BEFORE AND SO FIGURED MOST OF THE AUDIENCE PROBABLY HADN'T...

THE AUDIENCE COULD GO WHEREVER THEY LIKED, PROVIDING GUARDS DIDN'T STOP THEM. THERE WERE NO SEATS AND I'D PLANTED PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE TO TAKE ON THE ROLE OF THE WEST BERLINERS WHO GATHERED AGAINST THE WALL DURING THE ORIGINAL EVENT, SHOUTING AT THE GUARDS TO HELP PETER. I WANTED TO MERGE AUDIENCE AND PERFORMER A BIT FURTHER, WHICH SEEMED TO WORK AS A FEW AUDIENCE MEMBERS JOINED IN WITH THE SHOUTING. EQUALLY, IT WASN'T ABOUT DRAWING IN THE AUDIENCE IN ANY OTHER WAY THAN EMOTIONALLY.

RS: THIS PROJECT BRINGS INTO FOCUS SOME OF THE AMBIGUITIES AND 'TONES' IN THE OTHER WORKS. IT DEMANDS A LOT OF THE AUDIENCE – IT'S LIKE YOU'RE TAKING THEM HOSTAGE AND THEY CAN'T ESCAPE UNTIL THE SCENARIO IS PLAYED OUT. PERHAPS THIS IS THE ULTIMATE IN USING THE AUDIENCE AS ANOTHER PHYSICAL ELEMENT OF THE WORK.

SMG: IT DIDN'T DEMAND A LOT OF THEM IN A PHYSICAL SENSE, BUT EMOTIONALLY IT DID. I'M ALSO A BIG FAN OF THINGS THAT ARE NOT NECESSARILY IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZABLE AS ART. I'VE MADE A COUPLE OF PROJECTS THAT STRADDLE THE LINE BETWEEN 'THE CULTURE I'M ENGAGING WITH' AND 'ART'; A REAL ROCK ARCHIVE AND AMONG THE LIVING, WHICH I CURATED AND WHERE WE MET; ONE ENGAGING WITH ROCK MUSIC AND HISTORY, THE OTHER WITH SKATEBOARDING. BOTH OF THESE PROJECTS CAME OUT OF A GENUINE PASSION I HAVE FOR THE SUBJECT MATTER, BUT ALSO FROM A BELIEF THAT I COULD BRING TOGETHER 'ART' AND 'THIS OTHER CULTURE' WITHOUT COMPROMISING EITHER; THE ART WOULD STILL BE CRITICAL AND CREDIBLE BUT THE OTHER CULTURE REMAINED INTACT TOO.

THOSE KIDS IN CARDIFF ARE GOING TO REMEMBER THAT GUITAR FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES...

RS: THAT REFLECTS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF YOUR PRACTICE THAT ENGAGES WITH DIFFERENT CONSTITUENCIES – ALMOST LIKE A DOCUMENTARY MAKER WOULD POINT THE LENS IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS TO FOCUS ON SPECIFIC 'IDENTITIES' IT SEEMS THAT EACH WORK DEVELOPS A DIALOGUE WITH THE SPECIFIC CONSTITUENCY ADDRESSED.

THE PETER FECHTER RECONSTRUCTION MEANS SOMETHING DIFFERENT NOW THAN IT WOULD HAVE A DECADE AGO. I THINK THAT'S SIGNIFICANT AND I THOUGHT ABOUT THAT A LOT IN THE WORK I MADE FOR CHAPTER, IN CARDIFF, FOR MY PART OF THE SKATE PROJECT, IN YOUR OWN STORY, YOUR OWN RELATION TO THESE COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE WORK. I LOVED THE IDEA OF FREE ELECTRIC GUITARS FOR UNDER 18'S ON THE UNDERSTANDING THAT I'D MAKE A CD OF COVER VERSIONS OF THE FIRST SONG THEY WROTE ON THE GUITAR AND THEN WE'D RELEASE THAT – IT EXISTS IN ONE MOMENT, BUT PROMISES SOMETHING FOR THE FUTURE.

SMG: THOSE KIDS IN CARDIFF ARE GOING TO REMEMBER THAT GUITAR FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES... YOU MADE REFERENCE TO DOCUMENTARY AND ANTHROPOLOGY. MY WORK IS JUST BASED ON THINGS I FIND INTERESTING IN THE WORLD, HOLDING THEM BACK UP FOR RE-EXAMINATION. REFERRING BACK TO A POINT YOU MADE, THE WORKS WITHIN THE HERE TODAY, GONE TOMORROW PROJECT HOPEFULLY ALLOW THE AUDIENCE TO CONSTRUCT THE WORK TO BECOME MORE THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS. THAT WAY OF WORKING TO ME IS REALLY IMPORTANT. I DON'T SUPPOSE ANY CREATIVE PROFESSIONAL WANTS TO BE REMEMBERED FOR ONE THING, ONE PIECE OF WORK, ONE EXHIBITION, ONE FILM, WHATEVER, AS THAT'S JUST ONE THING YOU WANTED TO SAY TO THE WORLD.

RS: IT GOES BACK TO THE IDEA OF THE CREATIVE LIFE. THE LONG HAUL. IT'S A POLITICAL ACT. IT'S AN ONGOING FIGHT AGAINST CYNICISM – THE ANTITHESIS OF THE 'HERE TODAY – GONE TOMORROW' MENTALITY THAT SEEMS SO PREVALENT IN THE ART WORLD AT THE MOMENT.

EVERYTHING IS CONSUMED AND DISCARDED SO FAST THESE DAYS BUT I THINK THERE IS A REAL VALUE IN REFLECTING ON WORK IN CHUNKS OF YEARS. LET'S THINK ABOUT IT, LET'S TALK ABOUT IT, LET'S LOOK AT IT AS A BODY OF WORK WHICH SHINES A LIGHT ON MANY DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LIVING TODAY, SO WE CAN CELEBRATE AND COMMISERATE IN EQUAL MEASURE. ART, AND LIFE.

FOR A FULL VERSION OF THIS CONVERSATION BETWEEN S MARK GUBB AND ARTIST ROSS SINCLAIR, PLEASE VISIT **WWW.CERIHAND.CO.UK**

S Mark Gubb is represented by Ceri Hand Gallery
This book was published to coincide with his first solo show at the gallery:

My Empire of Dirt,
16 January – 28 February 2009

For more information on the artist and extended version of the texts in this publication, please visit www.cerihand.co.uk

S Mark Gubb
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