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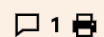
Rodney Graham: the conceptualist who makes painting his muse

The multimedia artist builds up layers of literary and visual reference to create dense yet witty work



© Rodney Graham Studio; courtesy Lisson Gallery

Rachel Spence 5 HOURS AGO



“I’m getting to my studio,” replies Rodney Graham when I ask him how he’s negotiating lockdown in Vancouver. That response says everything about the central role art plays in the life of the 71-year-old conceptualist.

Indeed, since his first works from the late 1970s, which riffed on the mechanism of the camera obscura, art has been not only Graham’s practice put also his subject.

Little wonder, then, that painting is the muse behind his latest work. Created for the Frieze New York Viewing Room and the gallery space — both online, naturally — of Graham’s dealer, Lisson Gallery, the sequence evolves out of an earlier cycle *Vacuuming the Gallery, 1949*, which Graham created in 2018.

That work comprises a lightbox display depicting a mise-en-scène of a postwar gallery hung with the graphic, abstract paintings fashionable at that time. Centrestage is occupied by the art dealer — white, male, middle-aged, pipe-smoking and played by Graham — as he nudges a vacuum cleaner across his already spotless carpet. In the background, an elegant woman peers at a picture as if considering purchase.

It's a witty gesture, taking a swipe at gender stereotypes as much as the art world. Although the paintings may be dated, the depiction of the blue-chip commercial gallery as an exclusive faux-museum, accessible only to the moneyed few, is even more acute today.



Rodney Graham's 'Vacuuming the Gallery 1949' (2018) © Rodney Graham; courtesy Lisson Gallery

The new presentation, entitled *Painting Problems*, focuses on Graham's paintings themselves, apparently of a similar era to those in *Vacuuming the Gallery*. They are however more varied and complex than their 2018 predecessors. Their floating shapes, geometric here, fluid there, and contrasting shades — some pale as sky, others in hard blacks and bruised purples — riff on Cubism, Art Informel and Constructionism. You feel you know the author but can't quite remember their name.

In truth, Graham concocted all these pictures in collaboration with Photoshop — “I have a very basic understanding” — and his team of assistants, who, says Graham, are “more precise” than he is, although they do follow his “Photoshop indications”.

With the dealer the picture of conservative masculine elegance, in his cashmere V-neck and tie leaning on an antique chair, a touch of melancholy in his eyes, the image has curious poignancy. It is not just that this era of painting, so diminutively innocent in comparison with today’s grandiose, commodified expressions, is over. It’s also that Graham himself is prey to nostalgia.

“I missed out on painting,” he tells me, his voice low and melodic. “So I am always looking for an opportunity to do it.”

Indeed, born in Abbotsford, British Columbia, in 1949 — no coincidence that *Vacuuming the Gallery* bears that date — Graham came of age in the 1970s, a time when painting was resolutely unfashionable. While ostensibly he studied fine art at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Graham — who describes himself as “a bit of a dabbler” — was always drawn to literary expressions as much as visual ones. He was especially drawn to French writer Raymond Roussel (1877-1933) whose surreal, rebus-like texts danced with wordplay and patterns.



Rodney Graham's 'Untitled' (2020) © Rodney Graham; courtesy Lisson Gallery

Does he ever lose his way in his encrypted labyrinths? “I work kind of slowly,” he muses, his voice reflecting this unhurried pace. “So I guess I feel in control of it.”

Although *Vacuuming the Gallery* and the new series for Lisson are layered as a Russian doll, Graham sounds sincere when he says he’s “trying to move away from the loaded back story”.

“I did so much conceptual work in the 1980s and ’90s which had so much explaining to do,” he continues, referring to pieces such as “Lenz” (1983) and “Reading Machine for Lenz” (1993), which reordered novella based on the experience of a schizophrenic by Georg Büchner in the first instance, then, in the follow-up, added a machine that rotated the existing chaos.

The film that plotted Graham on to the international map was *Vexation Island* (1997). Shown in Venice the same year, when Graham represented his country at the Biennale, it is a nine-minute loop in which the artist plays a 17th-century sailor washed up on a desert island under a palm tree. After sleeping for more than eight minutes, he wakes up, gets knocked out by a coconut and the sequence begins again.



A still from Rodney Graham's 'Vexation Island' (1997) © Rodney Graham; courtesy Lisson Gallery

The piece, which nails the human condition as a tragicomic loop of futility, set Graham on a path to a galaxy of solo shows in major global museums, including MOCA in Los Angeles (2004), the Museum Voorlinden, in Wassenaar, the Netherlands (2017) and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts, in Gateshead, the UK (2017).

Despite *Vexation Island*'s relatively straightforward premise, and Graham's desire to simplify his practice, much of his subsequent work has retained a mille-feuille density. Hence his decision to return more seriously to painting in the future.

"When I get painting, I make a mess!," he says, comparing the practice to the "super-disciplined" demands of film-making. "I want to find a balance between spontaneity and meticulous planning."

If he finds that equilibrium anywhere, it's with the Rodney Graham Band, a group of musicians with whom he has been singing and playing guitar for more than 20 years. After listening to some tracks online, I can say that his husky, subtle tones and quirky lyrics remind me a little of the downbeat allure of US singer-songwriter Loudon Wainwright III.

Asked how his musicality feeds into his art, Graham replies bluntly: "It doesn't. It's a hobby." Far from grandiose even when talking about his artistic career, on the topic of his music he is delightfully self-deprecating. "I just put my stuff up [online]. You can follow every play you're getting, you can track it precisely," he pauses for dramatic effect then says: "And hardly anyone listens!"



Rodney Graham's 'Untitled' (2020) © Rodney Graham; courtesy Lisson Gallery

That discovery has swept away his previous illusion, he says, that his music played to a “different audience” from the art world. “Now I’m finding there’s no audience at all!”

He has no plans to lean on his art-world networks to buff up the band’s reputation. Before we say goodbye, he recounts a darkly comic memory of playing at the opening of another artist, at the Frankfurt exhibition space Portikus. “They made me a cylindrical tub-shaped stage. I was playing acoustic guitar and the whole time, people had their backs to me. It was like being a performing animal at the zoo!”

Given his unvarnished self-image, I’m not surprised when Graham tells me he loathes visiting art fairs. “I’m fine about making work for them but I hate going to them because everything looks so great, and my work looks shitty,” he takes a breath before clarifying: “Lightboxes look terrible because the art fair is so bright.”

In Frieze’s new digital iteration, of course, Graham’s problem will be solved.

[Frieze Viewing Room](#), May 8-15

LISSON GALLERY

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Confessions Of A Window Cleaner: Rodney Graham Interviewed

—Allan Gardner , October 21st, 2018 10:09

Rodney Graham's current show at the Lisson Gallery, London, finds the Canadian artist inhabiting a variety of characters, both on and off the canvas. Allan Gardner joins him to talk post-punk, studio practice, and conceptualism



Installation view of Rodney Graham: Central Questions of Philosophy, Lisson Gallery, London (3 October – 3 November 2018) Photographer George Darrell. © Rodney Graham; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Rodney Graham is definably an interdisciplinary artist, examining nuances in cultural and historical threads across a variety of media, including performance, music, sculpture, painting and video.

Living and working in Vancouver throughout his career, Graham studied under Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall during the beginning of the Vancouver School's conceptual photography movement. Initially influenced heavily by their work, he soon branched out into his own aesthetic territories.

Graham's work inhabits the space between artist, performer and observer. He provides insight into social and historical cultures through often humorous depictions of the tropes he witnesses. This interview takes place during a tour of his recent solo show *Central Questions of Philosophy* at Lisson Gallery in London.

The exhibition (open until November third) explores the nature of the artist as a creator, performer and as a sort of culture-sponge. An envoy for ephemeral ideas, artefacts or symbols that filter down through communication – eventually becoming ubiquitous in our language and collective imaginations.

Through a series of light box works, Graham is photographed playing characters. These range from an ageing rockabilly fan in Vancouver through to famed gallerist Samuel Kootz and philosopher AJ Ayres. The key tenet linking these figures together remains the decision of the artist to inhabit them in some way. The walls surrounding the brand new series of light boxes entitled *Vacuuming The Gallery, 1949* are surrounded by paintings made by the artist as he performed the actions of an artist working in 1949.

Graham's works involve layers within layers, both figuratively and literally. The transparencies on the previously mentioned light boxes are made up of countless photographs of carefully staged sets. The conceptualism Graham learnt during his education in British Columbia carries throughout this new exhibition. The reasons for the work may not always be initially clear, but the conversations found in them are myriad.



Installation view of Rodney Graham: Central Questions of Philosophy, Lisson Gallery, London (3 October – 3 November 2018) Photographer George Darrell. © Rodney Graham; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

I was listening to U-J3RK5 [Graham's post-punk band from the late 1970s] earlier today

Rodney Graham: Oh yeah?

On a Vancouver punk compilation

the one with the blue stripe on it? Terrible cover.

It reminded me of Gang of Four, or Magazine or something in that wheelhouse. You guys toured together, right?

With Gang of Four? That was awesome. They were really good, really cool people as well.

I saw Dan Higgs recently in Leeds. Do you know his music? It seems like something that you'd be into.

Yeah, I actually have an indirect connection to him. I actually did a piece that relates to one of the works in this show [*Tattooed Man On Balcony*, 2018]. I wrote an open letter to a tattooer describing a tattoo that I wanted on my back, the poem is written with the text cascading across the page. The tattoo was of Popeye in a deep-sea diving suit with a helmet on blowing bubbles through his pipe, fighting a giant squid. The squid is fighting back and spraying black ink everywhere and it's going up my back and over my shoulder. I gave the poem to a tattooer to get the flash drawn up with the intention of showing the flash alongside the light box work, but decided not to. The guy who drew the tattoo flash had actually studied under Dan Higgs, from Brooklyn or something. I knew Higgs' music a little bit, I have a record of him doing Banjo improv. I never really knew about Lungfish until I got this record, but it's funny that he was also important in the tattoo world.

Yeah, he's like Thom De Vita. They were just artists working through tattooing. Dan Higgs is still just touring, doing his thing. It can almost be a guided meditation.

He does this weird preaching thing too, right? A friend of mine releases a lot of his stuff, Bill Mace. Daniel Higgs has actually come up before.

We could go on... Let's talk about *Vacuuming The Gallery*, 1949 (2018).

This one is based on a photograph I found on the internet of a gallerist in his gallery in 1947 - this guy called Samuel Kootz. I didn't really know anything about him but it turned out he was an important figure in promoting abstract expressionism in the forties and fifties, he did the first US show for Picasso post-war.

I wanted to do a piece about a gallery with paintings because I like having an excuse to make paintings. I made this piece specifically for this wall [at the Lisson]. It's as big as I can make these light boxes. That's what determined the structure. I made this four panels - my biggest yet - with the intention of making it more immersive. I made the paintings in it based on a Rodchenko drawing. They're all extrapolations of it. These look nothing like it. I just took the image from the internet and started cutting it up and pasting it back together then photographing that and repeating.

This is kind of a continuation from *The Gifted Amateur*, Nov 10th 1962 (2007) exploring modernist values in painting. I was including sand in the paint in order to create this texture - something that they also used in the forties. I wanted their texture in the lightbox to be very clear, because the photographs are made up of hundreds of images it requires something like this to bring out a strong texture with the light coming through.

I remember hearing you discuss switching from film to digital and the realisation that through using this medium you could pack your work full of so many more details. The depth here almost makes the room start to flex when you look at the difference between the angles in the images and the angles in the room. It's something I wanted to discuss with you, the idea of coming from a conceptual background and needing an excuse to make paintings. The idea that once you subscribe to having a strong conceptual language, you need to justify painting, to give yourself a reason to do it? That's something I can personally identify with.

Yeah, that's something that came from my teachers – my friends, Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall. Being a couple of years older than me, they had passed through that painting phase naturally. When I started at the University of British Columbia, it was Photo-Conceptual. Conceptual art was the main focus. I come from a slightly literary predilection so that was galvanising to me – the possibilities of art from a conceptual perspective.

I didn't go through a painting phase, it was only later that I began looking at painting. I was always more on the Duchamp side than Picasso. It took a long time for me to start dabbling in painting but it's something I very much enjoy doing. Are you a painter?

No, I started out as a painter but my own work is conceptually focused, mostly audiovisual and installation. I started as an abstract painter but one day I just couldn't do it anymore, it just felt pointless. I totally identify with this idea of needing to create a justification for doing something. I thought something that you'd said before about moving from being anti-studio to someone who is never away from their studio was interesting within this context. It's almost performative in itself, like having a studio is a justification of being an artist because you are in your artist's studio. Almost like when you're in your studio you're performing as an artist?

Yeah, having a proper studio changed things completely for me. I kind of took pride in doing stuff in my living room, sending specs out to have sculptures made or whatever. Just having a studio changed things.

There is a performative aspect too. Also a practice space for music or whatever. I love doing music, it's like a super serious hobby.

Could you tell me more about the actual paintings as well?

I was hesitant to put the paintings in the room with the light boxes. It's hard to pair the light boxes with other things.

I could see that. They're very dominant pieces but I feel like the inclusion of the physical paintings do add to this feeling of a gallery within a gallery. It ties the experience together.

The weird open angle in this room creates a weird continuum panorama. It opens up with the wall that the paintings are on.

It's also at odds with the angles of the room in *Vacuuming The Gallery*. It creates a sort of distortion. It initially looks like the paintings in the images and the paintings on the actual walls are the same. As your eyes switch between them you notice the angular dissonance between the two spaces – something interesting when you're in a gallery looking at a fake gallery that actually was a real gallery full of fake paintings that are actually real paintings. It's an unusual framework in which to parse an exhibition.

These light boxes and the paintings around them had me thinking about the work in terms of texture and application and line, something that I wouldn't be immediately drawn to in general – but at the time when the fictional artist made these works, these were almost the be all end all in discussing painting. It's interesting that these works shifted my critical perspective. It re-contextualised my thinking within the space. Your performing as the artist in the 1940s gets me performing as a viewer within the 1940s.

I also wanted to maintain this domestic feel. A lot of those 57th Street New York galleries were just converted apartments. You can see the filled-in fireplace in the fourth panel. In the actual photo of Kootz, he's sat in the corner smoking a pipe. I wanted to change it because I think there's something very self-satisfied looking about smoking a pipe that goes well with the vacuuming. I liked the way that the vacuum flowed across the first three panels. The formal aspect of making these things is really fun. I'm dealing with very determinate divisions in terms of what size the boxes can be so I like to play with them in some ways.

Looking at the suit and the pipe with the vacuum, I kind of saw it as a control thing. This is my gallery, I made this happen and it's up to me to make sure everything is correct. Abstract expressionism was a very serious time. This seems like the kind of thing that would have happened.

I never thought of that. He's almost manspreading across the space, taking up so many of the panels with the vacuum cleaner.

And the next piece is *Tattooed Man On Balcony*?

This piece came out of the Mallarmé poem cascading across the page and the tattoo idea that we were talking about earlier. I liked the idea of getting a lot of these Popeye universe characters made into temporary tattoos, putting them on this rockabilly guy who was obsessed with this old school kind of tattoo. I liked the style. It was very bold. Also, this kind of architecture is something that you see in Vancouver a lot, this suburban style – sometimes called the Vancouver special.

This house is based on a sort of 50s or 60s bungalow that's very common in Vancouver. I guess it also looks kind of like an apartment in Miami. He has his barbecue here, he's into a sort of retro vibe. I just wanted to explore this character that is present in Vancouver and I suppose, across North America. Similar to the aesthetic presence of the next piece.

[Screen Door, 2005] Yes, you had this cast in solid silver, right?

R: Yeah, it was made before the crash. There was this auction of Elvis memorabilia where they were selling some really funny stuff: top loading VCRs with monty python videos, his Texaco card, his golf cart – all this unusual stuff. One item was the screen door from the back of Graceland. It was aluminium.

I totally kicked myself for missing the auction. It was re-auctioned recently and I missed it again. This piece is based on it. I had to work from photographs and I got some screen doors from Vancouver for reference as well. This sort of door is ubiquitous across North America. I really wish I had the Elvis one to see if I managed to get it exact or not.

Is there a relationship between these two pieces? The idea of replicating classic Americana as it becomes less prevalent?

Not really, it was just something I was used to seeing around Vancouver and thought of it as being a beautiful object. It's not something I often do, seeing something and having it made in solid silver but I wanted it in the show because of the smaller piece upstairs [The poker table featuring a silver slipcase containing a copy of *Robinson Crusoe*]. This is sort of atypical of my work.

This was one of the pieces that I had the most trouble with figuring out, compared to the light boxes, there really aren't so many clues as to what you're looking at. Like the table upstairs?

The table upstairs actually relates to a lot of the earlier work that I was making. I worked a lot with a publisher friend of mine in Belgium, choosing a book and making a sculptural slipcase for it. It goes back to my earliest work, I actually conceived it about twenty years ago. I wish that I had the original drawing, I gave it to him and he said, I've found a really good book – this copy of *Robinson Crusoe*. It's the first Arabic translation – in fact the first Arabic translation of a work of European fiction – kind of a rare book. The slipcase was actually made by his dentist. I wanted to display it on this sort of fold out Sheraton games table on top of this carpet, alongside the film. The mechanism of the slipcase is shown in the film, to preserve it.



Installation view of Rodney Graham: Central Questions of Philosophy, Lisson Gallery, London (3 October – 3 November 2018) Photographer George Darrell. © Rodney Graham; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Could we talk about *Unused Prop: French Telephone* (2018)?

Yeah, this piece is based on the Martin Scorsese film *The King Of Comedy*. There's a scene where Jerry Lewis has a gun to his ear and to his other ear he's got this gold telephone, wearing these aviator glasses. I originally thought it'd be fun to do it as an album cover for the record I'm always working on... I bought it online and it looks identical to the one in the film. It was just sat on this scuzzy table and I thought I'd take a picture. If you google 'French telephone' these photos come up for some reason. I don't understand what's necessarily French about it but there you go.

I also wanted to ask you about the Smoke Break series [A series of photographic works in which Graham poses as different individuals on break]. I love the old punker one, it's such a ubiquitous image within subcultural spaces. I have a theory about the series in relation to the Liberty Cafe [The cafe owned by Graham in Vancouver]. Owning a cafe is the perfect excuse to people watch. You end up with this battery of subjects to pull from just by being able to be there all the time. Did that have anything to do with you taking it over?

Wow, that's kind of creepy in a way. I do go every day and sit there every day. It's all free for me, which is cool. The people watching is fun for me, yeah.

I guess becoming a studio artist, this is a way for you to reintegrate with the cultures you're inspired by? The observation of routine seems to be an undercurrent in your work.

Well I actually came across the inspiration for this work *Central Questions Of Philosophy* (2018) on Twitter. Someone tweeted this picture of AJ Ayres. I was interested in it and discovered that there were two version of the cover obviously from the same photo session – one with the dog and one without.

Although I read *Language, Truth and Logic* years ago, it's not directly about that. I was interested in the idea of the Philosopher with this animal but everyone thinks I look like some US Senator or something. I wanted to work with an animal. It ties in with the Robinson Crusoe work, using a dog.

I wanted it to be pretty exact. I had to get this chair reupholstered with the flame stitch pattern and we had to raise the back up in Photoshop to make it match. The uncanny thing is, to keep them uniform, we used the same head. So my head was just Photoshopped off my shoulders and onto the others.

The last piece in the show is called *Black Tapestry* (2018). It's this record called *Tapestry* by Carole King. She was a hit songwriter in the 1960s along with her husband. She moved to Topanga Canyon to reinvent herself as a singer-songwriter and she released this album in the early 1970s.

This album is kind of iconic for North American people my age. She's sitting by the window in her Topanga Canyon pad in her 70s jeans and I just wanted to give it a goth vibe. I'd been doing work on vintage record covers for a while, experimenting using inks, making monochromes and just letting a little bit of the image poke through. You start pulling the ink from the cover around with the brush and it can look really interesting. Sometimes it sinks into the cover.

The first edition was meant to look kind of like a watercolour on textured paper and subsequent editions were very different. It was a lot of fun to do and I liked the title *Black Tapestry*, taking Carole King and giving her this kind of goth or black metal vibe. I found some of them on eBay. They're ubiquitous in thrift stores throughout North America. It's one of those albums that you just see everywhere.

That reminds me, did you see *Mandy* [The psychedelic horror film featuring Nicholas Cage] yet?

Oh yeah, that's from a Vancouver guy. I didn't see it yet, I'm a bit of a wimp when it comes to horror movies.

I could talk about Nicholas Cage all day but there's something interesting about this in relation to the way you're painting. You're painting from this sort of place as the 'Other'. I think painting is something that gives you a great deal of personal license to experience this subject matter. Any feelings that you had in relation to this record will be coming up over and over again, each time you make a new version. I suppose you must have developed an entirely new relationship with the music and the imagery. Any personal experience you had must have been magnified?

It's true what you said about needing an excuse, being a conceptual artist and coming from a conceptual perspective. In a way, painting is like a calling. It's something that takes a lifetime – you get better at it so fast but I missed out on the development stage. I could never attain any kind of mastery at my age, but whatever...

Rodney Graham, Central Questions of Philosophy, is at the Lisson Gallery, London, until 3 November

Rodney Graham
performing in Dan
Graham's Stage Set
for *Music no 2 for*
Glenn 2018



Dan Graham: Rock 'n' Roll

Rodney Graham: Central Questions of Philosophy

Lisson Gallery London 3 October 3 November

Dan Graham and Rodney Graham are friends, paired in a double show where Rodney Graham played guitar and sang in Dan Graham's pavilion. Dan Graham has frequently engaged with performance, and his pavilion will also host a gig by Thurston Moore; but this show's double focus invites reflections on the Dan/Rodney Graham relation. Dan Graham's two-way mirror pavilions dispose viewers' images of themselves amidst others in amusing but often disconcerting ways. It is not just that we see ourselves as others may, but also as other than we have supposed. In his *Book of Disquiet*, Fernando Pessoa wrote: 'Each of us is several ... a profusion of selves.' Dan Graham's mirror-windows induce such profusions, and as much as his pavilions enact what Thierry de Duve called a 'critique of artistic autonomy' – they cannot be reduced to minimal objects – they also disturb participants' confidence in their sense as stable subjects. De Duve was describing Dan Graham's *Performer, Audience, Mirror*, which used a feedback loop to loosen his audience's certainty as to who was producing the affect of their mutual presence in the event. As I observed in my feature 'Looping The Loop' (AM406), it might be in Dan/Rodney Graham's common use of looping that their affinity originated.

But there are differences. Dan Graham works socially, mediating relations of subject-object and subject-subject amid webs of feedback and reflections. Rodney Graham, too, has worked by staging reflexive mediations; yet his subjects have not been social but recondite and romantic: an errant melancholic in 'Lenz' was looped into a circular labyrinth of repeating text, and his *How I Became a Ramblin' Man* set a wandering cowboy in a video palindrome. Gradually, however, the motifs that Rodney Graham caught within loops, interpolations or cultural clichés shifted from nature – a waterfall in *Two Generators*, inverted trees in camera obscura, or textual and musical systems in *Landor's House*, or *School of Velocity* – towards himself as others, in images of what Pessoa called 'Heteronyms' (personae staged amid their worlds, in meticulous

detail). Already, he appeared on the cover of his *Verwandlungsmusik* CD as if on a 1950s LP of a Viennese modernist composer like Anton Webern. Since then, Rodney Graham has staged himself as, amongst others, a 17th-century sailor, prisoner, barfly, 'gifted amateur' painter, 'avid reader', skulker (after Thomas Eakins), concertinist (after Georges Braque) et al ... 'Amongst others' is where Rodney Graham has dispersed – but not disguised – himself. We can't say 'disguised' because, as if among mirrors that never quite displace him, Rodney Graham is always recognisable. This double-take has been emphasised by his virtuoso use of high-definition lightbox photos. The photos, like 19th-century 'problem paintings', provoke minute scrutiny of details that leave nowhere to hide yet expose Rodney Graham to plain sight. His heteronyms as such present no problems, for their premise is as evidently sham as their 'gifted amateur' was ham. Nor is Rodney Graham's self involved. These are not Rembrandt costume self-portraits; and not like Cindy Sherman's studies in identity. Droll and arch, their play is with media images from mid-brow culture, as in the title work here, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* – adapted from a paperback cover of AJ Ayer's popular summary. Four photos show Rodney Graham as Ayer sitting with his dog, as Ayer without dog, the dog, and the empty chair. Shelved behind him are Ayer's works with others by JL Austin. Maybe among these is dispersed an allegory of Ayer's account of the problem of induction: 'the problem of finding a way to prove that certain empirical generalisations which derived from experience will hold good also in the future.' Or maybe not. But to decide that would require a reading of Ayer as close as our gaze into Rodney Graham's four lightboxes.

Moreover, Rodney Graham's recent works disperse his subjects even further, by fabricating props from their ostensive worlds. They appeared as actual paintings by Rodney Graham's fictive artists, and continue here with *Vacuuming The Gallery 1949*, a four-part lightbox showing a gallerist (based on New York dealer Samuel Kootz) preparing a show of abstract paintings in a style adapted from Alexander Rodchenko. Around this at the Lisson are actual paintings like those in the lightbox. The temporal looping in Rodney Graham's earlier works has now become a spatial circulation of actual and represented things, reminiscent in form – not content – of Joseph Kosuth's 1965 *One and Three Chairs*. Ezra Pound said that 'Art is news that stays news'; but in times of 'fake news', Rodney Graham's works make faking it into a comedic and elaborate capriccio. ■

Brian Hatton teaches at the Architectural Association in London and Liverpool John Moores University.

LISSON GALLERY

The Sunday Times
14 January 2018



THE SUNDAY TIMES

REVIEW

Art: That's Not Me

Cristin Leach



Canadian artist Rodney Graham's thrillingly slick Irish show is filled with large, lightbox-mounted photographs and projected film works, spanning the past 24 years. Graham is part of the Vancouver School, a 1980s post-conceptual photography movement which took its name from the city where he is based. Here, his images literally glow on the walls. The photographs feature the artist playing characters in immaculately constructed environments: Newspaper Man, The Gifted Amateur, Sous-Chef on Smoke Break. His monumental lightbox installations, some of which hang floor to ceiling, allow for close-up examination of remarkable detail and are back-lit to the point of hyper-realism. The Avid Reader 1949 is among the unmissable highlights. Graham combines real-life observed scenes with references to film, books, music and art history. Giant, custom-made projection machines operate as kinetic sculptural installations. Torqued Chandelier Release is mesmerising, and clever. This is shiny, technically attractive, well-observed work. It's funny too, in a deadpan, knowing kind of way.

Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Sun noon-5.30pm, Mon-Fri 11.30am-5.30pm, Sat 10am-5.30pm, 01 6129900

L I S S O N G A L L E R Y

The Guardian Guide
11 March 2017



Rodney Graham Gateshead

Here's a photo of a plasterer taking a quick fag break perched atop his metal tradesman's stilts, the banal routines of the workaday world seemingly corresponding with the ritualised absurdities of performance art. In fact, it's been staged by highly influential Vancouver-based artist Rodney Graham, who quotes influences ranging from Sigmund Freud to Black Sabbath. The deadpan conceptualist assumes all manner of make-believe personas, as he shape-shifts between a dilettante specialising in pipe-cleaner sculptures and an abstract artist who indulges in a bit of drip painting in his kitchen before breakfast. Thankfully, nowhere in this role play pretence does



Graham descend into elitist parody. Indeed, if anything, he appears to genuinely celebrate the creative potential of post-punk DIY defiance. **RC**
BALTIC, Fri to 11 Jun



RODNEY GRAHAM



"Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 91", 2013. Copyright Rodney Graham; Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

Proprio durante la settimana della Moda Uomo di Milano, dal 29 gennaio al 4 marzo 2016, il canadese Rodney Graham presenta *More Pipe Cleaner Art!*, debuttando negli spazi della galleria Lisson di Milano. Fonti d'ispirazione per questo nuovo progetto sono stati il ritratto posato di Jean Concteau realizzato da Man Ray nel 1930 e una fotografia del 1961 di Asger Jorn nel suo studio. Da queste due immagini, molto diverse tra loro, Rodney Graham ha immaginato un modello di artista modernista attivo in Italia negli anni Sessanta, proseguendo così le due serie già dedicate a un ideale d'atelier d'artista, dall'Action Painting al Diciottesimo secolo. In *Pipe Cleaner* l'evocazione è ancora diversa, uno studio utopico nel quale il tempo pare si sia fermato, per offrire una visione e una lettura familiare del soggetto ritratto. (www.lissongallery.com)

Giulia Bortoluzzi



IL GIORNALE DELL'ARTE

Coralli e scovolini

Milano. La **Lisson Gallery** ospita sino al 4 marzo una personale di **Rodney Graham**. Noto per i suoi lavori saturi di informazioni e riferimenti a cinema, letteratura e storia dell'arte (opere che includono una vasta gamma di media diversi, tra cui fotografia, video, pittura, scultura e performance), la sua pratica è ascrivibile a quel gruppo di artisti e fotografi che formano la cosiddetta Scuola di Vancouver: estetica, quella dei foto-concettualisti, fondata su svariati rimandi iconografici e sulla loro rielaborazione in immagini complesse e articolate. L'artista canadese, classe 1949, presenta un nuovo progetto che prende le mosse da un'opera precedente, una lightbox del 2013 intitolata «Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961» (nella foto). Ispirata a un ritratto di Jean Cocteau realizzato da Man Ray nel 1930 e a una fotografia di Asger Jorn nel suo studio di Albisola, l'opera rappresenta un ipotetico artista modernista intento a realizzare sculture fatte di scovolini, in uno studio inondato dalla luce del sole mediterraneo. Il nuovo corpus di sculture e dipinti ora esposti documenta le creazioni di tale artista fittizio; una sorta di alter ego di Graham, da lui descritto come «un avido sommozzatore la cui opera è influenzata dalla varietà cromatica dei coralli del Mediterraneo». □ **Federico Florian**



Rodney Graham alla Lisson Gallery di Milano

Un nuovo corpus di sculture e dipinti di Rodney Graham arriva a Milano per la sua prima personale alla Lisson Gallery. Il titolo è 'Più Arte dello Scovolino!' e presenta l'opera di un ipotetico artista disperso nella Storia: 'l'artista dei pulisci pipa'.



Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961 (2013)_CopyrightTheArtist_CourtesyLissonGallery

Graham si presenta in inedite vesti moderniste, come se si trattasse di un artista astrattista, le cui produzioni sono databili intorno alla prima metà degli anni Sessanta in Italia.

Eleggendo se stesso quale attore protagonista di tableaux intrisi di storia dell'arte, Graham si presenta allo stesso tempo come uomo del rinascimento e soggetto comico: le sue opere sanno essere profondamente intertestuali, ma anche autoreferenziali. Ognuna di queste immagini sviluppa molteplici riferimenti e allusioni, mentre l'assoluta pulizia della composizione nasconde una miniera di inganni visivi ed enigmi transculturali.

Per oltre quarant'anni, Graham ha condotto una ricerca concettuale e multidisciplinare che abbraccia fotografia, scultura, installazione, editoria, film, video, audio e pittura, con lo scopo di indagare le possibilità creative del passato e del presente. Fondamentalmente Rodney Graham è un performer, la sua esperienza artistica slitta dal travestimento alla digressione, passando per citazioni e note ironiche, sino al raggiungimento della completa comprensione di una determinata dimensione spaziale e culturale.

"Ho voluto evocare l'immagine di uno studio utopico, collocato in un periodo storico nel quale il modernismo sembrava avere ancora moltissime possibilità da offrire", ha spiegato Rodney Graham.

Così come le opere più datate, realizzate nella fattispecie di 'gifted amateur', che allo stesso modo prosegue il ciclo dello studio d'artista, i nuovi pezzi composti da scovolini si collocano nella convergenza tra distanza ironica, omaggio serio e aspetto ludico, laddove il romanticismo è nutrito di pragmatismo. Questa la descrizione che Graham dà dell'artista oggetto della sua ricerca: "come Cocteau, utilizza gli scovolini, ma la sua arte è informale, le sue influenze più contemporanee comprendono: Klein, Fontana, Manzoni. Si tratta probabilmente di un pittore nordico come Jorn (che credo sia arrivato in Italia per motivi di salute), che cerca di approdare a lavori tridimensionali attraverso l'assemblaggio, un avido sommozzatore la cui opera è influenzata dalla varietà cromatica dei coralli del Mediterraneo."

Dal collocamento temporale di nuove opere d'arte nel passato e dall'assurdo capovolgimento della logica produttiva, Graham trova nuovi modi di relazionarsi alla pittura e alla scultura, arricchendo la storia dell'arte con le sue personali invenzioni.

L I S S O N G A L L E R Y

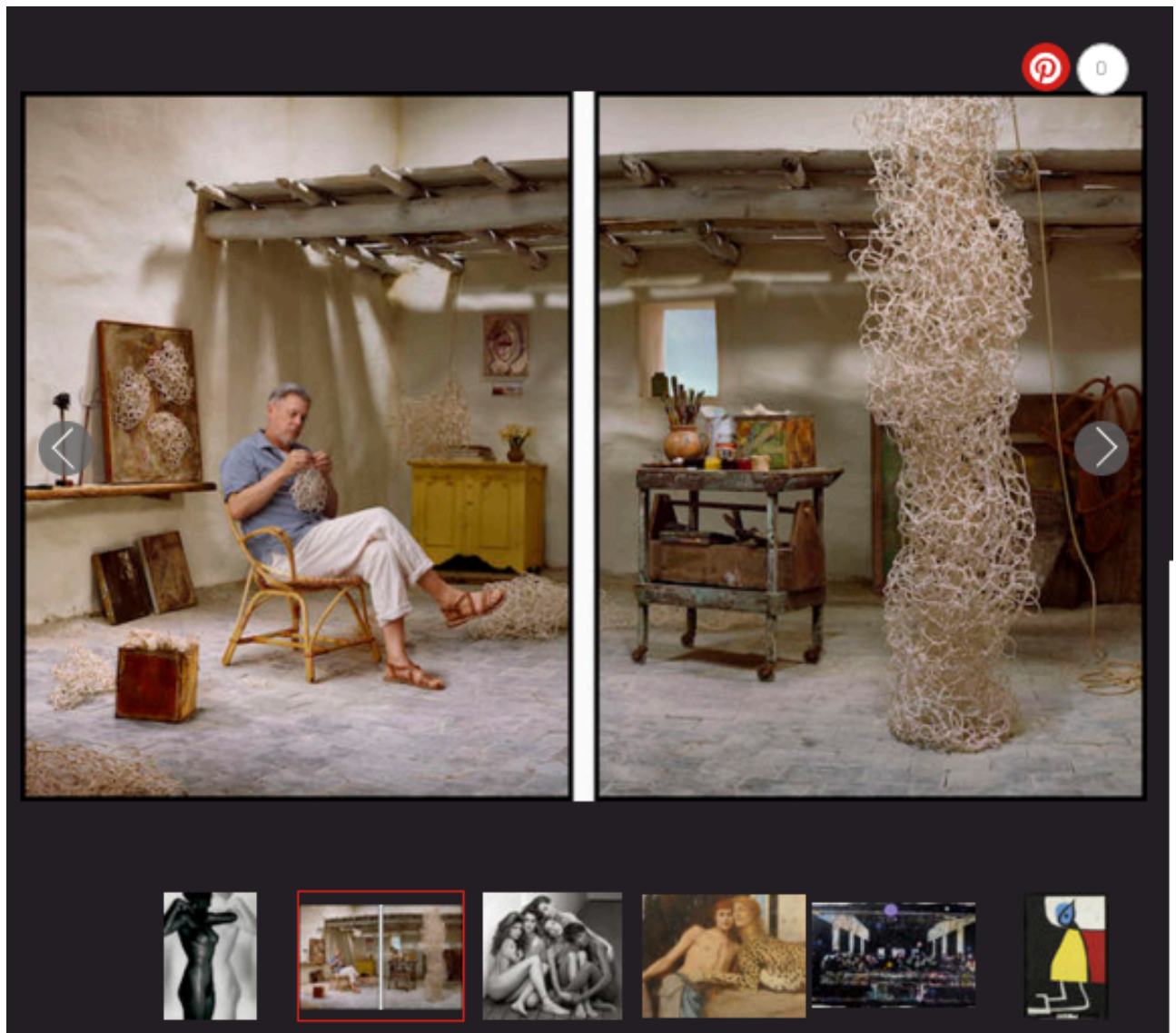
Marie Claire Italy
17 February 2016

marie claire

Mostre Milano, 8 eventi da non perdere

Da Joan Mirò al Mudec fino al Simbolismo a Palazzo Reale: tutti gli appuntamenti must del mese di marzo

di **Germano D'Acquisto** - 17 Febbraio 2016 - 11:30



1 Classico o forse no I capolavori dell'arte riveduti e (s)corretti da uno degli street artist più interessanti del momento. È la mostra *Traces*, firmata dall'indonesiano **Farhan Siki** nella sede di **Banca Generali Private Banking**. Più che un'esposizione, un grido d'allarme. Leonardo, Warhol e Michelangelo: nessuno si può salvare dal consumismo globalizzato. 2/3-30/9.

2 Poesie di strada Era un clochard e per realizzare le sue foto fragili e sgranate usava fotocamere che si costruiva da solo, prendendo qua e là oggetti dismessi. Il ceco **Miroslav Tichy**, scomparso nel 2011, è stato un vero outsider dell'immagine. I suoi scatti, tanto vouteristici quanto poetici, sono alla **galleria Six**. Fino all'30/3.

3 Joan Lui «Pittura e poesia si fanno come si fa l'amore: senza alcuna prudenza»: **Joan Mirò** dixit. A 32 anni dalla scomparsa, il maestro surrealista rivive al **Mudec**. In scena 100 opere, firmate tra il 1931 e il 1981 e influenzate dall'arte primitiva. Tripudio di colori e visioni per onorare un pittore che desiderava che ogni dipinto "abbagliasse come un corpo femminile". 25/3-11/9.

4 La forza del simbolo Si respira aria da Belle Époque a **Palazzo Reale**. Grazie alla mostra *Il Simbolismo*, che mette a confronto più di 150 tra oli, sculture e grafiche sul tema dell'amore, del mito e del peccato. I must? I quadri onirici di Khnopff e Redon e i "racconti" amorosi di Leo Putz (foto). Fino al 5/6.

5 Eros & thanatos Amore, morte e fede: sono loro a ispirare l'opera dell'artista milanese **Massimo Gurnari**. Alla **galleria Area B** ci sono i suoi ultimissimi dipinti. Una carrellata di donne, teschi e scheletri, a metà strada fra pop art e surrealismo, che segnano il suo ritorno al grande amore di sempre: la pittura. Fino al 9/4.

6 Il fattore H Per l'Italia è una primizia assoluta. È la mostra che la **Galleria Sozzani** dedica a **Heinz Hajek-Halke**, mito dell'immagine sperimentale del XX secolo. Tedesco, surrealista, mixava forme, luci e movimento. Nello spazio di corso Como c'è una selezione di foto inedite realizzate dagli anni 30 ai 70. Fino al 3/4.

7 Emozione Graham Per il suo debutto alla **Lisson Gallery**, Rodney Graham presenta un serie di opere ispirate a un soggetto già affrontato nella lightbox del 2013 *Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961*. Risultato: un immaginario atelier d'artista che in realtà non è mai esistito. La fonte d'ispirazione? Un ritratto di Jean Cocteau realizzato da Man Ray e uno di Asger Jorn nel suo studio di Albisola. Fino al 4/3.

8 Sedotti da Herb Sta all'immaginario anni 90 come le bollicine allo champagne. E' Herb Ritts, fotografo statunitense a cui il **Palazzo della Ragione Fotografia** dedica una super-retrospettiva. In scena top model come Linda Evangelista, Stephanie Seymour, Cindy Crawford e icone immortali come Madonna, David Bowie e Tina Turner. Più di 100 immagini originali, oltre a ingrandimenti spettacolari, video installazioni, tutti provenienti dall'Herb Ritts Foundation di Los Angeles. Fino al 5/6

🐦 Segui @gerdac19

SCOPRI ANCHE:

→ **Lady Tarin, erotismo in scena a Milano**

→ **A Milano c'è la Tauromachia di Chiara Terraneo**

scritto da



Germano D'Acquisto

Aesthetica

Review of Rodney Graham: Più Arte dello Scovolino!, Lisson Gallery, Milan



Rodney Graham's current exhibition at Lisson Gallery in Milan features new works that heighten a previous impression by simultaneously seducing and repelling the viewer. Complex compositions, smooth colours, and luscious surfaces – along with subject matter that is curious, materially charged, or simply alien – draw the viewer deep into imaginary worlds constructed out of pipe cleaners. Once there, however, the fading traces of those same colours, the intricate density of the compositions, and the rough, irregular, or uncanny *skins* and narratives force us back out, disturbed by what had intrigued us a moment before. These competing sensations are what give these unexpected new works their core power, allowing them to stay perpetually dynamic, complete, and yet never closed in on themselves.

Here, an emphasis on character over storyline again emerges as one of the differences between the work of Rodney Graham and fellow members of the so-called Vancouver School, post-conceptualists who are known for staged photographs with high production values. Graham's fictions, however, frequently present protagonists whose circumstances we can guess at but never really know. At Lisson Gallery, Graham's aim is to show the metaphorical dimension of the pipe-cleaner artist, pervaded by an implicit element: a new tribute to Italy.

"Music opened up my practice," said Graham at the exhibition opening. "It opened to other possibilities, but I have never really successfully integrated my music practice into my art-making except on a few occasions. It remains a hobby. There's a song on my new album called *Don't Give Up the Day Job*. Hobbies are important. I find song-writing very, very difficult, though. I have been trying to write a song about the death of Luigi Tenco for at least four years. It was when I did the show at Studio Casoli that I became acquainted with Italian popular music of the 1960s and 1970s through Ornella Vanoni. Through her music I discovered Gino Paoli and eventually Tenco, who I admire greatly."

Following this line of thought, the Canadian artist's three-dimensional works and paintings cast him as a pure maker of abstract sculptures and surfaces that supposedly date from early- to mid-1960s Italy. The pieces at Lisson Gallery recall Graham's *Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961* (2013), presenting a simultaneous journey through space and time. Despite their sometimes cryptic references, Graham's fictional self-portraits are anything but hermetic here, and no more central. Rather, they are accessible, humorous and beautifully crafted. On the walls, a light-box diptych portrays the artist in a frugally furnished room, meditatively knotting pipe cleaners into airy nets.

"I had a different idea for the show originally, but I changed my mind when I thought more deeply about the context of the city and my relation to it. Many years ago I visited a gallery in Fontana's old studio," explained the artist. "There was still stuff in the basement: boxes of pigments – things like that I remember. Copies of his *Manifesto Bianco*. I recollect the garden, too. The tree under which Fontana was photographed working on a painting. This was one of the photographic images that later inspired a large-scale photo work realised a few years ago, the *Pipe Cleaner Artist*. The character in the photograph, played by me, was a northern artist (like Asger Jorn, another model for me – the photo replicates his studio in Albisola) who came to Italy to work in the 1960s and who was influenced by Fontana, Manzoni, Klein, and to an extent, Fautrier."

This tense push-and-pull of forms, time and illusion creates a dialogue with the viewer, as if each work began a thought that trails off in an ellipsis, inviting us into the piece in order to complete the idea. Despite this invitation, the challenging and disquieting nature of these works frustrates the exchange and undermines our assumptions about representation and reality, leaving us pleasantly unsettled.

Ginevra Bria

Rodney Graham: Più Arte dello Scovolino!, until 4 March, Lisson Gallery, Via Zenale 3, Milan.

For more information, visit www.lissongallery.com.

Follow us on Twitter @AestheticaMag for the latest news in contemporary art and culture.

Credits

1. Installation view of *Rodney Graham: Più Arte dello Scovolino!*, 2016. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

Posted on 11 February 2016

Un ritorno e una prima volta. Rodney Graham a Milano

Lisson Gallery, Milano – fino al 4 marzo 2016. Rodney Graham espone la sua prima personale negli spazi della galleria milanese. Tra lightbox, dipinti e sculture che si scoprono solo lentamente, nel momento in cui il corpo del performer diventa catalizzatore di rimandi della storia.



Rodney Graham, Untitled, 2015 – Copyright Rodney Graham – Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Rodney Graham (Vancouver, 1949) torna a Milano per la sua prima personale alla Lisson Gallery, dopo la sua ultima mostra da Studio Casoli, nel 1988, quando si avvicinò e si appassionò alla cultura italiana. L'artista canadese presenta una nuova serie di lavori che, pur rievocando progetti passati, aggiunge al suo percorso una inedita porzione di materia scultorea, investigata rispettando il disordine del flusso trans-mediale che converge in lui. Il piano terra e il piano interrato descrivono due stadi differenti dei percorsi di Graham. Nell'ingresso, su esili basi bianche di metallo, gli scovolini intrecciati tra di loro e intrappolati in fusioni plastiche provano ad assorbire energia dalla loro stessa fissità, creando nuova frizione con la fotografia posta alle pareti. Nell'intento di rivelare un nuovo risvolto dell'ironica irrequietezza dell'artista canadese.

Ginevra Bria

Milano // fino al 4 marzo 2016

Rodney Graham – More pipe cleaner art!

LISSON GALLERY

Via Zenale 3

02 89050608

milan@lissongallery.com

www.lissongallery.com

Le belle arti

ALLA LISSON GALLERY

PER SAPERNE DI PIÙ
www.lissongallery.com
www.nuovagalleriamorone.com



LA MOSTRA
Rodney Graham.
Lisson Gallery, via
Zenale 3, lun-ven
10-13/15-18, oggi
15-18, tel. 02.8905
0608, fino al 4 marzo

L'OPERA
"Pipe Cleaner Artist"
la foto in cui Graham
si autoritrae nella
stessa posa di Asger
Jorn nel suo studio
ligure di Albisola

Uno, nessuno, centomila Graham

CRISTIANA CAMPANINI

UNA luce mediterranea scandisce gli spazi di uno studio d'artista. È spartano, come la casa di un pescatore. Sembra lo spazio in cui Asger Jorn si raccoglieva a dipingere nella sua casa (ora museo) ad Albisola, in Liguria. Ma non è Jorn e alle pareti non ci sono le sue opere. In perfetto stile Rodney Graham, concettuale e ironico, l'artista canadese dalle mille vite nell'arte (famosa la serie scatti di querce capovolte o le performance nelle vesti di chitarrista rock-folk) allestisce una foto di studio curatissima, come un set cinematografico. E poi vi si ritrae, da protagonista, quasi da performer. In questo caso, nello scatto che dà il via alla mostra, vi si immortala nelle vesti di un artista post-informale. Il personaggio fittizio vivrebbe ai

primi anni Sessanta tra Milano e Albisola dipingendo in solitudine e intrecciando sculture con fili di ferro e scovolini da pipa. «Il primo incontro con l'atmosfera di quegli anni l'ho avuto proprio a Milano, negli anni Novanta allo Studio Casoli, in corso Monforte, quando visitai lo studio sotterraneo di Lucio Fontana», spiega Graham, 67 anni, di stanza a Vancouver. Non c'è alcuna sceneggiatura scritta, ma qui il gioco dei ruoli prosegue. L'immagine fotografica è solo l'incipit di un racconto che va ben oltre. La mostra raccoglie anche i dipinti astratto-materici del fantomatico artista, squarciati al centro; e le sculture come grovigli di filo di ferro, gesso e pittura (i toni pastello ricordano alcune ceramiche smaltate di Fontana). «Le mie messe in scena sono sempre autoritratti. Qui protagonista è un vero e proprio

alter ego, artista. Per questo ho voluto spingermi a realizzare le sue opere e ad allestire addirittura un'intera mostra. Complice è un interesse per quegli anni, forse il desiderio di avvicinarmi a un episodio dell'arte che ha preceduto la mia formazione, per guardare oltre minimalismo e concettuale. O forse è solo una reazione al mondo dell'arte di oggi e al ruolo che vi riveste l'artista, ormai semplice imprenditore che non saprebbe realizzare nulla senza maestranze. Anch'io ho fatto a lungo scattare le mie foto da altri, ma oggi trovo ragionevole guardare indietro e tornare anche al lavoro manuale». È questo uno dei mille episodi di un'infinita declinazione di tecniche e di stili e di personalità messe in scena negli anni da Rodney Graham, tra realtà e finzione.

DIRIPRODUZIONE RISERVATA

ALTEREGO

L'artista inventa un suo doppio milanese ispirato a Fontana

LISSON GALLERY

Tutto Milano

28 January, 2016

la Repubblica
tuttoMILANO

Lisson Gallery



L'eclettismo di Graham

Con un titolo allegro e un po' provocatorio, "Più arte dello scovolino", apre la prima personale a Milano di Rodney Graham (nella foto *Pipe Cleaner Artist*), artista canadese, classe 1949, musicista, regista e intellettuale spinto a indagare il tema della creazione. In una sorta di ipnosi regressiva, si immagina proiettato negli anni Sessanta e indaga le cause di un pensiero teorico sbocciato nell'epoca che ha generato l'onda del concettuale. Un po' antropologo, un po' visionario. [Lisson Gallery](#), via Zenale 3, da venerdì 29 (ore 18) al 4 marzo.

Mostra Rodney Graham Milano Lisson Gallery, 28 gennaio – 4 marzo 2016, orario, opere, info

Si intitola "Più Arte dello Scovolino!": un nuovo corpus di sculture e dipinti inediti, in veste modernista e tutta da scoprire

DI REDAZIONE - 26 gennaio 2016



Eleggendo se stesso quale attore protagonista di tableaux intrisi di storia dell'arte, Graham si presenta allo stesso tempo come uomo del rinascimento e soggetto comico: le sue opere sanno essere profondamente intertestuali, ma anche autoreferenziali. Ognuna di queste immagini sviluppa molteplici riferimenti e allusioni, mentre l'assoluta pulizia della

composizione nasconde una miniera di inganni visivi ed enigmi transculturali.

50 ANNI DI OPERE – Per oltre quarant'anni, Graham ha condotto una ricerca concettuale e multidisciplinare che abbraccia fotografia, scultura, installazione, editoria, film, video, audio e pittura, con lo scopo di indagare le possibilità creative del passato e del presente. Fondamentalmente Rodney Graham è un performer, la sua esperienza artistica slitta dal travestimento alla digressione, passando per citazioni e note ironiche, sino al raggiungimento della completa comprensione di una determinata dimensione spaziale e culturale.

A MILANO – Le opere in mostra presso Lisson Gallery Milan sviluppano i propositi già enunciati in 'Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961' (2013). La lightbox dipinta lo ritrae all'interno di una stanza dall'arredo rustico, inondata dal sole, mentre completamente assorto nella riflessione trasforma gli scovolini in opere d'arte. L'ispirazione proviene da tre immagini distinte: il ritratto posato di Jean Cocteau realizzato da Man Ray nel 1930, nel quale il poeta lavora a una costruzione di scovolini simili a quelle realizzate per il suo film d'avanguardia 'Blood of a Poet'; una fotografia che ritrae Asger Jorn nel suo studio di Albisola nel 1961; un'immagine di Lucio Fontana che si rilassa nel cortile del suo studio di Milano mentre sembra giocare con dei ciottoli, muovendoli su di una tela. "Ho voluto evocare l'immagine di uno studio utopico, collocato in un periodo storico nel quale il modernismo sembrava avere ancora moltissime possibilità da offrire", ha spiegato Rodney Graham.

I NUOVI SOGGETTI – Così come le opere più datate, realizzate nella fattispecie di 'gifted amateur', che allo stesso modo prosegue il ciclo dello studio d'artista, i nuovi pezzi composti da scovolini si collocano nella convergenza tra distanza ironica, omaggio serio e aspetto ludico, laddove il romanticismo è nutrito di pragmatismo. Questa la descrizione che Graham dà dell'artista oggetto della sua ricerca: "come Cocteau, utilizza gli scovolini, ma la sua arte è informale, le sue influenze più contemporanee comprendono: Klein, Fontana, Manzoni. Si tratta probabilmente di un pittore nordico come Jorn (che credo sia arrivato in Italia per motivi di salute), che cerca di approdare a lavori tridimensionali attraverso l'assemblaggio, un avido sommozzatore la cui opera è influenzata dalla varietà cromatica dei coralli del Mediterraneo."

PITTURA E SCULTURA – Dal collocamento temporale di nuove opere d'arte nel passato e dall'assurdo capovolgimento della logica produttiva, Graham trova nuovi modi di relazionarsi alla pittura e alla scultura, arricchendo la storia dell'arte con le sue personali invenzioni.

Più Arte dello Scovolino!

- 28 gennaio – 4 marzo 2016
- Orari: Lunedì-Venerdì 10.00 – 13.00 / 15.00 – 18.00
- Sede: Via Zenale 3, Milan, 20123
- Telefono: +39 02 89050608

LISSON GALLERY

Arte

01 January 2016



IN GALLERIA MILANO

I set dettagliati e caricaturali di Rodney Graham

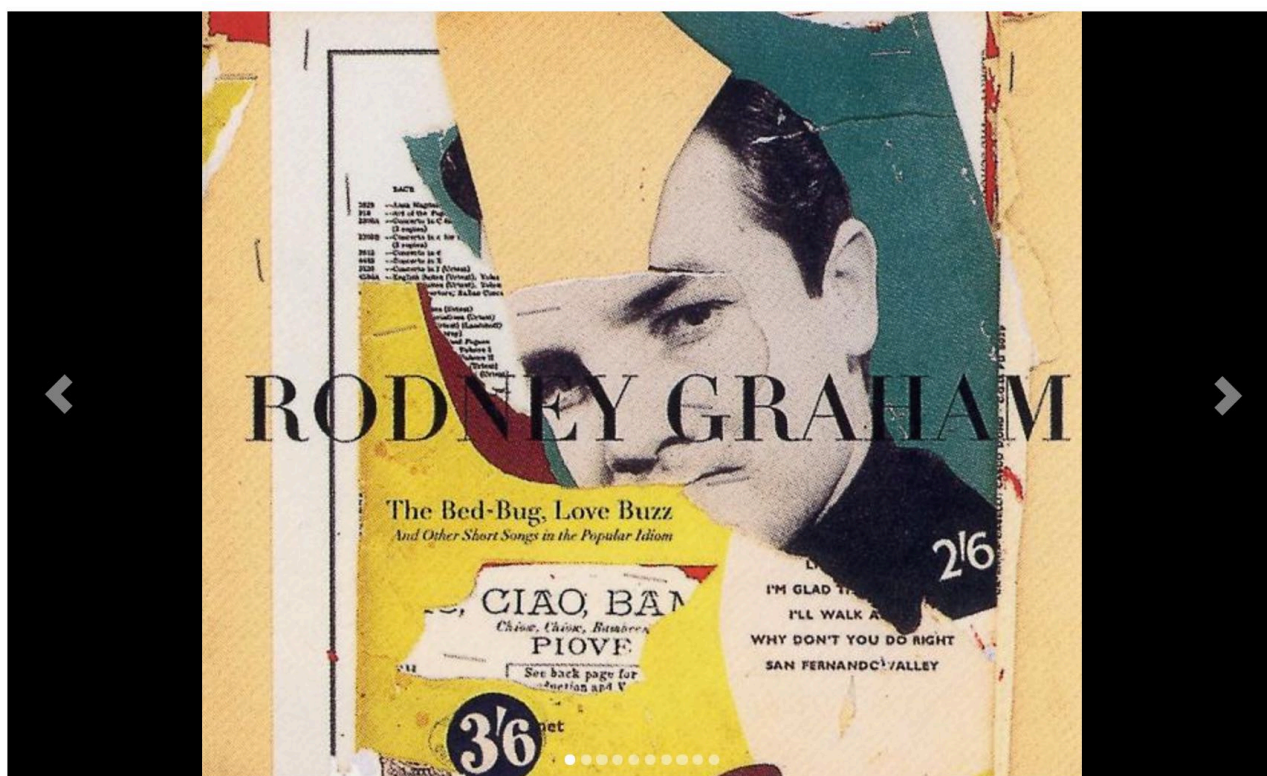


Rodney Graham, *Pipe cleaner artist, Amalfi (1961), 2013*, lightbox, cm 230,3x181,9x17,8.

VIA ZENALE 3. Dal 28 gennaio al 4 marzo Rodney Graham (1949; vive e lavora a Vancouver) espone da **Lisson gallery** (tel. 02-89050608) piccoli dipinti materici accanto a un grande lightbox. L'artista canadese, con un'anima ironica e dissacrante da punk-rocker, combina da sempre la fotografia a una forte componente concettuale, che si declina anche attraverso scultura, video e musica; e dal 2003 lavora anche con la pittura e il disegno. L'artista dà vita a storie e ambienti, come in un set cinematografico, con un'attenzione maniacale ai dettagli, ai luoghi e ai personaggi che li abitano, spesso caricaturali. I temi cardine del suo lavoro, che nel 1997 ha rappresentato il suo Paese alla Biennale di Venezia, attingono da sempre all'attualità, alla politica e alla società. **Prezzi da 68mila a 181mila euro.**

monopol

MAGAZIN FÜR KUNST UND LEBEN



Courtesy Sammlung Goetz, München

Rodney Graham in München

Wer ist er - und wenn ja, wie viele?

TEILEN

Text: Jens
Hinrichsen

Datum: 27.11.2015

Interpol

Wiederholt irrwitzig: Rodney Graham zieht in München seine Kreise

Paris um 1860. Ein Dandy tritt einem Landbewohner in den Hintern. Ein Hut fällt aufs Pflaster, worauf sich der Provinztrottel bückt, sich den Zylinder wieder aufsetzt, erneut getreten wird. Rodney Graham drehte diesen Videoloop "City Self/Country Self" im Jahr 2000 mit zwei Schauspielern, die Gesichtsmasken mit

"Rodney Graham",
Sammlung Goetz,
München,
28. November bis 23.
April 2016

seinen eigenen Zügen tragen. Er sei "ein wenig Rock und ein wenig Country", kommentierte der musikbegeisterte Künstler dieses Video einmal. Filme, Fotos, Malereien, Installationen und Skulpturen – Gattungsgrenzen scheinen für Graham nicht zu existieren. Wer ist er – und wenn ja, wie viele, fragt man sich im Vorfeld des retrospektiven Solos mit fast 50 Werken in der Sammlung Goetz. Und die Rollenperformances der Nullerjahre sind nur ein Teil seines auch ansonsten schwindelerregend abwechslungsreichen Werks.

Wie bei anderen Künstlern der sogenannten Vancouver School – Stan Douglas, Jeff Wall – spielt die Rezeption der europäischen Moderne eine zentrale Rolle für Graham. Inspiriert von der Kunst der Appropriation, entwickelte er seine Strategie der "Annexion", bei der er Zitate oder ganze Werke einem neuen Opus einverleibt. In München ist eine Graham-Komposition zu hören (Uraufführung: 2000 in Berlin), die auf Wagners "Parsifal" zurückgeht, genauer: eine theaterpraktische Ergänzung von Engelbert Humperdinck – für Graham ein Appropriationist avant la lettre.

1987 schrieb Graham den Roman "The System of Landor's Cottage" als gestreckte Version der letzten Erzählung von Edgar Allan Poe. Indem er den kompletten Originaltext erheblich ergänzte, wandte der Künstler eine Schreibtechnik des Schriftstellers Raymond Roussel an. Gezeigt wird die Installation "Mannitol from Heaven" (2008), unter anderem bestehend aus einer mit weißem Pulver bestreuten Schreibmaschine. Eine verzwickte Hommage auf den drogensüchtigen Roussel, der sich mit Schlafmitteln umbrachte. Mannitol ist eine weiße Substanz, die als Droge wie als Sprengstoff eingesetzt wurde.

Das Knallgas seiner Kunst setzt sich aus persönlichem Irrwitz und geliehener Substanz zusammen. Sigmund Freud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Lewis Carroll und Kurt Cobain. Graham-Werke sind oft komisch, aber nicht zuletzt in seinen Video-Endlosschleifen steckt ein tragischer Hintersinn: der Mensch im Hamsterrad seiner Rituale.



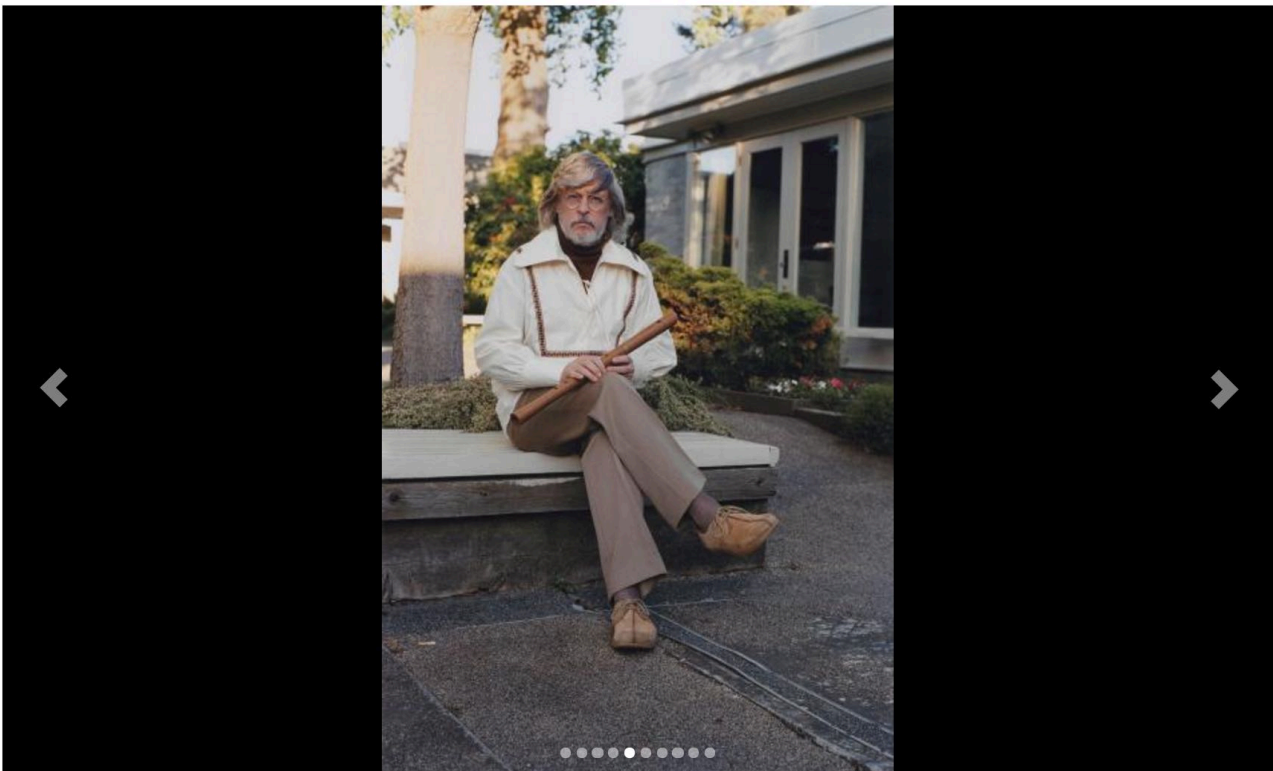
Courtesy Sammlung Goetz, München



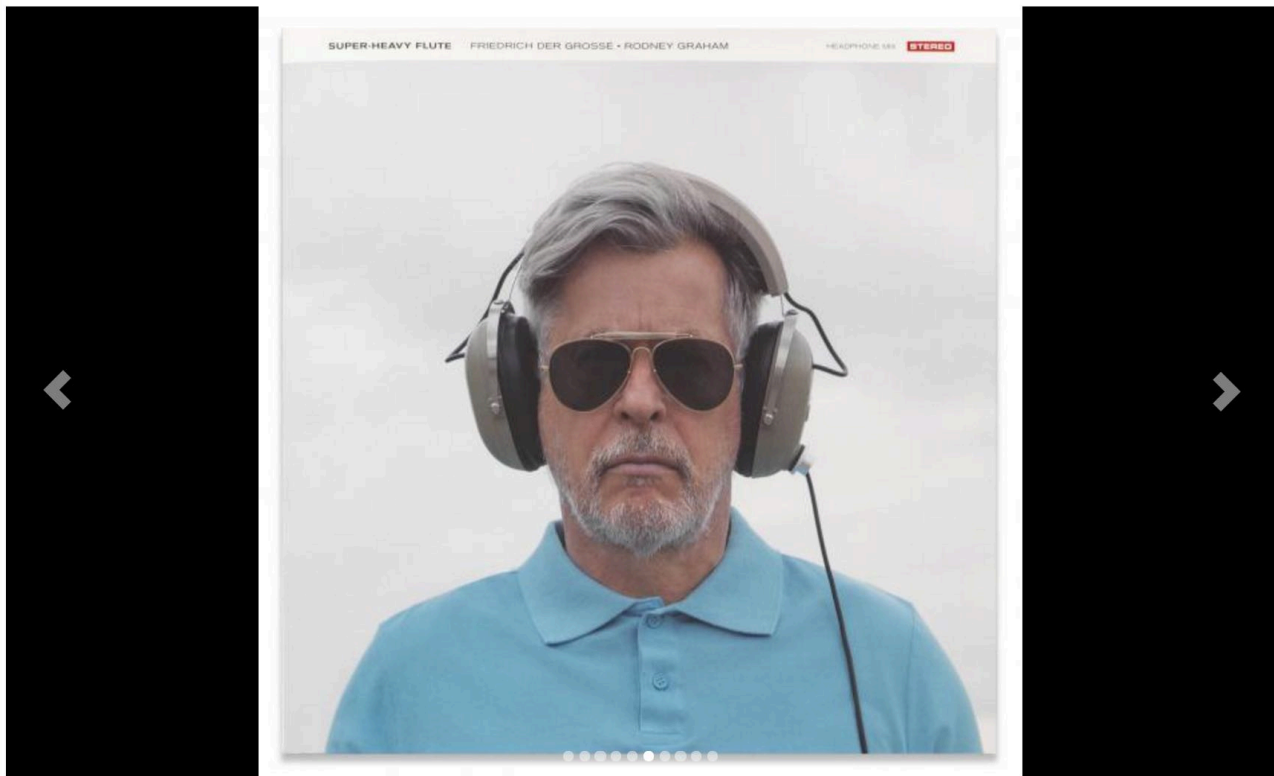
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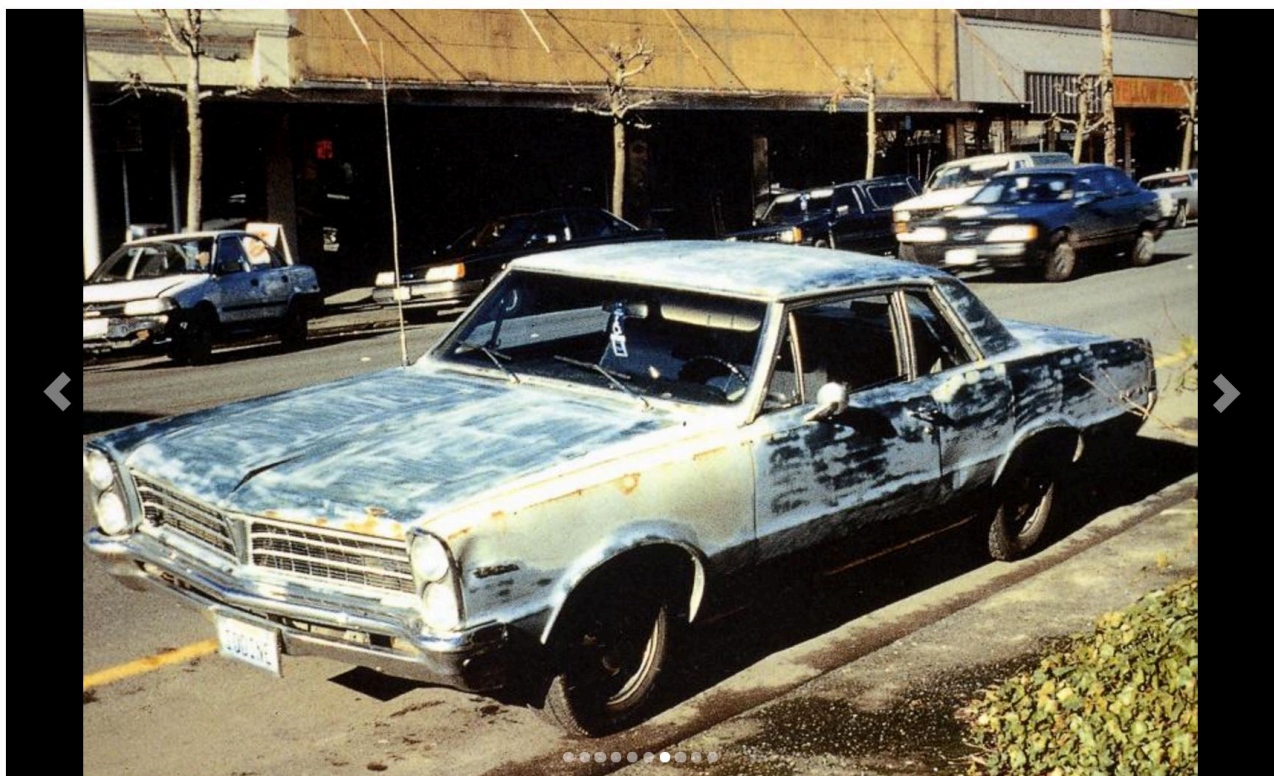
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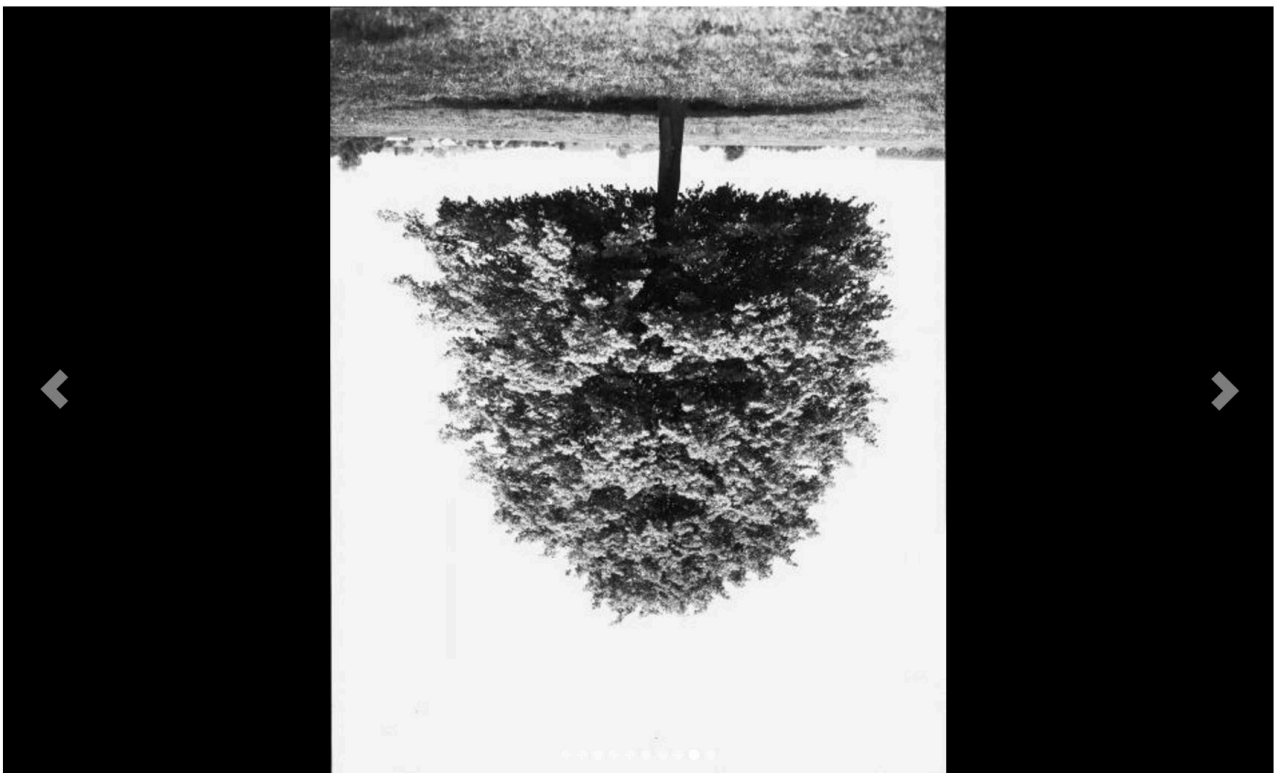
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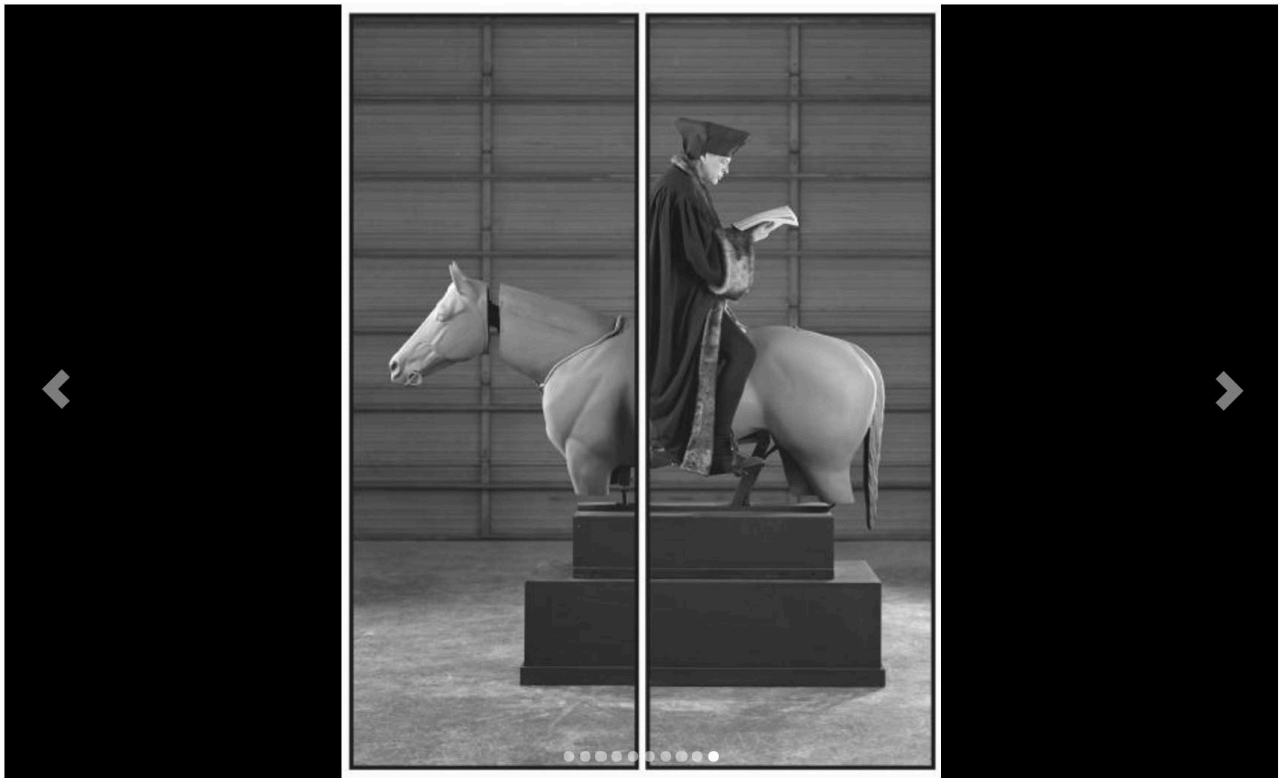
Courtesy Sammlung Goetz, Medienkunst, München



Courtesy Sammlung Goetz, München



Courtesy Sammlung Goetz, München



Courtesy Sammlung Goetz, München

Frankfurter Allgemeine

Rodney Graham in München

Bilder vom Philosophenherd

Küchenzauber mit Pfeifenputzern: Bei der Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle in München sind Buchillustrationen von Rodney Graham zu sehen. Sie zeugen vom ironischen Umgang des Künstlers mit der Moderne.

13.03.2015, von BRITA SACHS

Die Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle brachte früh Konzeptkunst nach München. Werke von Dan Graham sah und sieht man hier, von On Kawara, Jeff Wall. Überhaupt zum ersten Mal in Deutschland stellte Schöttle 1985 Arbeiten des Kanadiers Rodney Graham aus. Ihn fragte kürzlich der Galerist, der auch schreibt, ob er Lust habe, sein neuestes Buch „Küchenzauber“ zu illustrieren. Rodney Graham sagte zu. Laut Ankündigung basiert die demnächst erscheinende Schrift auf Gedanken von Theodor W. Adorno und Jacques Derrida, und die Küche dient „als Metapher und Raum für Schöttles Überlegungen zu Zeitlichkeit, Wahrnehmung und der Verbindung von Subjekt und Objekt“.

Auf den, so Rodney Graham, „sehr abstrakten Text“ beschloss er, mit der Figur des „Pipe Cleaner Artist“ zu antworten. Das ist eine der typischen Erfindungen dieses Künstlers, vor dessen ironisch reflektierendem Zugriff keine künstlerische Disziplin und keine geistesgeschichtliche Größe sicher ist, sei es Fotografie oder Film, Musik, Literatur und bildende Kunst, sei es Sigmund Freud oder Friedrich der Große. Subtil und humorvoll, dabei durchaus mit Respekt, legt Graham Schwachstellen bloß, etwa die erstickende Systematisierung der Moderne im

Raster von Quellen- und Querverweisen. Betreibt er ironische Dekonstruktion von Künstlermythos und Ikonenstatus, übernimmt er gerne selbst die Rolle des Protagonisten. Zum „Pipe Cleaner Artist“ inspirierten ihn Man Rays Aufnahmen von Jean Cocteau, der aus Pfeifenreinigern eine filigrane Porträtplastik biegt, sowie ein offenbar gestelltes Foto vom Pfeife rauchenden Asger Jorn in Sandalen, der im Sessel entspannt auf der Palette rührt.

Nicht nur inszeniert sich Rodney Graham 2013 im Fotoleuchtkasten in Jorn-Pose und, umgeben von abstrakten Gebilden aus Plüschdraht, zum Klischee des im aufgeräumten Atelier vor sich hin schöpfenden Avantgardisten der sechziger Jahre - er hatte, unter Aneignung diverser Vorbilder, auch selbst zu malen begonnen. Ausstellungstitel wie „Meine neuesten frühen Stilrichtungen“ persiflieren den je nach Bedarf und Nachfrage geschürten Hype um das Frühwerk eines Künstlers oder seine aktuelle Schaffensphase, während Grahams Bilder selbst, hinter denen immer ein „Sieht aus wie . . .“ hervorlugt, die Einzigartigkeit von Werken und Ideen befragen.

Mehr zum Thema

- Etel Adnan in Paris: Die glückliche Seite des Malens >
- Messe für Medienkunst „Unpainted“: Digital ist, was aus Nullen und Einsen besteht >
- Ausstellung in Pariser Galerie: Zeichen in der Gefühlslandschaft >

Zwei Serien von „Kitchen Magic Drawings“ sandte Rodney Graham aus Vancouver nach München. Die eine erinnert mit Wischungen von in schwarze Tinte getauchten Pfeifenputzern an informelle Malerei; die andere, mit Putzern und Pinseln farbig gemalte Reihe lässt

hier und da an Farbzeichnungen von Joan Miró denken oder von Alexander Calder, also an Kunst der sechziger Jahre. Beschriebe man sie weiter, rutschte man schnell tiefer ins kunsthistorische Raster und damit in die feingeknüpften Fangstricke des Künstlers. Ob die Blätter, wie Rodney Graham hofft, im „Text Resonanz finden, indem sie durch einen im Wesentlichen automatistischen Zugang unbewusste Bilder der Transformation evozieren“, wird sich zeigen, wenn das Buch vorliegt. Die Zeichnungen sind jetzt schon zu haben: Die elfteilige Serie in Schwarzweiß kostet 60.000 Euro, die zwölf Farbzeichnungen zusammen 75.000 Euro, Assemblagen aus Pfeifenputzern zwischen 22.000 und 53.000 Euro.

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Rodney Graham



Rodney Graham

Rodney Graham

17.05.13 - 29.06.13

Lisson Gallery / London / England

Rodney Graham / Reviewed by Nicolas Epstein / 05.06.13

The multi-disciplinary Canadian artist and musician Rodney Graham (b. 1949) is perhaps most recognized for his art film productions. He is one of the Canada's best known artists whose rich and varied body of work spans the past three decades.



© Rodney Graham

'Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, '61', 2013, Painted aluminium lightbox with transmounted chromogenic transparency, Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

© Rodney Graham

'Mouth of the Seymour', 2012-13, edition of 4. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery

The artist's exhibition at Lisson Gallery marks his seventh solo show at the Bell Street space. The work demonstrates his further engagement with large-scale light boxes, a medium popularized by fellow Vancouverite Jeff Wall, and one that Graham has only turned to in recent years. In each of the six multi-panel boxes Graham acts as a different protagonist. He puts his vivid life-size selves into a high definition performative context. For visitors, this engagement forms a cinematic-like experience despite the fact that the works are still images. This is because in most cases it appears as though the personages being acted out are in the process of moving, for example *Paddler, Mouth of the Seymour* (2012-2013) where the artist transfigures and contemporizes *A Single Scull* (1871) by Thomas Eakins. Graham's imposing triptych, set just north of Vancouver on a river with an industrial wasteland in the background, segments the figure as his kayak seemingly drifts from one panel to the next.

The exhibition itself is divided into two sections. The first, spread out over two rooms, emphasizes a cross-media dialogue between an anonymous artist and his creative impulses. A light-box diptych, entitled *Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, '61* (2013), presents Graham as considerate craftsman delicately sewing together small beige pipe cleaners. The adjacent room is outfitted with pipe cleaner designs, some of which are also used as props in the aforementioned work, along with other non-objective sculptures and paintings that also seemed as though they could have been fabricated by his alter ego. Graham is successful in highlighting the delicacies of meditative artistic process and its ends even if his dramatized hero is only a fictional semblance.

The second section, which is even more theatrical, consists of four massive multi-panel light-box installations in a single room. Individually and conceptually, the works and the way in which they are presented give their audience the opportunity to partake in an extended piece of theatre, with each image forming one act and the exhibition floor itself being the stage.

The works themselves are mysterious and encourage the spectator to come up with their own backstory. *Smoke Break 2 (Drywaller)* (2012) pictures a disheveled contractor holding a cigarette while elevated on dura-stilts. In surveying his surroundings he looks past our observing gaze. On the opening night the artist broke down the subtleties of this studio-produced montage, describing how he got into the role. The shot itself was a difficult set up, Graham explained, "I had to keep leaning on the walls until I could balance long enough for my assistant to get the exposure." The overall rugged attraction of the worker wasn't to be denied. "It just looks badass." I couldn't agree more.

- *Nicolas Epstein*

Rodney Graham is on display at the Lisson Gallery until June 29th.

Expanding Conventions

Rodney Graham

RODNEY GRAHAM'S EXHIBITION AT LISSON GALLERY, LONDON, UNCOVERS THE SCULPTURAL AND CINEMATIC NATURE OF HIS PRACTICE, AND THE CONTINUED INFLUENCE OF MUSIC, PAINTING AND FILM UPON HIS WORK.

In 1991, Canadian artist Rodney Graham (b. 1949) created a bookmark, typeset with text written by himself, to be inserted between pages 56 and 57 of an original first edition copy of Ian Fleming's book *Dr. No*. (1958). Seamlessly continuing from Fleming's page 56, Graham's intervening page introduces a new sequence in which a poisonous centipede traverses up James Bond's naked body. The use of literature and other art forms as source material is key to the photoconceptualist tradition of the Vancouver School in the late 1970s and 1980s: a group defined by a style of photography in which moments from art history or fine art are replicated. Although Graham is strongly associated with photoconceptualism, and this categorisation is fitting for much of his practice, it is specifically his expansion of literary, filmic and historical material in his work that defines him as an artist.

Following his acclaimed retrospective, *Through the Forest*, at MACBA, Barcelona; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, and Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, in 2010-11, a new exhibition of Graham's work at Lisson Gallery, London, focuses on the artist's recent photographic work. Each one of the six light boxes in this show depicts scenes that linger, freeze-framing moments of peculiarity, paradox and poetry. Curator Silvia Sgualdini says: "The pieces in this exhibition are replicas of specific moments that have been reappropriated from observations, paintings, books and films." The events in Graham's photographs, such as a painter taking a cigarette break on stilts in his work clothes, are bizarre, yet still perfectly possible and grounded in reality. They portray the brief happenings in life where not everything matches, and where things – scenes, people, objects – seem to go through a process of displacement. The paintings and film sequences to which some of the works refer also share this feeling of dislocation, illustrating figures, activities or facial expressions that seem estranged from their surroundings. As in the work *Dr. No*,

Graham's photographs select specific moments in film and fine art – moments, often, of idiosyncrasy or humour – and build upon them, sometimes stretching them endlessly.

This is exemplified in the work *Sunday Sun* (2012). Set in 1937, a small light box depicts a figure sitting up in bed, completely obscured by a large newspaper he or she is holding up, open, in front of his or her face. Sgualdini explains: "What makes *Sunday Sun* interesting is that you can see, when you observe closely, that the newspaper is being held up by two hands that are not actually from the same pair. Each hand belongs to a different person. It's a sketch that Rodney took from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), in which two of the characters have to share a small room in an inn with only one bed. The following morning, there is a scene in which it appears that one of them is in bed reading the paper, but in actual fact both characters are sitting next to each other behind the same newspaper." The uncanny character of *Sunday Sun* has its roots, of course, in the original Hitchcock scene. However, despite not being responsible for the comedy in this work, Graham is accountable for the preservation of the moment – the singling out of the sequence, the extraction of it from the film and the expansion of it. Hitchcock's subtle joke is held in a state of suspension by *Sunday Sun* at the pivotal point in between believing there is only one figure and seeing that there are, in fact, two. While in the Hitchcock scene, the film itself reveals the reality (or punchline) of the joke, in Graham's piece the viewer must comprehend it for themselves. Through translating the amusement of *The Lady Vanishes* from film to photography, Graham is changing the very time frame from within. The moment is paused in its entirety, and the joke lasts for as long as it takes for the audience to grasp it. That said, the visual exuberance of *Sunday Sun* – bright colours, floral wallpaper and bedding, plus the extremely busy cartoon pages of the



Rodney Graham, *Smoke Break 2 (Dijonella 2012)*. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist and the Vancouver School of Art.

newspaper (the only pages visible to the viewer) – distracts so much from the two hands on either side of the spread that the joke probably goes completely unnoticed. Graham's homage to Hitchcock is, in a sense, a bookmark for *The Lady Vanishes*. The suspense is continued indefinitely.

This borrowing from, and creating around, other art forms is not limited to Graham's practice. His contemporary, Jeff Wall, also replicates elements of other forms in his photography. *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993), for example, is a re-enactment of Katsushika Hokusai's *Travellers Caught in a Sudden breeze at Ejiri* (ca. 1832). The traditionally dressed rice field workers in Hokusai's print are transformed, in Wall's photograph, into tie-wearing Westerners in the countryside. Wall's piece is comparable to Graham's *Cactus Fan* (2013), a photograph that sees 19th century German romantic painter Carl

when photography was redefining its role in fine art. Squaldini explains the connections between Graham and the other artists of the Vancouver School: "I think that Rodney and these artists share a mutual influence and conversation due to their close background and concerns, and, of course, they have a natural exchange of ideas. But I think that, even though they are using light boxes, and even though several of the artists at this time set up scenes from observations and pre-existing paintings, they all follow different, personal lines of enquiry."

Today, with photography thriving in the fine art world, the literary, filmic and painterly themes in Graham's ongoing practice are no longer linked to the preoccupations of photoconceptualism, despite having partially stemmed from them. Observation, translation and adaptation are employed by Graham in his photographic work to create scenes of displacement and absurdity as

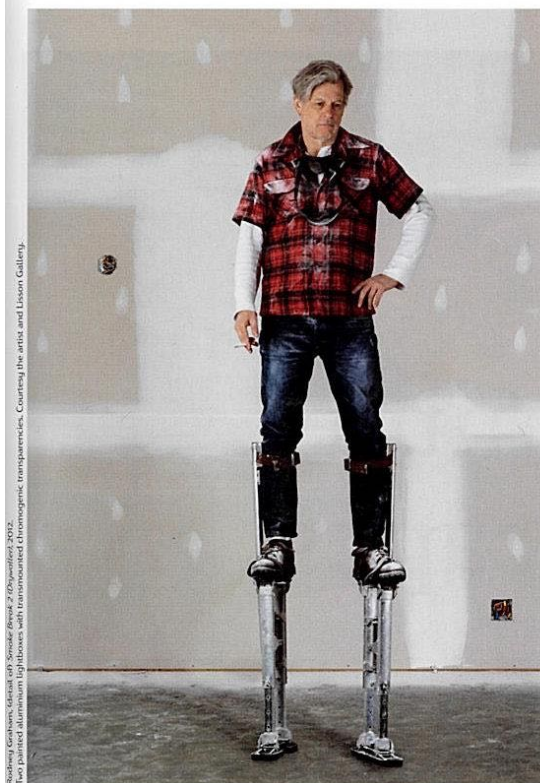
well as to stretch to its limit and expand upon source material. *Cactus Fan* is an example of this. In this image, the stern scholar and dull colours of Spitzweg's painting are transformed into a figure wearing a lab-coat, pondering over a cactus adorned with balloons in a science lab. The cactus,

of course, seems completely out of place in the clinical white space. "Whereas some of his works have a more direct relation to reality (for example to things that the artist has observed personally), others refer to moments in literature or things that exist in paintings, and these moments can appear more unusual due to the contemporary settings," says Squaldini. This relocation in Graham's work – the often conflicting situations, settings, objects and characters – explores how the role of the artist can be understood by what surrounds him. His translation of the subject built upon Spitzweg's solemn and pondering work to create a humorous result that ignites the imagination.

Graham has control over the original events and scenes that are depicted. He alone decides how he wishes the source material to be translated, portrayed and understood. Squaldini comments: "All of the works collected and referred

"Whereas some of his works have a more direct relation to reality (for example to things that the artist has observed personally), others refer to moments in literature or things that exist in paintings, and these moments can appear more unusual due to the contemporary settings."

Spitzweg's *The Cactus Aficionado* (1856) adapted to the setting of a university science lab. These two works are easily comparable due to the fact that both mirror the core concepts of esteemed paintings. However, the similarities between Wall and Graham are often disputed. The appropriation of high art concepts in photography is a theme associated with the photoconceptualist tradition of the Vancouver School – a convention both artists are associated with. This categorisation of artists, however, is problematic; the photoconceptualist theme of referencing and replicating other art forms, evident in *A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* and *Cactus Fan*, did not arise from a preference of style or concept but rather from the anxiety that photography was suffering. It is often argued that the only things Graham and Wall have in common are their similar background and the fact that they both came to prominence



Rodney Graham, *Stilts with Sounder Head, 2 (Photograph)*, 2012. Two painted aluminium lightboxes with translucent chromogenic transparencies. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery.



to have Rodney in them. Due to the fact that each image is purposefully constructed, every object in every piece has a reason to be in the frame." The resulting images are pictorial representations of the ways in which Graham views and understands the original source material. This element of restrained control and exacting choreography is extended, even, to the subjects of each photograph: the protagonists, all of whom are played by Rodney Graham. "He always acts as the main character in his work. He represents characters – impersonates them – despite not having any personal relationship to them," says Squaldini. Graham acts as a prop in his works, dislocated in the times and lives of other people: Hitchcock characters and Spitzweg subjects. Compared with the works of other artists, such as Cindy Sherman, who also appear in their pieces, Graham's presence in his photographs is unobtrusive and understated. Squaldini explains: "There isn't really any sense of masquerade in Rodney's work, as you might find in Cindy Sherman's photography. In Sherman's work, she appears in all the images, but she is never herself. Somehow, the characters who Rodney impersonates do not require him to be in disguise or to act; they're an extension of him." Again, the theme of enlargement is relevant. This time, however, it is the artist himself who is growing.

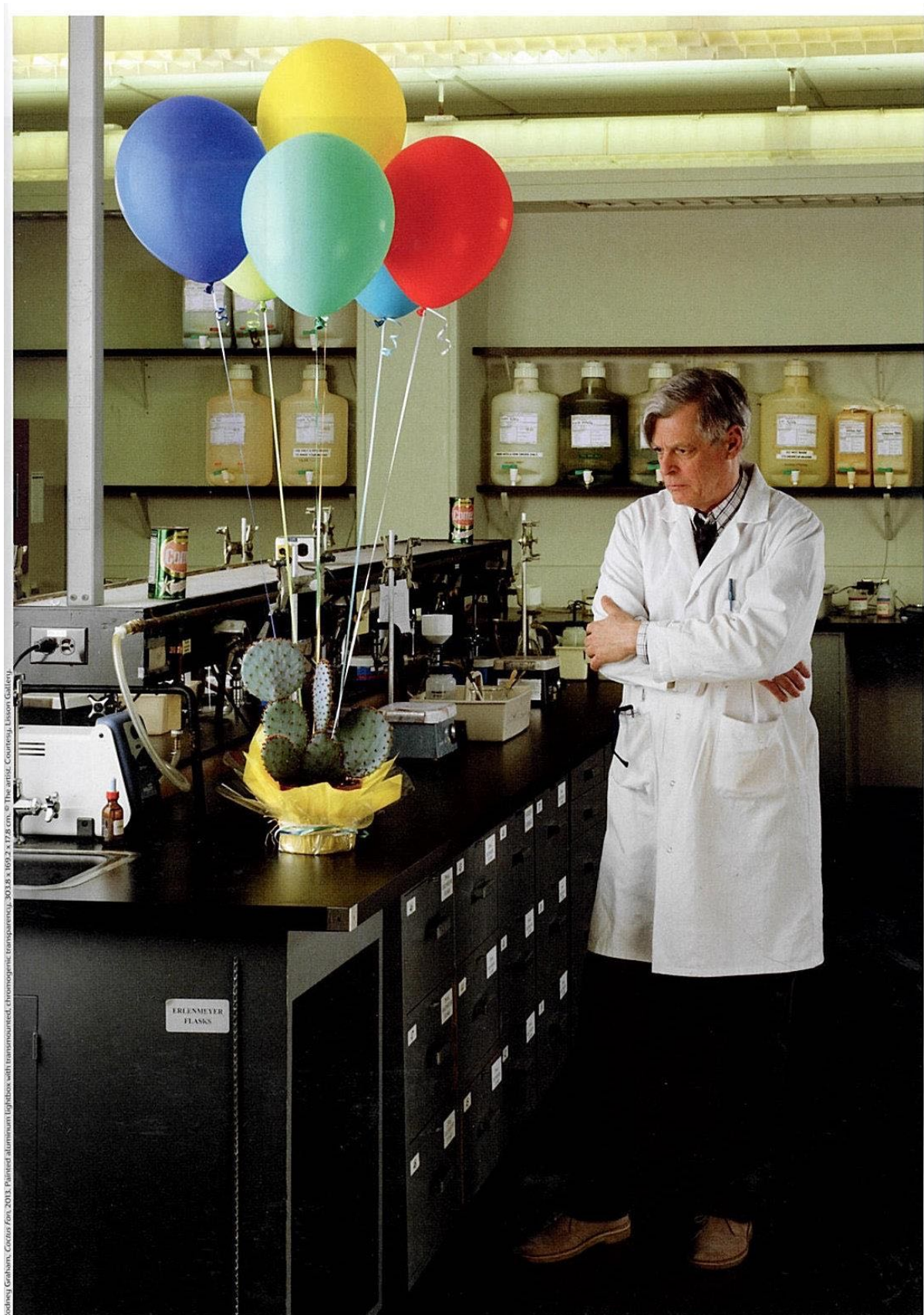
One particular work, especially, captures the artist as a character, but the lines between reality and fiction are truly blurred. Squaldini comments: "There is one light box called *Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961* (2013) which shows a painter sitting in a studio working. Rodney made a number of paintings that were originally designed as props to feature in the light box. However, as he was working on them, they developed into independent works so they exist now alongside the light box and as an extension of it." *Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, 1961* was inspired by the 1930s Man Ray photograph of Jean Cocteau working on a hanging pipe cleaner construction of the type he made for the film *Blood of a Poet* (1930), as well as a photograph of Danish artist Asger Jorn in his studio in 1961. The paintings are a product of the characters that Graham embodies, becoming an amalgamation of the real artist and the fictional one.

Although all of the works in this exhibition feature Graham as a protagonist, not all of them are absurd or witty. *Paddler, Mouth of the Seymour* (2012–2013) is a re-enactment of a painting entitled *Max Schmitt in A Single Scull* (1871) by the American Realist Thomas Eakins. The painting depicts Eakins' friend, Schmitt, resting after a race on the Schuylkill River near Eakins' home in Philadelphia. In the description of the work, Graham writes: "I have always admired this work and long wanted to adapt it to a photograph in a contemporary setting. Recently, I found a local equivalent of the bridge which figures in the back of the Eakins painting, and I decided to shoot the piece using myself as the model (as I always do)." Graham, in a sense, is prolonging the relevance of the original Eakins painting by adapting it into a photograph; furthering its reach and values, and pushing them forward into contemporary times. The scale of this work, plus the division of it into a triptych, makes the piece, when hung, appear like a window. Jeff Wall's *The Storyteller* (1986) and Stan Douglas' *Abbott & Cordova, 7 August 1971* (2009) have similar effects. These works, along with *Paddler, Mouth of the Seymour*, appear to be frozen in reality, expanded into a simulated space. Evenly lit by the light box backlights, the pieces, rather than simply looking like photographs, resemble real scenes suspended in time.

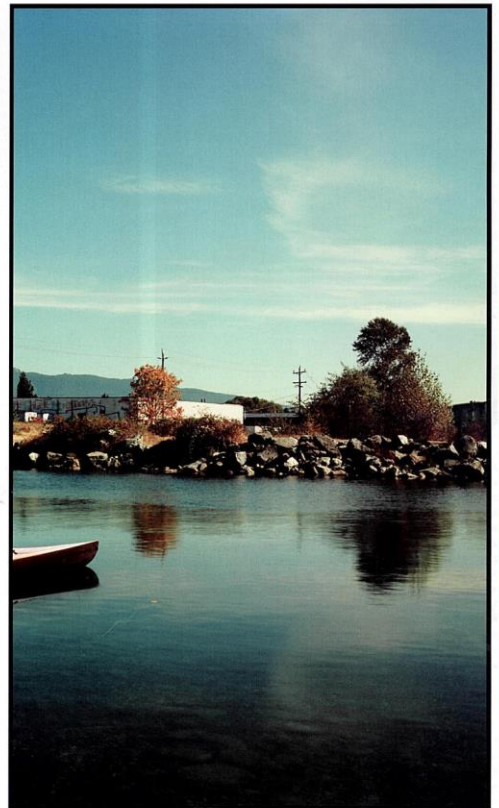
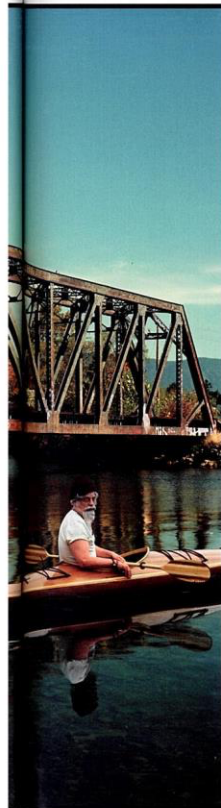
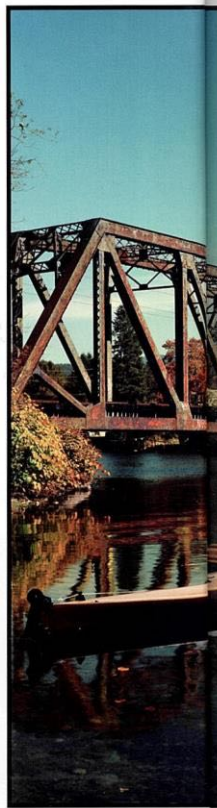
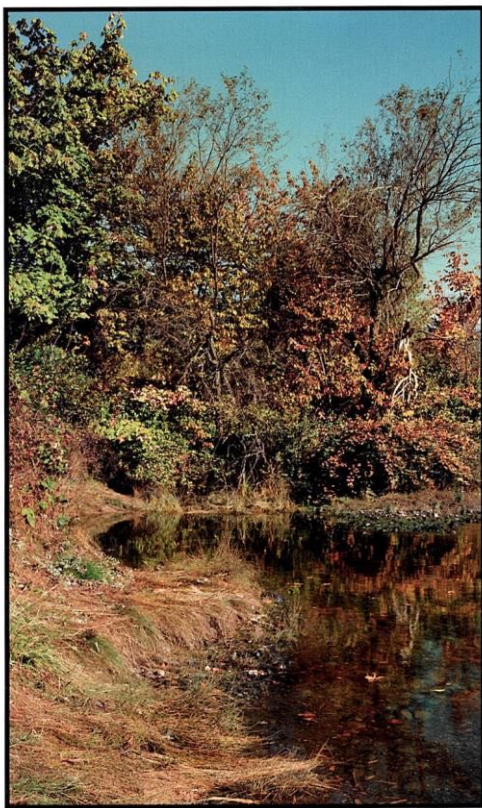
At every turn in Graham's work, he creates a form of intervention. In *Dr. No*, Fleming's text is interrupted and then looped. Similarly, Hitchcock's joke is infringed upon and left suspended in *Sunday Sun*, Spitzweg's subject is reinterpreted in a contemporary context in *Cactus Fan*, and even space and time are intervened upon in the larger window-like works such as *Paddler, Mouth of the Seymour*. Like *Dr. No*, the photographic works are all, in a sense, bookmarks too, continuing from, expanding upon and intervening in calculated moments of space, reality, film, art and life.

Rodney Graham continues until 29 June at Lisson Gallery, 29 Bell Street, London. For further information visit www.lissongallery.com.

Claire Hazelton



Rockley Graham, *Cactus for 2013*. Painted aluminum lightbox with translucent, chromogenic transparent, 30.3 x 69.2 x 17.8 cm. © The artist. Courtesy, Lison Gallery.



Rodney Graham, *Portrait: Mouth of the Seymour*, 2012-13.
Edition of 4, Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery.

Rodney Graham at Lisson Gallery | Exhibition review

Rodney Graham's latest exhibition at Lisson Gallery is a series of breathtaking transparencies overlaid on light-boxes, creating encapsulating larger than life scenes, fastidiously detailed and theatrically staged. These striking tableaux have a three-dimensional quality with impossibly saturated colours that capture strange moments in time. There is not a hint of realism about these images and each references a scene from existing literature, cinema or art history.

Cactus Fan depicts a scientist pondering a strange object, perhaps a gift: a cactus plant with four vibrantly coloured helium balloons attached to it. There's something comically absurd about the composition. *The Avid Reader 1949* is an expansive piece made up of three huge adjoining light boxes. It paints a re-imagined scene of an acquaintance of the artist stopping to read the newspapers plastered on the inside of the windows of a closed shop. Graham conflates fact with fiction by bringing to life a character that compulsively stops and reads everything he sees.

Paddler, Mouth of the Seymour takes the same triptych format as *The Avid Reader* but is inspired by a painting from 1871 by the American realist Thomas Eakins. Graham gives this scene a very modern twist, juxtaposing the idyllic river with a scene of urban decay in the background. *Smoke Break 2 (Drywaller)* sees the bizarre depiction of a workman having a cigarette break whilst on stilts. Graham teases the exciting and dramatic out of the mundane masterfully throughout the exhibition.

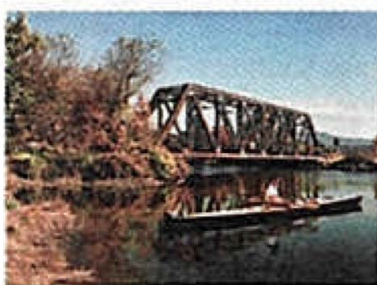


These epic light-box pieces are beautifully cinematic and immersive, beckoning the audience to take a step into these imagined worlds. They are like illustrations or comic book scenes, each with a subtle reference. Who wouldn't want to be a part of their favourite film, book or painting? Graham clearly does, painting himself as the protagonist in many of these pieces. There is nothing impossible or fantastical about these scenes and yet they are still clearly fictional fantasies.

The Pipe Cleaner Artist Amalfi 1961 takes this to new heights, referencing a Man Ray photograph from the 30s. This time the artist becomes self-referential, with his own works shown in the background and thus breaks down the barriers between the real and imagined, between the artist and the work.

The Guardian
11 May 2013

● Rodney Graham London



The characters Rodney Graham plays in his cinematic photographs often dream big, following in the footsteps of creative heavyweights from Kurt Cobain to

Morris Louis. The large triptych at the centre of his latest show (work pictured) sees him pose as a modern-day version of the 19th-century champion rower Max Schmitt in Thomas Eakins's painting, which celebrated his friend's win in Pennsylvania's Schuylkill river race. Yet in Graham's version, the white-haired chap taking

five in a kayak seems more hobbyist than hero. That Schmitt won the race again and again, forever trying to better his speed or get one up on his competitors, surely appeals to the artist, long fascinated by our compulsion to repeat, make the same mistakes, and create variations. ss *Lisson Gallery, NW1, Fri to 29 Jun*

exhibitions



● Dieter Roth London

A compact version of Charun, a tough, intimate show focused on the diaries and video portraits of painter, musician and Dieter Roth, was the high point of last year's Edinburgh festival. Its terrific counterpart is Solo Scenes, 128 videos documenting Roth's everyday life - reading, walking, going to the loo - during the final year of his life, when he had been diagnosed with an alcohol-related disease. Inevitable decay had long been his subject; his preferred materials, the perishable kind. Here, folders are stuffed with receipts, sketches and letters (anything under seven black that passed his way), while his diaries are crisscrossed with fleeting thoughts, doodles and to-do lists. *ss The Saatchi Gallery, NW1, Fri to 14 Jul*

● Ordinary/Extra/Ordinary West Bromwich

Contemporary artists stage here the age-old ambition of transforming the mundane into the magical by variously indulging in creative forms of second infancy. Every Delia and Alan Kane set the scene with their Folk Archive, a celebration of common creativity, including scarecrow-making, fairground signwriting and

a lineup of painted clove eggs, each neatly labelled by name: Auntie Pearl, Lord Fiddlers, Will & Doreen and Conk. Doug Forshaw has adapted a digital, back-projected, 1960s body-shaped cutout he found directing pedestrian traffic at Luton airport to present his busy cartoon virtual mannequin Martin Creed is here with his multiple-



ballroom installation (work pictured), displacing half the gallery space with a precisely measured smudge of oil. *ss The Public, Wed to 29 Sep*

● Rodney Graham London



The characters Rodney Graham plays in his cinematic photographs often dream big, following in the footsteps of creative heavyweights from Kurt Cobain to

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● Brian Griffiths Norwich

Brian Griffiths's installation These Foodie Travels (work pictured), sets the stage for some serious make-believe in Norwich Castle for this year's Norfolk & Norwich festival. The seafarers' tents, barbeques and every kind of canvas shelter in barbeque, which he's erected in the cavernous medieval keep, suggest



a time when roving minstrels plucked up and put on a show, though many of Griffiths's are dyed black and decorated with images of distant

constellations. He has also been getting busy with the Arts Council collection in the Castle, running Shortcuts & Digressions (5 to 8 Sept), a show of fellow British sculptors and conceptual artists, including Helen Chadwick, Adam Chodzko and Coby Wilkos. ss *Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Sat to 2 Aug*

Rodney Graham, Lisson Gallery - exhibition review

At this enjoyable show, Rodney Graham sets intriguing, immaculately detailed scenes in which he performs diverse roles



Taking from the master: Rodney Graham's Sunday Sun, 1937 (2012) echoes a scene from Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*

Rodney Graham's work largely consists of huge photographs on lightboxes but you wouldn't describe him as a photographer. The images are taken by his fellow Canadian, Robert Keziere, while Graham is director, setting intriguing, immaculately detailed scenes in which he performs diverse roles.

A cluster of new lightboxes, mostly vast diptychs or triptychs, dominate this show. *Smoke Break 2* (Drywaller) (2012) sees Graham taking up the role of a plasterer he saw having a fag while standing on the metal stilts used to reach the top of walls. He stands on the stilts, cigarette in hand, with a partly plastered wall behind him, which fills the frame. With knowing humour, he's equating plasterer and artist here — the wall resembles an abstract painting and Graham gazes out, as if deep in creative rumination.

He often draws on the past, quoting a Thomas Eakins painting in one work and in Sunday Sun, 1937 (2012), a scene from Hitchcock's The Lady Vanishes. Pipe Cleaner Artist, Amalfi, '61 (2013), meanwhile, fuses old photographs of Jean Cocteau and Asger Jorn to create a image of himself as a relaxed artist in a sunlit studio, creating an absurdly huge sculpture and delicate abstract paintings with pipe cleaners. The paintings in the photograph, which Graham calls props, are shown in a separate room.

The Amalfi work typifies what makes this show so enjoyable: the lightboxes might be grand in scale, but a self-deprecating humour permeates them. Graham hovers between a reverence for art and bemusement at the act of making it.

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LISSON GALLERY

Flash Art

January-February 2013

INTERVIEW



Rodney Graham

MISE EN ABYME

Matthew Shields



MATTHEW SHIELDS: *As an autodidact, you join a long and storied lineage that includes Leo Tolstoy, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, John Cage, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. For example, the image of you installing your first camera obscura in a field adjacent to your uncle's ranch in Abbotsford speaks to a distinctly self-directed line of inquiry. While you did not complete a formal art education, the typical initiation into the academy, you have accomplished much within the art institution's field of legitimizing authority. I bring this up*

because I think that the reading of amateurism in your work, the figure of the amateur and the discourses that attend it, could justifiably incorporate a stronger element of institutional critique.

Rodney Graham: I am not particularly interested in critiquing these increasingly beleaguered institutions. It seems rather the time to join fundraising efforts on their behalf, and to protect them from the cretins of the right who would shut them down. Also that part of the art world is just not that interesting as a

subject, at least to most people. I would venture to say it's even a little bit boring. As to the question about my amateurism, I have to say I am less interested in that idea than I was in the past, when I may have played it up a bit. I used to identify with Duchamp and Raymond Roussel, who never worked a day in their lives. 20th century dandies. Now I admire super-humanly productive artists like Picasso and, today, Paul McCarthy. Also, artists are never really amateurs. They sell everything! Doesn't Roland Barthes make a joke about the writer on holiday? You know, he writes a travel piece. When I think about it, I have actually had a lot of professional training, though much of it was on the job as an apprentice, with both Ian Wallace and Jeff Wall. I was lucky in that respect. Having said that, I did a piece called *The Gifted Amateur* (1962). It is about a professional in the middle of a life crisis. Then he discovers Morris Louis, and he decides to give this kind of painting a try because it looks easy and fun, which it is basically, at least compared to some other types of painting.

MS: *Speaking of the cretins of the right, how did you come to put a hex on George W. Bush? It was more explicitly political than any prior work, although hardly didactic, cloaked as it was in the rhetoric of Antonin Artaud's hermetic, symbolist doodles, which interested you at the time.*

RG: As to the exact formula of the hex on George W. Bush I can't remember, but at least it worked because he is now serving a life sentence in a maximum-security prison.

MS: *When I look at My Late Early Styles (Part 1, The Middle Period) (2007-09), I immediately recall the work of painter Johann Zoffany, particularly The Academicians of the Royal Academy (1771) and Tribuna of the Uffizi (1772-78). This association is appropriate given your interest in the physical context of the academician's studio, laboratories of Western, empirical observation. Can you rehearse for us your evolution from a staunchly conceptual, post-studio artist to your current interest in the mythos of the studio?*

RG: I guess this happened quite suddenly — a mystical epiphany in Venice when I saw that big polychrome sculpture of Jeff Koons having sex with his porn star girlfriend and member of the parliament. He really raised the bar. I thought it was time to ramp it up a bit. I think works like this made a lot of conceptual artists feel ineffectual, like Pete Townshend and Eric Clapton when they first

RODNEY GRAHAM, The Green Cinematograph (Programme 1: Pipe smoker and overflowing sink), 2010. Custom film projector with looper, 16mm color film. 5 min 35 sec, silent. Courtesy the artist and Lisson, London / Milan. Opposite: Lighthouse Keeper with Lighthouse Model, 1955, 2010. Two painted aluminum light boxes with transmounted chromogenic transparencies. Courtesy the artist, Lisson, London / Milan, and 303, New York.



heard Jimi Hendrix! I think I made *Vexation Island* (1997) after that, which involved a lot of financial speculation on my part. I put everything I had into it, and it ended up being a success. It was a very exciting time and I became converted to making works with more popular appeal. And this led somehow to the studio I guess.

MS: While in the past you have assumed postures of recline, movement is dissembled more expressively in *Dance!!!!* (2008) and *The Leaping Hermit* (2011). Can you discuss your recent interest in the gesture and rehearsal of dance?

RG: You are right about my movement towards dance. I don't know why really, but I am working on a piece about an old dance master — a subject suggested to me by Shannon Oksanen. I am working with some images of Balanchine from the late '40s where he is rehearsing a production of *Orpheus* that he did with Noguchi. I am making my own fifties-style prop lyres inspired by the Vulcan harp from *Star Trek* and Prince's guitar as well as that of Picasso.

MS: Few other contemporary artists have explored the possibilities of mise en abyme structures as effectively as you. Where would you locate the origins of your ongoing interest in mise en abyme? I know that very early on

you were interested in Foucault's writing on Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656). You would have also seen the cover of Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* (1969) around the same time. How do mise en abyme strategies inform a work like *Paradoxical Western Scene* (2006) for example?

RG: I wrote an essay on Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas* for a course in Structural Anthropology while a student. I thought it was pretty good, but I only got a mediocre mark. I should have disputed the mark. That's what students do now, being more savvy. In regard to the authority of professors, some of us were much more obedient in the '60s. I mainly use it for comic effects in pieces like *Paradoxical Western Scene* (2006), which is a pastiche of two record album covers, one by Marty Robbins and the other by Peter Sellers. I have been influenced a lot by album covers, though not by *Ummagumma*. The cover of *Country Life* (1974) by Roxy Music, for example, partly inspired my early piece *75 Polaroids* (1976): the original Canadian pressing I think showed a flash photograph of a patch of shrubbery. The original British version has the two women in underwear, shot, I believe, by Bryan Ferry, but it was censored at the time. Another influence on *Paradoxical Western Scene* is Michael Snow's *Authorization* (1969), which is the definitive work of that type.

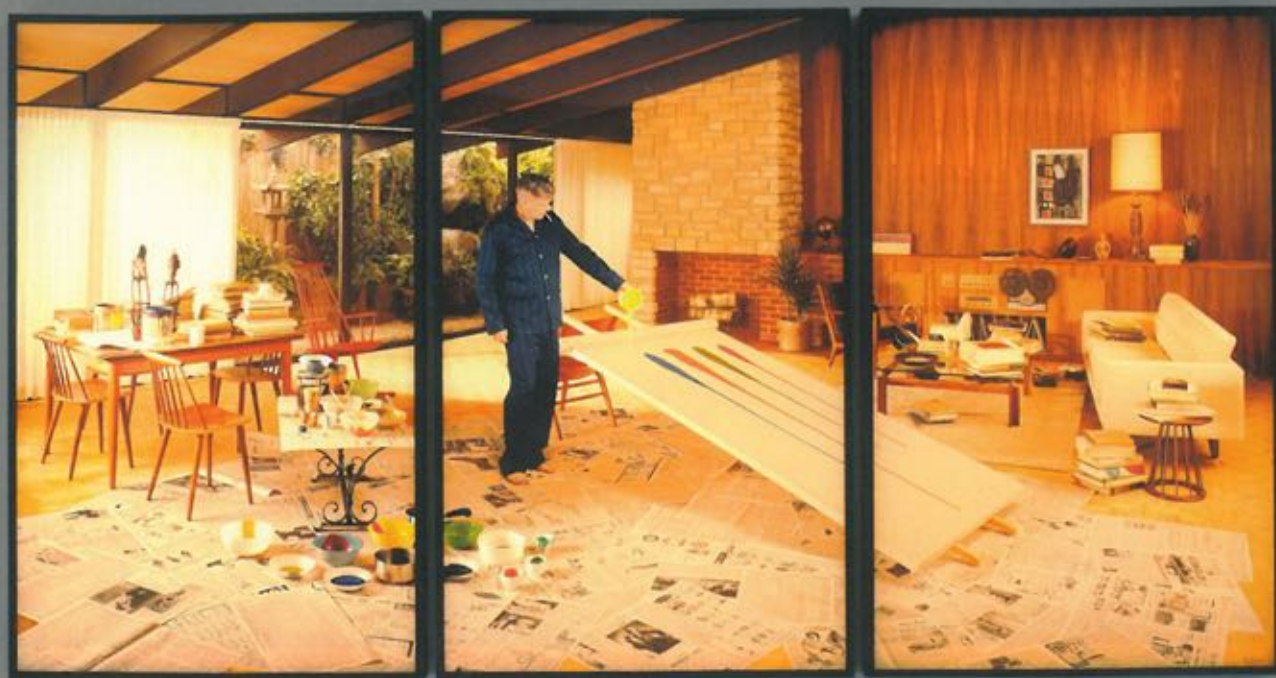
RODNEY GRAHAM, *Good Hand Bad Hand*, 2010. Two painted aluminum light boxes with transmounted chromogenic transparencies. Courtesy the artist and Lisson, London / Milan.

MS: Early on you wrote a short text about Robert Smithson's brain. Could you elucidate this now somewhat obscure text?

RG: The text on Smithson was modeled on the great short texts that I remember in Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957). I don't have the text, but I remember it used the brain coral as an analogy. I encountered a brain coral in situ on the island where I shot *Vexation Island*, and Shannon took a picture of me looking at it. Later I found an almost identical photo of Glenn Gould looking at a brain coral. What a thrill!

MS: Could you discuss the dialectic that developed between Duchamp and Picasso over the course of the twentieth century? You have said that the introduction of painting into your practice and a closer investigation of Picasso's analytic cubism instigated a further methodological shift away from Duchamp towards Picasso.

RG: I just came back from Madrid where I saw the Raymond Roussel show in which I have some works, and it made me think again about this whole tradition out of Roussel, of which Duchamp is the prime representa-



tive, and I kind of get it again. There is a good essay by Annie Le Brun in there, very anti-Foucault, at least against Foucault's interpretation of Roussel. Roussel was so important to me as a student, having been introduced to his book *Impressions of Africa* (1910) by Ian Wallace. We started this interview six months ago and I think I have changed my mind. I like the idea of going back to the hermetic/aristocratic tradition of Duchamp and Roussel, who really did teach him everything, and to whom I partly owe my decision to become an artist rather than a writer or something else.

MS: *As you know, a few years ago John Baldessari was asked who he thought was the most important or influential contemporary artist, to which he responded: "Rodney Graham." If you were posed the same question, how would you respond?*

RG: What can I say? It is Baldessari's student, Mike Kelly. His death was one of those truly shocking things. I only met him once or twice in passing, but I really admired his work. As an artist you had to be just a little bit jealous of his brilliance. I feel honored that he actually performed my *Lobbing Potatoes at a Gong* (1969) (2006) at a noise festival that

RODNEY GRAHAM, *The Gifted Amateur*, Nov. 10th, 1962. 2007. Three painted aluminum light boxes with transmounted chromogenic transparencies, 286 x 558 x 18 cm. © Rodney Graham. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich / London / New York.

he organized. But he didn't lob — them he hurled them. ■

Matthew Shields is an artist and writer based in Vancouver, Canada.

Rodney Graham was born in 1949 in Vancouver, Canada, where he currently lives and works.

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Skeletons in the Closet: Rodney Graham

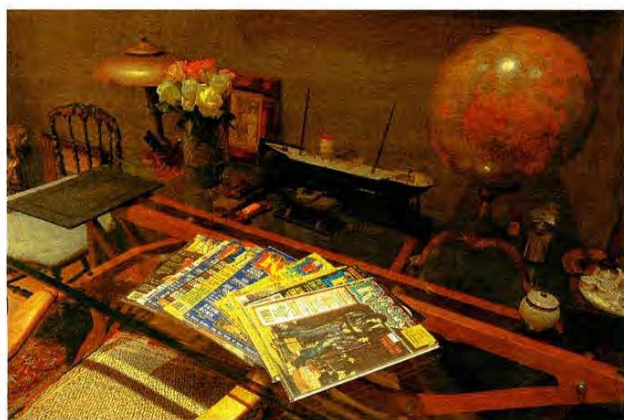
BY RACHEL ROSENFIELD LAFO



The Gifted Amateur, Nov. 10th, 1962, 2007, installation view, Lisson Gallery, London. Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery, London. Photo: Ken Adlard

*"Think you're escaping
and run into yourself.
Longest way round is the
shortest way home"*
James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Rodney Graham's setting for *The Gifted Amateur*, Nov. 10th, 1962 is so convincing that one might think it was photographed in his own home, especially given the artist's practice of performing as the protagonist in his photographs and films. The three-part backlit photographic transparency depicts an amateur artist creating a drip painting, à la Morris Louis, in a modernist West Coast living room full of objets d'arts, books, and musical equipment. But the room is not real. Rather, it is a fabrication constructed specifically for the shoot to recreate the interior and ambiance of an upper middle class West Vancouver living room from the 1960s, a room that Graham has described as "...a bit of a fantasy of males of my age". Yet even though this is not Graham's true living space, there are clues in this invented set that point to the artist's preoccupations with music, literature, and design, as well as his recent return to the practice of painting after a thirty year absence.



Graham's actual house is a 1930s wood-frame structure on a pleasant, tree-lined street in a Vancouver neighborhood close to the downtown core. It is not far from "Antique Row", a street lined with antique shops and second-hand stores, where the artist often browses for furniture and curios. As befits a Renaissance Man with an abundant curiosity, an interest in both high and low culture, who works in multiple media and genres, the interior decor of the house is eclectic and personal. There are assorted knickknacks, musical instruments and equipment, vinyl records, old rock and roll magazines, books, paintings by amateur artists, collectibles and miscellaneous pieces of furniture whose choice seems guided more by intuition and chance (some have been gifts) than any focus on a specific period or fashion.

DI RACHEL ROSENFIELD LAFO

"Credi di sfuggire e vai a sbattere in te stesso. La via più lunga è anche la più corta per tornare al punto di partenza"
James Joyce, *Ulysses*

L'ambientazione di Rodney Graham per *The Gifted Amateur*, Nov. 10th, 1962 è così convincente che si potrebbe pensare sia stata fotografata in casa sua, specie se si considera l'abitudine dell'artista di ricoprire il ruolo del protagonista nelle sue foto e nei suoi film. Un positivo fotografico in tre parti, illuminato in controluce, ritrae un artista dilettante che crea un dipinto con la tecnica del dripping, alla Morris Louis, in un salotto modernista tipico della West Coast, pieno di oggetti d'arte, libri e strumenti musicali. Ma la stanza non è reale. Si tratta piuttosto di un'invenzione costruita appositamente per lo scatto, al fine di ricreare gli interni e l'ambiente di una sala da pranzo dell'alta borghesia di West Vancouver negli anni Sessanta, una stanza che Graham ha descritto come "...un po' una fantasia dei maschi della mia età". Tuttavia, sebbene questo non sia il vero ambiente di Graham, in questo set inventato ci sono indizi che indicano l'interesse dell'artista per la musica, la letteratura e il design, e il suo recente ritorno alla pittura dopo trent'anni di assenza.

La vera casa di Graham è un edificio degli anni Trenta con la struttura in legno affacciata su una tranquilla strada alberata in un quartiere vicino al centro di Vancouver. Non è molto distante dalla "Antique Row", una strada costeggiata da antiquari e negozi di roba usata, che l'artista visita spesso alla ricerca di mobili e curiosità. Come si addice a un uomo del Rinascimento dalla fervida curiosità e interessato sia agli aspetti più elevati che a quelli più



triviali della cultura, a un uomo che lavora con svariati mezzi espressivi e generi, la decorazione degli interni è eclettica e personale. Ci sono ninoli assortiti, strumenti e attrezzature musicali, dischi in vinile, vecchie riviste di rock and roll, libri, dipinti di artisti dilettanti, pezzi da collezione e mobili, la scelta dei quali sembra guidata più da intuito e caso (alcuni sono regali) che dall'interesse per un periodo o una moda in particolare.

L'inclinazione per lo stile e il design pervade tutte le sue attività: gli oggetti che sceglie per la propria casa, i materiali usati come fonti, l'attenzione alla tipografia, al testo e alla presentazione, il gioco dei ruoli e i meticolosi dettagli che entrano nella produzione delle sue fotografie e film in costume, e il modo stesso in cui veste e si presenta. Certo, Graham indossa molti cappelli artistici, letteralmente e figurativamente. Le sue indagini nella psicologia, nella filosofia, nella letteratura, nella musica, nel cinema e nell'arte hanno prodotto un ricco e diversificato corpus di opere cinematografiche, fotografiche, teatrali, musicali, pittoriche, scultoree e letterarie, tutte caratterizzate dal profondo interesse per la ripetizione, la ricontestualizzazione, l'adattamento, l'intervento e la creazione di un alter-ego.

Unitamente agli oggetti di scena e ai costumi che sono comparsi nelle sue opere fotografiche e filmiche - come lo zuccotto di feltro che Graham







Left – *The Green Cinematograph* (Programme 1: Pipe smoker and overflowing sink), production photograph, 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich

An interest in style and design infuses all of his activities, from the objects he chooses for his home, his choice of source material, his attention to typography, text, and presentation, the role playing and meticulous detail that go into producing his photographic transparencies and period piece films, and the way he dresses and presents himself. To be sure Graham wears many artistic hats, both figuratively and literally. His investigations into psychology, philosophy, literature, music, film, and art have resulted in a rich and diverse body of works in film, photography, performance, music, painting, sculpture, and text works, characterized by their absorption with repetition, re-contextualization, adaption, intervention and the creation of an alter-ego.

Along with props and parts of costumes that have appeared in his photographic and filmic work, such as the felt beanie that Graham wears in his impersonation of the *Leaping Hermit*, the brown leather chair from *The Green Cinematograph*, or the glass chandelier that was used in the film projection *Torqued Chandelier Release*, the rooms in his house display other curious arrangements of objects. A glass cabinet in the den hosts a fascinatingly creepy collection of poison bottles, as well as a French brandy bottle that was used in the photograph *Dance!!!!*, an antique ice cream scoop, and a coconut found on the British Virgin island where *Vexation Island*, Graham's contribution for the Canadian Pavilion at the 1997 Venice Biennale, was filmed.

Certainly, a man who performs in his own elaborately filmed and photographed costume dramas must relish the chance to clothe himself and other characters, and to determine the details of buildings, interior spaces, and landscapes that create the ambience he seeks. No wonder, then, that the "amateur" actor who has dressed in a multitude of guises – as a pirate, a cowboy, a mariachi musician, the Renaissance humanist and theologian Erasmus, a country bumpkin, a city dandy, an old bugler in the uniform of a nineteenth-century French Zouave regiment, the debonair character that Cary Grant played in the film *To Catch a Thief*, among others – has what Graham describes as a "manly bar" on a trolley befitting James Bond, as well as an intriguing collection of bibelots grouped on the living room mantelpiece. Perhaps the metal figure of the Indian god Ganesha, with elephant head and multiple arms, the pepper shaker made in occupied Japan of a helmeted sea diver wrestling with a snake,

"Rodney Graham – Through the Forest", installation view, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich. Photo: Stefan Altenburger



a musketeer with an eyepatch and hook, a Robby the Robot toy, and a Turkish print from the 1930s showing a uniformed officer wearing a fez, will serve as props or inspirations for future productions. In an upstairs bathroom, a deer skull hangs on the wall, its antlers draped with necklaces that include a small size version of *Screen Door*, Graham's 2005 full scale pure silver replica of the aluminum screen door from Elvis Presley's mansion Graceland.

When Rodney Graham is asked about his interest in collectibles, he responds, with tongue somewhat in cheek, "If I weren't an artist I'd probably be a home decorator", quickly recanting that statement

indossa nella sua interpretazione del *Leaping Hermit*, la poltrona di pelle marrone de *The Green Cinematograph*, o il lampadario di vetro usato nella proiezione di *Torqued Chandelier Release* – le stanze della sua casa mostrano altre cu-



riose disposizioni di oggetti. Nello studio, uno stipetto con le ante di vetro ospita una collezione di bottigliette di veleno che inquieta e affascina allo stesso tempo, oltre che una bottiglia di brandy francese utilizzata nella fotografia *Dance!!!!*, una vecchia paletta da gelato e una noce di cocco raccolta in quella fra le Isole Vergini britanniche in cui venne girato *Vexation Island*, il contributo di Graham al Padiglione canadese della Biennale di Venezia del 1997.

Di certo, un uomo che recita negli elaborati drammi filmici e fotografici in costume di cui è l'autore deve provare gusto nel vestire se stesso e gli altri personaggi, e nel determinare i dettagli di edifici, spazi interni e paesaggi che creano l'ambientazione di cui ha bisogno. Non deve stupire, dunque, che l'attore "dilettante" che ha indossato molteplici costumi – pirata, cowboy, musicista mariachi, Erasmo (l'umanista e teologo rinascimentale), bifolco di campagna, dandy cittadino, anziano trombettiere con l'uniforme di un reggimento di Zuavi francesi dell'Ottocento, il bonario personaggio recitato da Cary Grant in *Caccia al ladro*, per citarne solo alcuni – abbia quello che Graham descrive come un carrello bar degno di James Bond, oltre che un'intrigante collezione di gingilli



raggruppati sul caminetto del salotto. Forse la figura in metallo del dio indiano Ganesha, con la testa di elefante e due paia di braccia, la pepiera fabbricata nel Giappone occupato che raffigura un palombaro in lotta contro un serpente, un moschettiere con una benda sull'occhio e un uncino, un giocattolo di Robby the Robot, e una stampa turca degli anni Trenta che mostra un ufficiale in divisa con un fez sul capo serviranno da oggetti di scena o ispireranno future produzioni. Alla parete di un bagno al piano di sopra è appeso il teschio di un cervo, con le corna ornate di collane e di una versione miniaturizzata di *Screen Door*, la replica a grandezza naturale della porta a soffietto montata a Graceland, la dimora di Elvis Presley, che Graham aveva realizzato in argento nel 2005.

Quando a Rodney Graham viene chiesto del suo interesse per i pezzi da collezione, risponde, con un pizzico di ironia, "Se non fossi un artista, probabilmente farei l'arredatore", affrettandosi poi a ritrattare questa affermazione quando gli si domanda d'identificare la data e lo stile di un particolare pezzo d'arredamento. Con poche eccezioni di opere d'arte acquisite attraverso lo scambio con altri artisti, Graham non colle-



when asked to identify the date and style of a particular furnishing. With a few exceptions of artwork acquired by trade with other artists, Graham does not collect fine art. When asked why, he says he would rather buy clothes or records, and then proceeds to show the visitor a collection of rock magazines and a fashion catalogue of men's boots.

One might expect to find a profusion of books in Graham's home, since for many years his artworks referenced, appropriated and reworked texts as varied as Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, and Ian Fleming's James Bond novels *Casino Royal* and *Dr. No*, to name only a few. Yet despite this long association with literary and philosophical writings, Graham claims that he does not read much anymore and would rather own records than books. As evidence, he points to the books



on the shelves in his den that have been arranged by the color of their covers rather than by topic or alphabetization. He has however, returned to the book as a topic in several recent artworks. The silk-screen *Weathervane* from 2009, which hangs in the artist's kitchen, and his new *British Weathervanes* book, published on the occasion of the installation of his weathervane sculpture on the cupola of the Whitechapel Gallery in London, are inspired by the design, typeface, colors and instructional tone of the 1940s series "Britain in Pictures", a war-time publication designed to both boost morale and record the British way of life. And in a recent work that invokes the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, *To the Tattooist*, 2010, Graham produced a deluxe vanity press edition of a poem addressed to a tattoo artist. The poem, a proposal for a tattoo for Graham's back, is printed in a typographic layout based on that used for Mallarmé's *Coup de Des*.

More than artwork, books, and decorative trinkets, Graham's residence is dominated by the tools of the trade of his alternate persona – the singer-songwriter and rock musician. There are numerous guitars (he owns twenty) and other musical instruments and equipment, including a child's piano from the 1930s, an old drum, various instruments in the basement where his band practices, and turntables



indicating his preference for vinyl records. Graham is obviously attracted to mechanical devices from the past, such as the 16 mm film projectors that are used in artworks like the *Green Cinematograph* and *Rheinmetall/Victoria 8*, which also features a 1930s typewriter. He also owns a vintage Premier amplifier from the 1950s and a McIntosh 240 tube amplifier from the 1960s with an elegant chrome and black chassis.

Surprisingly, even though he has used his own music as the soundtrack for some of his artworks, for example in *How I Became a Ramblin' Man*, *Phonokinetoscope*, and *Zabriskie Point*, and has produced records and CDs along with the publication of catalogues for exhibitions, Graham says that he doesn't

ziona arte. Se gli si chiede il perché, risponde che preferisce comprare abiti o dischi, e poi passa a mostrare al visitatore una collezione di riviste di rock e cataloghi di stivali da uomo.

Nella casa di Graham ci si aspetterebbe di vedere una profusione di libri, giacché per molti anni le sue opere d'arte hanno citato, si sono appropriate e hanno rielaborato testi d'ogni sorta, dall'*Elogio della follia* di Erasmo, all'*Interpretazione dei sogni* di Freud, fino ai romanzi di Ian Fleming con protagonista James Bond, come *Casino Royale* e *Licenza di uccidere*, solo per nominarne alcuni. Tuttavia, nonostante questa duratura associazione con scritti letterari e filosofici, Graham afferma di non leggere più molto e che preferirebbe possedere dischi piuttosto che libri. A prova di questo, indica i libri sugli scaffali del suo studio, per mostrare come la loro disposizione segua un ordine cromatico e non uno alfabetico o per argomento. In ogni caso, è tornato al libro come argomento di diverse opere recenti. La serigrafia *Weathervane* del 2009, appesa nella cucina dell'artista, e



il suo ultimo libro, *British Weathervanes*, pubblicato in occasione dell'installazione della scultura segnavento sulla cupola della Whitechapel Gallery di Londra, sono ispirati dal design, dal carattere tipografico, dai colori e dal tono educativo della serie degli anni Quaranta "Britain in Pictures", una pubblicazione di epoca bellica che si prefiggeva il doppio intento di sollevare il morale e di registrare lo stile di vita britannico. In un'opera recente che invoca il poeta simbolista francese Stéphane Mallarmé, *To the Tattooist*, 2010, Graham ha realizzato a sue spese un'edizione di lusso di un poema dedicato a un artista del tatuaggio. Il poema, una proposta per un tatuaggio da realizzare sulla schiena di Graham, è stampato con un layout tipografico basato su quello usato per *Coup de Des* di Mallarmé.



Più che da opere d'arte, libri e gingilli decorativi, la dimora di Graham è pervasa dagli strumenti del mestiere del suo alter-ego: il cantautore e musicista rock. Ci sono molte chitarre (ne possiede venti) e altri strumenti e attrezzature musicali, fra cui un pianoforte da bambini degli anni Trenta, una vecchia batteria, vari strumenti nel seminterrato dove la sua band fa le prove, e giradischi, che tradiscono la sua preferenza per il vinile. Graham è ovviamente attratto dai dispositivi meccanici del passato,

see a connection between his music and his art, and prefers not to perform his music in art spaces. And although his career as a songwriter and musician is well established, Graham somewhat disingenuously distinguishes between his "day job" as a visual artist and his "hobby" as a musician. He says this even though it is obvious that music as a theme and a medium has long infiltrated his artistic practice, and the few artworks by other artists hanging in his home are about music. There is Ron Terada's *Big Star*, a neon wall piece that replicates the sign on the cover of the rock band Big Star's 1972 album, and a photograph hanging on a wall behind his band's equipment by Scott Livingstone and Shannon Oksanen, in which they re-enact the image on the back cover of the 1969 Pink Floyd album, *Ummagumma*. Maybe it's that his art is very much about the music but the music isn't about the art.



A trip to Graham's nearby new studio, a 4000 square foot former industrial space, reveals two sets for recently completed photographic lightbox works that will debut in his June exhibition at Hauser & Wirth in Zurich. Having spent much time investigating literary, musical, scientific and artistic figures of the nineteenth century and fin de siècle, among them Edgar Allan Poe, Richard Wagner, Herman Melville, Georg Büchner, Stéphane Mallarmé, Sigmund Freud, and Raymond Roussel, Graham now turns to the early twentieth century cultural landscape. The sets for *Small Basement Camera Shop, circa 1931*, a recreation of a scene taken from a tiny black and white photograph of a proprietor in his small photographic studio, and *The Avid Reader, 1949*, a street scene located in front of the entrance to a Woolworth's store, are elaborate in their detail and verisimilitude.

This man of many talents moves continuously from one time period to another, "adrift in the corridors of art history", as the writer William Gibson recently described him. He experiments with different literary, artistic, and musical styles to create work that is enigmatic, intellectually rigorous, repetitively mesmerizing, and often humorous. He assumes the alter-ego of the amateur; the novice painter who tries his hand at styles recalling the School of Paris, Picasso, and drip paintings of the 1960s, the untrained actor who performs in his own staged dramas, and the musician-hobbyist who samples different musical genres in order to find his own voice. And although he tries at times to deny it, these different aspects to his persona fuse to make one infinitely complex, unpredictable, and always compelling artist.



come i proiettori a 16 mm utilizzati in opere d'arte come *Green Cinematograph* e *Rheinmetall Victoria 8*, in cui si vede anche una macchina da scrivere degli anni Trenta. Graham possiede anche un amplificatore Premier vintage degli anni Cinquanta e un amplificatore valvolare McIntosh 240 degli anni Sessanta, con un elegante chassis cromato e nero.

In modo assai sorprendente – per quanto abbia usato la propria musica come colonna sonora delle sue opere d'arte, per esempio in *How I Became a Ramblin' Man*, *Phonokinetoscope* e *Zabriskie Point*, e abbia prodotto dischi e CD, oltre ad aver pubblicato cataloghi per le mostre – Graham afferma di non vedere una connessione fra la sua musica e la sua arte, e preferisce non esibirsi in spazi dedicati all'arte. E, sebbene la sua carriera di cantautore e musicista sia consolidata, Graham distingue – in qualche modo falsamente – fra il suo "vero lavoro" di artista visuale e il suo "hobby" della musica. Dice questo nonostante la musica in quanto tema e mezzo sia penetrata da tempo nella sua pratica artistica e le poche opere di altri artisti che conserva in casa siano incentrate sulla musica. C'è *Big Star* di Ron Terada, un'opera a muro fatta da neon che riproduce l'immagine di copertina dell'album del 1972 della band omonima, mentre sulla parete alle spalle degli strumenti della sua band c'è una fotografia in cui Scott Livingstone e Shannon Oksanen mettono in scena l'immagine sulla retrocopertina di *Ummagumma*, l'album dei Pink Floyd del 1969. Forse si tratta solo del fatto che la sua arte riguarda molto la musica, ma la musica non si occupa granché dell'arte.

Una visita al nuovo studio di Graham lì vicino, un ex spazio industriale di oltre 300 metri quadri, rivela due set per opere fotografiche con la tecnica della lightbox recentemente completate, che saranno presentate a giugno in occasione della mostra da Hauser & Wirth, a Zurigo. Avendo trascorso molto tempo a indagare i personaggi della letteratura, della musica, della scienza e dell'arte del Diciannovesimo secolo e fin de siècle, fra cui Edgar Allan Poe, Richard Wagner, Herman Melville, Georg Büchner, Stéphane Mallarmé, Sigmund Freud e Raymond Roussel, Graham adesso si volge al panorama culturale del primo Novecento. I set per *Small Basement Camera Shop, circa 1931* – la ricreazione di una scena tratta da una piccola foto in bianco e nero di un proprietario nel suo piccolo studio fotografico – e per *The Avid Reader, 1949*, una scena di strada situata di fronte all'ingresso di un negozio di Woolworth – sono elaborati con precisione e verosimiglianza.

Quest'uomo dai molti talenti si muove continuamente da un'epoca all'altra, "alla deriva nei corridoi della storia dell'arte", nella recente descrizione dello scrittore William Gibson. Sperimenta con diversi stili letterari, artistici e musicali per creare opere enigmatiche, intellettualmente rigorose, ossessivamente affascinanti e spesso ironiche. Fa proprio l'alter ego del dilettante; il pittore in erba che si fa la mano con gli stili della Scuola di Parigi, Picasso e il dripping degli anni Sessanta; l'attore impreparato che recita nei drammi da lui stesso scritti, e l'hobbysta della musica che campiona diversi generi musicali per trovare la propria voce. E, sebbene, di tanto in tanto, cerchi di negarlo, questi diversi aspetti del suo personaggio si fondono per creare un artista infinitamente complesso, imprevedibile e sempre affascinante.

All images, unless otherwise specified –
Courtesy: Rodney Graham.
Photo: Scott Livingstone

UP NOW

Sigmar Polke

Thomas Ammann Fine Art

Zurich

Through September 30

Planned before Sigmar Polke died this past June (see obituary, page 64), this small, well-edited show reveals the striking breadth of interests across the artist's career. Work here ranges from his cartoonish iconography of postwar Western consumerism and his pixelated, fabric-strewn works of the '70s to the monumental sun-stroked lacquer works of the next decade and his recent, celebrated lens paintings.

The two earliest paintings on view feature couples. In *Liebespaar II* (Lovers II, 1965), abstract elements like dots and squeegees of paint encroach on a studiously generic bourgeois couple, as if the art world's midcentury turn toward abstraction were menacing this figurative model of happiness. *Flamingos* (1966) offers a more graphic juxtaposition of the banal and the abstract: a pair of flamingos



Sigmar Polke, *Liebespaar II* (Lovers II), 1965, oil and enamel on canvas, 78 1/2" x 54 1/2". Thomas Ammann Fine Art

is rendered in lithe strokes of garish pink against a dark ground, while two white triangles in opposing corners mimic the angled tabs that hold snapshots in photo albums.

In the gorgeous eight-panel work *Burda* (1979–82), painted and stenciled imagery is strewn across eight differently patterned textiles, highlighting the artist's

adroit merging of patterns and mediums that has defined his larger oeuvre.

The showstopper, however, is the enormous and seminal painting *Paganini* (1981–83), in which Polke reimagines a medieval engraving that features the devil playing violin for a dying man. Against a checkered fabric ground, myriad figures, forms, and styles are rendered in acrylic. A sleeping figure is surrounded by a starry smattering of swastikas; a skeletal jester juggles spools of film that transform into skulls; some stenciled '50s-era housewives loom dangerously in one corner. The painting deftly conflates Germany's Nazi-era atrocities with the cheery economic miracle that followed, indicting the country for its lack of retrospection that followed the war.

—Quinn Latimer

Rodney Graham

Lisson

London

In piling up allusions, Rodney Graham has few equals and surely no superiors. His images call on our associations, and the associations circle back until there are wagonloads of isolated notions. Nothing is too far-fetched and rarely is a hint left unembroidered. In this exhibition, "Painter, Poet, Lighthouse Keeper," the artist employed film, light boxes, painting, and architectural models to generate characteristic Rodney Graham moments, with one thing leading to another, the viewer struggling at times to catch up.

A large backlit photo of a man reading a book about lighthouses proves to be a tableau of a lighthouse keeper surrounded by the sparse equipment of a bygone lighthouse-keeping era. The same man is also dressed up for *Artist's Model Posing for "The Old Bugler, Among the Fallen, Battle of Beaune-la-Rolande, 1870" in the Studio of an Unknown Military Painter, Paris, 1885* (2009). This tableau is a pastiche of the work of Meissonier, whose attention to detail in military uniform made him Andrew Wyeth's favorite French painter. I digress, but this is what these works encourage one to do.

reviews: international

A green projector played a loop of film of a man smoking a pipe while foam bubbles up in a kitchen sink. In another loop, George Sanders repeatedly enters a room in the guise of a butler and offers a starlet a drink. The background decor in this scene, from the British schlock movie *Psychomania* (1971), was reconstituted in the gallery along with a scale model of the installation itself. Typical of Graham, this deployment of abstruse yet telling bits and pieces depended for effect on one's willingness to be put into the position of sleuth.

Why the silk-screen versions of Meissonier photogravures hung sideways? For



Rodney Graham, *Artist's Model Posing for "The Old Bugler, Among the Fallen, Battle of Beaune-la-Rolande, 1870" in the Studio of an Unknown Military Painter, Paris, 1885*, 2009, painted aluminum light box with transmounted chromogenic transparency, 71 1/2" x 97 1/2" x 7". Lisson.

one thing, it was a way of rendering Meissonier interesting again. As with everything else in the show, what may have initially appeared to be an idle fancy blossomed into a resounding hybrid.

—William Feaver

Erwin Olaf

Hamiltons

London

In the series of recent photographs shown here, Erwin Olaf places nearly naked subjects in meticulously arranged mock-ups of hotel rooms to create luxuriantly cinematic images. The shadowy lighting gives a retro feel to settings that puts the works somewhere between Edward Hopper and *Mad Men*.

More important, the models look gorgeous, wealthy, and vaguely unhappy, gazing into the middle distance with anguished, nervous, or blank expressions.

The Guardian

16 July 2010

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jul/16/artist-rodney-graham>

theguardian

Art

Artist of the week

Artist of the week 96: Rodney Graham

Frustrated desire is the keynote of Rodney Graham's diverse output, full of alter egos who seem destined to fail

Skye Sherwin

Friday 16 July 2010
10.28 BST



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Save for later



Shady dealing ... Rodney Graham's *Good Hand Bad Hand* (2010), courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.
Photograph: Ken Adlard

Trying to sum up Rodney Graham's shape-shifting art feels like a fool's errand - appropriately enough. In recent years, his work has been full of alter egos who seemed destined to fail. Take one of his best-known films, *Vexation Island*, created for the Canadian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1997. The artist stars as a shipwrecked pirate who wakes on a beach, shakes a palm tree and is knocked out by a falling coconut, only to come around a few minutes later and repeat the whole routine again.

Vexation Island is part of a trilogy of costume dramas, each projected as a loop. Other tragicomic creations include a guitar-strumming, wandering cowboy whose limited journey back and forth through the wilds contrasts with his song of free-living, and a town gent who continually boots a country bumpkin up the bum. Graham suggests that, whether it's because we're blind to our circumstances or condemned by fate, we're certain to repeat our mistakes.

Born in 1949, Graham is part of a network of Vancouver-based artists that includes his old college buddy and fellow Canadian art legend, Jeff Wall. In the 1980s his works included upside-down photographs of trees, exploring the rift between the world and how we see it. He began appearing in his own work in the 1990s, pursuing his fascination with circular time through looped film footage.

Limitations, false starts and frustrated desires are signature touches of Graham's hugely varied output. So is deadpan, slightly gonzo humour: in a 16mm film he entitled [Lobbing Potatoes at a Gong, 1969 \(2006\)](#) he recreates Pink Floyd's vegetable-throwing antics as a Fluxus-style performance. Other projects include a meticulously staged photographic and painting project, *My Late Early Styles* (2007), in which he poses knowingly as an ageing playboy whose latest project is abstract painting.

Why we like him: For his film *The Phonokinetoscope* from 2001, Graham took acid and rode a bicycle backwards. While the soundtrack that accompanies this feat suggests 1970s-style delirium, the everyday footage suggests a chasm between inner states and outer reality.

Art rock: Graham formed new-wave band called UJ3RK5 ("you jerk" - the five is not pronounced) in his twenties with Jeff Wall, while his current ensemble, the Rodney Graham Band, morph between country rock, folk and psychedelia.

Where can I see him? At London's [Lisson Gallery](#) until 31 July.
