

Simeon Barclay  
installation view

## The Feast Wagon

The Tetley Leeds 7 October to 10 January

'The Feast Wagon', featuring Simeon Barclay, Delaine Le Bas, Lubaina Himid and Susan Walsh, functions partly as a reaction to the British Art Show, situated nearby at Leeds Art Gallery (Reviews AM391). The British Art Show is contextualised as part of a history of culturally representative exhibitions and shows, from the Venice Biennale to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, bringing to light questions of representation and identity as presented by said shows. 'The Feast Wagon's existence also demonstrates one of the most important roles that exhibitions such as the British Art Show have to play: that of providing something to react to, a provocation vitally important to artists and galleries regardless of whether their reaction is positive or negative.

In this case, the Tetley's reaction can broadly be read as a critique of the British Art Show and indeed any exhibition that aims to provide a definitive representation of one area of culture, with Barclay and Le Bas directly addressing the complexity of individual identity when applied to large cultural groups. Of course, the British Art Show is not wholly representative of contemporary art in the UK, and the curators would probably not make any claim that it was, but the name nonetheless implies that this is the case and the scale makes it easy to get swept away by the occasion of it all.

Himid and Walsh produce a collaborative effort for the Tetley's atrium, *The Feast Wagons* (x39), a group of 'found and embellished' carts of various shapes and sizes, from models of Wild West-style wagons and a drawer on wheels to more practical objects. It has the appearance of a folk-art exhibit, and to an extent it is – with these being 'found' objects – while the 'embellished' elements leave the viewer guessing as to the extent of the artists' interventions and how representative these objects are as folk art. Viewers are invited to interact with a selected group of these wagons, making the wagon into a performative mode of transport, a point reinforced with the inclusion of archival materials relating to Buffalo Bill as well as Le Bas's references to gypsy culture in her work for the show. Walsh continues along similar themes with her series 'The Feast Wagon Collages', which depicts wagons hitched back-to-back in direct competition with one another in a literal push-pull conflict.

Lubaina Himid and  
Susan Walsh  
*Feast Wagons* 2015



Conflict is a recurring theme within the exhibition, as Barclay and Le Bas both address questions of internal conflict surrounding personal identity. Barclay presents an installation through a series of rooms, inventively playing with the difficult architecture of the Tetley, with its narrow rooms, low ceilings and wood-paneled walls which can be hard to accept for a viewer accustomed to white-cube galleries or the rougher industrial spaces often associated with artist-led activity. To counteract these restrictive spaces Barclay uses frame-like structures made from timber that function as permeable layers, allowing work to be hung on them and allowing the wall behind to be used for display.

Barclay greets viewers with the declaration 'Non Illegitimus Carborundum' ('don't let the bastards grind you down'), referring to the novel/film *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, an early example of British 'kitchen-sink' drama, and imagery of the protagonist played by Albert Finney also features in the installation. Alongside Finney, Bryan Ferry, Diego Maradona and Eric Cantona appear as iconic figures, all presenting a theatricality and flamboyance that contradicts more traditional notions of masculinity. Barclay proceeds further towards the overlap between the hypermasculine and the homoerotic when we see Vinnie Jones grabbing Paul Gascoigne's testicles as they clash on the football pitch. Sexual identity is further complicated with the introduction of feminine imagery: a neoclassical statue of Venus meets selfies, with selfies presented here as a sexualised female action. Barclay offers a scene of confusion, of struggling against rigid definitions with regard to self-identity, a desire for fluidity in the face of gender/sexual binaries.

Similarly dealing with issues around individual identity, Le Bas confronts the clash between her identity as both Roma and British. The two seem utterly irreconcilable, particularly as Le Bas uses text excerpts to detail the centuries-old discrimination against gypsies, and yet, as the title of one piece demonstrates, *Part Of This Society If You Like It Or Not – Made In England*, the two identities coexist, in spite of everything that pits one against the other.

Le Bas also presents us with another set of diametrically opposed statures: that of the romantic and the real. The question 'Truth or Myth?' emblazoned on a Union Jack confronts the viewer, immediately bringing to mind the romanticised figure of the gypsy as opposed to the real life of Romany people. The figure of the fortune-teller becomes something that can be co-opted by pop culture; fashion publications such as *Vogue* can appropriate the gypsy dress, while textbooks offering comprehensive histories can ignore gypsies altogether, the romantic image only highlighted when useful.

As with Barclay, Le Bas deliberately plays with the architecture of the Tetley, although where Barclay operates almost in direct conflict with the building, Le Bas immerses her work within it, in one case literally as she uses the fitted cabinets of one room to create a new

site-specific piece: *Cabinet of Curiosities: A British Romani Gypsy?* With her use of this dark, wood-paneled room and its heavy, traditional furniture, Le Bas seems to lend an air of authority to her work while also presenting the conflict between her own identity and this image of old-fashioned Britishness.

Particularly with Barclay and Le Bas, the Tetley is an appropriate venue for exploring conflicting ideas because here any art that wouldn't typically adorn the walls of a 19th-century industrialist seems out of place. The display of Walsh's collages simply reads as wrong to anyone accustomed to visiting more typical art galleries and the work is more successful when it takes this idiosyncratic environment into consideration. In the face of the British Art Show, such notions of internal conflict are particularly important, especially now. ■

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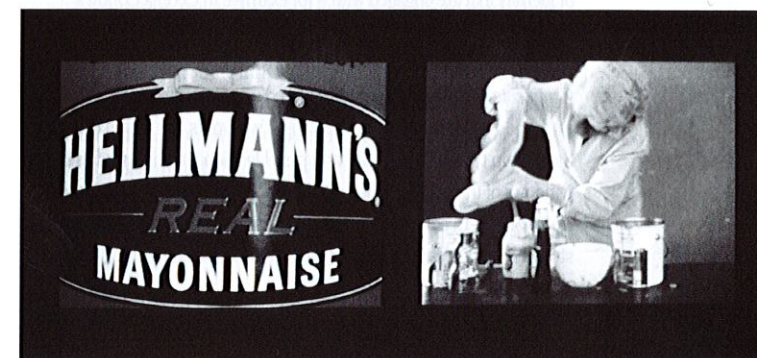
## duh? Art & Stupidity

Focal Point Gallery Southend-on-Sea

10 November to 26 March

Well, I feel stupid. Having arrived at Focal Point Gallery on a free train direct from Fenchurch Street for an exhibition private view I found myself almost immediately in a long queue to get inside the gallery. At this point I was mildly frustrated at having to wait, but only because I assumed that the gallery must be checking off some sort of guest list for the event, which I did not see as particularly necessary or welcoming. However, as I got nearer to the entrance I realised that the delay was in fact due to a small gaggle of women, all roughly middle-aged, who were blocking the doorway with a poorly situated conversation. This, it seemed, was caused by nothing less than their total obliviousness to anyone outside their group. As it came my turn to squeeze past, I tried to catch one of their eyes, but they showed no recognition of the awkward situation they were creating. People were just about managing to edge themselves into the space one at a time, either by pressing themselves up against the far side of the door, as I did, or awkwardly wriggling through the middle of the women. This provoked a little flash of anger, or at least social disapproval – how could they be so inconsiderate? How could they be so stu... Oh, of course: 'Duh!'

Curated by Paul Clinton and Anna Gritz, 'duh? Art & Stupidity' is an exhibition that looks at stupidity as both a subject in art and a tactic of art making. The first work I encountered, organised especially for the private view, was Annika Ström's *Seven women in the way*, Saturday 7 November 2015, which has been realised several times since it was first performed in the doorway of an art space in Berlin in 2011. Here it functioned as a truly effective introduction to an exhibition that attempts to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of stupidity. The performance, as specified in Ström's instructions, which are made available as a postcard, is very subtle: the women were not aggressive, nor could they be mistaken for having some official capacity, they were simply in the way. As an experience it swiftly moved me from superiority to inferiority and underlined the centrality of judgement within stupidity. While other works in the show also attempted to wrong foot me, to provoke or trick me, it was this disruption to my evening that best enacted what the curators described as 'the intrinsic irony of stupidity'. This irony is exemplified for them in the exhibition's onomatopoeic title, 'duh?', which is the sound made by those who fail to understand as well as



Annika Ström  
*Seven women standing  
in the way* 2015  
performance

Sturtevant  
*The Dark Threat of  
Absence* 2002 video

the dismissive, but similarly unintelligent, response of those who see themselves as too smart to explain.

Inside, stupidity has over taken Focal Point completely. In each of the exhibition spaces there are layers of the stuff plastered and projected onto the walls and cluttering up the floor. With over 30 works included, the exhibition's timespan (the 1960s to the present) crosses from the blank, feigned stupidity of Andy Warhol in interview mode in 1966 to the ferocious onslaught of Clunie Reid's *In the Pursuit of the Liquid*, 2013, here shown on two 50" monitors, superimposing flashing layers of animated porn stars, rearing unicorns and smiley-face GIFs. It is clear from the number of works amassed, and the slightly neurotic nature of the press release, that the curators have been thinking about stupidity for a long time. Clinton has conducted extensive research into this area, which gives a theoretical backbone to the exhibition, specifying the curators' interest in artists who take stupidity as subject and/or tactic of artistic production in connection with the politics and performance of identity. A number of the moving-image works on show were previously grouped together as part of *Stupidious*, an event at South London Gallery in 2014, where Gritz is curator of film and performance, and which was organised in collaboration with Clinton. These videos reappear here dispersed amongst other moving-image works, sculptures, sound works, works on paper and a full-length feature film.

Part of the neurosis of the curators' strategy for engaging with stupidity is their attempt to cover all bases, even messing with museological displays, such as in a wall text by Kim Schoen (*Gallery Text*, 2015), which rambles elliptically only adding to what is surely an already widely accepted and now somewhat clichéd critique of the emptiness of art speak (see BANK's 'Fax Back' series, 1998-99, also presented here). The staging of the works is more effective in some