**‘Laughing but not Cavalier’: Notes on Hans-Peter Feldmann at East Gallery NUA**

Hans-Peter Feldmann is the master of the comic deadpan. His blankly titled ‘Art Exhibition’ at NUA conjures images of the disarmingly amateur, untitled charmlessness of local art group shows at one’s community centre. The title of the show, brokered between the artist, gallery and curator is also absolutely true to form. Previous exhibitions have typically been launched with names such as ‘Hans-Peter Feldmann at…’ whilst signature publications have been stirringly anointed as ‘Catalogue’, ‘Another Book’ and ‘Pictures’.

This weird and wonderful exhibition at NUA presents us, amongst other things, with a typological pound of strawberries, a chromatically aberrative ‘David’ and a flotilla of underwhelming seascapes that appear as archetypal gallery flotsam, adrift in their very own ocean of mediocrity. His work snares us into viewing the vagaries of make-up, lipstick and the trappings of modernity as being just as ridiculous as the moribund portrayals of the subjects in the appropriated canvases. To deliberately misappropriate and misrepresent McLuhan[[1]](#endnote-1), the medium really is the message in this show; sculpture paintings and photographs all serve as valorized proxies, deployed as graceless vehicles delivering a vision that is as oblique as it is decoratively indecorous.

Hans-Peter’s work characteristically debunks art and culture by slicing through the accumulated lint of (art) history, semiotics and the paraphernalia that surrounds, and to some extent represents, key societal institutions, monuments and beloved museological icons. For me, his collections of anonymous and anonymized seascapes, scissors, hats, railway engines, photographs of the backs of people’s heads, shooting galleries *et al*. are telling typologies rather than collections of the similar. These typologies draw a bead on the same hyper-real (and somewhat fatalistic) processions of simulations and simulacra as Baudrillard[[2]](#endnote-2), Eco and the like, asking fundamental questions about individuality and the possibility of uniqueness on the face of an ever-deflating global village.

Perhaps ‘vainglorious’ is too harsh a term, but Feldmann skewers not only the subjects, but art itself with bident accuracy as he highlights the accomplished irrelevance of painting. His reactivation and appropriation of these images of ships, dogs and children summon a strange and simultaneous power through the re-working, a rare power that invokes both nostalgia and iconoclasm. Hans-Peter’s supercharged ‘David’ is patently not even in the same ‘Dulux™’-rich forest as the superbly bodged ‘restoration’ of Martinez’ 'Ecco Homo'[[3]](#endnote-3) in a church near Zaragoza, the terminal effect of H-PF’s work can be hilariously similar an effect not to be underestimated. After all, the restoration-by-obliteration of the (over-rated), original Martinez masterpiece has become a global icon and virtual antichrist-rival to *La Giaconda*.

I cannot recount how many times during the negotiations around this show I was asked, as the curator, if Hans-Peter would be attending the Private View. In fact Hans-Peter no longer, or at least very seldom, attends *any* private views, especially his own. Perhaps to give a context for this, many years ago, Hans-Peter, on a trip to Egypt, was so enchanted with the myriad postcard and other super-chromatic touristic representations of the Great Pyramids that he altogether declined to visit them for fear of disappointment.

Feldmann’s work, like all the best dark humour, is undoubtedly possessed of a deep, underlying melancholy that leaves one feeling cheered for only a short while, but still laughing.

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March 2017

1. MCLUHAN, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg galaxy: the making of typographic man*. [Toronto], University of Toronto Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. BAUDRILLARD, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Sanctuary of Mercy Church near Zaragoza [↑](#endnote-ref-3)