

Common Culture

Common Culture are David Campbell and Mark Durden. The artists' group was founded in 1996 and they have exhibited nationally and internationally since then. Common Culture achieved international recognition for their exhibitions with spectacular displays of fast food light box menus at the Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester, EAST International, Norwich, most recently as part of Tate Liverpool's popular exhibition Shopping – A Century of Art and Consumer Culture. They have also had solo shows in New York, London, Athens, Porto, Lisbon and Belfast.

In previous work *Common Culture* have explored the processes by which issues of taste, class and notions of 'Britishness' are negotiated through the transaction of commodities within popular culture. Our new work produced under the collective title of 'Pop Trauma', extends this research, developing the previous focus on object based commodity forms into an examination of how the culture industry routinely commodifies human labour and experience as entertainment.

The project includes the following individual artworks:

Tribute Singer.

Local Comic.

Bouncers.

Mobile Disco.

Adorno's Disco.

Tribute Singer (Video monitor /or DVD projection).

Disrupting the silence of Southend-on-Sea library, Danny Owen, a local tribute singer, performs his Tom Jones set. Here a carnivalesque performance is set against an unresponsive audience of readers. In "Local Comic" and "Mobile Disco" the absence of an audience highlighted self-consciousness and artifice, cruelly isolating the entertainers' lonely acts, Tribute Singer presents a scene of social aberration, colliding the mannered excess of the singer's energetic performance against a silent and indifferent audience, resolutely absorbed in their studies.

Local Comics (Video monitor /or DVD projection. Twelve comics simultaneously presented).

In *Local Comic*, twelve comedians are each separately filmed performing their individual act in an empty comedy club. Accompanied only by the microphone, lights and the video camera that record their performance – the comics deliver their carefully crafted routine.

For Common Culture, the 'stand-up' 'routine' represents a familiar device by which reflection and analysis of the world of human relationships is delivered as a form of popular entertainment. It is recognised as an articulation of a specific view of social experience; informed by a sense of who they are and how they relate to a world they share with their audience. It is the specificity of their observation, their articulation of the 'local' view on the 'big' issues of relationships, sexuality, race, class and politics, which marks their stories as funny and potentially insightful. Their observations reference a world in which tradition is framed by a world in constant flux, where often-remote transnational social forces determine individual experience. In one sense the comic's act is a litmus test of how this change is experienced and articulated by local communities. Often it provides a self-conscious show of resistance to the homogenizing tendencies of global market forces, creating comfort in the inflation of local and national distinctiveness.

The work is an ironic take on the loftiness allotted to artwork using psychoanalysis. Here is its real counterpart, urban, painful, raw, but authentic in many ways, no matter how often the routine is rehearsed.

The comic confronts an unseen audience, trying to grab a laugh, trawling through the complexities of everyday life, finding temporary solace and accommodation in the 'joke'. Unconnected to any audience response, the comic delivers his/her 'act' to the solitary camera. As their carefully timed routine spills into the void of the club, we witness the disintegration of the performance as they struggle to balance the rehearsed control of the professional with the panic of someone who knows all too well the mechanical nature of their "entertainment".

'Bouncers' - (Performance / DVD projection / Framed CType prints, 120cm by 120cm)

In 'Bouncers', Common Culture continue their interest in popular culture and the demarcation of social space. Through the deployment of nightclub 'Bouncers' (security guards), we stage a spectacular and powerful choreographic installation that addresses the tensions involved in the management of cultural power and the control of disruptive forces.

Fifteen bouncers were hired, choreographed and filmed in a grid formation that occupied the centre of a gallery space for three hours. The grid-like formation of the bouncers' deployment and their uniform appearance, knowingly plays with the formal rhetoric of minimalism. The bouncers, dressed in their 'work' clothes, uniform black jackets, remain in disciplined position for the duration of the performance, directly engaging the gaze of the viewing audience. In a reversal of the dynamics of looking normally operating between the bouncers and the public, and the artwork and gallery visitor, the performance seeks to collide different cultural forms of looking against each other so as to explore the dynamics of

cultural control and social exclusion.

Mobile Disco (*DVD Projection*)

In '*Mobile Disco*' a solitary DJ is locked in an empty gallery for four hours, heroically enduring his own performance. He is filmed stationed behind his deck, performing his set, choreographing disco lights and dry ice, wooing the non-existent 'audience' with his between-song chat and his calls for requests. This is the glamour of the 'super-star' DJ turned on its head, the mechanics of commodified entertainment laid bare. Exploiting the prevailing appetite for voyeuristic 'reality' television shows, '*Mobile Disco*' explores the artists' own squeamish fascination with popular forms of entertainment which test the bounds of human endurance and exploitation. As they are interested in the specificity of this experience, they film a local DJ playing his or her set in the empty gallery space. This is filmed preceding the opening of the show and projected in the same gallery space during the exhibition.

'Adorno's Disco'— *DVD Projection*

In '*Adorno's Disco*' Common Culture promote Theodore Adorno as the superstar DJ. Set within an empty nightclub, a DJ is hired to orchestrate the spectacular light show in synch with the atonal music of Arnold Schoenberg's 'Phantasy for Violin and Piano Accompaniment, Op. 47'. If Adorno turned to the Modernist form of Schoenberg's music as an autonomous aesthetic site, resistant to and separate from the light entertainment of the culture industry, Common Culture returns the modernist form to the dance-floor. Only Schoenberg's "anti-trance" anthem is no floor-filler.

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