

Perseverance

Sonia Bruce, Lee Campbell, Alexander Costello. Curated by **Lee Campbell**

Despite what the media suggests, there is art in London that has nothing to do with Saatchi, the YBAs (who in their turn were replaced by the New Neurotic Realists – all invented by Saatchi), Emin, Hirst, the Chapman brothers, the Tate Modern's Turner Prize, etc. This environment, which critic Julian Stallabrass has aptly named 'high art lite', has forced a generation of younger artists into less glib, less media-friendly modes of practice, subverting the already pretentiously subverted and kick the Sharons up the arse before they use up all the oxygen in the room. The title seems to sum the kulturkampf up: Perseverance.

Consisting of installations by young London artists Lee Campbell, Alexander "I am London" Costello and Sonia Bruce, and curated by Campbell, the show explores the banalities of the everyday as a pivot to transform space.

Campbell used supermarket sticker labels (supplied courtesy of local supermarkets) to cover walls, floor and second-hand thrift shop junk in a mosaic that visualised and made real the environmental and psychological effects of mass free-market capitalist consumerism, but also referenced other artistic traditions such as the landscape (always a popular British theme) and the legacy of Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades. It was a Chartres of bargains and sales. Obscured in this way, the objects beneath the stickers became un-identifiable commodities stripped of their uniqueness and resurfaced in the same way critic Clement Greenberg naughtily repainted a number of David Smith sculptures uniform brown, on the grounds that Smith wasn't a noted colourist.

Sonia Bruce is an abstract installation and digital print artist working with themes of identity and aspiration, social pressures and boundaries. Hers is a minimalist aesthetic crossed with assemblage, applied in gallery, outdoor, site-specific and on-line situations. Bruce's beautiful installation *Balance/Instance* reflected her own obsessive intensity and fascination with the individual's control of their own space and immediate

environment. At first it appeared to be a post-minimalist installation of hundreds of suspended tubes not unlike the kind of Op art Calderesque mobiles that appeared in Britain in the 1960s. On closer inspection the rods prove to be tightly rolled tubes of drawer lining paper printed with a kitschy rose print. It was very sweet and dramatic at the same time.

Alex Costello is interested in what he calls "slippage" – 'the misappropriation and inconsistencies in language and actions'. His work ranges over many materials and sources. His installation covered the walls with imagery derived from Sicilian comic books and, combining it with his own graffiti exclamations, explored linguistic ambiguity and the often bluntly tautological, if not downright idiotic, brusque contingencies of everyday interactions. The result was a volatile buzz reminiscent of the wall works of Paul McCarthy. It looked like political art, and in a sense it was, but more about the politics of language and communication of the minor everyday narrative than about any overreaching social agenda. In other ways it almost seemed a parody of the culture of the street and the urban youth-cultural fixation on the need to keep it authentic – as if anything was truly authentic anymore. Walter Benjamin's "aura" is well and truly extinguished.

While *Perseverance* was about art's ability to push the boundaries of wit and irony within the context of our consumer culture, it also recognised the need to retain a sense of personal involvement and immediacy in a world growing increasingly depersonalised and fragmented.

Andrew Paul Wood

Perseverance. *All Present*, Sonia Bruce. Photo: Rachel Brunton

