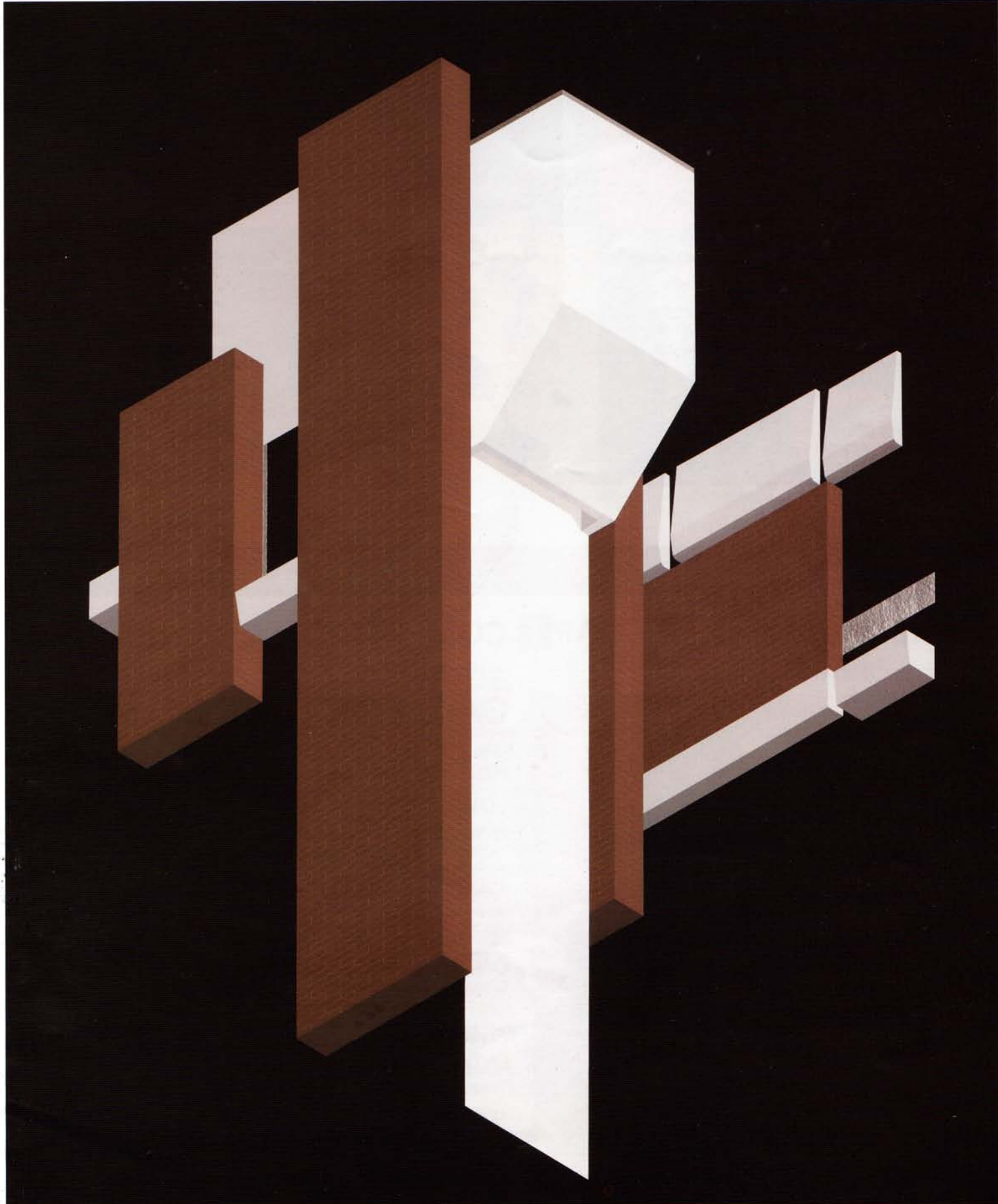


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Mark Pearson: BAR VUG GUM

Moot, Nottingham

13 November – 13 December

Macho, Male, Chauvinist, Brutalist

Aside from being a clever way to enliven the standard press release, these prodding, funny, provoking terms are meant to lead us astray – assigning these negative sounding words to the artist's practice is intended to wake up an audience regularly blinded by masses of tedious press. More importantly, it enables the bar-cum-installation 'BAR VUG GUM' to engage directly with its most simple observation head on: it is very male.

Essentially functioning as a bizarre disclaimer, the press release proclaims a perceived machoness of Pearson's work upfront. This permits the work to be more masculine, allowing the artist a larger creative scope, whilst avoiding the work being read as accidentally macho.

It is also a statement that accepts the limits of such an enquiry; we can't look masculinity in the eye anymore, not directly and not without a wry smile. We look through the eyes of Richard Prince, mockingly, self deprecatingly, and aware.

'BAR VUG GUM's smiling, gleaming, wonky aesthetic is the nearest we can get to masculinity; the direct route through Feminism is too difficult to navigate, and so we end up in an ironic cul-de-sac where masculinity is signified by excessive drinking, kebabs, and rock and roll. These things are re-formed from a residue of strength and aggressiveness play-acted out in previous eras by the likes of Jackson Pollock or Sid Vicious, of which contemporary versions fall into self-parody.

Actual aggression is ugly. Arty aggression is steeped in irony, and at the very most is slightly boisterous naughtiness. This aggression is perhaps another way of trying to convey 'newness': we are far enough away from a particular way of thinking that old conventions can be embraced without heavy repercussions. (See the tag-line for Nestlé's *Yorkie* chocolate bar: "It's not for girls".) These things can therefore be used to mark out an artwork's difference from history and its contemporary counterparts; this sculpture is different from those sculptures and the sculptures before them.

Not that Pearson's work really wants to sensibly describe masculinity with any certainty, or at all. The words 'macho', 'male', 'chauvinist' and 'brutalist'

form a contextual shell, which can describe a collection of highly aesthetical things that sit neatly and pleasingly within a particular idea of art. At two points in the installation the work seems deadily familiar; a home made DIY aesthetic with gloopy, messy paint on it, and a bar within a gallery.

Picnics, bars, boat trips, tea parties, meetings and the like are pretty standard fare within galleries to the point in which the term 'relational' can be used euphemistically, to describe hackneyed artistic customs.

Once we come out of the gallery, and put these work into the larger context of the last ten years, the big boldness displayed within the gallery is deflated.

Even so, in the main the works are not phlegmatic, but buzzy and entertaining; kitsch Bavarian steins hang uncomfortably on hooks that are too small, a kind of ideal sculpture for Pearson: oversized, eccentric, and playfully referential; literally and metaphorically unstable.

Pearson's rock-amp-guitar-karaoke-booth-thing-with-horns *Knack Kraft*, 2008, has a similarity to S Mark Gubb's *I'm Alive*, 2005, (which featured in 'Gordon Dalton vs S Mark Gubb' in 2006, at the Moot's old gallery space on Dakeyne Street). Gubb's work is composed of a Ramones album played through an old Marshall amp stack, edited so that the only thing left playing is the "one, two, three, four!" at the start of each track. The work is both surprising and romantic.

Pearson's *Knack Kraft*, uses the same surprising shouty-silent technique to invigorate the gallery space. A dark pleasure is derived from seeing visitors in the gallery finching when, without warning, Pearson's sculpture blasts out a barrage of rough guitar sounds. This joy is of course the outcome of having been subjected to this unforgiving prank oneself, providing the initiated with a smug, satisfying knowledge of what's in store for fellow visitors.

Snake Eyes, Super Balls, 2009, is a two metre by two and a half metre monster of a poster that carves out a strong idiosyncratic niche within the world of art posters. Each word occupies a different edge, in the font of Bob Holness' Blockbusters logo. We are well into Pearson territory here; this is the part of the exhibition where the work seems most at ease, most original, and most exciting. Pearson's *Snake Eyes, Super Balls* references and looks out, whereas his sculptures, in this exhibition at least, look inwards to a dwindling number of conventional sculptural options.

Bruce Asbestos is the curator of Trade Gallery www.tradegallery.org

1 Installation view from BAR VUG GUM, Mark Pearson, Moot, Nottingham.
Courtesy: the artist and Moot

