

I was walking through the graveyard this morning and saw Joe ducked behind a gravestone.

"Morning," I said.

"No", the artist replied, "just taking a shit."

Upon entering Under the Thumb, one is immediately presented with two possible lines of enquiry to follow whilst navigating the work in the show.

The first is that Orr views making art, like crafting a joke, as a playful act of subversion. The second is that Orr views contemporary art as a joke. In "Jokes sold here" (a re-appropriation of a sign happened upon by the artist at a joke stall in the Birkenhead market) Orr reduces the gallery go-er's elated expectations for his first solo show to nothing.

Are we, then, to view the work as a series of jokes? Frivolous commodities mocking the self-importance of the contemporary art world? Or are we to approach the work as a series of witty musings on the overlapping languages of comedy and art?

From coaxing the International 3 directors into wearing giant foam hands which bare the message "Go Joe" to spray tanning his silhouette onto the gallery wall, it is easy to read the work of the show as an art-world in-joke, a jibe at the seriousness of the private-view going contemporary art world. Yet in order to equate these works with 'frivolous commodities' one must have made an assumption that jokes are meaningless.

Certainly, the foundation of a good joke is in the joke-teller's replacement of an expected, logical outcome with an unexpected, illogical one - thereby opening a void in meaning. (Anyone acquainted with Orr's work will already be familiar with his use of negation, whether that be negating the audience's interaction with the work (The Bouncer, Open, Islington Mill, 2012) or seemingly negating his role as a curator by choosing to throw a party instead (I Dunno Shit, Rogue Project Space, 2014))

However, despite a joke's reliance on meaninglessness, that doesn't mean that humour is without intellectual merit. In *The Act of Creation* (1964), Arthur Koestler describes a shared plane of thought between the arts, comedy and science. He proposes a universal creative language whereby two seemingly incompatible modes of thought collide to produce comedic, artistic or scientific discovery.

In the fields of Art and Comedy, this 'plane of thought' is perhaps better described as a detachment from the real. In order to laugh at a joke, one must be removed from the situation. In order to understand an object as an art work and not as an object one must inhabit a space removed from everyday singular-plane thought. In what is arguably the most traditional sculpture in the show (Size 11 Shit) Orr interrogates this shared space to baffling results.

In presenting us with a concrete shit, it would appear that the artist is walking the same shit-laden path as that walked by Sam Goodman and Piero Manzoni 50 years earlier. However, unlike the shit of Goodman and Manzoni, Orr's does not function as a kind of dirty protest against the art world intelligentsia. Rather, Orr's shit serves as a wry interrogation of the line between comedy (the prank turd) and art (the representational turd).

Bearing the imprint of his trainer tread, it is as though Orr is comparing the cognitive moment of the creative process whereby the artist reveals art, the viewer encounters meaning and the academic discovers logic, to the sudden realisation that one has just trodden in shit.

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