

Julian
Maynard Smith
*A Split Second
of Paradise*



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I have seen the photographs of Julian Maynard Smith on a number of occasions over the years and each time I feel elated and then perplexed. Why has he kept these works away from the eager eyes and critical minds of the art world? Why does he prefer to play out his artistic reveries on the margins of mainstream culture? In recent years you would have had to travel to Brazil, China or Singapore if you wanted to catch a glimpse of his extraordinary work. With this recent collection of images before me, I can now feel elated without the accompanying perplexity, because Smith has finally agreed to present his photographs in a gallery context.

Julian Maynard Smith has been an accomplished and influential performance artist since the 1980s. In the early days his innovative and idiosyncratic performances, born out of post-structuralist concerns, celebrated the freedom that a deceptively frivolous aesthetic gave them. He was searching to re-examine our unquestioned cultural narratives and keen to create a series of rapturous events that could gently shake the senses. With these photographs we are now presented with scenes of great intensity and they confirm him as a radical maker of images. He conjures these images from the movie set in his mind and by externalising his internal magic he produces

scenes that both humanise and expand upon the narratives that we commonly populate our world with.

Tintoretto, Monteverdi and Sergei Eisenstein were Smith's big influences and with these artists to accompany him, he methodically explored the interstitial territory between the elements of space, event and activity. Smith loves to inhabit this kind of setting where, to quote Bernard Tschumi, he feels 'like a football player skating across a battlefield'. This is the kind of place he calls his studio.

These photographs are strikingly different one to another, but individually they also combine unlikely moments of coincidence. I feel bound to continually rehearse my connection to them switching my frame of reference repeatedly in an attempt to discover what evidence they might hold. They seem to be waiting to be discovered. Smith's ability to invent combinations of objects, actions and events has nothing to do with a standard notion of collage. There are no physical collage techniques here, no digital editing takes place, for Smith constructs these individual scenes and photographs them in the moment of their performance entirely as you see them now. This process gives the scenes a reality that is not achieved by other practitioners who design

scenes rather than discover them in mid action. For me they are more extraordinary and more real than many of the photographic works currently exhibited in the gallery context.

Smith's two-dimensional images have a less frenetic and more abstract quality than his three-dimensional performances, but there is something surprisingly edgy about them. It is the slightly ominous quality underlying the frozen intimacy of the characters that gives them a sense of the unknown waiting to be discovered. They are a million miles away from the commonplace narratives generally offered to us by theatre and as you walk the exhibition you move from a scene of Hopperesque moodiness to a Goddard like film set and then find yourself in a Fellini type landscape and always the objects have been reconfigured and often the world has turned upside down. These images explode like familiar yet unnatural collages of ordinary events that have the power to interrogate and obscure what we know about our world around us.

The play of chance occurrences is an important generator for this work, for it is from the tiny flicker of connection, observed with a quickness of eye that Smith drives ordinary events into a place where marvellous accidents occur. He puts it like this, "In

every inconsequential act opportunities go begging. It is as if the bullets cannot travel far or fast enough to prevent them from being plucked from the air by hungry birds." Smith is this hungry bird and with decisive speed he captures his images. Then he invites us to engage with his excited playfulness and when we view the scene he has prepared for us we discover that he has taken us to a place provokes a deep sense of meaning.

With a history such as his, you could not imagine Smith forfeiting his spirit of experimentation for anything else and he is now speaking about assembling many more contributors to help in the production of pieces that are technologically designed to incorporate the viewer as an active participant in the work. From a performer who travels the globe making trans continental, simultaneous web linked spectacles, we can expect to see many more delightful records of collision and coincidence. For the moment he is inviting us to view the breadth and beauty of his recent history in a gallery context and its exuberant reception will no doubt be the proof of his extraordinary contribution to the visual arts.

Max Pirelli



A Split Second of Paradise

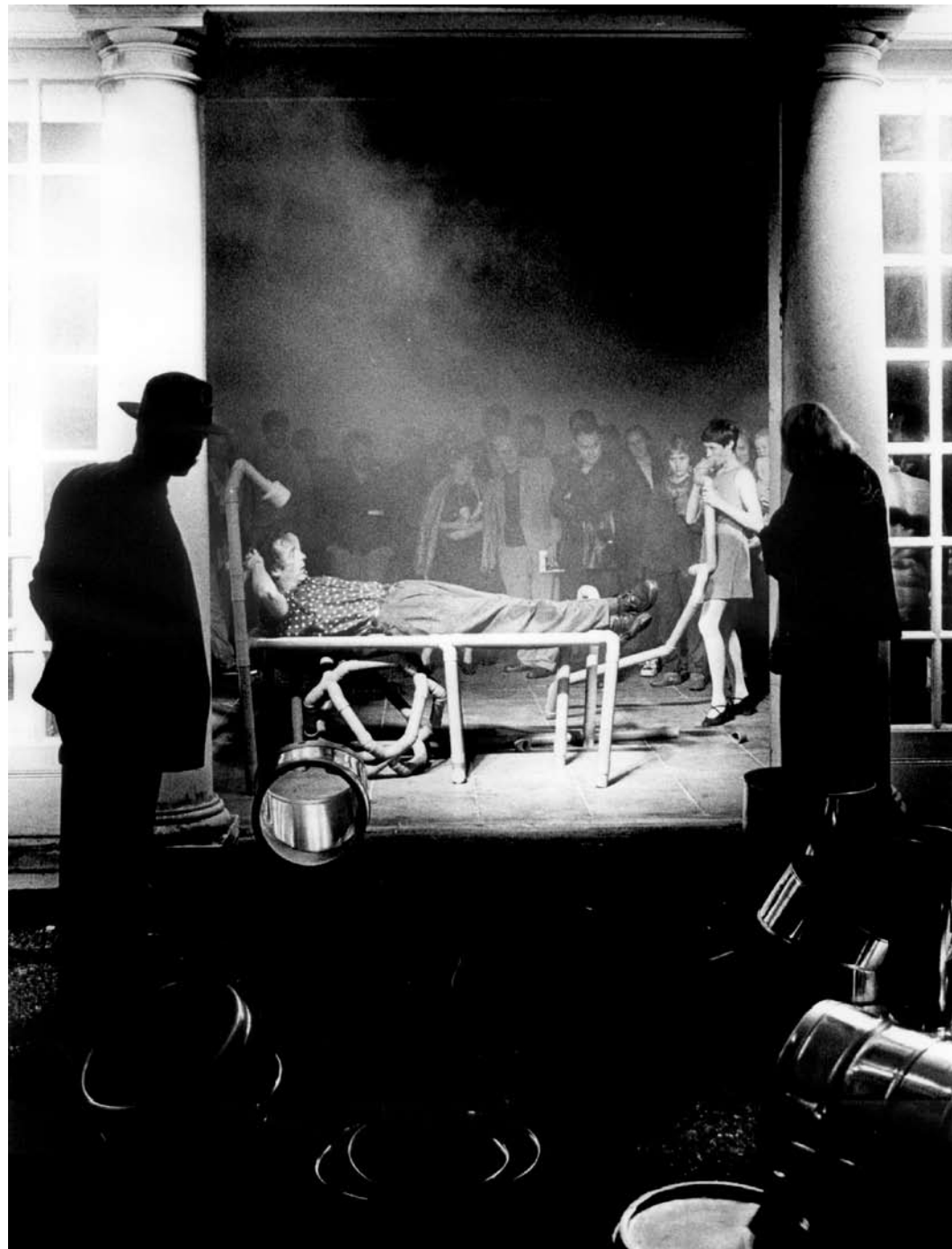
A Split Second Of Paradise 1985 2250mm x 2250mm



Mare's Nest #1 2003 1900mm x 1380mm



Mare's Nest #2 2003 1900mm x 1380mm



< *The Oracle #1* 1993 2400mm x 2000mm

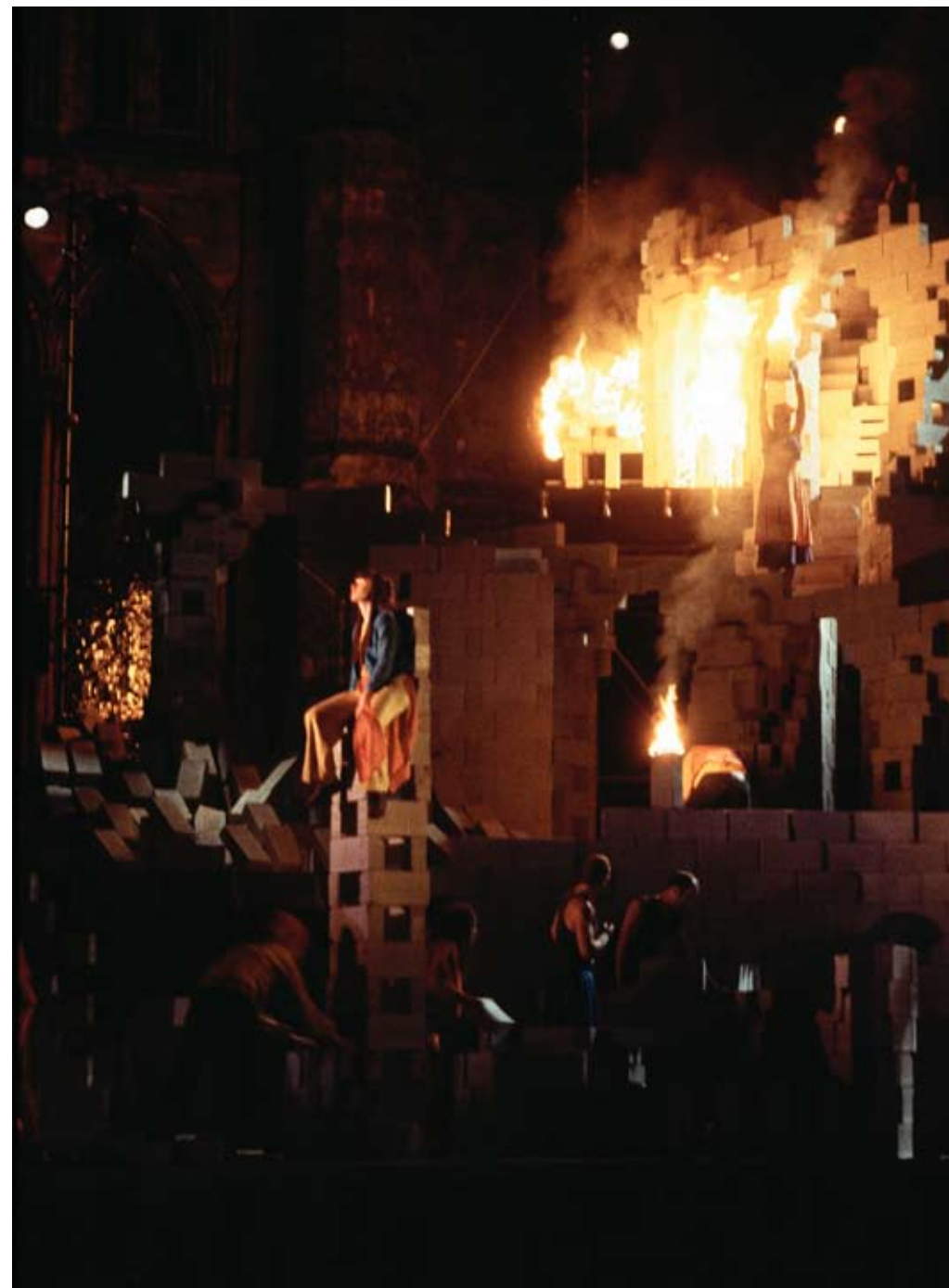
The Oracle #2 1993 1500mm x 2300mm



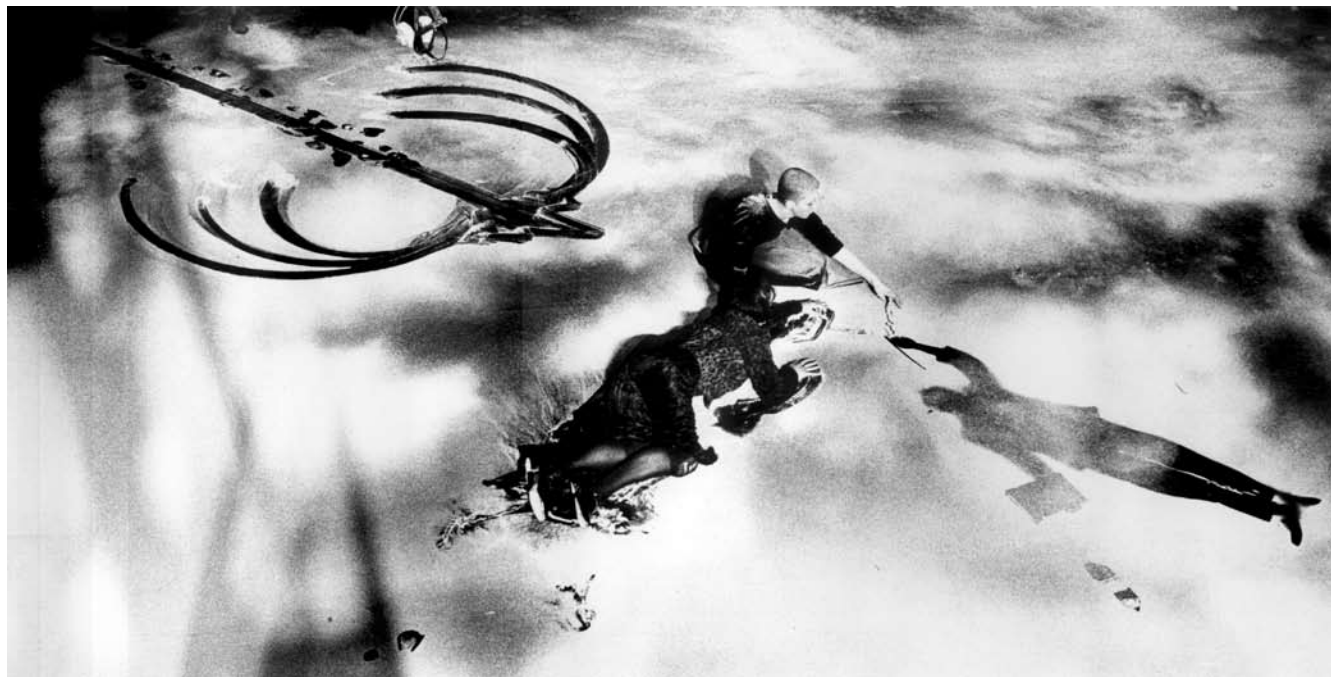
The History Of Light 1995 1470mm x 2100mm



The Bastille Dances 1989
2440mm x 1870mm



The Salibury Proverbs 1997
1650mm x 1250mm



Black Works #1 1991 2800mm x 1400mm



Black Works #2 1991 2200mm x 1300mm

Flying was central to the whole enterprise, whose aim was to occupy space as fully as the angels and cherubs do the canvases of Tintoretto.

Why should theatre and performance art be rooted to the floor?

Why be satisfied by the split second of airborne grace achieved in ballet or ice-skating?

Not only does flying liberate space, but allows the idea of the impossible to enter performance and come to echo the mind's uneasy partnership with the body. The ambition with the mechanics.

Natural Disasters 1982 2150mm x 1450mm



Six ambitions to make the relationship between mind and matter into a subject and demolish the connections between action and mood and action and usefulness.

1. Avoid, mechanistically, the psychology of intention and motivation.
2. Focus on the way ordinary actions are carried out.
3. Devise instructions that are applicable to many situations.
4. Have more psychology without being psychological.
5. Have more behaviour without being behaviourist.
6. Have more danger in every sense, conceptual and physical.

Limelight #1 1995 2100mm x 2100mm



Thirteen instructinal exercises that remove function and its social/narrative thrust from everyday actions. While these have psychological titles they are nothing more than a set of abstract rules polluted by recognisability. Walking, pouring a drink, kissing, talking, tying a shoelace, turning on a light, attacking someone with a knife, all normal actions with understandable beginnings and ends and internally ordered, all therefore bearers of psychological burdens. Suddenly all are freed to become nothing more than markers of a performer's psychotic relation to himself.



Piranesi in Tokyo 1990 2380mm x 1680mm

1. Suppressed: an action that does not achieve its purpose, but is turned halfway through into another action, disguising the first.

2. Truncated: an action stopped halfway through and left without being disguised.

3. Distracted: an alteration of two different truncated actions.

4. Chronis: a series of identical truncated actions.

5. Compulsive: repetition of the action after the purpose has been achieved. The action for its own sake.

6. Insistent: an action pursued without the purpose being achieved. Ill-defined but purposeful, unsuitable for its purpose.

7. Exaggerated: an action done more extravagantly than is necessary for its purpose.
8. Vague: use of the appropriate objects and motions for a purpose, but without a purpose being decided upon. Therefore in the wrong order.

9. Obscure: the use of inappropriate objects or motions for a purpose quite deliberately.

10. Jealous: the taking over of another's perceived purpose.

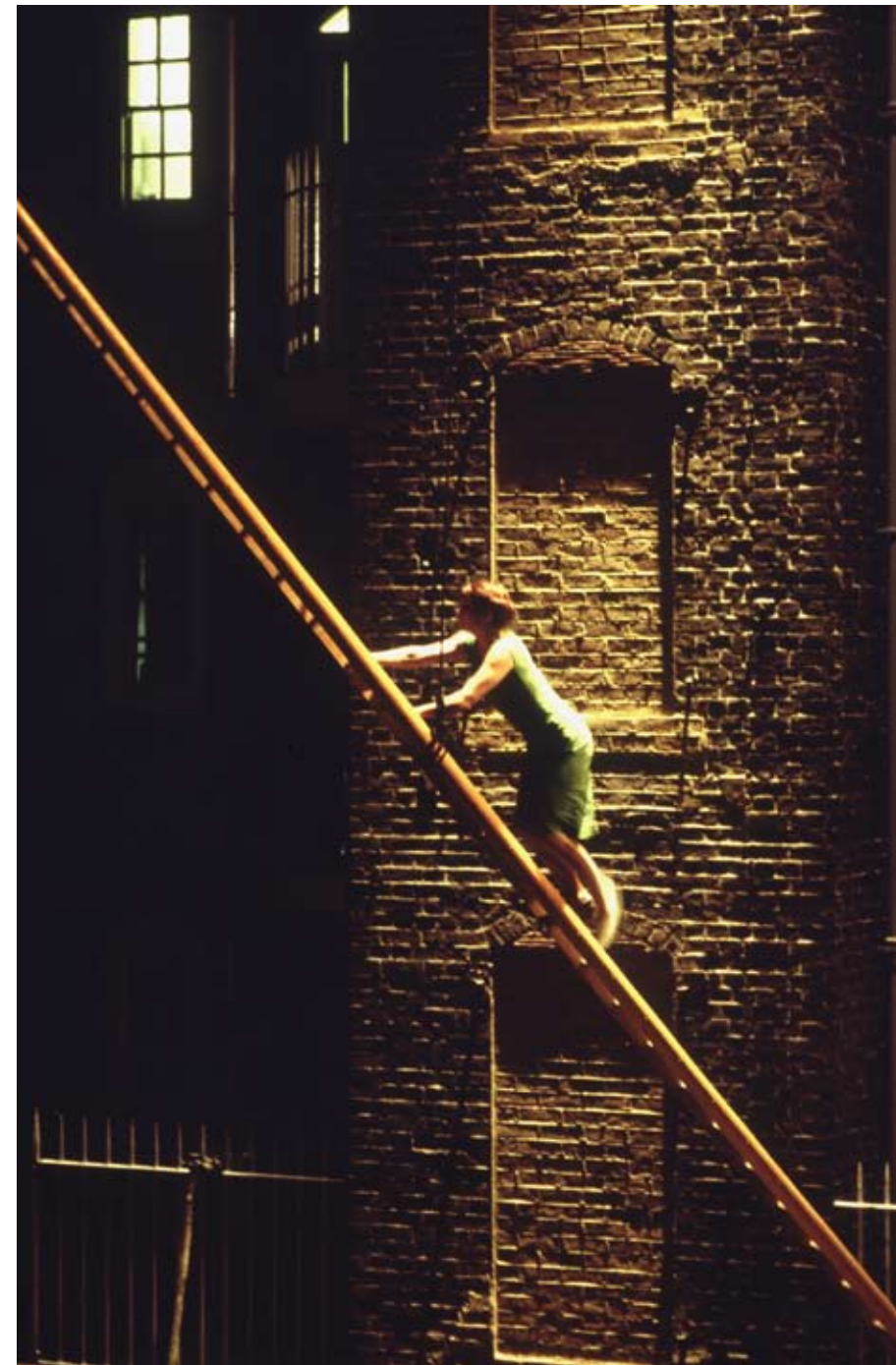
11. Efficient: an action that achieves a purpose as quickly and/or economically as possible.

12. Ambiguous: an action that achieves, or appears to achieve, more than one purpose.

13. Classical: an action that fits the purpose to perfection, taking long enough.



The Party 1988 2200mm x 1530mm



Snakes and Ladders 1998
2200mm x 1520mm

Drunken Madness 1983 1540mm x 2410mm





If a volcano erupts in a big city, potential victims may barricade themselves against the lava with office furniture. In this enforced isolation one of extraordinary abilities may become enamoured of another and remove his clothes. He is rejected, and when a jealous third rushes at him he may fly to freedom over the barricade. Should the volcano erupt a second time in the same circumstances, again these people will barricade themselves with furniture. However, the lava will not reach it, knowing it to be useless, and the barricade will not be put to the test. The one in love, knowing his failure and that flight is near at hand, removes only his outer garments, and his attacker, knowing his failure to catch him, rushes him without conviction. The lover flies leisurely away. Should the same situation arise a third time, the volcano in its failure will not erupt, but is content with rumbling. The barricade is not built, and the builders begin to argue. The lover in his rejection merely loosens his tie. Being approached by his attacker he notices his resolve is weakening. He steps away but is caught. For a moment the two look at each other before carrying on.

Limelight #2 1993 2100mm x 2100mm

Roadmetal Sweetbread 1999 1950mm x 3050mm





Ultramundane #1 1983 1110mm x 1400mm

Stand up, sit down. Stand up, sit down. Stand up, sit down. The exact repetition strips away any possibility of psychology. It becomes a sculptural act. It forces a re-appraisal of human presence. It produces great art. It becomes, after a few years, tiresome.

This tiresomeness is a naturally-occurring defence against numbness and (hypnosis; a closing down of alertness?) It's what motivates classical music to its use of expression: accents, glissando, vibrato. It's what disturbs an animal which senses it is too much at ease. The tiresome response to repetition is worth a sculptural response of its own.

In order to keep psychology firmly out of it, repetition which varies as a response to the previous repetition can be likened to a mathematical series, a series of universal sculptural forms of which psychological reaction may only contribute a vanishingly small number. What was originally seen in psychology as a reaction to a dangerous numbing of alertness can be expanded as a principle to apply to the whole natural world. Even volcanoes and tables. Why shouldn't a table remember what happened to it before?

In 1980 this was obvious; now it is a fact of life.



Black Works #3 1991 1650mm x 2100mm



Failing the attempt at flight makes the desire for freedom from gravity the subject and so by accident we stumbled into the aim of drama, which is to give a treatment of the unachievable, as opposed to that of art, which is to make actual the previously unachieved. And thus we discovered our position between two stools.

Ultramundane #2 1983 2100mm x 2100mm

Cuckoo 1987 2100mm x 2100mm



Julian Maynard Smith interviewed by Niamh Lydell



Jumpin' Jericho 1982 1000mm x 1500mm

NL Would you describe your photographs as theatrical?

JMS No, the theatre holds quite a few problems for some of us in the visual arts. For me, theatre operates under a set of conditions and materials stuck in the 19th century. The single viewpoint, the passive audience, interested only good sightlines and acoustics, and a bunch of outmoded illusionistic conventions of representation do not suit me. The uninflected notions of character and plot may suit most well thinking contemporary folk, but for me they result in a horror show.

NL So you object to a theatre world populated by people who prefer their plays to have a subject and to be told stories of social and political relations.

JMS I don't object, but I am interested in experimenting with forms of information, with human perception, cognition, memory and ontology. When theatre does attempt to present a spectacle of radical social comment, it still appears to be jammed into a preposterous old slop-bucket of staged implausibility.

NL Did you see *The World As A Stage* exhibition at Tate Modern?

JMS Yes and it adopted the same limited understanding of what theatre is. It seemed clear that most of the artists represented actually hate it, while some showed work that had little relation to theatre and appeared to have been hijacked to fit the curatorial remit. Unable to deal with the action that lies at the heart of theatrical reality, the majority had taken the dry husks of theatrical apparatus and conventions, isolated them and then imagined a story for them as justification.

NL Did the installation not work at all?

JMS No, the objects are bewildering in their ineffectiveness. Curtains, lights and seating banks are installed only to create relational tensions between the audience and the stage. Props were presented as evidence of performativity. Action was frozen (with video of motionless performers, or still photographs of moving ones) to remind us of time and memory. The image of the artist was used to remind us that the scene is not real. Strategies that have been used coherently in the past history of performance and video were here lazily applied to a hazy notion of 'theatricality', and consequently they look desperately second-hand.

NL So the show was just awful?

JMS Yes. It is hard to express just how awful this show was. It comprised inert and trivial objects that did nothing, and one might have suspected this from the pretentious nonsense that described them in the guide. The curators' intention to capture theatre was misplaced because the subject is illusory. This was a Pollock's Toy Theatre of a show, made by people for whom real time and change and human beings are threats to their practice.

NL But *The World As A Stage* was an attempt to examine something.

JMS It was an attempt to examine the act of performance, by presenting topologies that omit what performance does. In the process, the arrow of time and its paradoxes, along with the associated problems of cause and effect, and their dark companions chaos and uncertainty, had disappeared. A feeling persists that visual artists consider themselves the revolutionaries fighting the bourgeois complacencies of the performing arts, but these revolutionaries are extraordinarily passive and dull.

NL Do you think a different view could have been successful?

JMS In practice, I doubt that the theatre could present a context for an artist to research, other than the hackneyed one displayed here. Within contemporary performance one can experience a variety of forms of public connection: environmental immersion, one-to-one performance, mediated performance, performance from film, internet performance, absent and multi-present performance, site-specific theatre, interactive theatre, embedded and invisible theatre, and performance that draws on dance, magic, cabaret, slapstick and an assortment of other kinds of dangerous act.

NL So are you saying that it did not reflect was is happening now?

JMS In staged performance the use of action, gesture, text and speech as materials for sculpture as an equal to the conventional materials of inanimate matter is hardly new. The development of this sculpture into work that acknowledges its temporal requirements – the engagement of an audience primary among them – is an ongoing concern. It may be allied to gallery practice but can also be taken as an independent practice, and it is only really in this way that it avoids the fate of being a minor and subsidiary art form.

NL So, where should the territory between art and theatre be going?

JMS The area between or shared by art and theatre is uncertain, provisional, confusing and messy. Prejudices exist on both sides, so the area will probably remain in the dark and as the respective economic structures have driven their practices so far apart there is little possibility of exploring the common ground without engaging the accompanying risks.

NL What are the risks?

JMS Money mainly. This show could have explored the active area between art and theatre if it found the resources to present it. The gallery show was open for ten weeks, and in that time, apart from a slight Tino Sehgal piece at the entrance, presented a few, one-off live events. Limiting a performance to a single showing fails its duty to the public, as well as seeming to support the absurd idea that a performance is a single artefact to be consigned to instant history and definitive documentation.

NL But many performances are one-offs.

JMS Yes, but the practice of only thinking of a performance as an unrepeatable event has also had the effect of producing a slurry of terrible pieces whose terribleness is locked into a system that repeats the production of new terrible pieces. A piece is often proved and improved by repeated exposure. Theatre relishes the variations of daily performances and the building of an audience.

NL Are there venues here that are prepared to produce long run performances?

JMS No, the economics works against it. Performance is expensive and as a practice in itself, rather than an adjunct designed to lend sexiness to an exhibition of objects, it is human resource-heavy. Human beings are very expensive, but it is a great pity if the only strategy available to us is a zero-budget production like Tino Seghal's. Theatre at least realises that human materials need time, warmth and space in which to mature into works of art. The area this show addresses is precisely that which is engaged with time, and uses time in its making. Rehearsal for artists is studio time where many bodies need feeding and where the participants will not benefit from the sale of objects. The art world prefers to imagine performance as instant coffee, something that does not need practical preparation and skilful execution.

NL So the exhibition was actually stuck further in the past than much contemporary theatre practice.

JMS Yes, some of it was neurotically self-referential and uninterested in the real world altogether. Theatre, by being a public meeting of ideas, aesthetics, proposition, reception and reflection, has a political dimension and this could and should have been recognised here. By the time these still young artists realise this a new generation will be taking their unquestioning places in the art world.

The World As A Stage exhibition was at Tate Modern, October 2007 to January 2008.

Deceptio Visûs Exhibition



Julian Maynard Smith

Selected Performances and Exhibitions

What’s Wrong With The World

Soho Theatre, London

Oi Futura, Rio de Janeiro; 2008

The Other Is You

Groningen, Grand Theater

Berlin, Hebbel Theater

Brighton, Fringe; 2006

Play On Earth

Sao Paulo Brazil

Singapore Festival

Newcastle NGI; 2006

Live From Paradise

Colchester Arts Centre

Birmingham (Fierce)

London Toynbee Studios; 2005

Mare’s Nest

Kamptnagel, Hamburg; 2004

Mercat des Flors, Barcelona; 2003.

South London Gallery, London; 2001

How To Behave

Hampstead Theatre, London; 2003

Roadmetal, Sweetbread

Kiasma Art Centre, Helsinki; 2004

Chiang Kai-Chek Cultural Center, Taipei; 2003

International Arts Festival, Hong Kong; 2002

Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, Shanghai; 2001

Kunstfest 2000, Weimar; 2000

Spiel Art Festival, Munich; 1999

Haywood Gallery, London; 1999

I.C.A., London; 1998

Snakes And Ladders

Acme Studios, Bow. London; 1998

The Salisbury Proverbs

The Salisbury Festival; 1997

Limelight And Other Works

Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge; 1995

Dedesnn Nn Rrrrrr

Theater der Welt, Dresden; 1996

The Oracle

Serpentine Gallery, London; 1993

I.C.A., London; 1992

The Survival Of The Unfittest

South Bank Centre, London; 1992

Black Works

BITEF, Belgrade; 1991

The Kitchen, New York; 1991

Festival des Theatres Ameriques,

Montreal; 1991

I.C.A., London; 1991

Antwerp Festival; 1991

Piranesi In Tokyo UK90

246 Tank, Tokyo; 1990

Piranesi In New York

Melbourne Festival; 1990

First New York Festival of the Arts, New York.

Cuckoo

Hamburg Festival; 1990

Mercat de las Flors, Barcelona; 1989

Arnolfini, Bristol; 1998

Mickery, Amsterdam; 1998

Theater Spektakel, Zurich; 1988

Riverside Studios, London; 1997

A Split Second Of Paradise

Eurocaz Festival, Zagreb; 1990

Keep It Simple, Basel; 1990

Venice Biennale, Artangel; 1986

The Bastille Dances

Bicentenary of the French Revolution,

Cherbourg; 1989

London International Festival of Theatre,

National Theatre; 1989

Salzburg Festival; 1989

1st Olympic Festival, Barcelona; 1989

Scenes From A New Jericho

Zomerfestijn, Amsterdam; 1986
Hayward Gallery, London; 1984

Sex & Death

The British Art Show: Edinburgh, Sheffield,
Southampton, Lancaster, Birmingham; 1985
Centrum t’Hoogt, Utrecht; 1984
Stadsschouwburg / Het Apollohuis; 1984
Palais voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels; 1984
Spacex Gallery, Exeter; 1984
Air Gallery, London; 1984
Symposium International d’Art-Performance,
Lyon; 1984

Ultramundane

Brighton Festival; 1984
I.C.A., London; 1983

Drunken Madness

Brooklyn Bridge Centenary, New York; 1983
Waterloo Gallery, London; 1981
London, Fulham Studios

Natural Disasters

Mickery Theater, Amsterdam; 1982
Acme Gallery, London; 1981

Trio

Gallery, Birmingham; 1980

Landscape 1982 2400mm x 1725mm



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A Spilt Second of Paradise

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