

more binding them conceptually than the fact that they are all in the show together.

Interestingly, despite making no obvious claims to be constructing any specific narratives or meanings, Cross is strongly identified as the author of the show, with the press release/information sheet containing not only a quote about his childhood at the top of the page but also a brief biography at the bottom. Why, if the curator has made little intervention in the collective meanings of the objects in the exhibition, has he been so obviously identified as an author? If the selection of the participants was as arbitrary as it appears, what has Andrew Cross done other than to collect a number of old friends together? Is this an act of curation? Is it a party? Is it art? Is it just something nice?

It was in fact very nice to sit on or in one of Inflate's beanbags and watch an episode of *Starsky and Hutch* (which oddly enough, and apparently quite fortuitously, was showing a scene in which the dynamic duo discuss a school reunion in a cell with the Las Vegas Strangler), and the exhibition was probably more enjoyable for having soft furnishings and a telly in it. Perhaps this should become standard curatorial practice.

Judging by evidence from across the capital and around the country it would appear that more and more exhibitions are being produced in order to give the vast numbers of curators the artworld seems to be generating something to do. We don't really need as much art as we've got, but now we've got it we might as well let somebody play around with it and rearrange it a bit. Curating, of course, is a serious business; art and artists depend on it. And what would we do if we had lots of galleries and lots of art and no one to decide which bits should go where and for how long?

Unfortunately, however, we are no nearer discovering what 'School Reunion' actually is or what it means, and this is troubling, as it is after all a kind of group show, and we're supposed to understand them and know what they are. Perhaps it is because there is no real theme that it is confusing. Perhaps if we felt compelled to make some interpretation of the works, or to search for theoretical threads binding the objects and images together, we might feel ourselves on safer ground and more able to do, as viewers, what we feel is expected of us. Unfortunately though, 'School Reunion' makes no such demands on us. 'Look at this' it says mildly. 'Go upstairs, sit on that, and watch the other' it suggests. None of the objects in the exhibition seem prepared to clear their respective throats and demand that we concentrate on them until whatever meanings they may have pop out.

Is this because the works are somehow repressed and inhibited, as if taken aback by not having been prodded and cajoled into a curatorial uniform or straitjacket (which, some might suggest, is the real work ...)? Probably not; but it would be worth considering just what has happened at the Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, and is taking place, little by little, in galleries elsewhere.

Is this shift precipitated by curators, or are they just a by-product of all the art and all the new spaces? Do we really need curators? When asked the question 'are curators necessary?' on the Goldsmiths curating course website (www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/visual-arts/launchpad.html – not as advertised in *AM* 228, p30) BANK replied 'Who cares. It is not a relevant (sic) question. Is a Mars Bar necessary?'

Though BANK is certain to disagree, curating does, in some sense at least, seem to be encroaching on territory that previously has been set aside for the artist. It is unlikely that artists and curators will ever resemble each other much more than they do now (probably a good thing; difference after all facilitates transgression). We should perhaps bear in mind also that though curators assemble component parts to create some sort of whole in much the same way that artists do, they are also equally exposed to the vagaries of interpretation and the inability either to secure or to predict meaning. 'Solipsism'. 'Innuendo'. 'Stretch Marks'. Rock 'n' roll. ■

John Tozer is a curator. He was taught at Goldsmiths.

■ Heart and Soul

60 Long Lane London July 30 to August 5

One thing to love about contemporary art is the way it can be so fast – responding to and presenting new ideas faster than any other creative field (well, with the exception of live music and journalism, I guess). Ideas can spill out to the public quickly, cheaply, with very little time lag, compromise or censorship. And one thing to love about the way it's done in London is that contemporary art can be even faster, even more nimble and independent than almost anywhere else. So, an especially fast show like 'Heart and Soul' (put together in seven weeks by six of the artists in the show, mostly Goldsmiths grads, in their studio), with its 36 hot new artists, produces a sort of blur of ideas, ambitions, images. It's not that the work itself has been hastily slapped together; in fact, quite the opposite. Nearly all the work (mostly painting and sculpture; no video, no readymades) seems to say, 'Although indeed I look so cool and casual, pray do not be deceived. I am a time-intensive labour of love, a seriously considered work of art' – like Steven Dowson's *Happy Meal*, a detailed repainting of fast food packets on a trash piece of furniture wearing socks (my vote for the most eye-stopping work in the show); Dean Hughes' delicately scored *With Lots of Nicks and a Couple of Hole Punches*; or David Musgrave's meticulously painted, faux masking-tape figure, *Golem*. No, what's so fast about new art in London is the way it can be so rapidly heated, garnished and served to a big hungry audience – over a thousand lip-smacking art (and Gordon's gin) lovers at the summer party-style opening. There isn't the kind of hopeless, complaint-filled, empty waiting time you find among young artists in other cities. Art students still seem absorbed by social intricacies of

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the local art pageant, unselfconsciously tunnelling down the Warholian fast-track, begging "When will I be famous?" and, importantly, going all out to make the good work, to make it. The artistic results are uneven (OK, sometimes worse than uneven); but often though, one spots a gem or two, artworks that are stunning and inspired. The system here, following the by-now formulaic 'hey, let's put on our own show!' concept, really is fast and open and positive. London is still ready to soak up talent, and ultimately is an encouraging – if exhausting – place for new art to happen.

The artists in 'Heart and Soul' are still slyly taking cues from the legendary 'Freeze' generation (actually not much older than they are), and certainly continuing in the object-producing tradition – painting, for example, is a big favourite. The prevailing mood can't be bothered with corny old 1960s-style ephemera and invisibilia, naked performances and conceptual what-nots, the old 'art bursting free of the gallery' thing. No; sculptures live on pedestals, and most works cling to the gallery walls. For one thing, there's a good dosage of 'Die Young/Stay Pretty' two-dimensional works, centring on Martin Maloney's big dumb painting called *Fireside Cat*; Paul Morrison's signature black and white landscape *Plastochron*; Michael Raedecker's beautiful stitched canvas *Hollow Hill*; Jun Hasegawa's drawing *Butcher* and David Thorpe's magnificent cut-out landscapes, already starting to look like classics. The best new work in 'Heart and Soul' though has a kind of deliberate mystery to it, very different from the obvious symbolism of distant Goldsmiths stars like Hirst or Lucas. Imagery seems drawn from a baffling, idiosyncratic array of sources resulting in unexpected, very stylised, intensely

laboured and beautiful works. The best of these included Lucy McKenzie's 1950s Christmas card-style enigmatic painting called *Festival*; Elizabeth Kent's computer-generated patterns in *Shaded Indicator*; Peter Kapos' *Ruins of Ancient Buildings* and Martin Westwood's strange line drawings that I can't seem to forget, titled *Thin Coin*.

By the way, if the ongoing (by now ten years old) yBa/Goldsmiths thing gets on your nerves, you'll really hate 'Heart and Soul'. Two New York friends who attended the opening with me, already sceptical – as most Americans are – about the new Brit art, rolled their eyes with sickening boredom while I gushed about the show's confidence, inventiveness and youth. 'It's the back-drop for a party', they moaned, overserious, not enjoying the vibe. 'Where's the Politik, the Content, the Identity?', they demanded, really getting heavy. And 'Where are the Women?', finally asking a good question. I had to concede on this point: new art just can't be so significant if it's still mostly being made by a bunch of white guys. But I defended the ambitious kids (some in their mid-30s) behind 'Heart and Soul' nevertheless. Efforts like this, I insisted, genuinely contribute to ensuring the continuing existence of an independent alternative culture. They take upon themselves the important task of quickly informing a sizeable local audience about what recent artists are thinking about – light years before it snails its institutional way into 'Abracadabra', dead on arrival by comparison. It's fast and it's unconflicted, not produced by committee but by passion and personal connectedness, totally unreliant on pleasing some financial backer or education department or (heaven help us)

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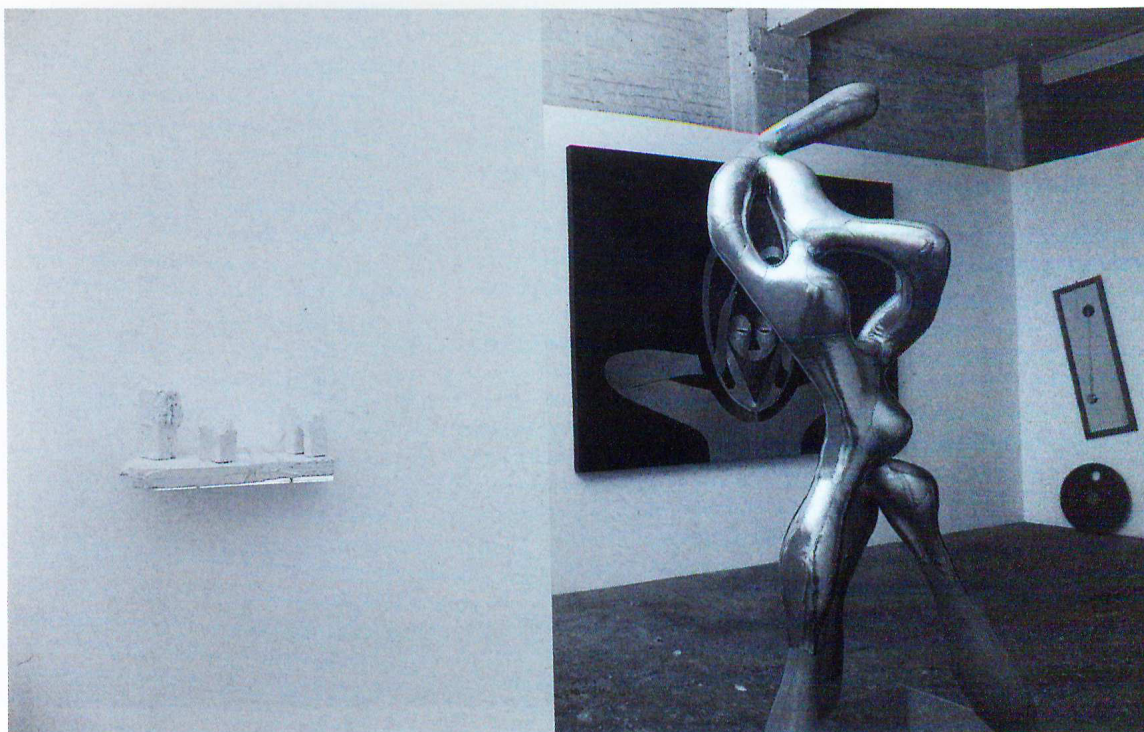


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public relations advisor. And so I applaud it. Even if one detects the persistent, fairly indiscreet ambition for the artists to be seen, to be sold, they've successfully invented an occasion for the work to be viewed at its best, without compromise, and that may never happen again – especially for the lucky ones who make it. ■

Gilda Williams is a writer and Commissioning Editor for contemporary art at Phaidon Press.

■ The Blood Show

Five Years London July 29 to September 5

In Guillermo del Toro's vampire movie *Cronos*, the central character, gripped by a desperate thirst, cleans up after the victim of a nosebleed by licking his spilled vital fluid off a toilet floor. It is a profoundly unsettling moment, playing on anxiety about AIDS in the context of a supernatural horror which is not removed to a romantic past, but set inescapably in the present. It is an image which is dirtier than the most sordid pornography, and as

such is not easily forgotten. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Peter Lloyd Lewis' mini-survey of the representation of blood in current art, an exhibition which appears curiously restrained given the Grand Guignol excesses suggested by its title. Shown against pale pink walls, all of the work included makes some reference to painting, and the visual similarity of the Abstract Expressionist drip to a drop of blood is a coincidence which does not go unexamined. However, none of the contributors seems able to transcend the internal discourses of their chosen media as fully and artlessly as del Toro. As a test of the assumptions that picturing or implying the presence of blood contributes moral weight to an image, 'The Blood Show' is successful only in suggesting the opposite.

But perhaps this is to take the whole project too seriously. True, the catalogue opens with a straight-laced biological primer, but most of the artists seem more pre-occupied by low comedy than high science. Liz Arnold and David Burrows both take Halloween as their starting point, mining the curious borderline between cute and spooky. Arnold's watercolour *Redheads* shows a coven of four identically dressed female figures gazing out of a

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