

tional video and here's the toy and don't you want to have a go? Don't you want to be in his place? Don't you want to have him?

This exhibition was a much cut-down version of an international touring show of work by the Canadian artist Jana Sterbak. It included a number of intimate early pieces, a few larger objects and three recent works using film and video. The earlier works included a series of drawings of cubes, the drawings being made of thread which was held in tension by needles stuck into the gallery wall. There was also a series of measuring tapes, coiled into horn-like shapes which were both aggressively phallic and strangely tender. These early pieces reveal interests which continue to inform Sterbak's work. They use feminised material to subvert a Minimalist vocabulary, perhaps in an attempt to explore gaps in the Modernist project. The cones also point towards later works in which Sterbak has taken up the legacy of the Surrealist object, and the possibility of making fetishes which reveal and perhaps transgress the dominant discourse of desire.

But we've seen a lot of this kind of stuff in the last few years. The danger with objects of this type is that by dealing with generic material they end up being generic themselves: they can satirise the impoverishment of human possibility within particular cultural forms, but I don't know how much they can recuperate actual human richness. (Moreover, some of Sterbak's most striking objects from the last ten years, such as the dress made of uncured beefsteak, and the one incorporating a red-hot filament, were seen last year in the Tate's 'Rites of Passage' show.) Recently however Sterbak has emphasised the element of performance in her work, and created films and videos showing her objects in use, rather like Rebecca Horn's cinematic experiments. I much prefer this body of Sterbak's work, as it seems to engage more successfully with the process of individual desire – whether that of the viewer or imagined performer – and keep it in a productive state of flirtatious suspension.

Or maybe I just like watching men. All three of the film and video pieces in the show featured men, and all three explored the main way in which our culture makes men available to be watched: through the spectacle of work. *Condition*, 1995, is a video projection of a man marching around an aerodrome, with some kind of prosthesis, like a hod or a tail, strapped to his back. The camera moves with him, and only gradually do you realise that the man is simply describing a circle. Then there's *Déclaration*, 1994, which doesn't involve any of Sterbak's objects at all, but simply shows a man with a stutter labouring his way through The Declaration of the Rights of Man. Both these works demonstrate the expression of masculinity through constraint and duress, and both demonstrate the limits of this expression while admitting the power of the resultant spectacle. These two pieces also come to implicitly humanistic conclusions, with the man in *Condition* finally shrugging off his prosthesis, and

the man in *Déclaration* gradually asserting his personality within his performance.

The work I liked best however was both more bleak and more pleasurable. This was *Sisyphus II*, 1991, the piece with the Russian. The activity which he performs is as circular as that in *Condition*, and thus in some sense loses its legitimation as work (just as Sisyphus is doomed by the gods to an endless and pointless task). However, in this case the crisis of spectacle does not give way to some form of personal triumph on the part of the performer. Instead, the less the Russian's activity appears as work the more it becomes a purely sensual display (and I guess it might help that the performer has the body of a god). Moreover, by showing the projection next to the actual empty cage, Sterbak complicates the viewer's experience further. The cage acts as a challenge, but one which mocks us, as we aren't allowed to take it up. Sterbak thus prevents us either from identifying with the performer or competing with him – and shows that both impulses are based upon a sublimation of desire. ■

Mark Sladen is a press officer and freelance journalist.

## ■ Young Americans Part I

Saatchi Gallery London January 25 to March 3

It's hard to look at 'Young Americans: New American Art in the Saatchi Collection Part I' without imagining all the trips to New York, the lunches, the nervous gallery assistants, the clothes, the close calls behind this cross-colonisation of hot art from Over There. Saatchi has done London a service in bringing exemplary works from the pick of contemporary American artists, Janine Antoni, Gregory Green, Sean Landers, Charles Long and Charles Ray (to be joined by four more in part II, coming in March); 'Young Americans' parts I and II should amount to something of a transcultural event this year, which is more than you can say about most shopping sprees. It looks expensive, but it also looks well-considered, and although it's cutting-edge stuff only for the tabloids, it's still new enough to be dubbed 'young', to have been seen little in Britain, and somehow to present itself convincingly as an even and cohesive group show.

All this can be said despite the disappointment with most of the works on exhibition. Far and away the most engaging work in this first round is Charles Ray's giant-sized toy firetruck installed (or should we say hidden, in comparison to its first sighting parked on a New York street during the 1993 Whitney Biennial) in front of the entrance. *Firetruck* works as a photogenic, emblematically American mascot for the show. Big boys do love their toys, and one can imagine that a lot of collectors probably thought 'I want that truck! That big red truck!' when they saw it. It's amusing, it's infantile, it's silly but like other pieces of Ray's it's also softly nostalgic about memory and our fears as children of growing uncontrollably,

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monstrously big. In New York, *Firetruck* looked vibrant, uncanny, but here it looked misplaced and forlorn – like an old discarded toy, abandoned in the driveway.

Sean Landers was represented by an engrossing body of work reiterating his relentlessly self-indulgent, self-parodying sarcasms about the artist as a young whatever. In Landers' world God looks like Jerry Garcia and the mind is encouraged to run amok rather than seize control. The canvases overflow with stream-of-self-consciousness texts about angst, ambitions, regret and occasional musings about his new haircut being attractive to Goth babes spotted downtown. In order to read these paintings you'd have to turn your neck back and forth as if attending a ping-pong match, so you end up absorbing mere fragments of his fragmented thoughts, most of which are artfully given a skin-deep, confessional 'edge'. The surf's up in *Worry Wart*, 1995, part of a new series of seascapes, words sink purposelessly into the depths of green waves, and you wonder whether the first of these drownings had come about accidentally, in order to conceal a blotch, or perhaps a truly revealing line which Landers preferred to bury at sea. His teasing self-

portrait *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, 1993, sees the artist vogueing before the unmoving video camera, looking rather like Val Kilmer when he was playing Jim Morrison. It's a striptease; it's a post-modern combination of Michelangelo and Calvin Kline (*sic*); it's a deconstruction of the eroticism of the Old Masters; above all it proves once and for all that men are most vain about what their penises look like limp, not stiff. In any case, Landers' work is finally about privilege, about having time, materials, attention; that narcissism *does* pay and that the confident (and Landers is absolutely confident) American male artist is always a sure bet, even when disguised as pathetic.

Janine Antoni gained notoriety in the early 90s with her sculpture and installations using chocolate, lard and soap. Her work was quickly latched onto themes like bulimia and other popular eating disorders. The works on view here suggest that as a *classical* sculptor she is capable, but as a conceptualist less so; for example in *Gnaw*, 1992, which sees two giant, partially chewed cubes of chocolate and lard propped up on marble slabs – pedestals, really. The point of *Gnaw*, however, is that

**Gregory Green**  
*Work Station No. 5*  
(London) 1994

**PETER McCaughey**

**STEPHEN SKRYNKA**

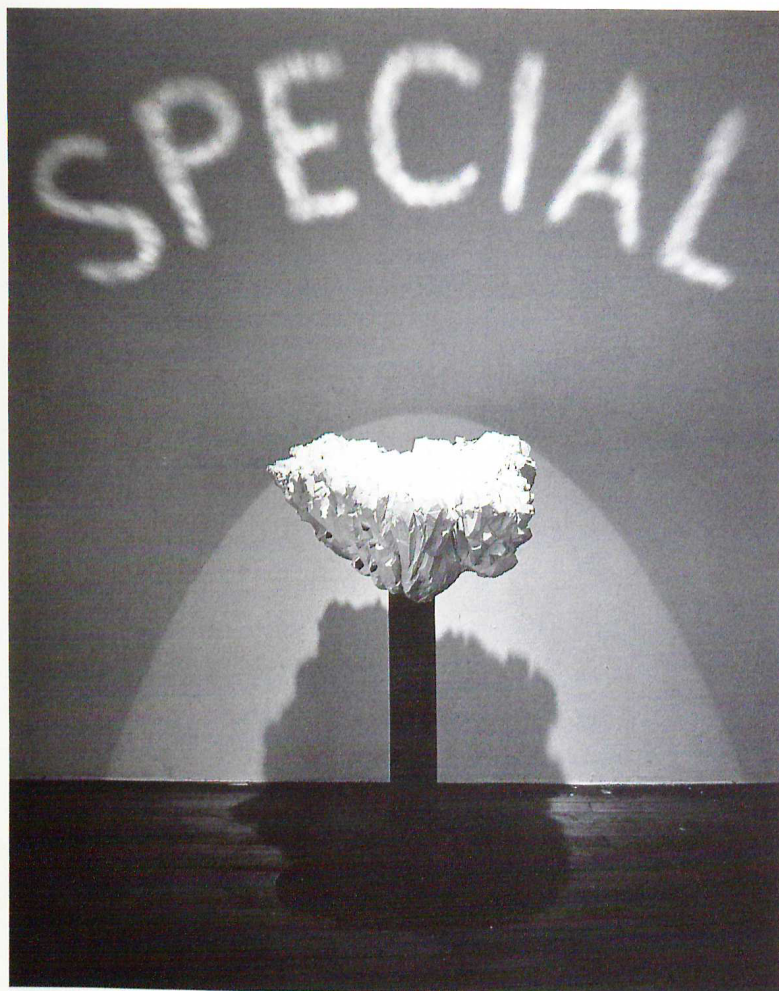
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Charles Long  
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her chosen materials are then spat out and shaped into more household things than minimalist, cubic sculpture: lipstick and those plastic trays chocolates come in. Their presentation, however, in very unsexy mirror and glass display cases is decidedly unsuccessful; wanting in irony and seduction, they demonstrate once again how skilful cosmetics companies and window dressers – the demons behind Antoni's accusatory work – actually are at making their products so enticing.

In the past Gregory Green has done some terrific work about the surprising accessibility of dangerous substances like narcotics and bombs (last year he was almost arrested – with his *dealer* – for allegedly fabricating LSD in a gallery). But Green's home-made bombs looked literally defused here. After queuing up to 'experience' his detailed *mise en scene* of an amateur terrorist's bunker, *Work Station #5* (London), 1994, you were not for an instant convinced of its authenticity, as if some bookish, vindictive nutcase were busy building bombs in the back room of Saatchi's. It rang somewhat truer in its earlier incarnation at the Cabinet Gallery in Brixton, whereas here what made it so exciting was that it felt like a *real* film set with real props for a real movie! With his stacks of DIY bomb manuals and army books on explosives, the murderer momentarily absent from the *Work Station* could be cast for the serial killer's part in *Seven*: an erudite, drably-dressed, meticulous loner who gains access to criminal behaviour through that superb symbol of American democracy: the library card.

Finally, sculptor Charles Long fills a peculiar gap. Less famous, less safe, more awkward, more varied, he's really out there, blithely combining Dr Suess with the Bauhaus with a kind of contained light-show, paying no

heed to elegance or consistency or social significance. Long was certainly Saatchi's riskiest, most idiosyncratic choice, and his inclusion offers telling insight into what the mega-collector might have been after as he pounded the SoHo pavement: he was optimistically in search of something *special*. ■

Gilda Williams is an art critic and editor at Phaidon Press.

## ■ Co-Operators

Southampton City Art Gallery

January 19 to February 25

Designed to highlight the contradictions between the concept of the artist as creative individual and the current trend in collaborative partnerships, 'Co-Operators' shows ten double-acts who, while generating a broadly diverse set of exhibits, have the unifying characteristics of constructing work that stems from the juxtaposition of two separate dynamics that produce artworks by virtue of, rather than in spite of, the friction that results from their mutual combination.

Alan Kane and Jeremy Deller's *Hospitality*, a fabricated room within the gallery, is designed to resemble the kind of waiting room that can be found in any doctor's, dentist's or vet's surgery. Containing comfy seating, mineral water dispenser, coffee machine and occasional table with magazines (*Heritage*, *New Scientist*, *Practical Gardening* but no *Art Monthly*), it introduces the outside world, or at least a specific part of it, into the gallery, thus drawing a comparison between the two spaces and equating the activities that take place within each. The act of waiting expectantly for something to happen is common to both the exhibition space and the waiting room, and the nature of the white cube as hallowed territory is mocked by transforming it into an example of the everyday, thus forcing us to reassess our relationship with the gallery and ask ourselves what form of cultural, intellectual or spiritual febrifuge we are seeking from our visit to the show. There is a double bind (or bluff) though, as the artwork, that attempts to duplicate the quintessential qualities of the waiting room, imitates the waiting room that attempts to duplicate the quintessential qualities of our homes, which in turn attempt, in the case of collectors of art, to duplicate the qualities of the gallery.

Any pretensions towards the curated show were disregarded, or discarded, by Tracy Emin and Sarah Lucas when they opened the 'Shop' in 1993 in Bethnal Green Road. The irreverence with which they treated the construction and presentation of artworks is illustrated here by their two exhibits *Stuff From the Shop* and *Tippi Hedren* (the title obliquely referring, via Hitchcock, to their ironic adoption of the cliché of themselves as two birds running a shop). The two pieces, floor and table-based collections of art/merchandise from the 'Shop' (clothing, tiny appliquéd blankets, personalised trinkets, hand-written messages) and photographic mementoes of the birds wearing 'Have You Wanked Over Me Yet' T-shirts, are designed to challenge perceptions of women artists as stereotypically feminine and 'nice' and to draw attention to the 'assumed banalities' of women's art production (Lucas' other works emphatically disprove these assumptions). In constructing artefacts that refuse to adopt the privileged status of exhibits, that eschew the