

Martin Creed  
Work No. 370: Balls 2004



*Ten thousand random straight lines*, 1970 – embodies a singularly concise and profound conclusion to the show, as the blatant materiality of this work seems to offer simple closure, while simultaneously tantalising us with unresolved issues. ■

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## ■ Martin Creed

Hauser & Wirth London October 8 to October 30

Martin Creed's tactic is often to appropriate the everyday object, somehow cleanse it of specifics so that it becomes generic, and then re-present it as a point of individual interface – wholesale intimacy, if you like. His neon word 'LOVE', mounted low on a wall in the upstairs gallery, exemplifies this wonderfully. On the other hand, he also orchestrates collective enjoyment through a similar process. The first gallery here is full of balls, so to speak – inflatable balls, rubber balls, marbles, a space hopper, juggling balls, knitted and furry balls, a dog toy, a gelatinous tomato, a globe, huge beach balls – apparently no two the same.

As a prime signifier of gaming, the ball stands as a pointed marker for participation, so this ball-fest must be the ultimate 'fun for all' installation. Creed's short run, then, is a crowd-pleaser for the Frieze Art Fair, perhaps. London galleries' strategic selections of shows, projects and events during the onslaught of dealers, collectors, critics, etc from abroad reflect an array of approaches to the problem of how to portray a polyvalent entity during a crucial period when mere

location increases visibility. Creed could be a wily choice: he is considered prestigious in broadsheet terms, difficult in the general public's opinion, yet clear and accessible to the art world. In addition, he is a token by which Hauser & Wirth can prove to the international circuit that it has established a significant foothold in this country. This show, then, covers many, many bases besides that of convivial participation.

The three installations, although not exactly risky, each have the simplicity of a bald statement. Creed does not fudge the issue, but allows plenty of clear space around each idea, leaving it uncluttered by expressive meanderings. This, perhaps, is the problem some may have with the work, as it becomes evidence of a decision made, almost nihilistically cocksure. The titles, comprising a number followed by a deadpan description, are like patent office records of disembodied aesthetic phrases: *Work No. 370: Balls*, 2004, is as indexed as it is accurate.

Creed's music, generally written for his band Owada, can also annoy and delight in equal measure. His bare-bones, utilitarian attitude to the music has, however, found its natural roosting place here in the gallery lift. A four-part harmony, sung by base, tenor, alto and soprano voices, mimics the ascent and descent of the lift as the participant presses the buttons. From the first floor, travelling downwards, a singular high voice is joined by the mid-ranges and falls away as its lower limits are reached, to be taken over by the deeper voices until a lone tenor resonates as the lift reach the basement. It is extremely simple but, like suitcases with wheels, you can't believe it hasn't been thought of before. What's more it is funny, like a swanee whistle.

Creed is more often wry than out-and-out hilarious though; more dryly satirical than slapstick. There is a brilliant instance of this in the upstairs gallery (although I'm not sure that it's intentional), where Creed's series of sheets of

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John Bock  
Boxer 2002  
video still



A4, coloured in with marker and highlighter pens, looks like a laconic remake of Roni Horn's *Dictionary of Water*, prominently displayed on a shelf nearby, among other gallery artists' publications. Creed's 'waters', however, are from a chromatically hysterical planet – neon pinks, racing green, holiday brochure aqua and Yves Klein Blue judder across the paper more like compounded electric shocks than ripples.

When discussing Creed's work it is well nigh pointless to describe the work itself in great detail, as its atmosphere is as much about absence as presence. His positioning of objects in the world is more to the point: at the curiously singular crossroads where Conceptualism and Minimalism converge. Creed constructs this hybridisation through the generalisation of specifics – by drawing our attention to the spherical nature of balls of various circumferences, the wateriness of marker pen marks when they overlap, the formal dexterity of voices singing scales. Although the vestiges of utility cling to each object, they have been manipulated as raw matter so that form and content inhabit one another. Everything is going to be about itself. ■

SALLY O'REILLY is a writer and a critic.

## John Bock

ICA London September 24 to November 7

On reading the list of artists' names chosen by John Bock for his exhibition 'Klütterkammer', I was perplexed as to why the ICA would want to follow their last two underwhelming

'Artists' Favourites' exhibitions with a third. My disappointment was quickly dispelled upon entering the show. This is Bock's first major exhibition in the UK and brings together his practice – performance, installation and film – alongside a collection of his major inspirations. This hall of fame includes works by artists such as Paul McCarthy and Otto Muehl, other musical and cinematic muses from The Cure to the 70s cult film *Theatre of Blood*, as well as more obscure artefacts such as the boxed fingernails of Rasputin, all of which are housed in haphazard structures built by the artist out of everyday materials like chipboard, tinfoil and hay. Once inside you have to negotiate ladders, tunnels and scaffolding to discover the objects nestling absurdly, like insects caught in an unruly Bockian spider's web.

The exhibition is both ridiculous and demonstrative in exactly the same way as Bock's performances, which mostly take the form of lectures. During these, fictional metaphysical processes or economic theories are explained with reference to various philosophers, economists and artists, in wonderful detail and with frantic urgency. The show opened with a performance in which Bock diagrammatically explained a theory of art-economy with the aid of some black gaffer tape, a punctured sausage and a portrait of John Maynard Keynes. The nonsensical vernacular that underpins Bock's practice manages to mix Hegelian transcendental terminology and scientific jargon with fairytales, like anarchic German compound nouns. Certain pseudo-concepts recur in his work, such as 'the recipient human' or the 'Quasi-Me', and teasingly suggest a grand underlying philosophy to his practice. Bock mimics the hybrid nature of academic discourses that gain legitimacy through referencing, and this operation – normally deadening – becomes the stuff of art, a readymade cultural map filled with the multiple associations



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