

Review Mother of all shows: Creed drives audience to delighted abstraction

Mothers

Hauser & Wirth, London W1

★★★★★

A steel beam sweeps the gallery, just above our heads. Standing under it, the air ruffles your hair as it turns. Its hard not to duck and cringe. If you are over 6ft 8in, Martin Creed's Mothers could kill you. Big hair? It'll scalp you.

Standing on the beam, and almost grazing the ceiling as it passes, is a large white neon sign saying MOTHERS. Originally one of a pair, (the other saying FATHERS), the sculpture was initially planned for a public site in Germany. It's a behemoth. What does it mean?

Perhaps the answer is found in Creed's new, self-released single, which the artist performed live with his band at a party following the opening of the show.

"I was thinking," he sings in his urgent Scottish lilt against jangling guitar, an urgent bass line and insistent

drum. "And then I wasn't thinking ..."
In the accompanying video a cocky little dog trots around a big white emptiness, following a much larger, loping mutt. The little dog's thinking, the big dog isn't, apparently. "Fuck off, off off off", Creed sang, in another tune, the only lyric. The crowd loved it.

Creed's songs are abbreviated, tight and abrupt, just like the paintings, which fill two rooms at the gallery. His little canvases are filled with abrupt little stripes, X's, little stacks and ziggurats of emphatic brushstrokes, in black and white and zinging colour in different media.

Each stroke hits the canvas with a different attack, beat and timbre. Black X's climb the wall, the size of each one determined by a different size brush. Creed's paintings are clever, dumb, smart and stupidly gorgeous. How often does one laugh out loud at an abstract painting? These little analytical lessons in materials and their application are more than funny or cute.

In a new video a woman's breast fills the screen. Her hand appears, tweaks the nipple in a businesslike way till it is erect, and we spend the next few minutes watching as the taut areola surrounding the nipple subsides into wrinkled folds and whorls. Isn't the body fascinating and peculiar, Creed seems to say. The film is a steady stare at a bodily function, continuing a series he has been making which so far include vomiting, defecating and intercourse. Whatever Creed does - painting, having runners belt from one end of Tate Britain to the other, making the lights go on and off (for which he won the Turner prize), filling spaces with balloons, working with professional dancers or singing with his own band, he brings a joyousness, lightness and objectivity to the task. But watch out for those Mothers. They can really make you cower.

Adrian Searle

Martin Creed, Mothers, until 5 March, Hauser & Wirth, London W1