

the week

diary

Martin Creed

The Turner prizewinner on why he finds Zurich restful and London stressful, and the art of putting on a good show



Someone recently asked me: "What are you trying to achieve?" Tough question. Art does not have a clearly defined goal or aim. It is not like football or comedy. I could not think of an answer at the time, but it played on my mind, and later I thought: I am just trying to make my life better. I work to feel better. I produce things to help me to live, to divert myself. But nearly every day, like it or not, I make s***. S*** happens.

You cannot have dark without light.

And you can't have a day without s***.

Living and working is a matter of trying to come to terms with that. I made some films of people s***ting. It was filmed on a closed set, with remote control cameras to make it easier for the players. It was a long shoot. We prepared the set and cameras and waited until the people were ready to go. I have been putting up an exhibition in Zurich that contains one of the films (*Work No. 660*), a suite of paintings, and a new work that consists of a pair of curtains opening and closing in front of one of the gallery windows.

It was a bit of a rest to spend time in Zurich. Things feel slower and steadier there than in London. I felt that I could concentrate on one thing. In London I feel like I'm always doing a lot of things at the same time, and fighting my way through the day.

Doing an exhibition is different from making the things that are in the exhibition. It is doing your best with what you've got to make a diverting and entertaining spectacle, to put on a show that a person might visit for just one minute. An exhibition is a demand for attention. A picture may work well as a little diversion in a hallway or a pattern of colours on a bedroom wall. It may form a nice background, but that does not mean it will look good as the centre of attention in an exhibition. In an exhibition it needs to work in the foreground, though it might spend the rest of its life in the background.

An art exhibition is like a long, slow theatrical event, a live show that lasts for perhaps six weeks. Unlike in a theatre in which the performance takes place on stage and people are expected to stay in their seats, the audience can move among the work. Not to have to sit through things, to come and go as you please, is a great freedom. That's what I like about art galleries.

Looking at things is perhaps more self-conscious, much more directed, than listening to things. You can listen to something that is behind you, but you can't look at something behind you. The problem of looking is looking away. The more you look the more you find. That's why it's better to work blind.

The more I write to make things clear, the more difficult it becomes to see. The words form a net curtain obscuring my view.

I have been working on a book, a collection of all the works I have ever made, or rather of everything that has been exhibited or sold or put into public. It is difficult to finish. It has been like trying to refold a map after a long journey. Since starting work on the book I have bought a Sat-Nav.

It's easy to start, but it's hard to go on, and it's difficult to finish.

I hate endings. That is a start.

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Martin Creed at Hauser & Wirth, Zurich until March 7



Someone asked me, 'What are you trying to achieve?' It's a tricky question. Art doesn't have a clear goal or aim

