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Another fine mess

Jason Rhoades' installations are not as difficult to invest in as they are to assemble, judges Morgan Falconer

A brightly coloured, foul-smelling mush of dried peas, salmon roe and Styrofoam beads does not have valuable industrial uses. Jason Rhoades, however, has proved that, as an artist's material, PeaRoeFoam can be very versatile. He's moulded it into sculptures, he's heaped lashings of it over his ramshackle installations, and in the magnificently antic construction *PeaRoeFoam: My Special Purpose*, he poured it into reproduction boxes of a famous brand of Seventies detergent.

PeaRoeFoam is just one of the multivalent motifs the Los Angeles artist has developed over the past 10 years, but it is typical of his sculpture in its potential for endless reproduction and multiplication. Big thinkers tend to explain Rhoades' preoccupations by talking about French theorists Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizomes: the capacity of some plants to grow by progressive division of their roots. His sculptures seem to adopt the same process with forms and ideas. It's partly erotic, partly pop-cultural, partly performance; and there's often the suggestion of a lonely hobbyist creator who is just a little bit eccentric.

This month Rhoades is staging his London debut with a new installation, *Black Pussy*. It's a potentially explosive assemblage combining allusions to pre-Islamic Arabia, pornography, neon lights, chrome chandeliers, scatological wordplay, hookah pipes, cowboy hats and much else besides. Where Rhoades gets these strange ideas might seem mysterious, but there is a clue in the fact that the gallery playing host to him, Hauser & Wirth, also represents Paul McCarthy and Richard Jackson: Rhoades' messy, process-oriented sculpture owes a lot to their example.

If selling Rhoades is as difficult as describing him, Marc Payot, Director of Hauser & Wirth in Zurich, has quite a task. Rhoades doesn't make videos of the performances involved in his work; nor does he produce framed photographs of his unframeable sculptures. And although catalogues will show you images of Rhoades in the 'Fat Man Suit' that he wore for his *More Moby Motals and Morass* installation of 1991, these are merely documents. But if past form is any guide, Rhoades needn't worry about making it difficult: *More Moor Morals*, the first work made intentionally for sale, was snapped up by American collectors Peter and Eileen Norton.

The concession he does make to sales is to produce multiples and works on flat-screen monitors which are related to his larger installations. Small-scale multiples cost between $5,000 and $50,000, rising to $200,000 for larger works. Rhoades is too young – and too sought-after – to have much of a history at auction, but the multiple *Potato Gun* sold at Phillips in New York in 2003 for $3,000. At Basel earlier this year, *The Bulgarian Wall* (2004), an amalgam of PeaRoeFoam, neons, soap boxes and monitors, sold for $200,000. His larger installations can go for over twice that.

One might hesitate at parting with such sums for a few silos of PeaRoeFoam, but Payot assures me that – at least from a commercial viewpoint – it is the certificate of authenticity that is the prize. And don't worry, he says: full instructions are [illegible]

'Jason Rhoades: Black Pussy', 21 Sept–29 Oct, Hauser & Wirth, London (+44 (0)20 7287 2300, hauserwirth.com)

Below: Jason Rhoades, *My Madinah. In pursuit of my ermitage...*, 2004, 1,724 neon sculptures, various materials, installation view at Hauser & Wirth, St Gallen