

Jason Rhoades

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Hauser & Wirth West End

Before bathing in the unflattering, ultraviolet glow of Jason Rhoades' installation, you have to leave your bag at the door. Not that you'd be tempted to make off with any of the loot. Towers of chrome shelves display a crazy horde of tat – rag rugs, ceramic donkeys, glass vegetables, pipe cleaners, 'camel saddle-style' footstools, sex toys – all of which are listed as 'Other Elements'. 'Core Elements' include Egyptian hookah pipes (seized, we're told, from a shipping container), beaver-felt cowboy hats and Chinese Gongshi stones. Hookah, beaver – ooh-er; the display is punctuated by neon signs that spell out slang terms for a vagina. As they ascend, they change colour from blackish purple to pink, yellow and blue, but the adolescent terminology continues – 'Fun Hatch', 'Baby Hole', 'Butterfly'. Rhoades has called the exhibition 'Black Pussy... and the Pagan Idol Workshop'. Purportedly, it refers to the idols banished by Muhammad from the Ka'bah in the seventh century.

If absolute faith does not require earthly imagery, Rhoades seems to be querying the validity of art. However, while the installation reeks of wasteful, idiotic cul-

ture and cheapened religion, it stops short of offering conclusions. There are formally satisfying moments – elements are repeated, slightly altered, throughout and the view from the balcony affords a Godlike perspective – but the experience is far from uplifting. Distance doesn't add a patina of glamour (as with a glittering city at night); aesthetic resuscitation isn't on the cards.

Downstairs in the former bank vaults, Rhoades has installed washing machines and an ironing board in the shape of an artist's palette. The space might be intended for redemption of sorts (a place to wash your clothes, mouth and mind out) but, standing on one of the machines, a fetish doll with a straw face, an exhaust pipe and a neon sign that reads 'Skanky' remind you of the weight of junk upstairs. Stacked next to an empty safe are boxes full of sickly smelling chocolate and vanilla 'Soft Serve' powder. Is this a critical comment about the increasingly commercial art world, or a rather lame visual joke about money laundering?

Artists have a tendency to over-simplify complex issues; the allure of this maddening work is that, just as you think you've spotted some kind of logic, it mutates. Rhoades evidently feels as confused as everyone else. *Martin Coomer*

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'The Black Pussy... and the Pagan Idol Workshop' (detail)