

**Robert Garnett, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*,
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Burbage House, a space run by the art group, Bank, is one of a proliferation of venues around Shoreditch in East London, an area that has in recent years become associated with the new London art scene. The emergence of such scenes, centred around specific localities, has not occurred in Britain for a long time. What is more important, though, is the emergence of a new attitude, a new kind of practice that is a product of the distinct contexts within which most new art in London is being made and displayed.

The art that came out of the first generation of ground-breaking 'do-it-yourself' shows such as 'Freeze' and 'Modern Medicine' was still rooted in a 1980s aesthetic and was easily transposable into the gallery and museum context for which it was intended. The success of these shows couldn't be repeated in the same way. The art that has emerged over the past three or four years is no less ambitious, but it does follow a different agenda. In the transformed art climate of the early 1990s, and in the kinds of spaces within which art was being displayed, some of the serious claims made for the art of the 1980s just didn't seem realistic, and many of its strategies seemed played-out and academic by then anyway. The London art world was probably hit earlier and harder by the recession than most others and paradoxically, what this afforded was the possibility to produce a new art out of this situation earlier than anywhere else. As a result, this looser, less formal but more direct art with a broader agenda soon found an international audience.

In their recent shows, the Bank group has taken a similarly situational approach. They don't run a professional gallery space, so there's no need for them to make it look like one. Theirs is an ongoing, collaborative project and the space still bears the traces of their previous show, 'Zombie Golf'. The centrepiece this time, replacing blood-splattered zombies, is an absurdist, deliberately low-tech, slapdash-painted mock-up of that ill-fated instance of blind, British heroism, 'The Charge of the Light. Brigade'. Full-scale horses, riders and swords are suspended precariously from the ceiling, blocking the entrance, and then diminish in scale as they recede towards the far corner of the gallery. What you're supposed to read into this I don't know, but it sends a clear message to the invited participating artists: that, this isn't the space, or the time, for high-minded seriousness and excessive subjectivity.

Ingrid Pollard takes the message literally. Her work *Key to Geological Symbols and Colours*, would, in another context, invite readings in terms of its questioning of the objectivity and ideological neutrality of scientific systems of mapping and categorisation; when previously exhibited, it probably did. Here, it is left deliberately half-wrapped, its status and viability remaining open to question.

Simon Bedwell has spent the duration of the show traversing the West End taking random snapshots of tourists. When the prints are returned he sorts through them, looking at the features, skin colour, clothing and demeanour of the subjects and guesses at their origins. Each print (a standard high street 5 by 4) is then captioned 'American', 'Japanese', 'Italian', and so on. Sifting through the piles of prints scattered across a table, we soon find ourselves drawn into playing the same game, uncannily concurring, even when the captions refer to nationalities that possess a less pronounced popular identity such as 'Welsh' or 'Austrian'. Jettisoning the dry theoreticism and detachment of 1980s image-text photographic art, Bedwell takes a more light-footed approach that is no less sophisticated. In common with much recent British art he deals not with

generalised paradigms but with everyday particulars that enable him more directly to involve and implicate the spectator.

Matthew Higgs' *Kunstlerbrau* is his own, brewed-in-the-gallery art beer, and is a send-up of the absurdity of, for example, Becks' limited edition artist's beer bottles. The piece comes equipped with an obviously Duchampian plastic bottlerack. Greenberg once described art in the Duchampian tradition as 'scene art', and this work is also about the contemporary London art scene where openings form part of an ever-expanding party circuit in which art, to misquote Ad Reinhardt, is often relegated to something you back into when you're trying to get another drink.

A party was guaranteed at this opening because the Ken Ardley Playboys were performing their versions of The Beatles *Let it Be* songs recorded at their last live appearance on top of the Apple headquarters in 1970. Had they not been rained off the roof of Burbage House, they would have beaten Blur, who had similar plans elsewhere, to the post by 24 hours. And this raises another issue, which is the parallel between new British art and the 'Britpop' phenomenon. Both look beyond the 1980s because they seem, at the moment to be a more distant point on the historical horizon than the 1960s and 1970s that are the source, partly, for John Cussans' neo-Situationist *derive* of the sites of the London Tonight news programme's crime reports and traffic cameras. Orphan Drift also work in a revivalist mode with their Techno-style installation update of the psychedelic environments of the 1960s. British popular culture and art are now clearly conjoined to an extent that is unprecedented since the 1960s.

In comparison, John Timberlake's show at the Commercial Gallery looks caught between generations. His work deals with the issues of the authoritarian, patriarchal Modernist architectural paradigm that he sees to have been reproduced upon the anonymous surfaces and within abstract syntaxes of Minimalism. This is ambitious work, and the problem here is not that these issues are no longer relevant; the problem lies in the way he deals with them formally. The largest body of work here consists of minimalist-looking modular forms made out of foam rubber, that according to the press release ostensibly, 'present a camp simulation via the subtle mismatch of form and material'. The problem is that it's just not camp enough. Similarly techniques he uses in the paintings and drawings on display, within which he superimposes upon abstract, geometric, quasi-architectural plans, signs of bodilyness by making gestural brushmarks or smudges upon their surfaces, are just too obvious; as is that of overlaying miniature 3-dimensional architectural models with images of 'normal' people in an attempt to locate his concerns, as the blurb again tells us, 'in a wider social context'.

What gives work of the kind shown at Bank the edge over this is that it no longer feels compelled by the kinds of agenda that this show pursues nor does it feel obliged to maintain the same 'professionalism' and production values in locations such as this. They, like much of the recent British art, have a sharper sense of the contexts they work in and are producing a more direct, more open, and occasionally more compelling kind of work.

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