

Zombie Golf

BANK Space, London

Page 128 of the (fictional) book *Zombie Golf* has been torn out to serve as a press release. It follows a Yuppie having a particularly bad day on the golf course which culminates in his being eaten by zombies. Free, democratic society is then brought to its knees by this swarm of the living dead. The narrative terminates with movie-style credits for the show, which is odd; but not too odd since books and films are closely linked media. However, it does demonstrate how the exhibition compounds disparate themes – as does the title: I mean, are there many artists who consider zombies and golf to be central to their work?

The space is another of the alternative efforts that have sprung up like mangy phoenixes from the flames of London's many building conversions. The first art encountered is a perfectly badly painted mural of a club house inferno with the show's title scrawled across the smoke. This is the handiwork of BANK – artists' group and organisers of this, their seventh, show. Thus, it comes as no surprise that their work gamely attempts to link the whole shebang together; the method is the rather blunt tactic of using the whole room so that other pieces have to be exhibited within it. BANK's work, *Figures in a Landscape* (1995), has transformed the space into a golf course, with

recourse only to the not-so-special effects of green paint and cardboard trees – a kind of crap virtual reality.

It is soon apparent that there are only a few works that can hold their own here, simply due to the fact that there are bloody zombies everywhere. These constitute the main body, as it were, of *Figures in a Landscape*: life-sized wax figures with awkward stances and pained expressions who populate the gallery/golf course. There are 12 of them, but if you count all of the abandoned bodily appendages then maybe there are about 14. They spew up guts, rip golfers limb from limb and generally hang-out, ignoring the artworks – not unlike most private view visitors. It's all too much to take in one fleshy mouthful.

Amongst the primary school shrubbery, there is a real piece of wood pretending to be man-made: Adam Chodzko's *This is it* (1992). The work's materials are listed not as wood but as synthetic chemical compounds, sowing seeds of doubt as to whether what we are seeing is real or not. To complicate matters, the stick has been split open to reveal an embedded glass phial that seals in an ecstasy tablet. Chodzko's other work reverses the coin by presenting a fake wood as real. One half of *Involva* (1995) consists of a not-quite photo-realist pencil on Conté board drawing of a woodland scene. The other half shows the same image, this time in an advert taken out by Chodzko in a contacts magazine. The message below it reads 'Please will you join me

here? Genuine and ALA with SAE. No fees. LONDON ANYWHERE'. So, amongst the photos of middle-aged women's crotches, pleas for 'adult fun' and other such poorly printed low-level desperation, is a fake landscape attempting to push its way from fantasy into reality, through the vehicle of a magazine in which people vainly try to turn their fantasies into reality on a regular basis. But where are we meant to meet? At this imaginary location, or at the drawing? At the opening I met Chodzko quite near to this drawing but nothing came of it.

John Stezaker's *The Mask Series* (1986-95) places snapshots of the countryside over images of heads, thus covering the most heavily manipulated part of the human body: the face. The landscapes, chosen for their resemblance to facial features, become exaggeratedly mask-like. This idea of Nature becoming a cultural construct is also evidenced in Peter Doig's three paintings of – at last – golf courses. *Cypress Point*, *Desert Canyon's Lake* and *Palhiera* (all 1995) are painted in thin oil, allowing the board support to show through. In effect, the meandering lines of wood

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grain become part of the painted cloud patterns, the natural wood becoming party to the beautification of nature in these holiday brochure scenes.

Thus far, the show seems to gel around the theme of the colonisation of nature by culture, but the rest of the works simply refuse to tie in.

Maria Cook's *Uncle George and Auntie Eileen* (1995), is a continuous play cassette, featuring her relatives chatting away about the National Lottery, or something. Sivan Lewin presents a couple of large colour photographs depicting her mother in the kitchen and her father and sister outside.

Martin Creed's *Work no. 117 and Two Minute Rest* (1995) is a sound piece that rattles through every percussion sound on Creed's synthesiser. Dave Beech's *The Road to Wembley* (1995) has photographs taken from the TV (of opening credits and the like) which have then been cut into cloud shapes and suspended from string in a little cluster over our heads. It's about hope...

This loose curatorial style suggests a democracy in which the viewer judges each work without a pre-set reading being forced upon them. But this freedom is impossible

to appreciate: we will always search for a coherent meaning, even if it ends in frustration. It's a chaotic mess, but what do you expect when working with zombies? The trouble with free democracy is that we are just not used to it. It's like trying to liberate a pet dog – domestication is ingrained. The art world is too well house-trained to wilfully poo on the carpet.

The best work in the show is a free-standing cartoon by Matthew Higgs. It shows a shady gentleman opening one side of his overcoat with an outstretched arm. It looks like a sign that could stand outside a shop with special offers painted on the inside of the coat. The outstretched arm has a pointing finger. It points at the wall. The space in the coat is empty. It is shoddily made. Its title is *Nothing* (1995). Perhaps this show is actually about fun, not democracy; to be remembered as an event even if the actual artworks are already difficult to recall. In the age of the sound bite, art has become more entertaining, leaving morals, politics and eternal truths to those who really know about them – like Walt Disney.

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