

Disappointment Now

Matthew Griffin

Uplands, Melbourne
2 – 27 November 2004
by Lily Hibberd

Below: Matthew Griffin
spare girlfriend, 2004
Pegasus print
50 x 61cm

Photo credit: Cath Martin
Image courtesy the artist & uplands gallery

The Griffin Conundrum

Disappointment Now is an exhibition rife with puns and riddles, largely fashioned for the artist's own amusement. It is rare that an artist relishes making work, with little apparent regard for its appreciation. With the imagery being entirely urbane, *Disappointment Now* runs the risk of being too audacious. Maybe this is why there are haiku reviews supplied on the exhibition catalogue, as an overt foil to 'traditional' interpretation.

Disappointment Now is about the manipulation and contortion of artistic methods and imagery. Each work forms an aesthetic and material play on the form and content of another. With most contemporary artists the medium is subservient to a specific concept, but in *Disappointment Now* the order is messed up. In it Mathew Griffin melds photography with sculpture, which intersects with the installation pieces, and drawing is indistinguishable from painting. The transitions are not always comfortable – nor are they meant to be. Each of the six works has a twist that switches on your brain.

First up are a couple of photographs depicting a girl in a blue satin dress, posing as a fashion model. In one shot a paper cut-out, reading 'Remain Untamed', drools from her mouth. The girl is both very striking and weird looking. It's a beauty versus gross-out situation; the force of our attraction to the model rammed up against revulsion at the ooze of words. This image messes with the slickness of photography. In addition, the temporal logic of the portrait is distorted by the inference that the words are melting; the still moment is imbued with the performative. In a second photo, this girl has a white plastic bag on her head, printed with another girl's face. This is a brilliant picture because the paper bag implication is so foolish and farcical. A third shot shows a different woman – in fact it's the girl whose face imprinted (like the shroud of Turin) on the bag. This chick has the paper words coming out of her gob as well.

The games with the plastic bag continues across other pieces. As an item of an everyday order and an inordinately



wasteful thing, it's a superb object. In earlier exhibitions, Griffin included imagery of teenagers chroming. There aren't any in this show, but as an essential tool for the chromer the plastic bag is a throwback to the subject. Here the bag from the photo is readmitted as a scenario on the gallery floor: two googly eyes next to a deflated balloon-brain stare out of the open bag, wet paint spews out of the bag onto the floor. The pools of paint form the words 'Disappointment Now', which I take as an admonition: don't get your hopes up this show is not guaranteed to satisfy. A good way to lower expectations and also a witticism on the use of 'Now' in titles of recent institutional shows. I'm sure a few sharp players got this in-house art joke.



*Above: Matthew Griffin
Images courtesy the artist and uplands gallery, Photo credit: Cath Martin*

Left: London Dungeon, 2004

Balloon, drum sticks, drum stool, matchsticks, paper, table tennis balls, acrylic paint & marker

Dimensions variable

Right: disappointment now, 2004

Plastic bag, acetate, balloon, table tennis balls, acrylic paint & marker

Dimensions variable



In being both arty and anti-art, Griffin is taking a classic post-modern stance. In this genre high and low culture intermingle; art historical references are continually interspersed with ironic and playful allusions to popular culture. Griffin's haiku reviews attest to his signature exploitation of street culture. For instance, 'bogan rock and hip hop schlock'¹ and 'Gothic font versus dribbles. Rap metal freakout'.² Recent works of Griffin are littered with bongs, faded hip-hop artists, tattoos and wasted teenagers, but don't assume that they're included as a social commentary, distinctions aren't made between aesthetic and moral values. For Griffin vomit and graphic design are on an equal footing – a chromer as fascinating but as cursory as an etching by Albrecht Dürer.

Disappointment Now is a taste of the stuff that happens in the studio, a series of 'elegant solutions'.³ In it, we can read Griffin's playful exploration of little trains of thought, wherein the new things that intrigue him are allowed to ricochet off an anthology of the old ones. The brain emerges once again in a sculpture set up in the corner of the room. Two baseball bats lean on a drum stool encased in model-maker's balsa wood struts, and a third bat rests against the wall. There's melting paper text drooling off the seat... 'I don't want to be here'. The brain (a deflated balloon) is suspended in a ball made out of these same sticks. It's a wacky work of art and it takes on a funny persona the longer you look at it, the bats as arms and the ball as a head with bloodshot eyes. First-class contradictions emerge in the conflagration of found objects with craft techniques, as art objects, dodgy but skilfully made.

Definitely on the arty side of the battlefield is a large wall drawing. This piece combines raw materials with a design aesthetic. Standard size panels of masonite are bolted directly onto the wall, and adhesive vinyl cut outs create an intricate line drawing. A woman is kneeling, a long scroll draped over her shoulders. Parts of a lyric from a Black Flag song are revealed among the furls. 'This fucking city is run by pigs. They take the rights away from all the kids.'⁴ The composition and sharp linearity is akin to Renaissance etching, which has strong ties to universal styles of contemporary illustration. Maybe it's the Gothic line-work but this piece has a distinctly religious flavour (very similar motifs are on the quilted works that hang in Anglican churches). In relation to the rest of the show this is not an overly articulated work of art and it's evident here that the artist is not trying to homogenise the ideas for the sake of conceptual ease.

In the end it is much easier to produce and sell an exhibition with a series of works of a similar appearance. It is to Griffin's credit that he has freed himself the constraints of these customary roads to success, made all the more remarkable for being a commercial gallery show.

<notes>

¹ Lisa Radford, Haiku Reviews, Matthew Griffin *Disappointment Now* exhibition catalogue, 2004

² Geoff Newton, Haiku Reviews, Matthew Griffin *Disappointment Now* exhibition catalogue, 2004

³ An extract from a conversation with Matthew Griffin at the Town Hall Hotel, December 2004

⁴ Lyrics by Black Flag, from 'Police Story', *Damaged*, 1981