

Adam McEwen

Revue de presse
Press review

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ART & DESIGN

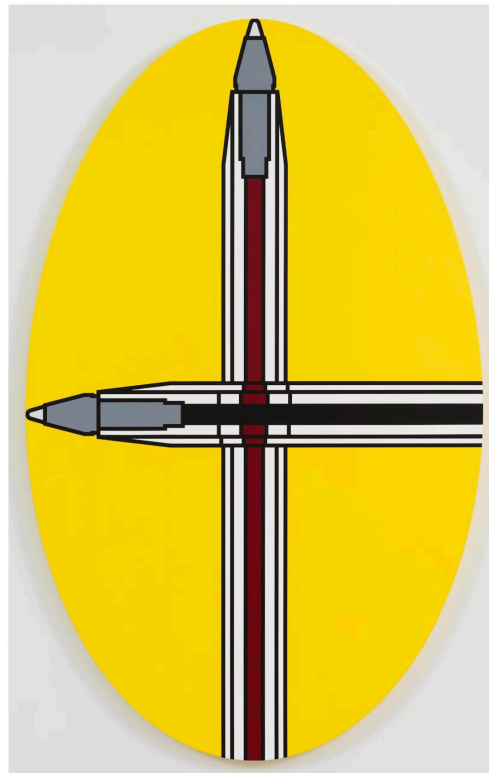
Why Adam McEwen Pre-Memorializes Our Most Beloved Celebs

The artist explains why writing premature obituaries for beloved figures such as Dolly Parton and Grace Jones is a means to inspire hope.

by **Steph Eckardt**
03.03.23



"Untitled (Dolly)," by Adam McEwen, 2023. Photograph by Prudence Cuning Associates Ltd. Courtesy of Gagolan



"Colossus No. 1" by Adam McEwen, 2023. Photograph by Rob McKeever. Courtesy of the artist and Gagolan

Dolly Parton, who has died at 77, rose from entrenched poverty in rural eastern Tennessee to become one of the most successful and beloved American entertainers of her era, writing and singing dozens of hit country songs, acting in a long string of popular movies, and operating her own amusement park empire.

Those words are not fake news, but art. They come courtesy of Adam McEwen, who has resurrected his series of chromogenic print obituaries of living celebrities for the first time in more than a decade, in a solo exhibition at Gagosian's London outpost. Such works are “not a wish fulfillment fantasy, of course,” he quickly assures me when I stop by the cavernous warehouse that serves as his studio in Long Island City, Queens. To be prematurely memorialized by McEwen, you must be someone he appreciates, admires, and genuinely loves; someone who, to him, is living proof that even under the crushing weight of capitalism, there is hope.

“These people are saying that we have more freedom than we realize, more power than we realize,” McEwen says. “They’re guides—and even revolutionaries, because they show you that the rules that seem to be oppressing you are an illusion. It’s a trick. Dolly Parton grew up in a two-room shack in Tennessee”—with 11 siblings, we might add—“and is now buying schoolbooks for kids across America because the government won’t. She says it looks impossible and hopeless, but it’s not.”



"Untitled (Greta)," by Adam McEwen, 2023. Photo: Prudence Cumming Associates Ltd. Courtesy of Gagosian



"Untitled (Grace)," by Adam McEwen, 2023. Photograph by Prudence Cumming Associates Ltd. Courtesy of Gagosian

Parton headlines a list including Grace Jones, David Hammons, Greta Thunberg, and Lewis Hamilton, who follow in the footsteps of past McEwen subjects such as Kate Moss and Macaulay Culkin. Their shared iconoclasm might be why some of these subjects—Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, and Malcolm McClaren among them—seem to appreciate this unique form of portraiture. “I told Malcolm about it the first time I met him and he was like, ‘What?!’; then smiled and laughed,” McEwen recalls of his inaugural euphemistic “kill.”

When the punk pioneer actually did meet his maker in 2010, the obituaries that appeared in newspapers were essentially rewrites of the one that McEwen had already penned. His prints not only look like the real deal (he licenses the photos from Getty Images), but read like them: The artist spent years writing obits for *The Daily Telegraph* in London as a way to make ends meet post-graduation from California Institute of the Arts (aka CalArts) in 1991. Even then, McEwen’s epitaphs had personality, but he always sticks to the facts. The only fiction is, in some ways, the date: “All I know for sure about these people is that they’re going to die,” he says.



Adam McEwen
Photograph by Anishish Avni

McEwen's goal is to, for just a moment, make you think that these public figures have already passed. His practice centers around "that moment of suspension, of instability, of everything being up for grabs, of getting someone to a different place where suddenly art is —'Wait, what?'"

In the 11 years before he returned to the obituary series, the work he made rendered the ultramundane extreme, or vice versa: paintings of crashed Teslas on supersized kitchen sponges; sculptures of water coolers that turn out to be made of graphite, the kind you can draw with; illustrations of Nokia text messages that feel too real to be fiction ("I heard you are in Gstaad? True? I am here."); or even the riffs on the all-too-familiar BIC pen that are at the center of his other current Gagosian exhibition in Rome.

McEwen's return to the obit series of works, inspired by a post-pandemic surge of optimism, came just before the fake celeb death trend on TikTok. (For the record, McEwen considers pranks such as making Angela Bassett think her costar Michael B. Jordan died purely cruel.) He's always been one step ahead: When I suggest that he pen his own obit—which he's always felt would be rather obvious—on his deathbed, McEwen responds like the journalist he once was. "Well, exactly," he says. "Beat them to the post."

CULTURA & SPETTACOLI / MOSTRE

COL PITTORE IN GALLERIA: ADAM MCEWEN IN MOSTRA ALLA GAGOSIAN DI ROMA

Adam McEwen, protagonista di due mostre in contemporanea da Gagosian a Roma e a Londra. Britannico, classe 1965, ancora poco conosciuto in Italia, racconta le sue stravaganti opere

Di Pier Andrea Canei 18 febbraio 2023



«Mi sono fatto conoscere con i finti necrologi di personaggi viventi: da Jeff Koons a Greta Thunberg. E ora mi dedico a composizioni in acrilico dedicate alle stilografiche Bic». Così Adam McEwen ha cambiato vita, da estensore di obituaries ad artista di grido.

È

uno stravagante outsider di successo dell'arte contemporanea Adam McEwen, britannico (classe 1965, cresciuto tra Londra e la Scozia, ci tiene da differenziarsi da un "Englishman", anche a New York, dove vive dal 2000) attualmente protagonista di ben due mostre personali presso la

Gagosian: a Londra (sede di Davies street, fino all'11 marzo), con una nuova serie di finti necrologi dedicati a personaggi illustri della contemporaneità, il filone con cui si è fatto conoscere, e a Roma (in via Francesco Crispi, fino al 1° aprile), dove ha appena inaugurato XXIII, un ciclo di dipinti dedicati alle penne di plastica più famose del mondo. È qui, nella grande sala ovale a due passi da Trinità dei Monti che forma il corpo centrale della galleria, che, a poche ore dalla vernice, un McEwen fresco e sorridente s'intrattiene con *Style*.

IL COLOSSEO DELLE PENNE BIC: INTERVISTA CON ADAM MCEWEN

Adam McEwen, come le viene in mente di dedicare un'intera mostra - nemmeno sponsorizzata - alle penne Bic?

Cercando di continuare la mia evoluzione ripartire dalla pittura, dalle basi, ripensando al primo Roy Lichtenstein, a Francis Picabia, dai disegni meccanici del dadaismo... A queste biro ho pensato per tanto tempo e quando, un anno fa, mi fu prospettata una mostra romana ho ripensato alla potenza di questo oggetto quotidiano che ti accompagna in giro per il mondo. Certe cose sono più grandi di quanto sembrano: l'arte è riconoscere le cose che ami e dialogare con esse. A 12 anni in classe prendi penna e ne fai una cerbottana per pallottole di carta, oppure quando sei un po' più grande prendi una mela, ci infili la biro svuotata, e la usi per fumare erba (*ride*) ... insomma oggetti generosi e democratici, che ognuno conosce e che ti permettono di usare la creatività.

Il tema del dipingere a partire dalla scrittura, ricorre nei suoi lavori...

Sono stato educato in Letteratura inglese all'Università; poi ho proseguito gli studi d'arte in California. E poi ho fatto sculture in grafite, un materiale industriale la cui polvere viene destinata alla produzione di matite, dunque strumenti per scrivere e disegnare. *La scultura di un disegno di un'idea...*

Come ripercorrere il processo creativo dietro ai dipinti in questa mostra romana?

Un anno fa a NYC ho fatto tutta una mostra in grigio, dipingendo gli sfondi era domenica, ed è arrivata la notizia che Putin invadeva l'Ucraina... e tutto questo grigio scuro... e ho pensato, ma questa è la cosa più deprimente che io abbia mai fatto. Questi grigi super scuro, questi incroci marziali, ripensando anche ai martelli che marciano in *Pink Floyd The Wall*... mi son venuti in mente i soldati. Che si possono schierare in tanti modi. Quando ho scoperto che questa stanza ha la stessa forma dell'arena del *Colosseo*... mi sono fatto un film con le Bic entrano nell'arena. Come materiale bellico. Come gladiatori, *Spartacus* o Russell Crowe... Ogni quadro è una variazione sul tema: soldati a riposo, soldati in marcia: qui duellano con un clangore di spade: il titolo è *Kling Klang*, che è anche lo studio dove registravano i Kraftwerk... Questa è la *fog of war*, questi potrebbero essere morti, e questa una processione funebre... Ma è solo una mia lettura! Il dipinto è l'arena per la battaglia personale del pittore. Si tratta di acrilici, quindi tutto si asciuga in fretta. Forse hai dieci minuti di tempo per agire; e allora entri in campo e combatti, capito?

Il principio non sembra troppo complicato.

Semplice semplice. Non cerco cose tecnicamente complicate. Se una cosa è abbastanza buona è perfetta. Avere abbastanza coraggio da fare errori. Se prendi rischi, ne fai. La libertà è nei luoghi in cui sbagli.

Intanto, alla Gagosian di Londra in Davies street, si espongono i suoi famosi "Obituaries", cioè i "coccodrilli" giornalistici, pezzi che rievocano le vite di celebrità appena defunte – che lei, però, dedica a personaggi viventi. Come è nata l'idea?

Scrivendo i veri "obituaries"! Quando ho finito l'Art school, a 27 anni, tramite un amico di mio padre, che avevo appena perso, mi è capitata l'occasione: per 2 o 3 anni sono stato in redazione al Daily Telegraph, addetto alla scrittura dei cosiddetti "obits". Il lavoro era buono, la paga interessante: ma non facevo l'arte che volevo ed ero depresso. Per qualche anno ho fatto questo mestiere che mi dava da vivere, ma mi chiedevo: mio padre è morto e io devo passare la vita a ricomporre vite altrui a partire da ritagli di giornale: leggere, scrivere, pubblicare per un milione di lettori... tutto formale, nello stile giornalistico della testata. Scrivere biografie senza sapere nulla delle persone, come fosse fiction.



Adam McEwen: Colosseo No.1 acrilico su tela (2023).



Kling Klang, acrilico su tela (2023). Il nome è ripreso dallo storico studio di registrazione tedesco dei Kraftwerk, gruppo di elettronica apprezzato da Adam McEwen.



In mostra a Roma: Motley Krew, acrilico su tela (2023).

Quindi è riuscito a ricontestualizzare questo mestieraccio, estensore di coccodrilli o necrologi, trasformandolo in arte...

Quel lavoro simboleggiava la mia inabilità a fare quel che volevo: sono le sei del pomeriggio e son qui al *Daily Telegraph*, e i miei amici vanno ai vernissage e ai cocktail... e io a sgobbare in redazione, alla scrivania. Nel 2000, già cercavo di cambiare vita; dovendo partecipare a una collettiva da Vivienne Westwood dove a ogni artista veniva data una T-shirt da personalizzare, mi venne in mente di scrivere l'*obituary* di Malcolm McLaren (*grande agitatore proto-punk, sodale della Westwood, produttore musicale; defunto poi nel 2010 ndr*). come se fosse morto. Scritto con amore, di un personaggio che stimavo. L'idea ha avuto un grande successo.

E McEwen si è creato un seguito internazionale...

Partito per New York con l'intenzione di costruire una vita artistica, mi son dedicato agli obituary su tela di persone viventi. Ho fatto le prime mostre facendo sorridere Jeff Koons o Richard Prince, colleghi artisti tutti oggetto di miei obits. Tutti sono dedicati a personaggi che amo. Qualcuno mi chiede: perché non scrivi un obit su Trump? E io: ma perché dovrei dedicare del tempo, e degli sforzi mentali, a un personaggio che non apprezzo?

Insomma, l'arte è più generosa del giornalismo. Come lavoro, come guadagni...

A NYC, il problema è diventato la soluzione. Prendi il problema e ribaltalo, e diventerà la soluzione. Abbiamo più risorse di quel che non crediamo! È tutto così, basta trovare il potere contro tutti quelli che ci dicono che non ce la possiamo fare: pubblicità, banche, assicurazioni, mutui... molte istituzioni ci vogliono spingere a risolvere i malesseri comprando, consumando. È una trappola, un'illusione!

A lei i personaggi piacciono variegati. Da Dolly Parton a Greta Thunberg...

I personaggi di cui compongo gli obituaries ci dicono, non vivere secondo regole prestabilite. Greta Thunberg ci dice che non siamo spacciati, ma dobbiamo lottare per cambiare le nostre sorti! Come certii grandi artisti... Dave Almond, cantante dei Ssoft Cell, uomo gay nella Inghilterra deli anni 80. Grace Jones, donna giamaicana, Dolly Parton, venuta da una capanna in mezzo al nulla. Tutti contro le regole prestabilite, figure-guida che ci dicono: "you are powerful". La società ti sospinge verso lo status quo, certe figure ti fanno scavalcare la barriera della disperazione.

ADAM MCEWEN DA GAGOSIAN

Di **Redazione** - 2 Febbraio 2023



Adam McEwen

Dal 10 febbraio al 1 aprile 2023 **Gagosian** presenta *XXIII*, una mostra di nuovi dipinti di Adam McEwen, la prima dell'artista con la galleria in Italia, che aprirà al pubblico venerdì 10 febbraio 2023.

Protagonista delle opere in *XXIII* è la penna a sfera, oggetto onnipresente della vita contemporanea e icona del design moderno. Trasformandone le sagome trasparenti ed esagonali in rappresentazioni piatte e schematiche, McEwen enfatizza sia l'aspetto lineare che il potenziale creativo di questi oggetti attraverso la pittura acrilica. Dalle dimensioni leggermente più grandi di una persona di alta statura, le composizioni di questi dipinti suggeriscono relazioni sia meccaniche che figurative.

Nella loro decontestualizzazione del quotidiano infatti, i dipinti Bic di Adam McEwen si ricollegano alle opere passate dell'artista: dalle sculture a grandezza naturale di oggetti fresati in grafite ai necrologi di persone viventi, questi ultimi al centro della sua mostra personale in corso presso Gagosian Londra dal 26 gennaio all'11 marzo 2023. Le opere richiamano inoltre l'appropriazione del disegno meccanico nella pittura di artisti quali Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp e Roy Lichtenstein.

Nella sala principale sette tele rettangolari di **Adam McEwen** di identiche dimensioni sottolineano interrelazioni compositive e simboliche: contemporaneamente aggressive e giocose, le opere sembrano suggerire idee e strutture sociali in competizione. Accomunate da sfondi violacei, presentano tinte che vanno dal lavanda al porpora, applicate alternativamente come strati monocromatici e passaggi pittorici in contrasto deciso con le linee delle penne. Il porpora è un colore associato alla storia di Roma fin dall'antichità, dai senatori e imperatori dell'antico impero alle vesti liturgiche, mentre le linee incrociate tracciate dalle penne in molte delle opere ricordano i numeri romani del titolo della mostra.

Disposte in precise linee parallele, le penne a inchiostro rosso di *Materiel* (2023) puntano verso il basso in una configurazione diagonale che trasmette un senso di ordine militaresco. In *Kling Klang* (2023) si incrociano tra loro penne a inchiostro nero e rosso le cui linee intrecciate ricordano una sorta di danza o di esercizio fisico. In *Dodger* (2023), il senso di regolarità e ordine è messo in discussione da una penna che rompe i ranghi, mentre *Good Night* (2023) sostituisce le linee rette delle penne con forme fantasticamente ondegianti.

Il dipinto più grande della mostra di **Adam McEwen**, *Big Spear* (2023), ricorda la mischia di lance nella *Battaglia di San Romano* di Paolo Uccello (c. 1435-40, Uffizi, Firenze), un'opera chiave del Maestro rinascimentale per la definizione delle potenzialità della prospettiva lineare. In un'altra sala opere ovali giocano con la forma geometrica che caratterizza la galleria. La disposizione delle penne in questi dipinti assume la forma della croce in *Colosseo No.1* (2023), dell'Uroboro, il serpente che si morde la coda in *Colosseo No.3* (2023), e del numero 8 o segno dell'infinito in *Colosseo No.5* (2023), simboli che risuonano con la storia di Roma e non solo.

Adam McEwen è nato nel 1965 a Londra e vive e lavora a New York. Le sue opere sono incluse, tra le altre, nelle seguenti collezioni: Arts Council Collection, Londra; Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, Scozia; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, Germania; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut; Rollins Museum of Art, Winter Park, Florida; de la Cruz Collection, Miami; Rubell Museum, Miami; e Museo Jumex, Città del Messico. Tra le mostre si annoverano: Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, Texas (2012); Museo Civico-Diocesano di Santa Maria dei Servi, Città della Pieve, Italia (2015); *I Think I'm in Love*, Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2017); e *10, Feels Like 2*, Lever House, New York (2019).



Publié le 01/02/2023 par Lise Lanot

Une initiative à première vue humoristique qui interroge nos façons de mener nos vies et ouvre des pistes de réflexion, personnelles et sociétales.

Greta Thunberg

Climate activist who became the face of a global youth movement demanding wholesale change

THUNBERG, who was 19, enjoyed a meteoric rise as a climate activist. The *Force of her rhetoric*, like her youth and charismatic world opinion, seemed huge support as easily changed intentions to act against climate change. She was first a girl intensely concerned about the environment. At 15, she and her mother, Malin Thunberg, moved to Sweden, the real world. But her school was a political act. In the fall of 2018, "I'm 15. My name is Greta. I'm in the ninth grade. And I'm striking for the climate." She was at the school, the Swedish Parliament, by a sign reading "Frida for the climate." Following week she was a handful of school- and teachers' media began to take the news that the strike Friday event, calling it "for future." By March a protest had spread to Paris. On September 20 million people took part in strikes in 161 countries. Climate change is a year she had become her most famous person. She was named for the Nobel Peace Prize. The United Kingdom, French, and European Union, and was thanked by the pope. She was named for the Nobel Peace Prize. She was named for the Nobel Peace Prize. She was named for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Thunberg (2019): trenchant rhetoric gave voice to the conscience of a generation

dreams and my childhood with your empty words." Her girl for the moment rhetoric was matched by her laconic politeness. When Theresa May, then British prime minister, said the

making a berth on a racing yacht near her by the UN climate meeting. Hundreds of journalists met her two weeks later when she arrived in Manhattan.

Her deftly simple remained

killers. "The climate gods are laughing you to sleep every now and then as they perpetuate."

Any will of bipolarity was bravely pursued by her mother, director. The TV pas-

is. It is not sustainable to like this."

Greta Thunberg's mother, Malin Thunberg, was born in Stockholm on January 3, 2003, the daughter of Malena Thunberg, an opera singer and Greta Thunberg's mother. Soon after her birth, her mother's international career took off, and her father moved home to raise Greta and her younger sister, Isabella.

Thunberg first modeled watching, at age 8, a film about an island of plastic refuse floating in the Pacific Ocean, an incident her mother's understood why people could be so little.

"I became very affected," she said. "I began thinking about it all the time and I became very sad. These pictures were very in my head."

At the age of 11, she fell into a deep depression, and stopped talking and eating. "She was slowly disappearing into some kind of darkness," wrote her parents later, "and, little by little, by the way, she stopped talking." The whole family were "turned out people on a burned-out planet."

Thunberg was eventually diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, OCD and selective mutism, a diagnosis that came as a great relief. The subsequent years of autism her "super power," allowing her to take out everything and focus on the environment.

Her work started at home. "She blocked us," her father noted. "She started turning off lights, she cut the electricity bill in half." She could "be very, very, very annoying," he said. "But because we were in this crisis we had to react... to save our child." Her mother, by then a world-renowned singer, gave up flying, thus effectively ending her career.

The parents' initial reactions about her school strikes were flat. Indeed, camping, in fact, had unconsciously beneficial consequences for Thunberg. She was "not a good student," he said and looking after her, a pair of dogs and an Icelandic sheepdog named Garmur were added looking to maintain the house and the money and papers, and having far



Grace Jones

Ironic artist and performer whose high-octane persona pushed boundaries of gender and image

GRACE JONES, the Jamaican singer, actress and model who died aged 74, recorded some of the most original pop music of the 1980s, including the B.B. King classic, "Put U Up To The Bump" (1981) and the Billboard dance No.1, "Slave to the Rhythm" (1985).

Androgynous, theatrical and audaciously inventive, possessed of an excellent sense of humor, Jones was a child of the 1960s counterculture who rose to prominence in the Paris and New York gay club scenes of the following decade.

One of her original disco queens – her semi-nude recording of Edith Piaf's "La Vie En Rose" was an international smash in 1977 – Jones stood out from the start for her fashion sense and gender fluid looks. "I like dressing like a guy," she told *Interview* magazine in 1984. "The future is not sex. You can be a boy, a girl, whatever you want."

Her early shows were a cross between disco and the theatre of the circus, as she prowled wearing sexually provocative and covered in chains such as New York's Studio 54 and Paris's Club Sex, lashing out with a whip or in boxing gloves. Her stylized persona, further honed with the collaboration of her then partner, French graphic designer Jean-Paul Gault, combined icy self-possession with twinningbackled sexuality.

It was a far cry from her strict religious upbringing in Spanish Town, Jamaica. But, as Jones later revealed, her performances channelled her gay grandfather, a Protestant preacher and fierce disciplinarian, who had been responsible for the slightest of infractions, from doing handstands to turning down the corner of a page in the Bible. Mimicking him – the glare, the stance, the whip – proved cathartic.

The outrage didn't end there. In 1979, when she was 24, her Blackwell record label hired Island Records, who were struck by Jones as an enigma. In the studio, soundscaped, proposed a selection of songs for her to perform. "I would send bands such as Jay's Devotion,

infections 'My Jamaican Guy' with Chaka Khan, reached new heights on the album covers, videos and 1982's performance film *A One Man Show*." Jones derived an edge from such collaborations. As a model, she worked closely with designers such as Kenzo and Issey Miyake; as a performer, with artists Andy Warhol and Keith Haring. Such creative chemistry studied her as an actress, however, and she always read her songs down a pair in Ridley Scott's *Boyz n the City* (1982). From the mid-1980s, still, she appeared alongside such A-listers as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Roger Moore in films including *Conan The Destroyer* (1984) and *A View To A Kill* (1985), but she never escaped typecasting. Hollywood's idea of a strong, malicious woman, she observed, was an ironic strap.

Her iconic slogan "Sister after Sister To The Rhythm," the album produced by Trevor Horn, and her subsequent move to Capitol Records. After *Bodyguard* film in 1989, it was nearly a decade before she would record another studio album.

The press took to portraying her as a diva with anger issues. She was no stranger to scandal, from her flirts on live TV with chat show host Russell Harty to her infatue bus from Disney Parks for flashing her breasts. But as far as she was concerned, the most recent event compared to her deal with Luciano Pavarotti on Madonna's "Pavane" film in 2003, which she considered the ultimate validation of her singing.

The release of *Chatterbox* in 2008, recorded with her Congolese Pointe-à-Pitre cousins, marked a sea change. Jones's troupeheart performance that year's *Michelle* Festival in London, earned by *Maestro* Award, proved not only how well-loved she was, but also how relevant.

Occasionally by her second name, Grace, she was from a prominent Protestant family, her father, a bishop, from a line of army officers and civil servants.

Her parents moved to Syracuse, NY, when Jones and

she was a student of The Studio 54 and Andy Warhol's acts.

Jones had an unbroken career as a model and worked as a go-go dancer before moving to New York City aged 18, signing with Wilhelmina

she was a staple of The Studio 54 and Andy Warhol's acts.

Jones had an unbroken career as a model and worked as a go-go dancer before moving to New York City aged 18, signing with Wilhelmina

Plusieurs raisons pourraient expliquer la décision de l'artiste Adam McEwen d'un jour rédiger et partager les avis de décès de personnalités bien vivantes. On pourrait imaginer que c'est la mort de son père, survenue à la fin de son adolescence, qui lui a donné l'idée du projet. Ou le fait qu'il écrivait des nécrologies comme petit boulot en sortant de ses études d'art. C'est sûrement le cas, mais c'est aussi le fond même de ce que représente un avis de décès qui l'a motivé : ce que la mort dit de la vie, de façon générale.

Après du Guardian, l'artiste définit un obituaire comme un *“récit de prises de décisions”* sélectionnées par une auteur·rice. *“En 1984, elle a fait ça ; en 1987, elle a fait ci. La personne crée une histoire.”* Cette prise de conscience lui permet de gloser sur la façon dont chacune mène sa vie.

Dolly Parton

Universally beloved singer, actress and philanthropist whose hits included Jolene and Nine to Five

DOLLY PARTON, who has died at 77, rose from entrenched poverty in rural eastern Tennessee to become one of the most successful and most beloved American entertainers of her era, writing and singing dozens of hit country songs, acting in a long string of popular movies and operating her own amusement park empire.

In an age of intense political and cultural polarization, Parton was the rare person who was almost universally adored – by young and old, liberal and conservative, gay and straight. Her outlandish public persona, built on towering wigs, an expansive bust, vertiginous heels and thick Southern accent, managed at once to convey sincerity and kitsch, transgressive glam and good ol' down-home virtue.

She was one of the only American musicians to have a No.1 album in every decade from the 1960s to the 2010s. She sold more than 100 million albums and had 25 No.1 hits, tied with Reba McEntire for the most by a female country star, and holds the record for most top-ten albums, at 44.

She wrote almost all her own songs, many of which became instant classics: 'Jolene', 'Coat of Many Colors', 'I Will Always Love You', 'Nine to Five'. And while remaining firmly identified with country music, she was among the genre's most successful crossover acts, with multiple songs reaching the top of both charts simultaneously.

Like Madonna or Lady Gaga, Parton stayed on top by never staying still. She began her career in the 1960s as the sassy-clean understudy to Porter Wagoner, an ageing country star. In the 1970s she became a sex symbol, appearing on the cover of Playboy (though not inside it, at least not disrobed). A movie career followed in the 1980s and 1990s. And as country music returned to its roots that decade, so did she, duetting with venerable traditionalists like Linda Ronstadt and Loretta Lynn.

All along, she seemed to revel in subverting expectations about large-breasted, big-haired women from the American South – one of her first hits was a cover of a song called 'Dumb Blonde'. She was open about her extensive adventures with plastic surgery, quipping that "it takes a lot of money to look this cheap." She was anything but dumb. Observers considered her one of the savviest businesspeople in Nashville, with a genius grasp for the intricacies of the music industry. In 2017 she was estimated to be worth \$500 million, making her the wealthiest performer in country music.

She wrote some 3,000 songs and retained publishing rights to all of them. When Elvis Presley wanted to do a version of her song 'I Will Always Love You' but insisted on getting half the royalties, she declined, even though it meant passing on a quick windfall. Her long-gone bet paid off when in 1992



Parton (1980): megawatt charm, stellar musicianship and an easy way with a joke

Whitney Houston's cover of the song topped the Billboard charts for 14 weeks, making Parton a fortune. "I made enough money to buy Graceland," she joked.

In 1987 she opened Dollywood, an amusement park near her birthplace in East Tennessee. Almost immediately, it became one of the state's biggest tourist draws, and spawned spinoffs in Missouri and South Carolina.

She funded hospitals across Tennessee and relief efforts in the wake of the region's frequent tornadoes and fires. Her real passion was literacy: she gave away more than 100 million books, and was a relentless guest reader at libraries and schools around the country.

And when the pandemic hit, she was among the few country stars willing to take a strong public stand in favor of mask mandates and other public health measures. She made a video of her receiving a Covid

vaccine, accompanied by a version of 'Jolene', including the lines "Vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, vaccine/I'm begging of you please don't hesitate."

She was, for all that, an intensely private person. She lived on a farm outside Nashville with her husband of nearly 60 years, Carl Dean. He shunned the spotlight and they were never seen together in public.

It could be hard to distinguish the person from the persona. She insisted that she was who she was, no secrets, but also dropped hints about a salacious past – romantic affairs, one-night stands – and an introspective, even intellectual side. Though maybe that was an act, too.

"I've been around a long time," she said in 2014. "The magic with me is that I look completely false when I'm completely real."

Dolly Rebecca Parton was born on January 19 1946, in a

one-room cabin in rural Sevier County, southeast of Knoxville, Tennessee. Her father, Robert, was a sharecropper. He eventually saved enough to buy his own tobacco farm and moved the family to a slightly larger, but still single-room, cabin.

Parton was the fourth of 12 children born to her mother, Avie Lee, before she was 35. Parton attributed her business sense to her father, but credited her musical gifts to her mother. She spoke rapturously about Avie Lee's mental library of ballads and stories, many of them old Welsh and Scottish tales.

Parton was never long for farm life. She propped a tin can on a stick for a microphone. At age 10 she made her first radio appearance. At 14 she was on the Grand Ole Opry, the legendary variety show out of Nashville. Backstage she met Johnny Cash, who told her to keep at it.

The day she graduated high

school she moved to Nashville. She had no money, no car, no apartment. Staying with an uncle for a while, she persuaded friends to drive her to the publishers and studios along Music Row, where she begged producers to listen to her demo tapes.

Parton's first successes came as a writer. When she did manage to get behind the microphone, she was saddled with bubble-gum pop tunes, which sank without a trace.

It was only when she recorded as a country act that she began to gain an audience. Among her new fans was Mr. Wagoner, 20 years her senior, who invited her to join his TV variety program, "The Porter Wagoner Show." She sang, quipped, danced and won over legions of admirers.

Together they churned out a series of hit albums, while Parton struggled to make her way as a solo artist. She received acclaim for her first release, *Hello, I'm Dolly*, in 1967, but by the early 1970s she was feeling constrained by Wagoner's often domineering presence in her career. The two split up in 1974, an occasion for which Parton wrote 'I Will Always Love You.'

With her feet planted firmly in country, she struck out for mainstream success. It helped that at the time, America was enthralled with country culture – "The Dukes of Hazard" was one of the most popular shows on television and singers such as Mr. Cash, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings were megastars. In 1977 she released the album *Here You Come Again*, which topped the country chart and broke the top 20 on the pop chart.

Easy with a joke, Parton became a favorite on talk shows and variety programs. Soon she was being lined up for acting roles. She starred alongside Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda in 1980's *9 to 5*, and earned an Oscar nomination for writing its theme song. Other films followed, with varying box-office success: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982), *Rhinestone* (1984), *Steel Magnolias* (1989).

Her subsequent music career ranged from bluegrass to gospel and folk. By the end of the century it had slowed, only to come roaring back a decade later – with the encouragement of a new manager, she returned to live performing and to the recording studio.

It worked: in 2014 she released *Blue Smoke*, her 42nd album, which debuted at No. 6 on the Billboard chart, a personal best. That summer she played for 180,000 at Glastonbury, in Britain, one of the largest crowds ever at the festival. After several attempts to decline the honor, in 2022 she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, making her one of the few artists to be in the Country and Songwriters Halls of Fame as well.

She is survived by her husband.

“C’est ce qu’on fait toute la journée, on décide de se prendre un café ou un thé – ce sont des décisions basées sur ce que je m’imagine devoir faire pour que ma vie soit plus comme ce à quoi je veux qu’elle ressemble.” Une réflexion qui peut pousser au nihilisme ou donner le vertige, pour peu qu’on angoisse de l’effet papillon.

Invité à participer à une *“petite exposition de groupe”* à New York, à laquelle le public devait customiser un T-shirt de Vivienne Westwood au début des années 2000, Adam McEwen a eu l’idée de transformer un *“problème”* en *“solution”*, c’est-à-dire faire d’un petit boulot pas très épanouissant l’inspiration d’un projet artistique. Sur le fameux T-shirt, le jeune artiste décide, au dernier moment, d’imaginer la nécro de Malcolm McLaren, artiste britannique alors bien vivant.

David Hammons

Artist whose poetic vision rooted in Black American culture produced works of confounding power

DAVID HAMMONS, the artist who has died aged 79, was a new mythic figure whose carefully guarded anonymity and radical investigations into the nature of art earned him mystique and international renown in equal measure.

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"Those pieces were all about making sure that the Black viewer had a reflection of himself in the work," he told the art historian Kellie Jones in 1986. "White viewers have to look at someone else's culture in these pieces and see very little of themselves."

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'Insurance Case' (1970), the most famous, saw in the collection of LACMA, shows a Black man sitting in a chair, gagged and bound, his head thrown back, in reference to Black Panther activist Bobby Seale at the trial of the Chicago 8.

Hammons' work could astonish by its leanness and efficiency. 'In the Hood' (1993) consisted only of a severed, unidentifiable head, threaded with wire to sit open on the wall, an object of morose severity.

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Despite support from the arts establishment in the form of grants, for much of the 1980s Hammons lived close to the poverty line in a studio in Harlem. He guarded his privacy and cemented a reputation as an elusive and mercurial artist.

One curator recalled that securing an audience with him might involve calling a payphone outside his studio at a set time, with no guarantee that it would be answered.

But his refusal to play the conventional artist's role was deeply inspiring to his peers. "[He] gave artists – and not just Black artists – a new way of imagining what an art practice could be," according to curator Naomi Beckwith.

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Hammons (1980): "supernatural noticer" who reimagined the practice of art

“Quand je suis arrivé à New York dans les années 2000, la seule chose que j’ai apportée avec moi, c’était cette idée des nécrologies”, résume l’artiste dont le travail fait aujourd’hui l’objet d’une exposition à la galerie Gagosian de Londres. Imprimées en très grands formats, ces nécrologies mettent en relief paradoxes et pouvoirs des récits, au fil des sources et du temps. Une nécrologie de Roman Polanski n’aurait pas la même forme, ni le même fond, selon les époques et les auteurices, par exemple. Une façon de rappeler que l’histoire est une matière malléable, et parfois contestable.

Adam McEwen joue également sur la culture des médias et la façon dont nombre de rédactions rédige à l’avance les obituaires de grosses personnalités afin de publier le plus vite possible leur avis de décès lors de leur mort – une pratique qui donne parfois lieu à la propagation de *fake news*, lorsque les avis sont partagés par erreur. Depuis une vingtaine d’années, l’initiative artistique d’Adam McEwen n’est pas qu’humoristique, elle ouvre des pistes de réflexion, personnelles et sociétales.

Sadhguru

Spiritual leader and mystic whose accessible approach to the yogic tradition reached a vast audience

SADHGURU, who has died aged 64, was a South Indian mystic and yogi whose message of spiritual liberation found millions of adherents across the world. A gifted teacher and communicator, “a guru for the digital age,” as many put it, he promoted yoga and meditation as ways to achieve not just truth but joy and self-determination. His broad appeal stemmed from his ability to show the variety of forms a spiritual life can take in the modern world.

“I am neither modern nor ancient – just contemporary, as every Guru ever was. If one is not relevant for today, what is the point,” Sadhguru explained in 2015.

His teachings were traditional, harking back to Shiva, the first yogi or Adiyogi, who, before the advent of established religion, is regarded as having transmitted the yogic sciences to his disciples in the Himalayas.

Structured around a series of harmonies, these sciences are, in Sadhguru’s words, “tools of transformation” that enable a union of individual and universal consciousness, an experience of the oneness of existence. But as important as this liberation is the path, the spiritual journey inward. Only by self-realization can humans overcome suffering, master their desires and transform the world.

The first step on a spiritual path, Sadhguru stressed, is to acknowledge the limitations of the human intellect. Part of his appeal lay in the fact that he did this wholeheartedly. The intellect, for him, was a sharp knife which humans don’t know how to hold: “whichever way we touch it, it cuts us.” But he also celebrated the intellect’s achievements, particularly technological.

He spoke for all developing countries in his candid admiration for the comfort and convenience offered by modern societies, and couched his teachings in technological metaphors. His New York Times bestseller, for instance, was titled *Inner Engineering – a 10% Guide to Joy*.

In an interview with *New India Express* in 2016, he explained: “Yoga is essentially the science of understanding the human gadget. The highest level of technology is the human system. Now I’m asking you, have you read the user’s manual?” In a similar spirit, he displayed remarkable tech and social media finesse. He had almost 9 million subscribers to his YouTube channel, over 6.6 million followers on Instagram and 8.5 million followers on Facebook.

Sadhguru, whose name means “true teacher,” had a calm, easy manner, with a ready laugh and a penchant for irreverent humor. He described meditation, for example, as “just sitting there, blissed out.” Possessed of a flowing white beard, he was as comfortable in robes as in jeans.

Jagadish Vasudev, who was born on September 3 1957 in Mysore, a city in the state of Karnataka on India’s west coast. He came from comfortable wealth: his father, a doctor, worked for the railways; his mother was a homemaker.

Sadhguru’s path did not reveal itself immediately. As a teenager he took classes with a yogi, but they left little impression. He studied English at the University of Mysore, then started a poultry farm outside the city, followed by a construction company.

But he was restless. He bought a motorcycle, and would disappear with it for long stretches of time. At one point he persuaded a friend to take over his businesses for a year so that he could travel.

“There was a time when I literally lived on a motorcycle,” he told a reporter from *Mazda*, an Indian automotive website, in 2021. “When I rode somewhere, I never checked into a hotel, I just slept on my motorcycle.”

He took up yoga again, this time seriously, and in 1983 taught his first class. He rode around Karnataka and the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh on his motorcycle, initially using the profits from the poultry farm to fund his teaching, before becoming a yogi full time when contributions from his followers permitted.

In 1992 he founded the Isha Foundation at his ashram. Run almost entirely by volunteers, and well-funded by donations, it is an eye-catching place, not least due to the Adiyogi statue, which is recognized by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world’s largest bust sculpture.

In 1984 he married Vijaya Kumar, who helped run the business side of his teaching efforts and featured prominently in his promotional publicity. She died in 1997 from unknown causes, which Sadhguru explained as *mahasamadhi*, a yogi’s conscious exit of her body, although a small but vocal number of his critics alleged foul play, to little avail.

Despite his conservative Hindu politics, Sadhguru took a progressive stance on many social issues, especially women’s rights and gay marriage, both of which he supported enthusiastically.

He also built bridges with other spiritual traditions. He opened an ashram on 4,000 acres in rural eastern Tennessee, to put him in touch with the suffering of the Cherokee people, who had been driven out to Oklahoma, along the infamous Trail of Tears.

In 2020, not long after the onset of Covid, Sadhguru and a small number of followers set out on a 6,000 mile motorcycle journey into the northern Midwest, then heading south to Tennessee, meeting with Native American leaders along the way. He rode a 1600GT BMW.

He is survived by his daughter, Rachel, Jaggi, a Bharatanatyam dancer.

Sadhguru (2018): a calm manner, a ready laugh and an ease with technology

A fan of motorcycles, helicopters and, after he spent time in America, golf (with a handicap of 15), he was at pains to strip yoga of esotericism or exclusivity.

Rising to fame in India in the 1980s and 90s, he founded an ashram near Coimbatore in the south which accommodated 4,000 followers. His teachings soon spread far afield, winning over Bollywood stars, cricketers, Hollywood actors such as Leonardo DiCaprio, Will Smith and Matthew McConaughey, musicians from Stevie Wonder to Ozzy Osbourne and Madonna, and scientists such as Michio Kaku and Neil deGrasse Tyson.

He ran seminars at the World Economic Forum in Davos and the United Nations, treading a line between decrying materialism and emphasizing the importance of economic growth and personal wealth to personal, as well as national, wellbeing. In this, he was emblematic of the booming Indian middle-class, and found a particular following in the business and entrepreneurial communities.

Professedly apolitical, Sadhguru aligned himself with the Hindu nationalists of the

Bharatiya Janata Party, especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was the guest of honor at the 2017 unveiling of a 112-foot steel bust of Adiyogi Shiva at Sadhguru’s ashram.

In the 2000s Sadhguru began campaigning for the environment, in particular in Tamil Nadu, where desertification and deforestation threatened to bring to an end thousands of years of agriculture.

He launched reforestation initiatives, including the Rally for Rivers campaign, which drew the likes of the billionaire businessman Anand Mahindra and retired cricketer Virinder Sehwag, to clean up the heavily polluted Cauvery River, and in 2020 founded the worldwide Save Soil Movement to counteract the degradation of agricultural land.

Sadhguru was not without his critics. Journalists and politicians, especially in the opposition, considered him a showman, even a charlatan, who preached an Indian version of the gospel of wealth. In May 2021 Pallab Halderman, the finance minister of Tamil Nadu, called him a “publicity hound” and a “commercial operator.”

Others said that some of his beliefs, such as a personal prohibition on eating during lunar eclipses, were hypocritical, given his embrace of technology. Some considered his reformation projects in Tamil Nadu simplistic, a smoke-screen for government policies incentivizing unsustainable agriculture.

And there was little echo in the West of the political positions he increasingly seemed to take. In the wake of the Pulwama suicide bombings in Kashmir in 2019, for instance, he spoke of “sweeping out the enemy within” and, in the name of speedy justice, advocated the forming of people’s juries.

Internationally, he remained a bonnet for transformation and spiritual awakening. His celebrity status grew further after an enthusiastic account of playing golf with him in Dubai in 2017 written by Thomas Friedman, the New York Times columnist, and a 2022 appearance on *The Daily Show* in front of a starstruck Trevor Noah.

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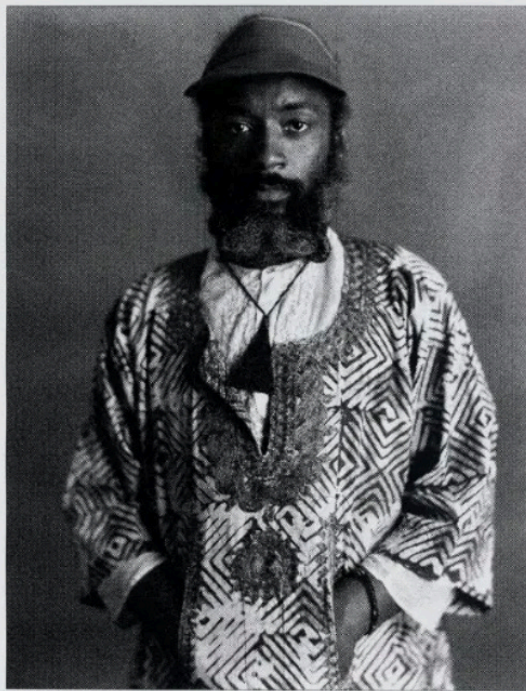
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Grace Jones

Iconic artist and performer whose high-octane persona pushed boundaries of gender and image

GRACE JONES, the Jamaican singer, actress and model who has died aged 74, recorded some of the most original pop music of the 1980s, including the R&B classic, 'Pull Up To The Bumper' (1981) and the Billboard dance No.1, 'Slave to the Rhythm' (1985).

Androgynous, theatrical and endlessly inventive, possessed of an excellent sense of humor, Jones was a child of the 1960s counterculture who rose to prominence in the Paris and New York gay club scenes of the following decade.

One of the original disco queens – her seven-minute reworking of Edith Piaf's 'La Vie En Rose' was an international disco hit in 1977 – Jones stood out from the start for her fashion sense and gender fluid looks. "I like dressing like a guy," she told Interview magazine in 1984. "The future is no sex. You can be a boy, a girl, whatever you want."

Her early shows were a cross between disco and the theatre of cruelty, as she prowled virtually naked amongst the crowd in clubs such as New York's Studio 54 and Paris's Club Sept, lashing out with a whip or in boxing gloves. Her stylized persona, further honed with the collaboration of her then partner, French graphic designer Jean-Paul Goude, combined icy self-possession with swashbuckling sexuality.

It was a far cry from her strict religious upbringing in Spanish Town, Jamaica. But, as Jones later revealed, her performances channelled her step-grandfather, a Pentecostalist preacher and ferocious disciplinarian, who beat her repeatedly for the slightest of infractions, from doing handstands to turning down the corner of a page in the Bible. Mimicking him – the glare, the stance, the whips – proved cathartic.

She outgrew disco when it lapsed into self-caricature. Chris Blackwell, her label boss at Island Records, who was struck by how un-Jamaican her music sounded, proposed a selection of songs for her to cover by new wave bands such as Joy Division, Iggy Pop and The Normal.

He booked her into the Compass Point studios in Nassau, Bahamas, with a stellar band that included the rhythm section of Sly Dunbar and Robbie Shakespeare, keyboard player Wally Badarou and guitarist Barry Reynolds.

The result was three groundbreaking albums – *Warm Leatherette* (1980), *Nightclubbing* (1981), and *Living My Life* (1982) – which seamlessly blended dub, funk, French chanson and post-punk.

The songs suited Jones's naturally low voice – something which she had misgivings about – and acrobatic approach. Covers such as Bill Withers's 'Use Me' sat alongside original material like the gleefully suggestive 'Pull Up To The Bumper' and the

infectious 'My Jamaican Guy.' Her work with Goude reached new heights on the album covers, videos and 1982's performance film *A One Man Show*.

Jones thrived on such collaborations. As a model, she worked closely with designers such as Kenzo and Issey Miyake; as a performer, with artists Andy Warhol and Keith Haring. Such creative chemistry eluded her as an actress, however, and she always rued turning down a part in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). From the mid-1980s on, she appeared alongside such A-list stars as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Roger Moore in films including *Conan The Destroyer* (1984) and *A View To A Kill* (1985), but she never escaped typecasting. Hollywood's idea of a strong, rebellious woman, she observed, was an irate stripper.

Her musical output faltered after *Slave To The Rhythm*, the album produced by Trevor Horn, and her subsequent move to Capitol Records. After *Bulletproof Heart* in 1989, it was nearly two decades before she would record another studio album.

The press took to portraying her as a diva with anger issues. She was no stranger to scandal, from her fistfights on live TV with chat show host Russell Harty to her lifetime ban from Disney Parks for flashing her breasts. But as far as she was concerned, it was all irrelevant compared to her duet with Luciano Pavarotti on Massenet's 'Pourquoi Me Réveiller' in 2003, which she considered the ultimate validation of her singing.

The release of *Hurricane* in 2008, recorded with her Compass Point compatriots, marked a sea change. Jones's triumphant performance at that year's Meltdown Festival in London, curated by Massive Attack, proved not only how influential she was, but also how relevant.

Honages, direct or indirect, followed from global hitmakers such as Rihanna and Nicki Minaj. Jones had guest spots on albums by Gorillaz and Beyoncé, headlined major festivals and in 2012 performed at Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. She published a moving and witty autobiography, *I'll Never Write My Memoirs* (2015), and was the subject of Sophie Finnes's lauded documentary *Bloodlight and Bani* (2017).

The following year, she was awarded the Order of Jamaica, an accolade all the more pleasing for having never required her to compromise. As she said in the preface to her autobiography, "I don't want to spoil any image people might have of me being out of control, demanding, crazy, offensive, indulgent, chaotic, depraved. I can be a pain. But most of all, I can be a pleasure."

Grace Beverly Jones was born in Spanish Town, Jamaica on May 19 1948 (officially, at least; she considered 1952 more accurate), and was known initially by her second name. Her mother was from a prominent Pentecostalist family, her father, a bishop, from a line of army officers and civil servants.



Jones (1981): seamlessly blended dub, funk, French chanson and post-punk

being a lifelong advocate of the therapeutic and transformative powers of both.

She was a nudist and worked as a go-go dancer before moving to New York City aged 18. Signing with Wilhelmina Models, she struggled to break through for four years, primarily as a performer. Not getting the part of the Acid Queen in The Who's musical *Tommy* particularly stung.

Everything changed when she moved to Paris in 1970. Her angular and, by the standards of the time, distinctively African beauty made her a fashion sensation, a regular on the cover of *Vogue*, championed by the likes of Antonio Lopez, Azzedine Alaïa and Thierry Mugler.

While she felt like an outsider, the move to America was profoundly liberating. She enrolled in college but dropped out in her first summer. She lived in communes in Philadelphia and joyfully embraced drugs – particularly LSD – and sex, remain-

ing a staple of New York's Studio 54 and Andy Warhol's Factory alike.

Jones had an unshakeable faith in art and the future. Her hunger for experience could lead to turbulence in her emotional life; her autobiography is not short of lines such as, "He called just when I was setting fire to Dolph's trousers."

But the dominant note is affection for her collaborators and partners, whether Dolph Lundgren, the bodyguard whom she helped become a movie star; or Atilla Ailunbay, briefly her husband; or Goude, with whom she had a son, Paulo.

Hailed as an Afrofuturist and pioneering queer icon, Jones's most universal achievement may have been her fearless individuality and the inspiration people drew from it. She felt no need to explain her position, she simply inhabited it. As curator Olivia Aherne observed, "Grace challenged people. She pushed everyone around her to think differently."

Greta Thunberg

Climate activist who became the face of a global youth movement demanding wholesale change

GRETA THUNBERG, who has died aged 19, enjoyed a meteoric career as a climate activist. The clarity and force of her rhetoric, along with her youth and charisma, galvanized world opinion and garnered huge support as she tirelessly challenged international leaders to act against global warming.

Diagnosed with autism in her early teens, she was from a young age intensely concerned about the environment. At 15, as an isolated child at secondary school in Stockholm, she realized she could turn her school-going into a political act.

"[S]ince you grown-ups don't give a damn about my future," she tweeted in the fall of 2018, "I won't either. My name is Greta and I'm in the ninth grade. And I'm school striking for the climate..." Skipping school, she spent the day studying on the steps of the Swedish Parliament, accompanied by a sign reading "Skolstrejk för klimatet" - "School strike for the climate."

The following week she was joined by a handful of schoolchildren, parents and teachers, and the media began to take interest. She soon made the strike a regular Friday event, calling it "Fridays for Future." By March 2019 her protest had spread to 70 countries. On September 20 2019, 4 million people took part in school strikes in 161 countries, the largest climate demonstration in history.

Within a year she had become one of the most famous people on the planet. She was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize, addressed the United Nations, the British, French and European parliaments, and the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, and was personally thanked by the pope.

Her appearance - diminutive, pig-tailed, with an open, unswerving gaze - became iconic, her speeches media events. Courtied by liberal leaders, mocked by rightwing populists, her prominence was in striking contrast to her early days at secondary school, when, as she put it, if her fellow students noticed her at all, it would have been simply as "that girl in the back who never said anything."

Apart from her youth and conviction, her ability to strike a chord lay in the power and simplicity of her message: older generations had left the young to suffer the consequences of their consumption. Everyone knew it; now the young weren't going to let them ignore it anymore. "We can't save the world by playing by the rules... Everything needs to change - and it has to start today."

World leaders patronizingly praised her initiative as a beacon of hope. In her address to the UN in 2019, she responded, "I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you? You have stolen my



Thunberg (2019): trenchant rhetoric gave voice to the conscience of a generation

dreams and my childhood with your empty words."

Her gift for trenchant rhetoric was matched by her laconic put-downs. When Theresa May, then British prime minister, said the 2018 student protest movement "wastes lesson time," Thunberg tweeted, "But then again, political leaders have wasted 50 yrs of inaction. And that is slightly worse."

Her timing was excellent. When Time magazine named her its Person of the Year for 2019, the youngest ever, then US President Donald Trump tweeted, "So ridiculous. Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with a friend! Chill Greta, Chill!" 11 months later, when Trump was headily demanding a recount in the 2020 US presidential election, she coolly repeated his tweet back to him, substituting their names.

She never missed an opportunity to spread her message, taking a berth on a racing yacht rather than fly to the UN climate meeting. Hundreds of journalists met her two weeks later when she arrived in Manhattan. Her debating style remained constant - measured quoting of the climate science, exhorting denunciations of the consequences of political inaction - but she became increasingly optimistic. "There is hope - I've seen it - but it does not come from the governments or corporations, it comes from the people."

Her campaigning inspired huge admiration, sometimes verging on idolatry. Her fellow Swedes treated her with characteristic discretion, but the relentlessness of groupies from overseas forced her to move out of the family home. She received numerous death threats. Her parents were accused of brainwashing her. She was repeatedly smeared online as an "evil, manipulative child," possibly with communist leanings, an appalling puritan

killjoy. "The climate goblin is forcing you to stop eating meat," as she drily paraphrased.

Any whiff of hypocrisy was feverishly pursued by her mainstream detractors. The TV pundit, Piers Morgan, for instance, tried to make huge capital out of her eating at McDonald's. She was accused of reductionism, preferring shaming and impassioned slogans to engaging with her adversaries.

But Thunberg managed to sidestep even the most nuanced arguments. She was not a policy maker or a politician, she said. She was simply a canary in the still operating coal mine, a young person not yet beholden to compromise.

"I don't think I have any specific wisdom," she told The Guardian in 2021. "I don't have much life experience. One thing that I do have is the childlike and naive way of seeing things. We tend to overthink things. Sometimes the simple answer

is, it is not sustainable to live like this."

Greta Tintin Eleonora Ernman Thunberg was born in Stockholm on January 3 2003, the daughter of Malena Ernman, an opera singer, and Svante Thunberg, an actor. Soon after her birth, her mother's international career took off, and her father stayed home to raise Greta and her younger sister, Beata.

Thunberg later recalled watching, at age 8, a film about an island of plastic refuse floating in the Pacific Ocean. It horrified her; she couldn't understand why people cared so little.

"I became very affected," she said. "I began thinking about it all the time and I became very sad. Those pictures were stuck in my head."

At the age of 11, she fell into a deep depression, and stopped talking and eating. "She was slowly disappearing into some kind of darkness," wrote her parents later, "and, little by little, bit by bit, she stopped functioning." The whole family were "burned-out people on a burned-out planet."

Thunberg was eventually diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, OCD and selective mutism, a diagnosis that came as a great relief. She subsequently called autism her "super power," allowing her to tune out everything and focus on the environment.

Her work started at home. "She hijacked us," her father recalled. "She started turning off lights. She cut the electricity bill in half." She could "be very, very, very annoying," he said. "But because we were in this crisis we had to react... to save our child." Her mother, by then a world-renowned singer, gave up flying, thus effectively ending her career.

Her parents' initial reservations about her school strike soon faded. Campaigning, in fact, had unexpectedly beneficial consequences for Thunberg. She had always enjoyed reading, ballet and looking after her pets, a pair of dogs and an Icelandic horse named Freyja. To these were added listening to music and podcasts, embroidery and jigsaws, and having fun. She revealed a winningly goofy sense of humor, leading chants of "You can shove your climate crisis up your arse" at Cop26 in Glasgow in 2021 and singing Rick Astley's *Never Gonna Give You Up* at Climate Live.

When she turned 18, to the delight of her parents who had feared she would never be able to lead an independent life, she moved into her own apartment. During Covid, she built relationships over Zoom with climate activists around the world, many of them teenagers like herself, and spent many pleasurable hours making silly jokes.

It was, she said, a silver lining - finally she had a group of friends her age, a renewed faith in humanity. She was happy again.

© Adam McEwen

L'exposition dédiée au travail d'Adam McEwen est visible à la galerie Gagosian de Londres jusqu'au 10 février 2023.

ADAM MCEWEN DA GAGOSIAN

Di **Redazione** - 2 Febbraio 2023



Adam McEwen

Dal **10 febbraio al 1 aprile 2023** **Gagosian** presenta *XXIII*, una mostra di nuovi dipinti di Adam McEwen, la prima dell'artista con la galleria in Italia, che aprirà al pubblico venerdì 10 febbraio 2023.

Protagonista delle opere in *XXIII* è la penna a sfera, oggetto onnipresente della vita contemporanea e icona del design moderno. Trasformandone le sagome trasparenti ed esagonali in rappresentazioni piatte e schematiche, McEwen enfatizza sia l'aspetto lineare che il potenziale creativo di questi oggetti attraverso la pittura acrilica. Dalle dimensioni leggermente più grandi di

« Adam McEwen Da Gagosian » in www.villegiardini.it. 02.02.2023

una persona di alta statura, le composizioni di questi dipinti suggeriscono relazioni sia meccaniche che figurative.

Nella loro decontestualizzazione del quotidiano infatti, i dipinti *Bic* di Adam McEwen si ricollegano alle opere passate dell'artista: dalle sculture a grandezza naturale di oggetti fresati in grafite ai necrologi di persone viventi, questi ultimi al centro della sua mostra personale in corso presso Gagosian Londra dal 26 gennaio all'11 marzo 2023. Le opere richiamano inoltre l'appropriazione del disegno meccanico nella pittura di artisti quali Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp e Roy Lichtenstein.

Nella sala principale sette tele rettangolari di **Adam McEwen** di identiche dimensioni sottolineano interrelazioni compositive e simboliche: contemporaneamente aggressive e giocose, le opere sembrano suggerire idee e strutture sociali in competizione. Accomunate da sfondi violacei, presentano tinte che vanno dal lavanda al porpora, applicate alternativamente come strati monocromatici e passaggi pittorici in contrasto deciso con le linee delle penne. Il porpora è un colore associato alla storia di Roma fin dall'antichità, dai senatori e imperatori dell'antico impero alle vesti liturgiche, mentre le linee incrociate tracciate dalle penne in molte delle opere ricordano i numeri romani del titolo della mostra.

Disposte in precise linee parallele, le penne a inchiostro rosso di *Materiel* (2023) puntano verso il basso in una configurazione diagonale che trasmette un senso di ordine militaresco. In *Kling Klang* (2023) si incrociano tra loro penne a inchiostro nero e rosso le cui linee intrecciate ricordano una sorta di danza o di esercizio fisico. In *Dodger* (2023), il senso di regolarità e ordine è messo in discussione da una penna che rompe i ranghi, mentre *Good Night* (2023) sostituisce le linee rette delle penne con forme fantasticamente ondegianti.

Il dipinto più grande della mostra di **Adam McEwen**, *Big Spear* (2023), ricorda la mischia di lance nella *Battaglia di San Romano* di Paolo Uccello (c. 1435–40, Uffizi, Firenze), un'opera chiave del Maestro rinascimentale per la definizione delle potenzialità della prospettiva lineare. In un'altra sala opere ovali giocano con la forma geometrica che caratterizza la galleria. La disposizione delle penne in questi dipinti assume la forma della croce in *Colosseo No.1* (2023), dell'Uroboro, il serpente che si morde la coda in *Colosseo No.3* (2023), e del numero 8 o segno dell'infinito in *Colosseo No.5* (2023), simboli che risuonano con la storia di Roma e non solo.

Adam McEwen è nato nel 1965 a Londra e vive e lavora a New York. Le sue opere sono incluse, tra le altre, nelle seguenti collezioni: Arts Council Collection, Londra; Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums, Scozia; Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf, Germania; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut; Rollins Museum of Art, Winter Park, Florida; de la Cruz Collection, Miami; Rubell Museum, Miami; e Museo Jumex, Città del Messico. Tra le mostre si annoverano: Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, Texas (2012); Museo Civico-Diocesano di Santa Maria dei Servi, Città della Pieve, Italia (2015); *I Think I'm in Love*, Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2017); e *10, Feels Like 2*, Lever House, New York (2019).



THE ART NEWSPAPER

The art of the obit: Adam McEwen on his hypothetical obituaries of living celebrities who are 'guides to life'

The Art Newspaper's obituaries editor speaks to the New York artist about how his journalistic training informs his tributes to figures like Greta Thunberg and Dolly Parton



Adam McEwen has shows running concurrently in London and Rome; the artist's hypothetical obituary of David Hammons
© Adam McEwen. Courtesy Gagosian. Portrait photo: Andisheh Avini; Work photo: Anna Mathias

"These are people I love. They are homages," says Adam McEwen, the New York-based, London-born artist about a new group of hypothetical obituary articles of living celebrities that he has created for his first one-man show in London.

McEwen's much-enlarged facsimiles of newspaper obituaries address the imagined loss of seven living subjects: the publicity-shy artist David Hammons; the tech pioneer and prophet Jaron Lanier, the climate activist Greta Thunberg, the spiritual leader and mystic Sadhguru and the singers Dolly Parton, Grace Jones and Marc Almond.

"I think of the people I choose to do," McEwen tells *The Art Newspaper*, "as models, in a sense, or guides [to life]." He says he sees the collective message of his subjects—all of them decision-makers and mould-breakers—as essentially optimistic.

Louis Jebb, « The art of the obit: Adam McEwen on his hypothetical obituaries of living celebrities who are 'guides to life' » *The Art Newspaper*, 03.02.23



Rule-changers: Adam McEwen's hypothetical obituaries of Greta Thunberg, Sadhguru, Dolly Parton and David Hammons at Gagosian, Davies Street, London

© Adam McEwen. Photo: Lucy Dawkins. Courtesy Gagosian

McEwen has made these works—60in tall and dry mounted for the show at Gagosian, Davies Street—so that they can be viewed, and read, like posters, by two or three people at a time. In their chaste graphic presentation—with black and white photographs centrally placed under functional headlines and scanned to resemble the gritty 200 dots-per-inch resolution used for printing on newspaper presses—the works are anchored in the visual world of the mid-1990s when McEwen, a recent graduate of California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) looking to fund his life as an artist, worked as an obituary writer at *The Daily Telegraph* in London.

McEwen's pieces play with the fact that an obituary article is not about death *per se* but is an informed, though not uncritical, profile of personal achievement; the first draft of biography; an analysis of the change wrought by time on personal reputation; an article that might answer Carl Jung's injunction that "the beloved dead are our task". McEwen sees his conceptual obituaries, in the way they memorialise their subjects' decision-making, as "optimistic in the face of oblivion": as if he had made "the beloved living" his task.

Life as an obituary writer

McEwen wrote at *The Daily Telegraph* at a time when quality newspapers in London regarded their obituaries pages—which had been stirred up by the entry into the market of *The Independent* in 1986—as high-profile arenas of editorial competition; in a battle to be the market-leader and the newspaper of record for the recently deceased.

The Daily Telegraph and *The Times* stuck to a historic practice of publishing unsigned obituary articles, aspiring to an anonymous, detached-seeming objectivity. *The Guardian* followed *The Independent's* practice (also adopted by *The Art Newspaper* after its launch in 1990) of running signed articles, where the author's identity is part of the editorial transparency with which the subject's achievements are assessed, while explaining the context of their working lives, and where the judicious use of the first person may be usefully deployed.

The language, as much as the typographical design, of McEwen's pieces is a testament to *The Daily Telegraph* of the 1990s, where McEwen's boss was the celebrated Hugh Massingberd (1946-2007), a characterful historian and genealogist who had devised a laconic, nudging, coded prose for the *Telegraph* obituaries page. "There was a dry, understated, style," McEwen says, "which ... was a very clever way to imply things ... [while] trying to be factual."



"These guides are rule-changers": Adam McEwen, *Untitled (Greta)* (2023)
© Adam McEwen. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd. Courtesy Gagosian

When McEwen was asked to write an obituary in advance (to be kept on file by *The Daily Telegraph*) or in response to the news—he wrote an article on John F. Kennedy Junior when the light aeroplane Kennedy was piloting went missing on his way from New York to Martha's Vineyard on 16 July 1999—he sometimes wondered to himself at the challenge of writing instant history when he had no personal knowledge; where everything he produced was dependent on trusting published sources, from newspaper cuttings to the nascent internet. That challenge was an early case for McEwen of creating certainty on uncertain foundations. In succeeding decades he has demonstrated an interest in his art in the uncannily real, in material decay and sell-by dates, and the shifting of life's foundations; where the only certainty is the finiteness of life.

A hypothetical Malcolm McLaren

McEwen's first exercise in hypothetical obituary was a piece on Malcolm McLaren, the godfather of Punk, which he devised using the fonts and design of *The Daily Telegraph*. It was shown in a group exhibition in London, organised by the gallerist Paul Stolper, where "everyone was given a muslin Vivienne Westwood shirt". Not long after, in 2000, McEwen, then 35, gave up his life as an obituarist and moved to New York City to make a fresh start as an artist.

Work on a documentary about the band Sly and the Family Stone tided McEwen over during his early days in the Big Apple. Resisting offers of further well-paid television projects, he started a series of works inspired by another genre of understated messaging, very different to that of *The Daily Telegraph*—the "Sorry" signs on sale in New York hardware shops that read "Sorry, we're closed". "Sorry, we're sorry, 'Sorry, we're dead'," McEwen says, musing on that series. "They were really about not being able to make art." But he exhibited his "Sorry" pieces in group shows and, from there, things "slowly snowballed".

At the same time, the concept obituaries, represented by the McLaren piece, were "asking to be made". "The next one I did was Rod Stewart," McEwen says, "and [then] Bill Clinton and Nicole Kidman." These were shown in a group of seven such pieces in 2004. In 2011, McEwen added the novelist Bret Easton Ellis, the Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi and Princess Stephanie of Monaco to the group. There were no "lies" in the pieces, McEwen says, nothing invented, except the standard wording "who has died, aged...". "It was only in the selection of the pieces that my bias was evident," he says. "These are people I love."

In 2020-21, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, included McEwen's Kidman piece, *Untitled (Nicole)* (2004) from its collection, in its *Pictures, Revisited* [survey](#) of artists who have worked with image appropriation. McEwen added to his roster of hypothetical obituaries in his April 2022 show *Execute*—at Gagosian, 980 Madison Avenue, New York City—with pieces on three of the subjects of his London show: Sadhguru, Lanier and Thunberg. The format remained unchanged, and the only thing that had altered in a decade was the selection of the people. "That is maybe why I had not done it for a while," he says.

“

You have to remind yourself: 'I know this feels important now, but there is a very good chance it will feel completely unimportant in five years time'

Adam McEwen

"In the last three or four years we have been living in a very different world ..." McEwen says. "Suddenly it felt interesting to ask myself who is important to me ... [Thunberg, Sadhguru and Lanier] cover three huge bases of thought and activity. Greta Thunberg is obviously foregrounding [climate change], something we are all thinking about. Sadhguru is an emblem of a notion—what are we engaged in with Western industrial capitalism? Why are we working? Is there an alternative? Jaron Lanier [shows] we are sliding into this very strange digital reality, led by profit."

The personalities McEwen chooses "need to have a permanent value at the time. ... You have to remind yourself: 'I know this feels important now, but there is a very good chance it will feel completely unimportant in five years time' ... Time changes one's position to the subject. It is prismatic."

When he made a hypothetical piece on Ang San Suu Kyi in 2011 she was globally recognised as a pro-democracy heroine. "Three, four years later, that story had shifted in a way that would have been very hard to predict," McEwen says. "That makes the artwork even more insecure. [It] is standing on shifting grounds. That's interesting. It means the relation between viewer, artwork and reality, which is already illusory and nebulous, just becomes even more so."

Dolly Parton

Universally beloved singer, actress and philanthropist whose hits included Jolene and Nine to Five

DOLLY PARTON, who has died at 77, rose from entrenched poverty in rural eastern Tennessee to become one of the most successful and most beloved American entertainers of her era, writing and singing dozens of hit country songs, acting in a long string of popular movies and operating her own amusement park empire.

In an age of intense political and cultural polarisation, Parton was the rare person who was almost universally adored – by young and old, liberal and conservative, gay and straight. Her outlandish public persona, built on towering wigs, an expansive bust, vertiginous heels and thick Southern accent, managed at once to convey sincerity and kitsch, transgressive glam and good ol' down-home virtue.

She was one of the only American musicians to have a No.1 album in every decade from the 1960s to the 2010s. She sold more than 100 million albums and had 25 No.1 hits, tied with Reba McEntire for the most by a female country star and holds the record for most top-ten albums, at 44.

She wrote almost all her own songs, many of which became instant classics: 'Jolene', 'Coat of Many Colors', 'I Will Always Love You', 'Nine to Five'. And while remaining firmly identified with country music, she was among the genre's most successful crossover acts, with multiple songs reaching the top of both charts simultaneously.

Like Madonna or Lady Gaga, Parton stayed on top by never staying still. She began her career in the 1960s as the soapy-cleas understudy to Porter Wagoner, an ageing country star. In the 1970s she became a sex symbol, appearing on the cover of Playboy (though not inside it, at least not disrobed). A movie career followed in the 1980s and 1990s. And as country music returned to its roots that decade, so did she, dating with venerable traditionalists like Linda Ronstadt and Loretta Lynn.

All along, she seemed to revel in subverting expectations about large-breasted, big-haired women from the American South – one of her first hits was a cover of a song called 'Dumb Blonde'. She was open about her extensive adventures with plastic surgery, quipping that "it takes a lot of money to look this cheap". She was anything but dumb. Observers considered her one of the savviest businesspeople in Nashville, with a genius grasp for the intricacies of the music industry. In 2017 she was estimated to be worth \$500 million, making her the wealthiest performer in country music.

She wrote some 3,000 songs and retained publishing rights to all of them. When Elvis Presley wanted to do a version of her song 'I Will Always Love You' but insisted on getting half the royalties, she declined, even though it meant passing on a quick windfall. Her long-game bet paid off when in 1992



Whitney Houston's cover of the song topped the Billboard charts for 14 weeks, making Parton a fortune. "I made enough money to buy Graceland," she joked.

In 1987 she opened Dollywood, an amusement park near her birthplace in East Tennessee. Almost immediately, it became one of the state's biggest tourist draws, and spawned spinoffs in Missouri and South Carolina.

She funded hospitals across Tennessee and relief efforts in the wake of the region's frequent tornadoes and fires. Her real passion was literacy: she gave away more than 100 million books, and was a relentless guest reader at libraries and schools around the country.

And when the pandemic hit, she was among the few country stars willing to take a strong public stand in favor of mask mandates and other public health measures. She made a video of her receiving a Covid vaccine, accompanied by a version of 'Jolene', including the lines "Vaccine, vaccine, vaccine, vaccine/I'm begging of you please don't hesitate".

She was, for all that, an intensely private person. She lived on a farm outside Nashville with her husband of nearly 60 years, Carl Dean. He shunned the spotlight and they were never seen together in public.

It could be hard to distinguish the person from the persona. She insisted that she was who she was, no secrets, but also dropped hints about a salacious past – romantic affairs, one-night stands – and an introverted, even intellectual side. Though maybe that was an act, too. "I've been around a long time," she said in 2014. "The magic with me is that I look completely fake when I'm completely real."

Dolly Rebecca Parton was born on January 19 1946, in a one-room cabin in rural Sevier County, southeast of Knoxville, Tennessee. Her father, Robert, was a sharecropper. He eventually saved enough to buy his own tobacco farm and moved the family to a slightly larger, but still single-room, cabin.

Parton was the fourth of 12 children born to her mother, Avie Lee, before she was 35. Parton attributed her business sense to her father, but credited her musical gifts to her mother. She spoke rapturously about Avie Lee's mental library of ballads and stories, many of them old Welsh and Scottish tales.

Parton was never long for farm life. She propped a tin can on a stick for a microphone. At age 10 she made her first radio appearance. At 14 she was on the Grand Ole Opry, the legendary variety show out of Nashville. Backstage she met Johnny Cash, who told her to keep at it.

The day she graduated high school she moved to Nashville. She had no money, no car, no apartment. Staying with an uncle for a while, she persuaded friends to drive her to the publishers and studios along Music Row, where she begged producers to listen to her demo tapes.

Parton's first successes came as a writer. When she did manage to get behind the microphone, she was saddled with bubble-gum pop tunes, which sank without a trace.

It was only when she recorded as a country act that she began to gain an audience. Among her new fans was Mr. Wagoner, 20 years her senior, who invited her to join his TV variety program, "The Porter Wagoner Show". She sang, quipped, danced and won over legions of admirers.

Together they churned out a series of hit albums, while Parton struggled to make her way as a solo artist. She received acclaim for her first release, *Hello, I'm Dolly*, in 1967, but by the early 1970s she was feeling constrained by Wagoner's often domineering presence in her career. The two split up in 1974, an occasion for which Parton wrote 'I Will Always Love You'.

With her feet planted firmly in country, she struck out for mainstream success. It helped that at the time, America was enthralled with country culture – "The Dukes of Hazard" was one of the most popular shows on television and singers such as Mr. Cash, Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings were megastars. In 1977 she released the album *Here You Come Again*, which topped the country chart and broke the top 20 on the pop chart.

Easy with a joke, Parton became a favorite on talk shows and variety programs. Soon she was being lined up for acting roles. She starred alongside Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda in 1980's *9 to 5*, and earned an Oscar nomination for writing its theme song. Other films followed, with varying box-office success: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982), *Shogun* (1984), *Siege*, *Magnolia* (1989).

Her subsequent music career ranged from bluegrass to gospel and folk. By the end of the century it had slowed, only to come roaring back a decade later – with the encouragement of a new manager, she returned to live performing and to the recording studio.

It worked: in 2014 she released *Blue Smoke*, her 42nd album, which debuted at No. 6 on the Billboard chart, a personal best. That summer she played for 180,000 at Glastonbury, in Britain, one of the largest crowds ever at the festival. After several attempts to decline the honor, in 2022 she was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, making her one of the few artists to be in the Country and Songwriters Halls of Fame as well.

She is survived by her husband.

McEwen's London show includes pieces—a 2015 charcoal drawing on paper; a 2023 sculpture in milled steel, *Rain Puddle*—that reflect other sides to the wide-ranging practice he has developed over the past 20 years. It covers conceptual, sculptural and installation work, including facsimiles of everyday items—jerry cans, ATM machines, clocks, air-conditioning units, safes—in graphite, sponge and other materials. Those "everyday" pieces, he said in 2018, make a "very familiar object, momentarily unfamiliar". The "momentarily unfamiliar" is an effect that he achieved with his "Sorry" works two decades ago and that he generates to this day with the scale, and hypothetical nature, of his obituary works.

The London exhibition runs concurrently with *Adam McEwen XXIII*, at Gagosian Rome, a series of paintings inspired by the artist's love of ballpoint pens. In this new body of work, McEwen frames the "ballpoint pen as seen through the lens of very early [Roy] Lichtenstein or Dada or mechanical drawing". He has been thinking about this approach, he says, for 10 years. "The simplicity of very early Lichtenstein. What if I draw this pen in that style? Maybe it is going to speak to a lot of people."

An unchanging format

By keeping the format and typography, and the understated, impersonal, authorial voice, of his obituary pieces unchanged for more than 20 years, McEwen has allowed himself "a kind of distance" that places the changes in his choice of personalities—and the types of decisions they have made in their lives—in even stronger relief.

McEwen's piece on David Hammons, an artist he particularly admires, has a special meaning for him. The subheading reads: "Artist whose poetic vision rooted in Black American culture produced works of confounding power." The main article text testifies to McEwen's awareness of the work, of that confounding power, and demonstrates the neutral crispness of his "dry, understated" 1990s *Telegraph* style.

“

We are all more powerful than we think. We have the choice to say 'No'. We have the power to negotiate the factors that seem to have control over us. They don't

Adam McEwen

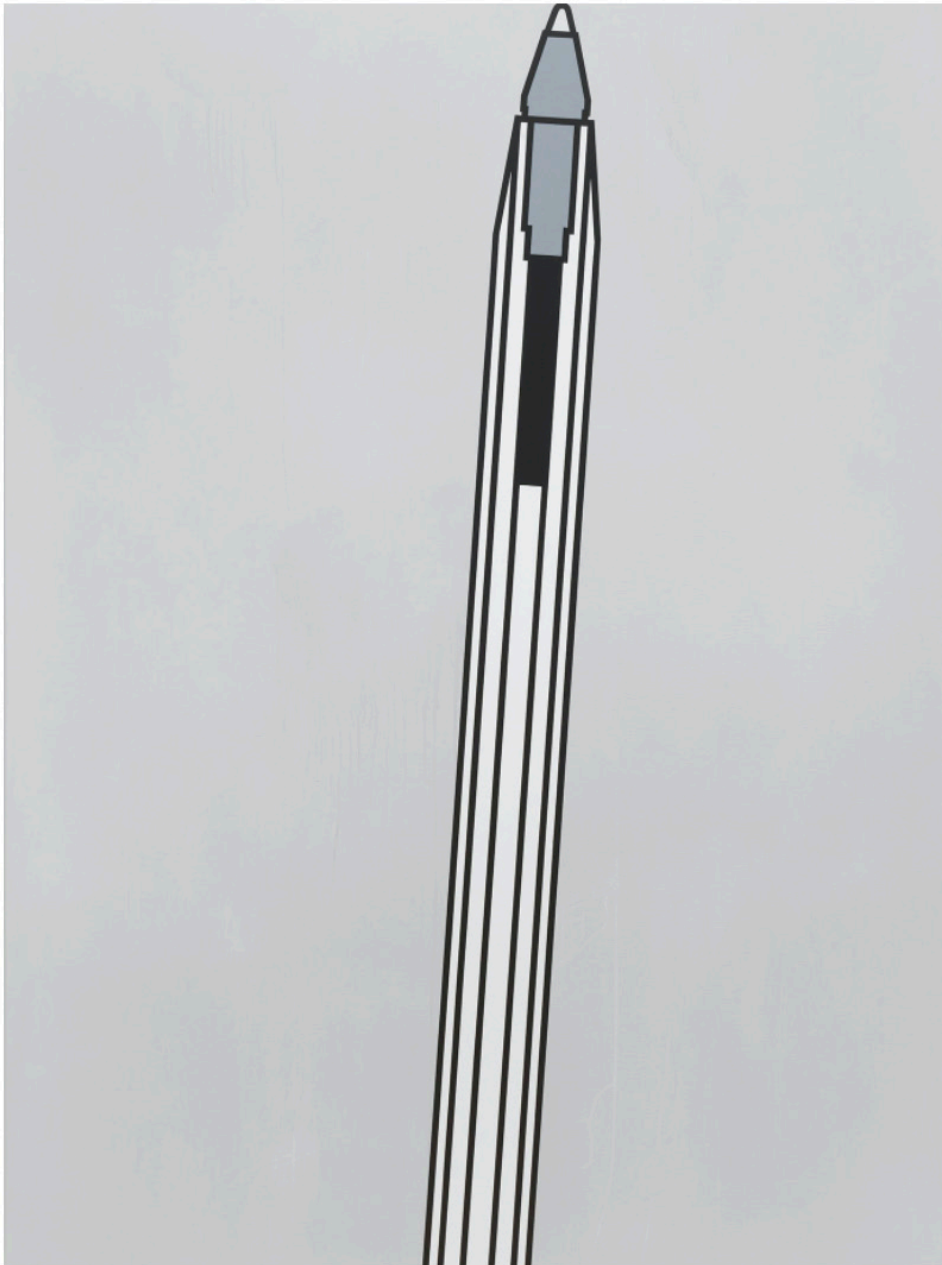


McEwen's sculpture *Rain Puddle* (2023) and his hypothetical obituaries of David Hammons, Marc Almond, Grace Jones and Jaron Lanier. Gagosian, Davies Street, London

© Adam McEwen. Photo: Lucy Dawkins. Courtesy Gagosian

Adam McEwen: *Execute*

By **Amanda Gluibizzi**



Adam McEwen, *Bic #2*, 2022. © Adam McEwen.
Courtesy Gagosian.

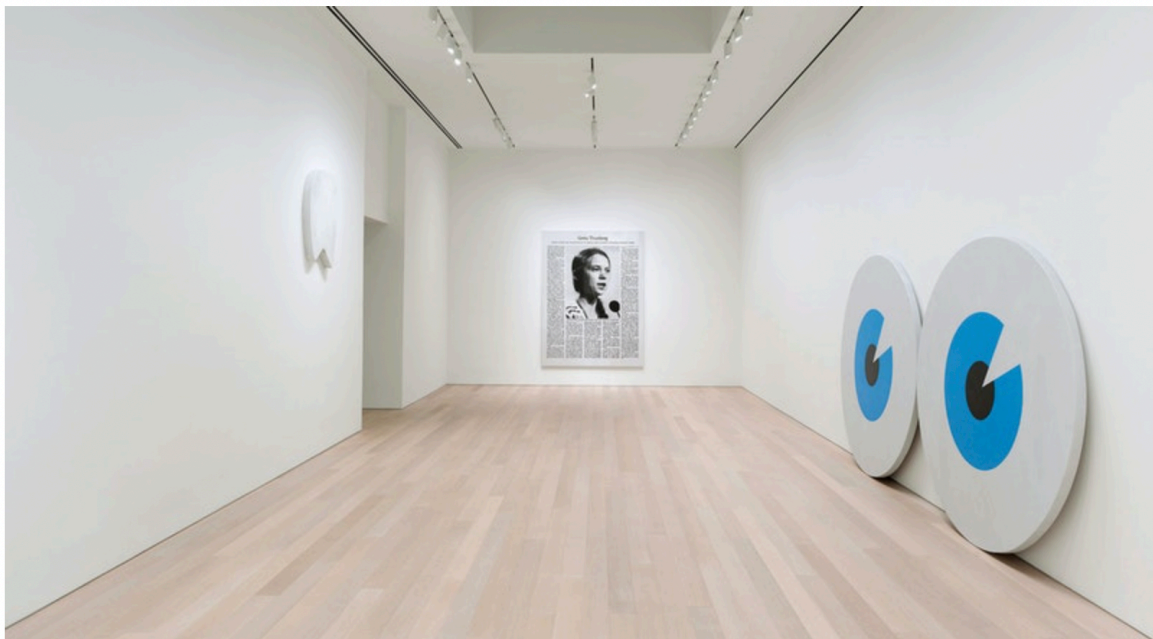
As I walked through Adam McEwen's latest show at Gagosian, I was surprised to find my hands clenching. Normally I'm an alert art-viewer, of course, but with this exhibition everything felt taut, from the tightly stretched canvases to the tips of Bic pens painted barely to touch the corners of the pictures' surfaces, and my body responded in-kind.

McEwen has prepared us (set us up?) for this sort of response from the first with the exhibition's title. *Execute* is a contranym—or, more poetically, a Janus word—and has two oppositional meanings: both to carry out and to extinguish. “To carry out” might even be too gentle a definition, frankly. To execute something suggests the ruthless potential energy contained in a box of disposable black pens—no retractable, multi-color pens here. In *Leaning Bics* (2022), six seemingly identical, titanic pens stretch across the picture plane at seemingly identical angles, upper left to lower right; McEwen has taped out his pens so that he paints exceptionally straight lines without much modulation in tone or paint thickness. The eye boggles at the running stripes, unable to gain purchase on the façade, constantly sliding up and down, relieved only by the lighter or darker gray drips that roll down the picture plane at true south rather than on the diagonal. This visual assault is made even clearer in *Dueling Bics* (2022), which overlap one another at cross purposes and create slight jags in the onslaught. The gallery press release suggests a relationship to Roy Lichtenstein, and that is there, but I also thought of Bridget Riley married to an inescapable, mazelike, monochrome Eduardo Paolozzi or to Frank Stella on one of his darker days.



Installation view: Adam McEwen: *Execute*, Gagosian, New York, 2022. © Adam McEwen. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

McEwen's relentless deployment of gray reminded me, as well, of midcentury exposés of the menace of advertising: *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955) or *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), both of which laid bare marketing's dismal strategies and were written just at the time that Bic pens were introduced to the public. The promised efficiencies yet pervasive impotence of corporate culture echo in works like *Compressed Spring #1* (2022), one of several paintings in which a helical compression spring is depicted in various levels of contraction. Such springs bear within them the greatest amount of potential power, yet here they are trapped within the confines of the canvas. *Compressed Spring #1* implies the force exerted fully to flatten it not only by the tight lines held nearly at horizontal but also by the implacable field of gray above it, suffocating it further. McEwen's works that include color hold out the hope of some visual release, but they, too, are often exercises in frustration. *To Start* (2022) gives the lie to all our best-laid plans. A light-gray sheet of paper with a pie chart rests Cézanne-askew to the picture plane as well as to the surface on which it is placed and the wall beyond. On it is written "To Start [underlined three times in red, black, and blue]. 1. Execute [underlined twice in black and red with a particularly springy capital E]. cont." A glass cheekily half-emptied with a vile green liquid waits off to the upper left. This endlessly postponed commencement betrays an utter lack of initiation, more ineffectual than Escher's stairs. What McEwen has developed in this room is a new type of American (im)Precisionism, all whacks on the back of the neck with a blunt cartoon blade (the painted fiberglass *Execution Block* [2022] waits for us at the center of the room).



Installation view: Adam McEwen: *Execute*, Gagosian, New York, 2022. © Adam McEwen. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

On the gallery's lower level, McEwen has included five additional paintings, including two shaped canvases: *Six Foot Two Eyes of Blue* (2022), a painting in two parts—one for each eye—resting on the floor up against the wall, like a dismantled oculist shop sign and the bedazzled *Tooth* (2022) hung high on the wall. These are surrounded by three obituary paintings (all 2022), created to look like memorial statements run in the print version of the *New York Times*. Their subjects, the mystic Sadghuru, technologist Jared Lanier, and environmental activist Greta Thunberg are still young enough that their actual deaths are hopefully far away. But the Thunberg painting especially stopped me short: she is the youngest by far and for most viewers is the best known. And yet, newspapers of record the world over almost certainly already have an obituary begun for her. McEwen's texts possess a sly humor and care for their topics and do not predict how they [will] die. But death is inescapable and, for a figure like Thunberg who inspires such manic devotion and vitriol, it must be ever-present, not least because climate change—her cause—is a death sentence. These paintings are fascinating and disturbing, almost like being compressed like a spring or being buried alive. I left reminded that as I turned the corner to walk down the stairs, I ran headlong into *Train* (2022), with its hazard-orange Vertov cowcatcher, hung in the stairwell and barreling straight toward me. It tolls for thee, right?

Contributor

Amanda Gluibizzi

Amanda Gluibizzi is an art editor at the *Rail*. An art historian, she is the Co-Director of the New Foundation for Art History and the author of *Art and Design in 1960s New York*.



PARIS

Adam McEwen

Galerie Art : Concept / 13 octobre - 18 novembre 2017

L'Anglais McEwen semble entretenir un lien privilégié avec les situations anxiogènes ou les catastrophes, notamment celle du Titanic. Celle-ci est en quelque sorte inscrite dans son héritage familial, puisque son arrière-grand-père comptait parmi les victimes du naufrage.

Cette catastrophe maritime fait partie de notre imaginaire collectif, dans lequel elle a la particularité de s'inscrire en noir et blanc : elle s'est passée de nuit, dans une profonde obscurité et la photographie couleur n'existait pas. Ce ressenti particulier transparaît dans les images d'Adam McEwen ; il les traite soit au graphite, soit avec un pigment phosphorescent sur du grafoil. L'ambiance nocturne est de mise, accentuée par le support utilisé : des plaques d'éponge en cellulose, matériau ingrat gommant toutes les précisions du cliché. Il entretient ainsi un flou mémoriel qui pourrait peut-être se justifier, si ce n'est que certaines images sont affublées d'accessoires (une ventouse, une cymbale, un cerceau) qui mettent le spectateur à distance, voire le provoquent. Aussi cette œuvre évoquant une catastrophe majeure se révèle-t-elle quelque peu anecdotique, les associations d'idées de McEwen paraissant plutôt incongrues.

Aux icebergs dévastateurs, quoique métaphoriques, on préférera des scènes plus contemporaines, comme cette catastrophe aérienne ou ce tunnel sous l'Hudson, à New York. Ici, le sentiment de catastrophe ou de dangerosité n'a aucun affect historique. Il offre un aspect distancié de la réalité, notamment par l'usage de couleurs ambivalentes, comme si tout cela n'était qu'un cauchemar, comme le fut naguère le Titanic, la nostalgie en moins.

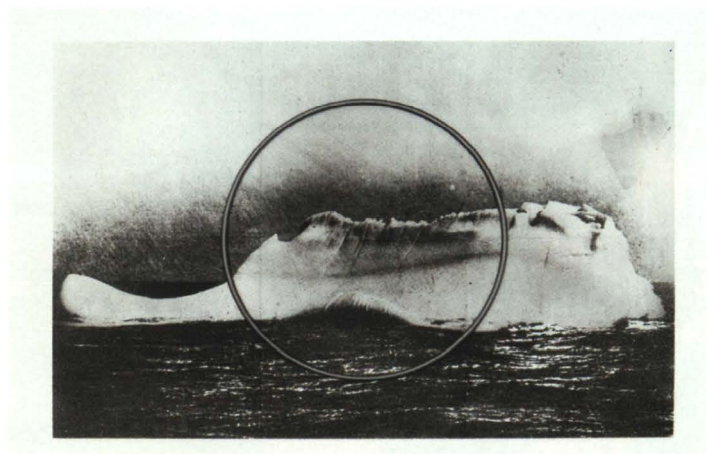
Bernard Marcelis

This British artist seems to have a personal connection with anxiety-producing situations and catastrophes, especially the sinking of the Titanic. It's related to his family background—his great-grandfather was among the victims.

That disaster at sea is part of our collective imagination, and among its particularities is that we always think about it in black and white. The liner went down at night, in total darkness, and color photography hadn't been invented yet. That particular mode of perception marks Adam McEwen's images of it. He prints them either in graphite or with a phosphorescent pigment on Grafoil. The ambience is always nocturnal, accentuated by the support he uses, cellulose sponges, a difficult medium that blurs the precise details of the photo. This might be said to correspond to the fuzziness of memory, except for the accessories some images are decked out with, generating a distancing effect or even a provocation. Thus this work based on a major disaster has a bit of an anecdotal feeling to it, and McEwen's associations seem incongruous. Instead of the somewhat metaphorical icebergs, some people might prefer his more contemporary scenes like the aftermath of an airplane crash and Manhattan's Hudson Tunnel. There's no historic dimension to the feeling of danger or catastrophe. His version of reality is made all the more distanced by the use of ambiguous colors, as if all this were just a nightmare, like the Titanic once was, before the nostalgia set in.

Translation, L-S Torgoff

« Ice Ice Baby ». (Ph. Claire Dorn)



DISCOVERIES *art scene*



ARTIST ADAM MCEWEN WITH RECENT PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS ON SPONGE IN HIS NEW YORK STUDIO. HIS SOLO SHOW AT THE ASPEN ART MUSEUM RUNS FROM JANUARY 13 TO MAY 28 (ASPENARTMUSEUM.ORG).

Provocative Statements

On the eve of his first U.S. solo museum show, *Adam McEwen* opens his studio for a look at his wry, wondrous works

At first glance, the through line of Adam McEwen's art appears to be humor—of the deadpan variety often associated with Brits

like himself. There are his parodies of shop-window signs, such as the one announcing "Fuck Off We're Closed," which he made shortly after moving to New York in 2000, and his pitch-perfect obituaries for subjects who are still alive. There are his drawings of real text messages (one reads, "Cant. Dad's shooting a porno in ohio, mom's flying to seattle") and his photographs, printed on colored kitchen sponges, of chewing gum stomped and baked into sidewalks.

But take another look, and something darker, more unsettling surfaces. Those wads of gum in fact reference bombing patterns from the Second World War. Graphite sculptures of everyday objects, meanwhile, may look hyperreal, only that mailbox doesn't open, and that elevator button doesn't light up. "A lot of things I've made in graphite, like a watercooler or an ATM, are analogies for nondelivery," McEwen says in his Long Island City, New York, studio. "That sense of wanting to deliver and failing—art can feel a bit like that."

Tall and lanky, with a plummy English accent, McEwen has a knack for keeping viewers off-balance. Videos shot driving through Manhattan's tunnels loop so the car never reaches an

exit. An infamous photograph of an executed Mussolini and his lover hanging by their feet in a public square is inverted, so the couple appears to be flying. His obituaries have a similar effect. "You see it and are like, Is Bill Clinton dead?" McEwen says. "In that split second, things become unstable."

"There is a poeticism about the realities of the lives we lead," says Heidi Zuckerman, director of Colorado's Aspen Art Museum, which has organized McEwen's first solo museum exhibition in the U.S., on view from January 13 through May 28. "The show is really about death." Case in point: a 2013 graphite version of the coffin carrier McEwen and his fellow pallbearers used to take his father, Rory—the influential folk singer and botanicals painter—to the graveyard 35 years ago. "If you had made that object in 1450, you would have made the same object," says McEwen, marveling at the timeless form, a minimalist abstraction embedded with emotion.

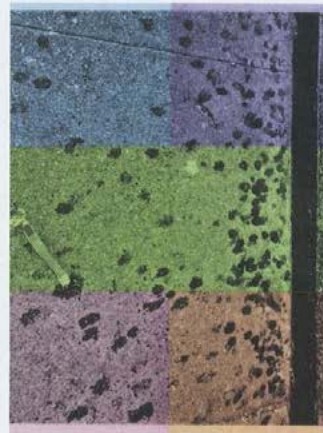
It took McEwen several years to come to terms with his own artistic ambitions. Raised in London and Scotland, he studied English at Oxford, let a family friend guilt-trip him into taking a job at an investment bank, then bolted for the

DISCOVERIES *art scene*



1

1. DISPLAYED IN HIS STUDIO ARE SMALL CONCRETE SCULPTURES OF DEPLOYED AIR BAGS. 2. AN UNTITLED 2015 PRINT ON SPONGE. 3. HOLLAND TUNNEL (YELLOW), 2016.



2

“That sense of wanting to deliver and failing—art can feel a bit like that,” says Adam McEwen.

California Institute of the Arts. After graduating he returned to London, where he took a part-time job writing obituaries for *The Daily Telegraph*. Struggling to find his artistic voice, he composed an obit for punk icon Malcolm McLaren, then living. After moving to New York at age 35, he made more faux death notices, some of which attracted attention as part of the 2006 Whitney Biennial. “They’re homages, not wishful thinking,” he says. An homage to Macaulay Culkin? “He was pretty incredible in *Home Alone*. Nothing wrong with that film.”

More recently McEwen has created concrete sculptures of deployed air bags and a series of long, narrow photographs of stretch limousines, printed on sponge. “Again, they speak of people wanting,” he says, exclaiming with a tragic twinge, “‘It’s going to be the best night of our lives!’” As he points out, such limos have fallen out of favor. “These guys are cruising around desperately looking for work.”

McEwen empathizes with the drivers, obscured behind tinted windows. “As an artist, you’ve got to reveal yourself, because if you don’t, you won’t make good work,” he says. “But you don’t want to reveal yourself, because it’s horrible.” —JULIE L. BELCOVE



3

VISUAL ARTS / MUSEUMS / ARTICLE

Try 'Til You Die: Adam McEwen's Art of the Obituary

BY MARGARET CARRIGAN, MODERN PAINTERS | JANUARY 12, 2017

Bill Clinton

Forty-second President of the United States who presided over a decade of prosperity and stability

BILL CLINTON, who has died aged 58, was the 42nd President of the United States, the self-styled 'Man from Hope' whose life both enchanted and appalled his nation. He was a man of oversized appetites, ready emotion and the warm embrace for a voter regardless of wealth, station or race.

Clinton was at once the most cynical of political opportunists and the guileless son of the Deep South truly hungry for the love of all he met. But while his extraordinary charisma and the gift of empathy made him unbeatable at the polling booth, his weakness to a siren's call and a willingness to parse the truth cost him dearly when he became only the second President to face impeachment.

Perhaps more than any other President, Clinton stood for his generation. The first of the post-War "Baby Boomers" to reach the Oval Office, he embodied both their idealism, their hopes for a perfect America in an orderly world, and the self-indulgence of their unprecedented wealth.

Through two terms as president he led the nation through a period of unrivalled prosperity. It was a period during which America seemed to perfect the doctrines of capitalism and of



Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He was a popular student, became class president and on graduation sailed into a prestigious launch-pad as a clerk to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It was the beginning of a relentless climb to the top: the committee chairman was Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas, leading the emerging opposition to the Vietnam War, and he took the young Clinton under his wing to sponsor him for the Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford.

Oxford was followed by Yale Law School, and Clinton's momentous meeting with a plain, bespectacled young scholar quite unlike the 'beauty queens' he had been used to dating at home in the South. She was Hillary Rodham, from Chicago, and she became his wife in 1975. Described as the perfect baby boom match, they mirrored the seismic changes that had taken place in American life. Clinton may have strayed, but he regarded his wife as his professional partner and his equal, and she brought a new, if controversial, role to the West Wing. Through all the ups and downs of power, scandal and the persecution by their opponents in what Mrs Clinton famously termed a "vast right wing conspiracy", they

Detail of "Untitled (Bill)," 2004.
(Adam McEwen)

RELATED

VENUES

Aspen Art Museum

ARTISTS

Adam McEwen

As a former obituary writer for London's Daily Telegraph, Adam McEwen is all too familiar with death. [An exhibition](#) of the British-born artist's work at the Aspen Art Museum, on view January 13 to May 28, takes his fascination with mortality as its cue.

In the early aughts, McEwen began writing imaginary obituaries for notable living subjects such as Bill Clinton and Nicole Kidman. "It's not morbid," he says, "I definitely know they are going to die. I take death as a perfect rule and work backwards from that." The faux obits highlight a central theme in the artist's practice: What constitutes the "real world" when our time — and scope of experiences — on this planet are limited? For

McEwen, the real is subjective and dependent on our ability to ignore the constant reminders that life is fleeting. "We live, by nature, optimistically and, therefore, in denial."

His sculptural works — which often represent everyday objects such as yoga mats, air conditioning units, or car passenger airbags in materials like graphite or concrete — are exercises in denial since they are fundamentally unable to serve their intended purposes. “A graphite air conditioner is guaranteed to fail at what it’s supposed to do,” McEwen explains. “But it tries, despite its obvious limitations. We all try to do our best.”

The artist’s focus on the mundane, however, keeps his work from becoming too macabre. For instance, his text message series renders banal mms correspondence gleaned from his and his friends’ phones into framed, haiku-like musings. The content of the texts ranges from making plans to meet someone to blistering breakup words, reminding us that life is lived in the details.

ART & DESIGN

Review: Adam McEwen's 'Harvest' Explores the Movement of People, Vehicles and Information

By ROBERTA SMITH MARCH 24, 2016

Adam McEwen is an excellent journeyman artist who keeps a low profile behind an astute recycling of objects and images. His work has a streamlined intelligence, attention to detail and austere beauty that make it seem transparent yet mysterious, straightforward yet perverse. His latest show, "[Harvest](#)" at Petzel Gallery, takes its theme from one of Jean-François Millet's paintings of gleaners in a field — talk about detail work. Its sculptures and paintings examine the movement of people, vehicles or information through relentlessly controlled channels. "[TSA](#)" recreates the table and stack of plastic bins from airport security checkpoints but in stark white Corian (the table) and machined graphite (the bins). They're fragile, luminous and nonfunctional, like art.

Two dark minimalist sculptures, "IBM Blue Gene 1" and its mate "2," recreate the mass and exterior detailing of giant supercomputers, also in graphite. They evoke both the fictional runaway machine of the 1968 movie "2001: A Space Odyssey" and the actual data-gathering behemoths of the National Security Agency.

Four paintings appropriate black-and-white photographs of the sleek empty interiors of tunnels — Holland, Midtown, Lincoln and Brooklyn-Battery — connecting Manhattan to the surrounding area. Printed on sheets of cellulose sponge, a staple of kitchen cleanliness, they have the smoky allure of charcoal drawings until you see the bubbles. Nearby is a symbolic attempt to prevent easy access: an actual example of the sticklike door-to-floor [locks](#) endemic to unrehabilitated New York lofts and tenements — a madeleine for creative types of a certain age. The final piece is interactive, a handsome steel-and-wood sculpture shaped like a giant K, a form that neatly accommodates a steep switchback staircase. It reaches almost to the ceiling, and a dead end.



ART IS A TRANSLATOR,
ART IS A FRIEND

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN
ADAM MCEWEN AND URS FISCHER

Above - Urs Fischer, *Problem Painting*, 2013, installation view at Gagosian Gallery, Rome, 2013. © the artist. Courtesy: the artist and Gagosian Gallery, Rome. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

Opposite, left - Adam McEwen, *Instrument*, 2014. Courtesy: the artist and Art : Concept, Paris. Photo: Claire Dorn

Opposite, right - Adam McEwen, *Conduit*, 2014. Courtesy: the artist and Art : Concept, Paris. Photo: Fabrice Gousset

Adam McEwen and Urs Fischer weave a conversation that touches on the more personal and human aspects of the work; on the one hand, the past that intervenes as an element of investigation and comparison with the present,



and on the other the revelation of what is in some ways a manifest truth, though it has been repressed and resurfaces to destabilize things. Art as the maieutic possibility of extracting an upheaval, not to free ourselves from it but to reify it, to make it visible and manageable. Finally, poetry as ultimate, rarified, available and universal expression.

Urs Fischer was born in 1973 in Zurich and studied photography at Schule für Gestaltung, Zurich. He has exhibited extensively all over the globe, and his work is included in many important public and private collections worldwide. His recent solo exhibitions include "Urs Fischer," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2013), "Madame Fisscher," Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2012), "Skinny Sunrise," Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2012), "Oscar the Grouch," Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut (2010), "Marguerite de Ponty," New Museum, New York (2009), Cockatoo Island, Kaldor Art Projects and the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, Sydney (2007), "Mary Poppins," Blaffer Gallery, Art Museum of the University of Houston (2006), "Paris 1919," Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2006), "Jet Set Lady," Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan (2005), "Kir Royal," Kunsthaus Zürich (2004), and "Not My House Not My Fire," Espace 315, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2004). Fischer's work has been presented in numerous group exhibitions, including the Venice Biennale (2003, 2007, 2011), "Lustwarande 2011 – Blemishes," Park De Oude Warande, Museum De Pont, Tilburg, the Netherlands (2011), "L'invention de l'oeuvre: Rodin et les ambassadeurs," Musée Rodin, Paris (2011), "Modern British Sculpture," Royal Academy of Arts, London (2011), "Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century," New Museum, New York (2007), "Fractured Figure: Works from the Dakis Joannou Collection," Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens (2007), "Sequence 1: Painting and Sculpture in the François Pinault Collection," Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2007), and "Cinq milliards d'années," Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2006). Fischer lives and works in New York.

Born in London in 1965, **Adam McEwen** lives and works in New York. He studied English literature at Christ Church, Oxford, before attending California Institute of the Arts, where he graduated in 1992. His work moves freely between the disciplines of painting, sculpture, and installation. After writing obituaries for the *Daily Telegraph* in London, McEwen turned the genre into artworks with a series of obituaries of still-living figures, including Kate Moss, Bill Clinton, and Jeff Koons. He is known for his life-size graphite sculptures of such familiar consumer objects as an ATM, a drinking fountain, or a credit card. His "Bomber Harris" series consists of monochromatic paintings covered with chewed gum, and other recent works include prints on oversize sheets of sponge. McEwen's recent solo exhibitions include "Non-Alignment Pact, Art : Concept," Paris (2014), "Factory Tint," Capitain Petzel, Berlin (2014), "Sawney Bean," the Modern Institute, Glasgow (2013), "Rehabilitating the Steinway Tube Ducts," Rodolphe Janssen Gallery, Brussels (2013), and "The House of Marlon Brando, Art : Concept," Paris (2011). He has been in the important group shows "Love Story, Sammlung Anne und Wolfgang Titz," 21er Haus, Belvedere, Vienna (2014), "Wanted: Selected Works from the Mugrabi Collection," Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2013), "Haunted," Guggenheim Museum, New York (2010), the Whitney Biennial (2006), and "Into Me / Out of Me," MoMA PS1, Long Island City, New York (2006). As a curator he has conceived various projects, including *Fresh Hell: Carte blanche à Adam McEwen* at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2010).



Above - Adam McEwen, "FactoryTint"
installation view at Captain Petzel, Berlin, 2014.
Courtesy: the artist and Captain Petzel, Berlin.
Photo: Jens Ziehe

Opposite - Urs Fischer, *38 East 1st Street*, 2014,
"Burning Down the House" installation view at
Gwangju Biennale, 2014. © the artist. Courtesy:
the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London. Photo:
Stefan Altenburger

**ADAM MCEWEN**

When I was at CalArts in the early 1990s, the word “co-opted” was constantly being invoked. Specifically in the sense of how to make art that would resist being co-opted.

URS FISCHER

How much work from that time succeeded in that?

A M That’s what I was just thinking. For a long time, it seemed like a lot of art made then had an indestructible armor. Works by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mike Kelley, Richard Prince, Christopher Wool—it all seemed to be perfect. Perfectly made of steel. But now, as time goes on, and for instance Mike Kelley’s no longer around, it doesn’t seem as indestructible anymore. That’s a strange thought; it bothers me. Can Kryptonite drain of its power?

Another, related thought: on a bigger time scale, when I was growing up in the 1970s it seemed like rock and roll, and that culture, was everything. It was *the* defining factor. Now, today, I can actually imagine that rock and roll could simply dissipate.

U F It will be like jazz music. Some people still do it, but it’s not...

A M For instance a 12-year-old someday might know about Jimi Hendrix, or not. Jimi Hendrix could become a niche interest.

Then I was thinking about how any conversation about production has to come back to Warhol as the archetypal producer. But a lot of his late work was rejected when it was first shown. His last shows at Castelli, the knives and guns, didn’t sell a single painting. He was making work that was troublesome, and subversive, and political, and people didn’t want it. He was working in a context of outsider-ness on a certain level. Even though he was still going to every party, he was feeling under siege.

U F He started out as an outsider.

A M We’ve talked before about how the things we really like tend to be subversive in some way. A Mike Kelley teddy bear sitting on a knitted carpet is a fucked-up object. It implicates you.

Then it begins to ripple out and talk about everyone it touches. It’s like a virus. It talks about its context. (This is giving it the most benefit of the doubt.)

U F Like Kelley, you frequently call upon elements that have a relation to your past.

A M Yes, as a way of looking at a situation in the present. I ask myself, “What is the difference between what this thing looks like now and what it looked like then? And what is the blank area in between them?” It’s not about nostalgia in the sense of wishing for the past, but more like wondering about the relationship between the past and the present.

U F You mean the relationship between things that you encountered in the past and how they partially manifest in your memory, and how they manifest in reality now?

A M Well, it’s interesting how you can take what appears in the present and scratch the surface a bit and very quickly reveal a different present or a different reality, which is usually less manicured than you might wish. I think that’s what some of this is about—the way that time refracts and collapses and expands. You scratch the surface and very quickly get to distant places.

U F When I look at what you do, it’s charged emotionally. The memory is emotionally charged, and these things go revisit the charged memory. For instance the Cold War captures a specific feeling that was attached to something, and that feeling sometimes evacuates, like a ghost leaving a body. It leaves this thing that was charged when you were a younger person, and which is now an empty thing in some way. Or, not an empty thing, but *just* a thing. It’s just a can now. It maybe looks old or colorful or cool in this case, but all the things it links to aren’t there anymore.

A M I’m simply looking for motive, trying to keep myself interested. The Tennent’s cans from when I was a kid, they keep me



Adam McEwen, *Taps*, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow. Photo: Keith Hunter







Above - Urs Fischer, *CECILLE / BRENDA / ERICA*
and *Untitled (Floor Piece)*, 2006

Right - Urs Fischer, *FRANÇOIS / RENÉ*, 2013,
and *Untitled (Floor Piece)*, 2006

Opposite - Urs Fischer, *Mr. Flosky*, 2001-2002;
Problem Painting, 2011; *Untitled (Floor Piece)*, 2006

All images: installation view at The Museum of Contemporary Art,
Los Angeles, 2013. © the artist.
Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Stefan Altenburger



interested. And I do it because I believe, I suppose, that if I stick a chair leg in the can, and it disturbs me and says something, then it will say something to somebody else—to someone I don't even know. I don't really know what the feeling I'm trying to evoke is, but in this case it's not a good feeling.

U F What are these newspaper pieces about?

A M These are two pages from the *New York Times* that appeared opposite each other on the same day in 2012. They were brought to my attention by Dick Hebdige, the English writer. He lives in Los Angeles and wrote that book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, about teddy boys and mods and rockers. Anyway, on the left-hand page is an article about Jimmy Savile, the English television personality who throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was very much a part of British culture. He was on TV every week and worked with handicapped kids, and it turned out after his death that he was a serial child molester. Even young girls in hospitals. It was something that he subtly kind of boasted about and everybody unconsciously knew it was happening, but nobody wanted to do anything about it. But when it was revealed after his death, nobody was surprised. The article has a photograph of him with a cigar.

And on the right-hand page is an article about the skeleton of a carrier pigeon from World War II, which was found in a barn with a little coded message around its leg. They were trying to decode the message.

Dick Hebdige suggested to me that this was what my work was like, and I thought he was right. Both have to do with scratching the surface and revealing something that is in plain sight. Right in front of you is this guy Jimmy Savile who's smoking a cigar, he's got his arm around little girls and you know he's messing with them. But you don't want to see it. The same with the bird. The past is right there: there's a lot of hidden and coded stuff right in front of us and it somehow seems to say the same kind of thing that my work is trying to say. To put somebody in the position where they feel on uncertain ground, and they don't know why. I like art that does that. I like it when art makes me constantly destabilized.

U F When you look at it, it shifts something.

A M Right. Of course, some art can do that and make you feel great. But for some reason I don't feel equipped to try and do that. Although, don't you think that even when somebody makes you feel uncomfortable, it's a good feeling, ironically? It's good to feel anything.

U F I think sometimes art works as a translator. An interpreter of sorts.

A M You mean translating feelings that you have?

U F Translating an understanding of something through matter into something you can then read again.

A M In order that it can be felt again.

U F Exactly.

A M That it can be felt anew, in a different way. So that you can feel bad again. It's like: "Here, have this, I don't want it anymore!"

U F In your case, you think you can give things away by making art that is connected to your past. The impression I get with a lot of the graphite works is that you have a very particular way of selecting things that interest you, and you go through a long process of evaluating them again and again and again. Many of the things you select reject the viewer. The roll-down gate is clearly rejecting you. Even the air conditioner pushes you away.

Or they contain, like the air conditioner or the safe. They contain something and you would like to have it, but they don't let you in.

A M That's right.

U F The air conditioner contains literally, but the AmEx card is also something that contains. It contains something that is not yours.

A M Well, they all promise. And I feel that they wish to deliver on the promise, but they fail. The air conditioner in theory provides some kind of sustenance, but it cannot deliver. There is something hellish about a machine that blows cold air, artificially refrigerated air, at a human. I remember being eight years old in a hotel room with a window unit, and it was a horrific object.

U F You could say something similar about the installation you did with the fluorescent tubes, where they don't give light. It makes a promise, and then there is nothing.

A M That was about minimalism—the promise of minimalism. When I was in my teens, what I always got from minimalism was this slightly punishing aura of a cleansing.

U F Or a ritual or something.

A M Exactly. By the time it comes to the 1990s and certainly the early 2000s, minimalism didn't seem to be able to deliver on its promise any more.

U F It has a repressive core. It's interesting to me that, say, in Carl Andre's work, the repressiveness of minimalism seems to go with a repressed emotional side. It's very emotional, but it deals with repression and manifests itself with this purity.

A M I believe that was again something that our generation inherited.

U F The absoluteness of it.

A M So the work with the lights is about the promises of minimalism. It's not that I have anything to say about that; I simply don't understand it. I don't have anything to say about anything except trying to point to things that I don't understand.

Somebody told me the other day that my art was absolutely closed and shut down. They used the words "fascism" and "fashion." In a way I don't think this person was wrong—it was actually astute—but I would then say in my defense that it's very emotional because it's talking about the attempt to deal with a closed-down system.

U F Do you think you can rid yourself of the bad by making works that deal with past memories? When you do something with a thing from your past, is it cathartic?

A M Um, no.

U F No.

[both laugh]

A M I do think it allows me to move on to the next problem. It's like, you take something unpleasant, something from inside yourself, and you don't get rid of it but rather place it outside of yourself, and then you carry it with you. Better to have it sitting next to you and visible. Then in a sense it becomes a companion. The works become friends and they talk to you, to each other, and to other people.

U F I consider art a friend.

A M Exactly.

U F It sounds so terrible.



Adam McEwen, *Safe*, 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Photo: Douglas M. Parker Studio



Above - Urs Fischer, *fountain and boy w/ tongue*, 2014, "mermaid / pig / bro w/ hat" installation view at Gagosian Gallery, New York, 2014. © the artist. Courtesy: the artist and Gagosian Gallery, New York. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

Below - Urs Fischer, *Melodrama; 2; 8; 4*. All works: 2013, installation view at Sadie Coles HQ, London, 2014. © the artist. Courtesy: the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

Opposite - Urs Fischer and Georg Herold, *Necrophonia*, 2011. © the artists. Courtesy: the artists and The Modern Institute, Glasgow. Photo: Stefan Altenburger







Top - Adam McEwen, *Wham-O All American*, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels

Bottom - Adam McEwen, "Rehabilitating the Steinway Tube Ducts" installation view at Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels

AM Well, it's tough. But what might be a problem could be turned into a solution. So an enemy can become a friend. And then you realize that maybe an enemy is not an enemy. It simply has its own problems.

UF Do you consider a lot of your work as dealing with the past, the far past, the recent past, or the present? And do you make works that deal with the future?

AM I think it's all about the present—the constant, ongoing present. But since you constantly fall into the future, moment by moment, it's about trying to make the future closer to the future you wish to see.

UF Based on your past, in some way.

AM Yes. For instance, how can you make art and not acknowledge whatever other art you want to talk about, minimalism and so on? We are inheriting, we have made art in a context, and to ignore context is ignorant.

UF So you can say that art is a language. You didn't invent it, but...

UF One thing I never understand, when I look at an artwork, is why it speaks to me, or not. How can anything be transferred or invested into an object so that it communicates back? When we look at a work that has clear references to the past, for instance the Cold War, it triggers a similar sentiment in other people from the same background. But a bunch of shells, to someone from a culture where shells have a totally different value, maybe as currency, means something other than "vacation." There are so many different layers. And somehow, as an artist, you believe in something being contained, and your understanding of it, and where it begins and ends. When does your way of dealing with it become more important than what it is? At what point does this happen?

AM Ideally, the common ground actually recedes and fades, and the thing that you make is somehow empowered by your relationship to it such that it can speak to somebody else, even if you have no common ground. Of course, somebody from another culture may never have seen an air conditioner and it probably will mean nothing to them, so maybe that one is a failed artwork for those viewers. But I hope that if you have a slight inkling of what this object was, then there's a kind of iconic quality that I can get to. I think that we *don't* see the world around us. I don't see, I cannot see, the world in front of me, and I think it's possible that I could. And in a way, an odd way, making art is an acknowledgment of the attempt to see reality because I'm putting the feeling that I have in conjunction with an object. And that's a stronger sense of reality than one or the other alone.

UF This morning, while taking a shower, I was thinking about atheists.

AM Atheists?

UF Yes. Then I was thinking about believers. And about religions. The Vatican is the HQ of one religion. For any human being, given the short time you have, it's insane to ever think you're right about anything at all. Sure, people might agree on something, and that's fine. There's a lot of thought to be done, a lot of meditation. But the universe is so incomprehensibly vast, and in time, everything we ever knew will be overtopped. It's ridiculous to insist on anything. Whereas at the Vatican, people have the audacity to think, "We know we're right. We've researched this stuff."

AM But given the vastness and the incomprehensibility of the universe, the upside of the belief is A) it deals with the problem of the fear of the unknown, and B) it makes you powerful.

UF I think that religion is a great concept. Nowadays, we get to take whatever we want from any religion without being religious.

It helps you, sometimes, as a human being. I understand that part. I'm very indifferent to it. I'm not pro or con.

AM I think that it's inspiring when you see things that include the possibility of pain and failure.

UF Spirituality.

AM Right, because it's inclusive. It's inclusive because it's made on the basis of being human. I aspire to make something out of things that are, maybe, cheap, or even better, nonexistent. No materials, available to everybody, and speaking to everybody's fears.

UF Poetry, reciting poetry. It's good, it works.

AM Poetry is the best, except that nobody has time to read it.

UF I do.

AM Do you?

UF Not a lot, but I like poetry. I like it better than fiction because it's more to the core of things.

AM Poetry is the most rarified of all. For me, I want a context that protects the artwork—that turns the noise down.

UF Your Kryptonite concept.

AM I want to walk into the room and think about the artwork, that's all. If you can perform a sleight of hand, in which—even though the context is compromised and the world is compromised and it's all an illusion—a viewer walks in and only thinks about the artwork, what it might be doing, then it gives the artwork the best chance to do what it can do. It maximizes the possibility. Given that the artwork is flawed and maybe not very good at doing what it's trying to do.

If I make, say, a limousine printed on a sponge, real scale, it's kind of funny and hopefully it's curious and slightly confusing. But it's also about the way people wish to escape their lives—escape a bad week or a bad day or a bad marriage. A limousine, those things that roll around New York, they are like sculptures. Their shape is based on a promise of desire. They talk about sex and glamour and what goes on inside. They have mirrored windows because then you feel, inside the mirrored window, that you're powerful.

UF It means you're happy.

AM The person outside cannot look in and the person inside cannot be seen. And maybe things get turned around: maybe you can live out a fantasy. A sense of relief. Or you might look at a limousine with disgust. And there are all these connections between the limo industry and drugs, prostitution. They trigger all different responses.

But as well as being stupid, I want it also to include people's hopes. It's about aspiration and about wishing to be helped, or to be free. It's about being trapped and about escape. Even if it is a slow release, to get to this feeling, that this 15-foot limousine would give this thought. A sense of movement, but it's not really going anywhere. I think, for that to happen, you need a context that is slow, where things are slowed down. I want the melancholia to be included.

Una conversazione fra
Adam McEwen e Urs Fischer

Adam McEwen e Urs Fischer intrecciano una conversazione che tocca gli aspetti più personali e umani dell'opera, da un lato il passato che interviene come elemento d'indagine e confronto col presente, dall'altro la rivelazione di una verità per certi versi manifesta, e tuttavia rimossa, che riemerge a destabilizzare. L'arte come possibilità maieutica di estrarre un turbamento non già per liberarsene ma per reificarlo, renderlo visibile e gestibile. Infine la poesia come espressione ultima e raffinata, disponibile e universale.

ADAM MCEWEN Nei primi anni Novanta, quando ero alla CalArts, il termine "cooptato" veniva costantemente chiamato in causa. Precisamente nel senso di come produrre un'arte che avrebbe potuto resistere alla cooptazione.

URS FISCHER Quanto lavoro di quel periodo riuscì in quell'intento?

AM È proprio quello che stavo pensando. Per lungo tempo, sembrò che molte opere prodotte all'epoca avessero un'armatura indistruttibile. I lavori di Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mike Kelley, Richard Prince, Christopher Wool – tutto sembrava essere perfetto. Perfettamente forgiato in acciaio. Ma adesso, col passare del tempo, e oltretutto in assenza di Mike Kelley, tutto ciò non sembra più indistruttibile. È un pensiero strano, che m'infastidisce. La Kryptonite può esaurire il suo potere? Un'altra considerazione collegata a questa, considerando una scala temporale più ampia: crescendo negli anni Settanta, sembrava che il rock'n'roll e quel tipo di cultura fosse tutto. Che fosse il fattore determinante. Adesso, oggi, posso perfino immaginare che il rock'n'roll possa semplicemente esaurirsi.

UF Come nel caso della musica jazz. Qualcuno ancora la fa, ma non è...

AM Per esempio, un dodicenne un giorno potrebbe venire a conoscenza di Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix potrebbe diventare un interesse di nicchia. Poi stavo pensando a come qualsiasi discussione sulla produzione debba riferirsi a Warhol in qualità di produttore archetipico, tuttavia gran parte della sua produzione tarda è stata respinta la prima volta che è stata presentata. La sua ultima mostra da Castelli – i coltelli e le pistole – non ha venduto un solo dipinto. Stava facendo un lavoro che era difficile, e sovversivo, e politico, e la gente non lo voleva. Lavorava in un contesto di alterità, in un certo senso. Anche se continuava ad andare a tutte le feste, si sentiva sotto assedio.

UF Agli inizi era un outsider.

AM Prima abbiamo parlato di come le cose che ci piacciono veramente tendano, in qualche modo, a essere sovversive. Un orsacchiotto di Mike Kelley, seduto su un tappeto intrecciato, è un oggetto incasinato. Prima ti chiama in causa, poi inizia a propagarsi e a parlare di tutti quelli con cui viene a contatto. È come un virus. Parla del suo contesto. (E questo gli dà il beneficio del dubbio).

UF Al pari di Kelley, anche tu ricordi frequentemente elementi che hanno una relazione con il tuo passato.

AM Sì, è un modo di guardare a una situazione del presente. Mi chiedo: "Qual è la differenza fra il modo in cui questa cosa appare oggi e come appariva allora? E qual è lo spazio bianco che le divide?" Non si tratta di nostalgia nel senso di desiderio del passato, ma piuttosto d'indagine sulla relazione tra passato e presente.

UF Quindi la relazione fra le cose che hai incontrato in passato, il modo in cui si

manifestano parzialmente nella tua memoria, e quello attraverso cui si manifestano attualmente nella realtà?

AM Beh, è interessante come tu possa prendere ciò che appare nel presente e, grattandone un po' la superficie, rivelare velocemente un presente o una realtà diversi, che è di solito meno ordinata di quanto potresti desiderare. Credo che questo sia ciò di cui tratta parte del lavoro – il modo in cui il tempo rifrange, e collassa, e si espande. Scaffisci la superficie e molto velocemente arrivi in posti lontani.

UF Da osservatore, ciò che produci mi sembra emotivamente forte. La memoria è emotivamente forte, e queste cose vanno a rivisitare quella memoria carica di tensione. Per esempio la Guerra Fredda cattura una sensazione specifica connessa a qualcosa, e quella sensazione a volte sparisce, come un fantasma che abbandona un corpo. Lascia questo residuo che era carico di tensione quando eri giovane e che ora è, in un certo senso, vuoto. O, piuttosto che vuoto, semplicemente una cosa. Adesso, è solo una lattina. Potrebbe apparire vecchia o colorata o interessante, in questo caso, ma tutte le cose cui era collegata non esistono più.

AM Sto semplicemente cercando una motivazione, nel tentativo di mantenere vivo il mio interesse. Le lattine di Tennent che appartengono alla mia infanzia, attraggono il mio interesse. E lo faccio perché credo, suppongo, che se conficco la gamba di una sedia nella lattina, e ciò mi disturba e mi dice qualcosa, allora dirà qualcosa a qualcun altro – qualcuno che neppure conosco. Non so proprio quale sensazione io cerchi di evocare ma, in questo caso, non è positiva.

UF Di cosa trattano questi lavori con i giornali?

AM Queste sono due pagine del *New York Times* che sono apparse una di fronte all'altra in uno stesso giorno del 2012. Me le ha fatte notare lo scrittore inglese Dick Hebdige. Hebdige vive a Los Angeles e ha scritto il libro *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, che parla di teddy boys, mods e rockers. Ad ogni modo, sulla pagina di sinistra c'è un articolo su Jimmy Savile, la personalità televisiva inglese che durante gli anni Sessanta, Settanta e Ottanta dilagava nella cultura britannica. Era in tv ogni settimana e lavorava con i bambini handicappati, ed è venuto fuori, dopo la sua morte, che era un molestatore seriale di bambini. Anche di ragazze ospedalizzate. Era qualcosa di cui lui, in qualche modo, sottilmente, si pavoneggiava, e tutti inconsciamente sapevano cosa stesse succedendo, ma nessuno voleva prendere l'iniziativa a riguardo. Ma quando questo fatto fu rivelato, dopo la sua morte, nessuno ne fu sorpreso. L'articolo è illustrato da una sua fotografia con un sigaro. E sulla pagina di destra c'è un articolo sullo scheletro di un piccione viaggiatore della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, che fu trovato in un granaio con un piccolo messaggio cifrato legato alla zampa. Stanno cercando di decifrare il messaggio. Dick Hebdige mi suggerì che il mio lavoro appariva nello stesso modo, e pensai che avesse ragione. Ambedue hanno a che fare con il grattare la superficie e il rivelare qualcosa che era pienamente visibile. Proprio di fronte a te c'è questo tizio Jimmy Savile che sta fumando un sigaro e cinge col braccio delle bambine, e tu sai che le sta infastidendo. Ma non lo vuoi vedere. La stessa cosa con il piccione. Il passato è proprio qui: c'è un sacco di roba nascosta e codificata proprio davanti a noi e, in qualche modo, sembra dire lo stesso tipo di cosa del mio lavoro. Cerca di mettere qualcuno nella posizione di sentirsi su un terreno precario, senza sapere perché. Apprezzo l'arte che agisce così. Mi piace un'arte che mi faccia sentire costantemente destabilizzato.

UF Che quando la osservi, smuova qualcosa.

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AM Giusto. Certo, c'è anche dell'arte che lo fa pur facendoti sentire alla grande, ma per qualche ragione non mi sento attrezzato a cimentarmi. E tuttavia, non credi che quando qualcuno ti fa sentire a disagio, si tratti ironicamente di una bella sensazione? È bello sentire qualsiasi cosa.

UF Credo che l'arte a volte funzioni come un traduttore, credo che funzioni più o meno come un interprete.

AM Intendi dire traducendo le tue sensazioni?

UF Traducendo la conoscenza di qualcosa attraverso la materia in qualcosa che sia nuovamente leggibile.

AM In modo che possa essere percepito di nuovo.

UF Esattamente.

AM In modo che possa essere sperimentato nuovamente, e diversamente. In modo che tu possa sentirti di nuovo male. E come dire: "Ecco, prendilo, non lo voglio più!"

UF Nel tuo caso, credi di poter rivelare qualcosa producendo un'arte legata al tuo passato. L'impressione che ricevo dalla gran parte dei lavori in grafite è che tu abbia un modo molto particolare di selezionare le cose che t'interessano, servendoti di un lungo processo per valutarle di continuo. Molte delle cose che selezioni respingono lo spettatore. La saracinesca chiusa chiaramente ti sta respingendo. Persino il condizionatore d'aria ti spinge via. Oppure si tratta di contenitori, come il condizionatore d'aria o la cassaforte. Contengono qualcosa che vorresti avere, ma a cui loro ti negano l'accesso.

AM Sì, è così.

UF Il condizionatore è letteralmente un contenitore, ma anche la carta di credito American Express è, a sua volta, un contenitore. Contiene qualcosa che non è tuo.

AM Beh, si tratta di oggetti che promettono. E sento che desiderano mantenere fede alla promessa, ma falliscono. Il condizionatore, in teoria, fornisce un certo tipo di nutrimento, ma non può dispensarlo. C'è qualcosa di diabolico in una macchina che soffia aria fredda, refrigerata artificialmente, verso un essere umano. Ricordo a otto anni di aver alloggiato in una stanza di hotel con un condizionatore montato nella finestra, si trattava di un oggetto raccapricciante.

UF Potresti dire qualcosa di analogo sull'installazione che hai fatto con i tubi a fluorescenza che non forniscono luce. È un lavoro che fa una promessa e non la mantiene.

AM Quel lavoro trattava del Minimalismo – della promessa del Minimalismo. Da adolescente, il Minimalismo mi evocava un'aura leggermente punitiva di pulizia.

UF Oppure di un rituale o di qualcosa del genere.

AM Esattamente. Arrivando agli anni Novanta, e certamente ai primi anni Duemila, il Minimalismo non sembrò più capace di tenere fede alla sua promessa.

UF Possedeva un'essenza repressiva. M'interessa il fatto che, per esempio, nel lavoro di Carl Andre, la repressività del Minimalismo sembra accoppiarsi con l'aspetto dell'inibizione emotiva. Un'emotività viva, ma affrontata attraverso la repressione e manifestata attraverso la purezza.

AM Credo che questo sia di nuovo qualcosa che la nostra generazione ha ereditato.

AM Quindi il lavoro con le luci riguarda le promesse del Minimalismo. Non che io abbia qualcosa da dire sull'argomento; semplicemente non lo capisco. Non ho niente da dire su niente, e quello che faccio è cercare di additare le cose che non capisco. Qualcuno mi ha detto, l'altro giorno, che la mia arte era assolutamente chiusa e spenta. Ha usato le parole "fascismo" e "moda". In un certo senso non credo che si sbagliasse – in realtà si trattava di una considerazione perspicace – ma, a mia difesa, direi che era anche molto emotiva perché riguardava il tentativo di affrontare un sistema chiuso.

UF Credi di poterti liberare della negatività producendo lavori che riguardano memorie del passato? È catartico produrre un'opera con qualcosa del tuo passato?

AM Beh, no.

UF No.

[ridono]

AM Credo che mi permetta di passare al problema successivo. Si tratta di prendere qualcosa di piacevole, che senti dentro, e piuttosto che liberartene, portarlo fuori da te, e poi con te. È meglio che stia proprio al tuo fianco, visibile. In un certo senso diventa un compagno. I lavori diventano amici e ti parlano, parlano l'un l'altro, e con altre persone.

UF Considero l'arte un'amica.

AM Esattamente.

UF Suona veramente terribile.

AM Beh, è dura. Ma quello che potrebbe essere un problema può trasformarsi in una soluzione. Un nemico può diventare un amico. E poi ti rendi conto che forse un nemico non è veramente un nemico. Ha semplicemente i suoi problemi.

UF Ritieni che molti dei tuoi lavori abbiano a che fare con il passato remoto, prossimo, o con il presente? E crei delle opere che hanno a che fare con il futuro?

AM Penso che tutto abbia a che fare con il presente – l'incessante, continuo presente. Ma dato che ricadi di continuo nel futuro, attimo dopo attimo, ha tutto a che fare con avvicinare il futuro a il futuro che vorresti vedere.

UF In un certo modo dipende dal tuo passato.

AM Sì. Per esempio, come puoi creare arte e non riconoscere qualsiasi altro tipo d'arte di cui vuoi parlare, il Minimalismo o altro? Noi ereditiamo, e creiamo in un contesto, e ignorare quel contesto è da ignoranti.

UF Quindi puoi affermare che l'arte è un linguaggio. Non l'hai inventato ma...

UF Non capisco mai, guardando un'opera d'arte, il motivo per cui mi comunica qualcosa o non lo fa. In che modo si può trasferire o investire qualcosa in un oggetto così da renderlo comunicativo? Guardando un lavoro che ha riferimenti chiari al passato, per esempio alla Guerra Fredda, si risveglia un sentimento comune nelle persone che provengono dallo stesso background. Ma una manciata di conchiglie, per chi provenga da una cultura in cui le conchiglie abbiano un valore completamente differente, per esempio monete, significa qualcosa di diverso dall'idea di "vacanza". Ci sono così tanti livelli diversi. In qualche modo, da artista, credi che esista qualcosa di comprensibile e limitato, qualcosa che abbia un inizio e una fine. Quando il modo in cui affronti qualcosa diviene più importante della cosa in sé? A che punto succede?



AM Idealmente, il terreno comune in realtà recede e svanisce, e la cosa che hai creato è in qualche modo rafforzata dalla relazione che hai con essa, così che possa parlare a qualcun altro, con il quale puoi anche non avere cose in comune. Certamente, qualcuno che proviene da un'altra cultura potrebbe non aver mai visto un condizionatore, che pertanto non avrà per lui molto senso, quindi è possibile che quel lavoro sia inefficace per determinati spettatori. Ma io spero che, se hai un vago sentore di cosa sia quell'oggetto, allora ci sia una certa qualità iconica che puoi cogliere. Credo che noi non vediamo il mondo che ci circonda. Il mondo davanti a me, non lo vedo, non lo posso vedere, anche se credo che sia possibile vederlo. In un certo senso, stranamente, creare arte è l'ammissione del tentativo di vedere la realtà perché include la sensazione che ricevo relazionandomi a un oggetto. E le due cose insieme rimandano un senso di realtà più intenso delle due cose singolarmente.

UF Stamattina, facendo la doccia, pensavo agli atei.

AM Gli atei?

UF Sì. Poi ha pensato ai credenti. E alle religioni. Il Vaticano è il quartier generale di una religione. Per qualsiasi essere umano, dato il poco tempo a disposizione, è folle persino pensare di aver ragione su una qualsiasi cosa. Certo, la gente può essere d'accordo su qualcosa, e va bene. C'è molto a cui pensare, molto su cui meditare. Ma l'universo è così incomprensibilmente vasto, e col tempo, tutto ciò che abbiamo conosciuto sarà sepolto. È insensato insistere su qualsiasi cosa. Mentre in Vaticano, la gente ha l'audacia di pensare: "Sappiamo di aver ragione. Abbiamo compiuto ricerche in proposito".

AM Ma data la vastità e l'incomprensibilità dell'universo, il lato positivo della fede è A) che si occupa del problema della paura e dell'ignoto, e B) che ti rende più potente.

UF Credo che quella della religione sia una grande idea. Oggi, siamo arrivati a prendere qualsiasi cosa vogliamo da ogni religione senza essere religiosi. È qualcosa che a volte ti aiuta in quanto essere umano. E questo lo capisco. Sono imparziale, né a favore né contrario.

AM Credo che sia motivante vedere cose che comprendono la possibilità della sofferenza e del fallimento.

UF Spiritualità.

AM Giusto, perché la spiritualità è inclusiva. E lo è perché prodotta sulla base della nostra umanità. Aspiro a fare qualcosa con oggetti che sono, forse, comuni, o ancora meglio, non esistenti; con qualcosa di smaterializzato, disponibile a chiunque, e che parli delle paure di tutti.

UF La poesia, la declamazione della poesia. È ottima, funziona.

AM La poesia è la modalità migliore, a parte il fatto che nessuno ha tempo di leggerla.

UF Io sì.

AM Ne leggi?

UF Non molta, ma mi piace. Mi piace più della narrativa perché arriva maggiormente al cuore delle cose.

AM La poesia è il mezzo più rarefatto. Per quanto mi riguarda, voglio un contesto che protegga il lavoro – che spenga il rumore.

UF La tua idea di Kryptonite.

AM Voglio percorrere la stanza pensando al lavoro, ecco tutto. Se potessi per magia – e anche se il contesto fosse compromesso e il mondo fosse compromesso e tutto fosse un'illusione – far entrare uno spettatore che si concentri solo sull'opera e sulle sue potenzialità, allora si potrebbe dare a quel lavoro la migliore chance di sviluppare le sue risorse, di massimizzarle. A patto che l'opera sia imperfetta e forse non particolarmente capace di fare ciò che sta cercando di fare. Diciamo, che posso stampare su una spugna una limousine di dimensioni reali, in un certo senso è divertente e forse curiosa e leggermente disorientante. Ma tratta anche del modo in cui la gente desidera sfuggire alla propria vita – a una pessima settimana, o a una giornata terribile, o a un matrimonio fallimentare. Le limousine, quelle cose che si muovono per New York, sono come sculture. La loro forma è basata sulla promessa del desiderio. Parlano di sesso e di glamour e di ciò che succede al loro interno. Hanno finestrini a specchio perché tu senta che dietro a quel finestrino sei potente.

UF E quindi felice.

AM La persona che sta fuori non può guardare all'interno e la persona all'interno non può essere vista. E può darsi che le cose si confondano: può darsi che tu possa vivere una tua fantasia e sentirti sollevato. Oppure potresti guardare la limousine con disgusto, dal momento che ci sono diversi collegamenti fra l'industria delle limo, le droghe e la prostituzione. Queste auto scatenano risposte completamente differenti. Ma oltre a cose stupide, voglio anche includervi le speranze della gente. L'ambizione e il desiderio di essere aiutati o di essere liberi. Di fuggire da dove si è intrappolati. Anche se si arriva gradualmente a questa sensazione che una limousine di quattro metri e mezzo possa riflettere tutto ciò. Un senso di movimento, ma non di andare veramente in un luogo preciso. Io credo che, perché ciò succeda, sia necessario un contesto lento, in cui le cose siano rallentate. Voglio che la malinconia ne faccia parte.

Urs Fischer and various artists, YES, 2011-Ongoing, "The Event Sculpture" installation view at Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, 2014-2015. © the artist. Courtesy: the artists. Photo: Jerry Hardman-Jones

Paris

Fresh Hell, carte blanche à Adam McEwen

Palais de Tokyo
20 octobre 2010 - 16 janvier 2011

Après Ugo Rondinone en 2008 et Jeremy Deller en 2009, c'est au tour de l'artiste Adam McEwen de se voir confier un commissariat d'exposition au Palais de Tokyo. Passionnant et décalé, le résultat, placé sous le signe d'une conception de l'histoire de l'art qui échappe à toute logique positiviste, conjugue des œuvres médiévales et des propositions contemporaines, témoignant d'une constellation d'esthétiques hétéroclites. En puisant dans un tel réservoir, McEwen est parvenu à élaborer un parcours transversal innervé de rencontres improbables et à échafauder un récit d'une fraîcheur inusitée dans les institutions parisiennes. « *Toute histoire, déclare-t-il, est présente en même temps, disponible, en un sens équivalente (...) Je suis souvent plus frappé par les similitudes entre les formes artistiques ou des périodes de l'histoire de l'art distinctes que par les différences.* » Cette observation lui permet de mettre « *en résonance* » des œuvres que l'on n'aurait pas imaginé cohabiter au sein d'un même espace. Indépendamment de la présence des têtes de rois de Juda de la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, on notera que cette exposition a également le mérite de convoquer des artistes, à l'image de H.C. Westermann, peu exposés de ce côté-ci de l'Atlantique. Et de présenter des œuvres rarement diffusées d'artistes plus notoires. Il en est ainsi des dessins de Philip Guston ou de la vidéo de Bruce Nauman et Frank Owen. Sans doute pourrait-on reprocher à McEwen de ne pas avoir su davantage expliciter et approfondir un propos qui, par moments, peut s'avérer opaque et bâclé. La fluidité du parcours, le sens du rythme et l'impeccable disposition des pièces relativisent toutefois ces réserves, l'artiste n'hésitant pas à revendiquer la part d'échec inhérente à toute entreprise créatrice. « *On s'efforce, affirme McEwen, d'avancer et on puise dans le temps et dans l'histoire (...) sans discrimination, selon des liens complètement organiques et non linéaires. (...) Mais (...) l'histoire est un mur de briques qu'il faut constamment faire sauter afin de pouvoir avancer (...)* Beaucoup d'œuvres de cette exposition portent en elles les cicatrices d'échecs passés. » Fresh Hell n'échappe pas à ce constat. La preuve nous est ainsi à nouveau donnée qu'une exposition truffée de paradoxes peut se révéler des plus stimulantes.

Erik Verhagen



« Fresh Hell », Bruce Nauman et Frank Owen, "Pursuit", 1975. Film 16 mm transféré sur vidéo, couleur, son, 28'. (Court. Sperone Westwater, NY ; © B. Nauman). 16 mm film/vidéo

After Ugo Rodinone in 2008 and Jeremy Deller in 2009, it's the artist Adam McEwen's turn to curate an exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo. The fascinating and loopy result combines medieval and contemporary art in a constellation of heteroclite aesthetics. This conception of art history escapes all positivist logic. By drawing his choices from such a broad range of possibilities McEwen has been able to chart a sideways journey strewn with improbable encounters and sketch out a narrative organized into several chapters with a freshness rarely seen in a Paris museum. "All of history," he explains, "is present and available simultaneously, and in a sense equivalent... I'm more often struck by the similarities between different art forms and periods of art history than by the differences." This realization led to an approach that allowed him to bring out the "resonance" between works one would not have imagined coexisting in the same

space. Aside from the inclusion of the sculpted heads of the kings of Judah from Paris' Notre-Dame cathedral, this exhibition also has the merit of bringing us work by artists like H. C. Westermann who are rarely seen on this side of the Atlantic, as well as rarely-shown pieces by better-known people such as the drawings of Philip Guston and a video by Frank Owen and Bruce Nauman. True, McEwen could be criticized for not having better explained and expanded upon an approach that sometimes seem opaque and even sloppy. But the fluidity of the exhibition, its sense of rhythm and the impeccable display somewhat counterbalance this objection. Further, McEwen himself does not hesitate to acknowledge that any artistic enterprise is bound to embrace some degree of failure. "[...] in trying [...] to move forward" he says, "you take from time and history [...] indiscriminately, according to completely organic and nonlinear connections [...]" At the same time, history is a brick wall which



« Fresh Hell ». De gauche à droite /from left: Anne Collier, Rob Pruitt, Michelangelo Pistoletto. (Ph. A. Morin)

demands to be blown up again and again in order for the next step to happen. [...] A lot of the work in the exhibition carries with it the scars of past failures." With *Fresh Hell*, once again, we have proof that an exhibition shot through with paradoxes can turn out to be extremely stimulating.

Erik Verhagen
Translation, L-S Torgoff

MCEWEN, ADAM

→ fig. # 43 – # 44

[F] → *1965, vit à New York. Adam McEwen s'est fait connaître grâce à ses panneaux peints à la main portant les inscriptions « Sorry we're Sorry » ou « Sorry we're Dead », ses nécrologies fictives de célébrités (telles Jeff Koons et Nicole Kidman), ses toiles parsemées de chewing-gums et ses sculptures industrielles en graphite. Suivant les traces d'Andy Warhol et Richard Prince, l'artiste exhume les fantômes de l'iconographie pop afin d'explorer les contradictions des normes culturelles. Il opère des décalages précis de détails de notre quotidien et, par la juxtaposition d'éléments en apparence déconnectés, il questionne l'élaboration de nos systèmes signifiants. Il envisage l'histoire comme un ensemble de constructions soutenues par la croyance et la confiance du public envers les discours prépondérants et les médias. Ambivalents et impassibles, ses travaux sont néanmoins nourris d'humour, même si celui-ci est parfois morbide. Avant → **FRESH HELL**, Adam McEwen avait notamment organisé les expositions « Power, Corruption and Lies » en 2003, une topographie d'œuvres d'art engagées, « Interstate » en 2005, centrée sur le paysage et l'esprit, et « Beneath The Underdog » en 2007, exposition organisée avec → **Nate Lowman** dans laquelle les deux artistes confrontaient les relations individuelles à l'imposant schéma d'un capitalisme tardif.

[E] → *1965, lives in New York. Adam McEwen is known for his hand-painted hardware store signs ("Sorry we're Sorry," "Sorry we're Dead"), his fictitious newspaper obituaries of celebrities (such as Jeff Koons and Nicole Kidman), his paintings consisting of chewing gum on canvas, and his sculptures made from machined graphite. Building on the traditions of Andy Warhol and Richard Prince, the artist excavates the shadow of pop iconography to explore the contradictions buried within cultural norms. He hijacks small details that form part of our daily life, and through precise juxtaposition of apparently unconnected elements, he questions our elaboration of signification. History is for him a sum of constructions maintained by the audience's confidence towards mainstream thought and the media. Ambivalent and deadpan, his works are nonetheless humorous even though it's a humour of the dark kind. Before → **FRESH HELL**, Adam McEwen had curated the exhibitions "Power, Corruption and Lies" in 2003, a survey of politically themed work; "Interstate" in 2005, which dealt with landscape as a psychological arena; and "Beneath the Underdog" in 2007, a group show curated with → **Nate Lowman** which

addressed the individual's relationship to the towering landscape of late capitalism.

Adam McEwen

Adam McEwen
Switch
2009
Installation view



Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York, USA

For his solo show 'Switch and Bait', which was housed in a large, temporary project space, Adam McEwen made clear, yet again, just how much he likes to turn things up, down and around in order to try and see them anew. McEwen has previously employed masticated chewing gum to map air raid bombing patterns on canvas, and created obituaries of living celebrities. Here, the two sculptures that comprise the exhibition are fabricated from machined graphite, an industrial form of carbon associated with artistic, military and solar applications.

Like the gum paintings, *Switch* (both works 2009) constitutes a singular form that is repeated to chart the area in which it is located. Comprised of 45 standard fluorescent light fittings suspended in five equidistant parallel rows of nine units, each is outfitted with light tubes made of solid graphite.

Self-Portrait as a Credit Card, a carbon replica of the artist's own American Express Platinum Credit Card, sits upright on a plinth in an adjacent room. McEwen not only risks potential theft by exposing his account information; he complicates the work's reception in the process. If McEwen believes that determining the value of art has become indistinguishable from its commercial function, it is troubling that he identifies himself among those having to shift gears and take 'credibility on credit' - that is, in lieu of monetary gain - to survive in an art market gone bust.

If *Self-Portrait as a Credit Card* offers a skewed perspective of present conditions, *Switch* turns this upside down - or right side up depending on your point of view. In referencing light, McEwen owes an obvious debt to both Dan Flavin and Walter de Maria. Compositionally, *Switch* bears a striking resemblance to De Maria's *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), which is now permanently installed at the former gallery

of the founder of the Dia Art Foundation, Heiner Freidrich, at 393 West Broadway. As in McEwen's sculpture, the piece is comprised of 500 solid rods, although De Maria's were manufactured in bronze, and placed in increasing spatial increments on the floor in five parallel rows to create the effect of light cascading over a wheat field. Another Dia commission, De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977) also comes to mind, as does Richard Wilson's Saatchi Gallery oil pool, *20:50* (1987): all these works use manufactured processes and incorporate the presence or absence of light to create an optical effect that evokes a kind of post-industrial sublime.

For McEwen, non-reflection is also a metaphor to analyze the space itself. Already rife with artistic, commercial, historical, theoretical and subjective associations, McEwen's void offers the possibility to 'absorb' as well as 'reflect'. This provides added weight to the work given the current threat of art spaces having to relocate or close down, and how artists are adapting to the situation at hand.

As such, McEwen's show title notably reverses 'bait and switch', a phrase referring to a common swindling technique whereby cheaper items are advertised to lure potential buyers who are then offered more expensive goods instead. Whether this laments the current state of the global economy and its effect on art or extends the hope for another outcome remains debatable. Works like *Self-Portrait as a Credit Card* highlight what 'Switch and Bait' ultimately provides - the possibility of both options being within reach.

Ingrid Chu

Art in America

Adam McEwen at Nicole Klagsbrun

It's surprising how few contemporary artists bother to address the subject of war, or manage to do so in a compelling way, particularly when one considers how often this nation has been engaged in combat since WWII.

Adam McEwen's outstanding exhibition was the more timely as we are so deeply mired in Iraq. In a recent crop of conceptual works, McEwen obliquely examines some of the myths of war.

The first images one confronted at Klagsbrun were two black-and-white photographs: *Untitled (Dresden)*, 2006, reproduces an aerial nighttime view of the bombing of the German city; *Self-portrait as Bomber Harris* (2006) shows the artist seated behind a desk, with white hair, mustache and a uniform helping to identify him as Arthur Harris, the person in charge of the massive and highly controversial Allied air campaign waged from 1942 to 1945 against the population centers of Nazi Germany. McEwen informed me that as a teenager in England, he was struck by the comic books and pulp literature glorifying the Allied forces' massacre of German civilians, stories in which complex issues were boiled down to good versus evil, and in which the supposedly good were perfectly justified in using all means necessary to squash their opponents.

The abstract paintings *Lübeck*, *Kassel* and *Magdeburg*, named after German cities bombed during WWII, allude to masticating, spitting out and squashing in beige fields of paint dotted with flattened and soiled wads of chewing gum—a familiar urban blight. However, from a distance these pictures read as beautiful

exercises in formalist painting, somewhat reminiscent of Larry Poons's abstractions of the 1960s. Viewed more closely, the chewing gum resembles drips or flecks of paint, or crushed and dried petals arranged in irregular clusters. One soon recognizes a connection between these patterns and the bright explosions in the strangely beautiful aerial photograph of a darkened Dresden, though in most of the paintings (all of 2006, and all but one 90 by 70 inches) the values are reversed, with the ground lighter than the gum. The exceptions are two glow-in-the-dark paintings subtitled (*Phosphorbrandbombe*), the yellow-green phosphorescent ground of which alludes to the phosphorus bombs used, to horrendous effect (victims' flesh was burned to the bone).

In the next room was a series of almost identical color photographs (all 40 by 30 inches, 2006) of the Lefrak City housing complex in Queens, shot from above and moments apart—only the traffic patterns at the bottom of each picture and the cloud formations at the top differed noticeably. McEwen's images of this city-within-a-city (its 5,000 air-conditioned apartments rented for \$40 a month per room in 1969) oppose Samuel LeFrak's triumph of construction—which clearly required plenty of tearing down of existing structures—to "Bomber" Harris's campaign of wartime destruction. A trompe-l'oeil 2005 oil painting of the front panel of an air conditioning unit was displayed high on the wall, playing this symbol of a cool 1960s working- and middle-class utopia against the heat of 1940s firebombing raids. McEwen makes you connect the dots.

—Michaël Amy

Adam McEwen

NICOLE KLAGSBRUN GALLERY

In a small booklet published to accompany his recent exhibition at Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, Adam McEwen writes: "War. It's always been all the rage. Bomber Harris, Commando Comics, Sven Hassel and every kid who grew up in Britain of parents who survived the war knew it." McEwen's booklet also reproduces a newspaper ad memorializing real estate developer Samuel J. Lefrak ("The Vision to See / The Faith to Believe / The Courage to Do"), images of sidewalks dotted with discarded chewing gum, a view of a landscape pocked with bomb craters, and a news brief about a boy sticking a piece of gum onto a \$1.5 million Helen Frankenthaler painting during a visit to the Detroit Institute of Arts—as well as a digression into the life of Hassel, a Danish writer of pulp combat fiction who drove a German Panzer tank during the war. The mixture of flippancy and historical gravitas recalled the artist's last Klagsbrun outing—which included an enlarged, inverted image of Mussolini and his mistress on the gallows, as well as obituaries of undead celebrities and cheeky store signs telling customers to FUCK OFF WE'RE CLOSED—though here the scales were tipped toward gravitas.

In *Self-Portrait as Bomber Harris* (all works 2006), McEwen recreates an official black-and-white portrait photograph of Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, the British air marshal who oversaw the carpet bombing of German cities. Another C-print, *Untitled (Dresden)*, an initially abstract-looking mass of white bursts against a black ground, is actually an aerial shot of fires in Dresden on the night it was bombed. Also included were two other series—a group of monochrome paintings with dirty blobs of gum flattened onto their surfaces and named after bombed German cities, and a group of nine photographs of Lefrak City, a 1960s housing development in Queens. The latter look identical at first glance but were in fact taken by McEwen within minutes of one another, such that the positions of cars on the highway and the clouds in the sky differ slightly in each.

So, how do Lefrak, bombings, and chewing gum relate? Well, in its similarity to *Ways of Seeing*, McEwen's booklet also seems to evoke the spirit of John Berger, arguably as big an influence on an art student of McEwen's generation as the war would have been on his parents. A broadly comparable exercise in the strategic juxtaposition of word and image, the publication might also act as a kind of Rosetta stone for the artist's project as a whole, asking us to consider how a picture is read, how text and image function together, and how history itself is formed.

But where Berger's mash-up of images is, if dated, generally coherent, McEwen's efforts to "expand" certain elements into larger works



Adam McEwen, *Kassel*, 2006, acrylic and chewing gum on canvas, 90 x 70".

come off looking rather thin (a little canvas and a lot of gum don't go as far as he might have hoped). One wants to applaud art that counters painterly bombast, but comparing gum-chewing Americans with their housing developments and contrasting facile "progressive" slogans (Lefrak's was "Live a Little Better") with the devastation of wartime Germany feels clumsy. McEwen writes: "Harris made war acceptable. Carpet-bombing suggested the muted obliteration of that which was too distant to be seen. It was no more connected to the defacement of innocence than chewing gum on a concrete grid is to the saliva of the person who placed it there." A nice analogy on the page, but one that entirely loses its acuity on the gallery wall.

—Martha Schwendener