

## **GAVIN TURK BURNT OUT 2008**

### **Burnt Out (2008)**

The eponymous fire is immortalized in painted bronze, lying on the gallery floor as a last vestige of human achievement. Our species' ability to control and affect its environment, from the stripping of forests to climate change began with 'the power of man's red flower'. This residual bonfire, like the black boulders of the rubbish bags lying on the gallery floor, contains an element of performance. The sign that a gentleman of the road has lit a fire where there shouldn't be one, or someone has brought rubbish into the hallowed walls of the gallery. All possibilities and function are now defunct. Who was it? What was it for? And why is it here?

### **Ash (2008)**

The cone of ash proffered on a plinth is a preserved souvenir, a minimal formal moment in the destruction of matter.

### **Spent Match (2002)**

A miniature echo of BURNT OUT, this match was used to start the fire. Its sulphur is used up and the tiny tool discarded.

### **Waste (2006)**

A bag full of discarded products, unrecycled organic matter thrown in with the by-products of our wasteful consumerist lifestyles. This rubbish is encapsulated in the formal roundness of this classic *trompe l'oeuil* artwork. We are defined by what we throw away and conversely we are deconstructed by what we choose to display in our hallowed museum halls.

### **Car Boot (2007)**

This artwork was first created as an elaborate ruse. In the summer of 2007 the artist was invited to take part in THE ART CAR BOOT FAIR in Brick Lane, East London-an annual jamboree where artists take over the marketplace selling their bizarre wares. In this twist on the English car boot fair phenomena (where people sell their unwanted goods from the back of cars), Turk decided to take the brief at face value and literally sell a motley collection of second-hand car boots selected and adorned with the artists signature flamboyantly embellished in permanent marker. A battered relic of the motor car, itself a symbol of income and social status hangs as an artifact separated from its function. A useless flap hanging on the wall like instant archaeology as an epoch struggles to come to terms with its out of control consumer appetite. The back end of a once noble steed becomes a Moose Head on the wall.

### **Drainpipe (2007)**

This readymade was found by the artist; a u-bend from a drain, a transition point between private and public waste disposal. The seal to prevent contamination of smells and germs between the individual and civic space, the shape is also reminiscent of a toilet bowl or the philosopher's tobacco pipe. The male accessory of traditional patriarchal values displayed as a decrepit old tube.

### **Painted bronze III (2004)**

This pair of crushed cans found by the artist discarded and flattened by vehicles, cast in bronze and painted to look real, is a reference to Jasper Johns' BEER CANS (1960), in a classic moment of Pop art when the low culture of the street was glorified in the gallery. Turk's version is degraded and crushed. Special Brew is the high strength beer of choice for the street dweller escaping from reality.

### **Untitled Anthropomorphic Piss Painting (2008)**

These elegiac works steal much from previous paintings by Otto Muhl, Hermann Nietsche and other 70's actionists, as well as the great recycler and thief of imagery Warhol, who in the early 1980's made a series of oxidization works created by his assistant's urination. The copper ground and cobalt fractals of these works brings echoes of Klimt and the decorative precursors of the actionists, but this is simultaneously counteracted by the transgressive process of their production: bodily waste, the ultimate form of disposable human rubbish used to make marks on canvas. This series of works has come out of a performance at **Riflemaker** gallery in London during the exhibition '**Me as Him**' 1997 where camouflage fright wig screenprints of the artists as Warhol were on display. During the evening visitors were invited to urinate on a collection of pre-prepared canvases in an extrovertly collaborative exercise. The signature of mark making, in random spurts, rushes and pools, makes a corrosive recycling of ideas.

### **Faded Glory (2007)**

This used screen, a by-product of the process of making images, is re-presented in the gallery as a finished artwork with the ghost of the artist as Elvis barely discernable. A residue of a previous artwork series, the process is brought to the forefront; the repetition of the repetition of the image ad infinitum until the image fades away.

### **Somebody's Son (2007)**

The Clues and markers hidden amongst the pieces of this exhibition indicate the contemporary English national identity its sense of nostalgia, loss, and indecision. The absurd and darkly comic uniform of the Queens Guard echoes cultural colonization and war whilst being primarily an oversized toy, symbol of tourism; a combination of the souvenir shop and Madame Tussauds.

The caricature with his shiny shoes, ornate buttons and deadly machine gun stands encumbered by his huge bearskin protuberance. The artist's face once again peering out from over the chinstrap. The black sentry box is an ornate and cartoon like packaging for the cultural toy within, framing our man in a new form of vitrine, albeit one designed by Her Majesty's Armed Forces. The title SOMEBODY'S SON imbues a sense of loss and familiarity. These most highly trained soldiers, whimsically used as cultural decoration, escape the active duty of war.

### **Relations and Shop Signs (2005-2007)**

England as a nation of shopkeepers is a notion attributed to economist Adam Smith and then later to Napoleon who was scathing in his attitude to Britain as a worthy opponent. The artist spent his formative years under the political regime of Margaret Thatcher, herself a daughter of a grocery shop owner, she took on the task of radicalizing the free market and embracing capitalism.

The nostalgia generated by Relations and the other works in the shop sign series reflects a cultural shift from small family run business to global brands more allied to America than to Europe. England is no longer a nation of shopkeepers but factory fodder for corporate consumerism.

The irony of an individualist free-thinking artist being part of a family business is bound up in this paradoxical image. The artist could not have been running the business that the sign implies, his grandparents could perhaps: but then again. They would have sold up long ago. This work suggests that the sign has been found like several other works in the exhibition. A prop from a film found in a junk shop, an

accidental readymade, a piece of ephemera rather than the meticulously crafted artifact that it actually is.

### **Turkey Foil Box XL (2007)**

Pop art and the minimalism of Carl Andre meets the toilet humour of the artists and his camouflage foil. Playing puns with his name and the factory formed manufacturing of the aluminium foil box, he plays Warhol and the street off together. Turkey Foil 'extra wide' printed again and again on crafted, painted wooden boxes.

### **Paint Maps (1997-2008)**

Staring at the wall with an unfocused eye, while the brain is working something else – perhaps sitting on the toilet or maybe taking a break from gazing at the computer screen, the brain finds patterns and forms in peeling paintwork of details of brushstrokes. The daydreaming reverie finding the country map, a cultural shape more symbolic and timeless than the flag. Islands drawn out in the peeling paint like distant memories of once Great Nations.

### **Nomad (2002)**

At first sight this appears to be the form of a homeless sleeper. Wrapped in a sleeping bag cocoon, its title implies a wanderer living peripatetic life outside our cultural value systems. But the soft folds of the sleeping bag turn out to be hard metal, a painted bronze cast of this embarrassing cultural phenomenon. With uncompromising stillness the sculpture will never move or wander except at the behest of an art transport hoist. This image captured forever in the gallery, allows the viewer to wonder about lives led outside the ordinary; it gives them the power to stare.