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L'AMOUR FOU INSTALLATION

Courtesy of David Nolan Gallery

GAVIN TURK EXPLORES THE WORKING CLASS MALE IN "L'AMOUR FOU"

More than a decade after his YBA days, Gavin Turk's inaugural exhibition "L'Amour Fou" (on view through March 30 at David Nolan Gallery in New York) is a pensive, compact installation of photographs, videos, sculptures and automatic drawings that center around the white transit van, a symbol of the decaying British working class.

In the first part of the gallery, Turk dissects, reproduces, and records automotive components; yet, their familiarity does not diminish their impact. Severed, half-breathing exhaust pipes cast in bronze recline in vitrines, canopied by photographs of exhaust smoke.

Further down gallery presents a series of "exhaust drawings," blossoming supernovas created by blocking exhaust emission with watercolor paper. The only glimpse of a fully assembled vehicle in "L'Amour Fou" is a van Turk reduced to a 3-foot tall cube, installed in a blank room that seems to sustain the crushing pressure from the compression machine. "It's the detritus, it's post-car, the car's gone. How the car is and how it functions tell us a lot about ourselves. It's like a forensic investigation - you take someone's rubbish and go through it, you get a good idea of what they keep and can draw up quite a good character profile. Some things are defined by the opposite," said Turk.

We spoke with Turk about his process and subject matter.

WHITEWALL: You created this show specifically for David Nolan Gallery, was it tailored for an American audience?

GAVIN TURK: Maybe. I've done two shows [in the States] that were riffing on various American artists. The first was heavily influenced by Warhol, and everyone was like, "we've done it, we've repeated it, and why here you are doing it again?" It didn't go down too well [laughs]. The second was huge paintings of me painting my signature the way Jackson Pollock did it, and through that process, it became someone else's signature. I found this attention to originality very American, especially when you view all the paintings in one room, it feels like a room in a museum you might visit in America. This show is more European - it has a surrealist element. Hans Belmer inspired me quite a bit and other surrealist artists.

WW: How does cultural identity relate to this show?

GT: The crushed transit van is quite a cultural symbol in England - the sort you would find in London. They were ubiquitous during the late '80s and early '90s. There was even a "white van man," a working class, not very nice [laughs], post-punk, somewhat unpleasant, DIY man. However, they were the conjurers who made things work.

I literally turned the carcass of a white transit van into a modern art object. I put it through a crushing machine, and produced a cubistic object in how it redefines the three dimensions of the van.

WW: Can you tell us more about the exhaust pipe sculptures?

GT: They are used pipes, and I think the word "exhaust" is very important. Something "exhausted" is finished, broken forever. It wasn't possible to repair the pipes and they were seemingly very difficult to recycle because the metal's properties change when it comes in contact with exhaust fumes. I found these pipes on the road and I cast them in bronze. Pipes found on the road are becoming a huge problem, just like used tires, as they cannot be recycled.

The pipes are alchemical as they are transporters of the combustion fumes. I made a mold and cast it, then bronze-treated it and applied a silver base coat before I painted it. I applied splats of oil paint to mimic the results from the natural process of driving along a road with dirt flicking up, a naturalistic painting of a van driving along bits of color. It sort of recalls [René] Magritte's painting *This is not a Pipe*, a representational painting of a pipe that claims to not be a pipe and is conscious of it being not what it is. It's a philosophical object of inquiry. The cabinets were like Joseph Beuys' museum cabinets, they create a closed environment where the exhaust is sealed in to create some sort of potential danger of suffocation, it's like closing the garage window with the car running. It's claustrophobic. It also resembles a reclining figure, an anatomical drawing of intestines that's very anthropomorphic.

WW: And your exhaust drawings?

GT: I had this idea to put paper behind a van and then start and stop the van. There are bits of water vapor in the exhaust because hot air passes through the closed space and water vapor would accumulate in the mufflers and sit there and then suddenly fly out. I did the drawings at different times of the day and at different temperatures. It looks like the Big Bang, the beginning of life, the moment of the start of something. Simultaneously, it is a full stop, an ending as well as the closing down of something. It's a completely involuntary drawing of accidental marks.

WW: Why did you decide to single out the working class male?

GT: I suppose it has to do with frames. "Working class male" is much too wide of a category, [I'm often interested in] tramps, the homeless revolutionary, people who live on the street, people on the edge of society and people who define what's possible and what's not. Also, I was interested in the idea of populism and the working class male - they cannot and don't generally seem to be interested in art, because they cannot afford to be thinking about it and cannot come to grips with it. All they do is work, play and rest, but they probably really need art.

Gavin Turk was born in 1967 in Guildford, England. In 1991 he was denied his MA certificate from the Royal College of Art for his degree show in which he exhibited an empty white studio with a blue English Heritage plaque commemorating his occupancy with the inscription "Borough of Kensington/Gavin Turk/Sculptor/Worked Here 1989-1991". Since then Turk's work has been included in many exhibitions including the latest POP! LIFE show at Tate Modern (2009) as well as the Venice Biennale (2001), the 46th International Istanbul Biennial (1999), Material Culture, Hayward Gallery, London (1998), and Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection, Royal Academy of Arts, Saatchi Collection, London (1995). Recent exhibitions have included: Gavin Turk: The Negotiation of Purpose, GEM Museum for Contemporary Art, The Hague, The Netherlands; Gavin Turk: Last Year in Eggenburg (The Paradise Show), Schloss Eggenburg, Graz; Gavin Turk: et in arcadia ego, New Art Centre Sculpture Park & Gallery, Salisbury; and Gavin Turk Oeuvre, Tate Britain Sculpture Court Display, London.

