

LaBelle, Charles. "Brian Jungen", *Frieze*, pp 101-102, Issue 83, May 2004

vention in the structure – 'caressing Zaha with vodka', as he put it – was the most spectacular. He and his assistants poured crateloads of vodka into channels dug into the upper surfaces, set them alight and let the blue and gold flames illuminate the night sky. The blazing fluid wrought its own distortion on the ice blocks, causing loud cracking sounds to emanate from deep within.

Future Systems and Anish Kapoor's *Red Solid* was conceived as a large crimson whale form leaping from the site towards Rovaniemi's frozen river, but it ended up something of a wet fish. The pigmentation process didn't really work – one day pre-opening it was still only a dull pinky-grey. A bucket

of post-office red paint slung over it at the last minute just looked a mess, and it seemed inevitable that, on the afternoon of the opening, the maltreatment, coupled with the presence of lights contained inside the body cavity, caused it to become unintentionally auto-destructive: it collapsed and lay in chilly fragments like so much chopped crab stick. Kapoor was already boarding his plane home at that point, so the sculpture was simply bulldozed out of existence – but then oblivion is a fate that, owing to the impermanence of ice even at these Arctic latitudes, will be common to all these delicate constructions within a couple of months.

Rob Young

Tod Williams + Billie Tsien and Carsten Höller
Meeting Slides
2004
Snow, ice
Dimensions variable

Brian Jungen

Triple Candie, New York

Situated in the centre of Triple Candie's cavernous main space in a former Harlem brewery, Brian Jungen's untitled installation was as much a proposition as a self-contained work. It was composed of 214 sewing machine tables placed side by side to form a single surface two metres off the ground, punctuated by 12 white lacquered columns. Jungen set two basketball hoops mounted on free-standing ladders at each end and painted lines over the surface of the tables, creating a half-size basketball court. Yet, bathed in bright lights, the glowing expanse is also a stage that would be perfectly suited for a Pina Bausch performance or Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957).

Echoing the empty gallery space, this empty court/stage is an anxiety-engendering void demanding to be filled. Fools, they say, rush in, and part of the subtle brilliance of Jungen's installation is the way it lures us close and encourages us figuratively to place ourselves on this stage. Thus the 'theatricality' inherent in Minimalism, which so outraged Michael Fried in 1968, is, by way of Bruce Nauman and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, made the very heart and soul of the work. With a deft economy of means Jungen activates both the space and the viewer, creating an environment in which participation is not without consequence. The numerous associations, histories and ideas that he introduces all have their moment, yet are quickly dispatched. Their gutted remains pile up like bodies in *Macbeth* (c. 1606).

Site-specific in the best sense of the term, Jungen's installation positions itself at the junction of socio-economic and geo-political forces. Its layered spaces are not only physical and geographic but also historical and cultural. How can we not look at a basketball court in Harlem without thinking of the Harlem Globetrotters? Or of David Hammons' seminal *Higher Goals* (1982).

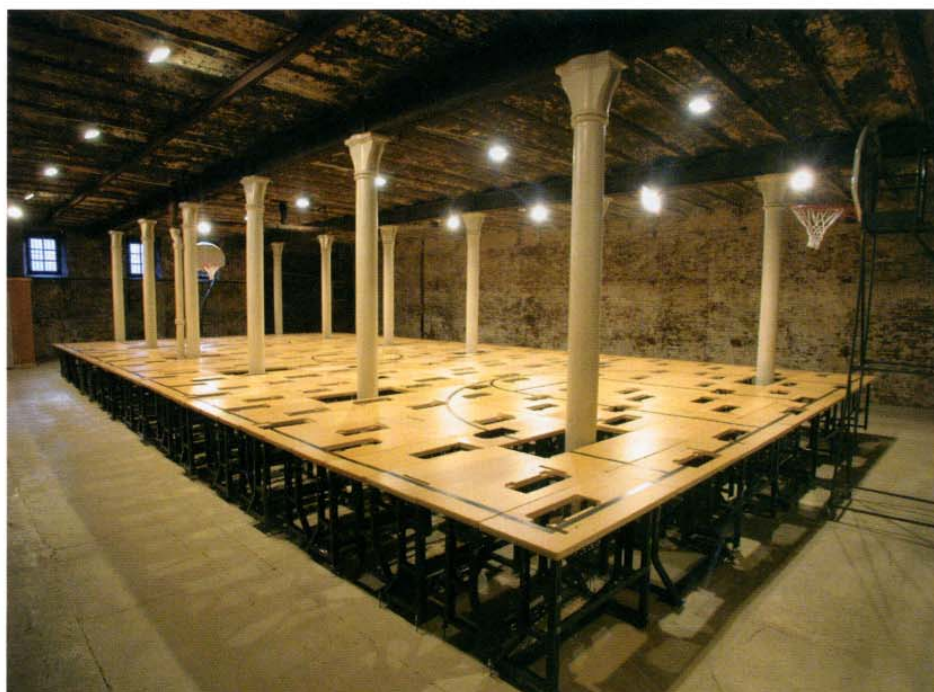
Disenfranchised minority members of the population have traditionally found successful avenues into the mainstream via the alignment of sports, entertainment and fashion: for example, Harlem's history of sweatshops. Globalism has redefined Harlem and the US workplace as clothing companies export their labour needs to distant Third World countries. The irony of these

The 'theatricality' of Minimalism, which so outraged Michael Fried, is the very heart and soul of Brian Jungen's work.

goods returning to adorn the bodies of the disenfranchised reflects how well the notion of planned obsolescence applies not only to commodities but also to consumers. Dichotomies of absence and presence, nearness and distance, difference and sameness; non-sequiturs such as Comte de Lautréamont's famous meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a mortician's table. A cornucopia of art-historical references from Minimalism, 'women's work' and issues of female labour to Body Art, the 'arena' of Action Painting, commodity fetishism, Performance and

black/'post-Black' art and the struggle of self-representation – these myriad thought channels are all evoked with an almost magical sleight of hand. Now you see them, now you don't.

In this sense perhaps the most significant precedent for Jungen's piece is Gabriel Orozco's *Empty Shoe Box* (1993), which performs a similarly powerful disappearing act. As ambitious as it is restrained, Orozco's work goes to the very core of art's reception and value. Is the box a hollow joke or a vessel of contemplation full of meaning? Like Orozco's, Jungen's practice is embed-



Brian Jungen
Installation view

ded in the realm of the everyday and frequently uses ordinary objects, re-making ready-mades to call attention to their underlying politics and poetics, drawing lines of connection between late capitalist production methods, post-colonial deterritorialization, identity politics and institutional critique. His series of sculptures, each titled *Prototype for a New Understanding* (1997–ongoing), transforms Nike Air

Jordans into Canadian First People's tribal masks, while for his large-scale *Shapeshifter* (2000) Jungen used cheap white plastic chairs to create the hanging skeleton of a whale. Thus commodities whose transience is palpable become the source material for mock ethnographic displays – investments in the reclamation and reification of an often dubious 'history'. These hybrid forms, exercises in sculptural *détourne-*

ment, play havoc with the way that capitalism seeks to inscribe the sign value of all things within the culture. Funny, intellectually rigorous, celebratory, self-critical and disobedient, all of Jungen's work refuses to sit quietly and be still.

Finally, it is significant that Jungen chose to use new sewing machine tables rather than used ones, which would have been overburdened with the weight of their respective histories,

too marked by their use(d) value and evidence of the body. Shiny and unblemished, the tables/court/stage, while referencing a pointed, problematic past, create a sense of immediacy and an awareness of how we continue to be determined by the specific forces of control – vicious cycles of production and consumption – that shaped our predecessors.

Charles LaBelle

Kaye Donachie

Maureen Paley Interim Art, London

Kaye Donachie's recent paintings reek of ambiguity and a studied lack of clarity as regards the historical moment they may or may not depict. The six modest canvases here – painted in a tightly restrained range of pastel pinks, garish yellows and occasional dark greens or browns – record the apparently passive antics of a gathering of young people lounging about in bright, sun-splattered woods or the shady enclave of a low-roofed cave. Dressed in the casual apparel of the teenager or hippy, these tragicomic characters seem uncertain as to whether they should frown or smile. Are we witnessing a group of drugged-up, super-cool drop-outs from the recent past or glimpsing a future in which the only bits of technology required are a hammock and an acoustic guitar? Donachie leaves the viewer to work out both the historical and the moral contexts of these pictures. It's an ambiguity that is both productive and problematic, deliberate and yet a little too slightly adrift.

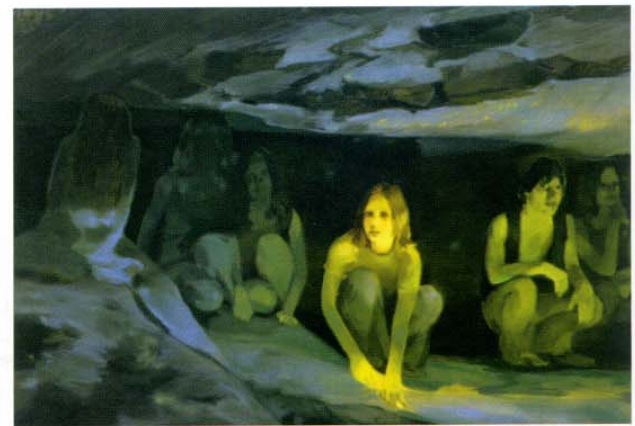
'Our typical response to a disrupting new technology', noted Marshall McLuhan, 'is to recreate the old environment instead of heeding the new opportunities of the new environment.' In Donachie's work we seem to be seeing one such historical moment, that of 1960s youth relishing its non-reliance on modern technology, returning instead to the simple safety of a purportedly timeless cave or glade. The sophisticated culture of the city is, in this reading, a straight non-starter for those youngsters brought up in such a world; one encounters, in the clothes and confident grimaces, a counter-cultural conceit, a post-1950s climate of easy optimism and indulgent, almost insolent, laziness. At the same time, however, one might readily regard these vignettes as portraits of a later

generation, which is living out the last years of its teens coolly in tune with 1960s style yet devoid of that period's confident energy and exploratory aspirations. In either case, whether these are the children of the 1960s or their offspring, a return to nature asserts itself here as the only acceptable exit route from the murky mire of modern suburban living.

In this Thoreauesque refusal of cultural conformism, individuals with indeterminate expressions romp around a camp-fire quite oblivious to the broader order of things or, conversely (one imagines), all too conscious of what they are desperately trying to forget. A sharp sense of the tribal, of the integration of individual and group, comes across in these paintings, with such societal cohesion being here and there undermined by a lost, distracted or detached figure, sitting among the others but contemplating something the viewer of these works is not privileged to see. This isolation within the group, its deep-set divisiveness, is a sign that inside this little utopia all is not as it originally appears. The spartan pastoral setting is underpinned with something unpleasant, bitter and inept, a crude interruption into an otherwise elegiac estate.

Donachie's handling of paint is, at different points across the works, variously loose and tightly controlled. Figures sitting in bright sunlight lose their features in a dissolve that makes them look like ghosts, while the poses and geometry of other forms suggest the complicated solidity of Paul Cézanne or of pre-Cubist Georges Braque. The execution is intelligent, awkwardly elegant, appropriately concise.

The paintings' titles, like the pictures themselves, border on kitsch. *Can't find nothin' I can put my heart and soul into* and *You've got to keep in mind love is here today* (all works 2004) are, as verbal pointers, imbued with depression and doubt. One is unsure if they are intended to be ironic or merely descriptive of the material



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depicted. *You still believe in me* depicts the heads of three figures, a male and two females, the latter either side of the former, leaning on his shoulders. Whether the title represents the thoughts or one or all of this trio is again unclear. This openness is one of the difficulties of this display: looking, at first sight, as though it is proposing fairly overt inferences regarding the niceties of historical repetition, and of culture and nature as opposing but related forces, the show is, in the end,

rather too ambivalently constructed. 'Epiphany', the exhibition's title, suggests spontaneous revelation and an acute spiritual shift from the mundane to the ecstatic; but how, finally, the artist regards such extremes is left without elucidation. This is disappointing and perhaps, if inadvertently, irresponsible, even if these works are, first and foremost, paintings rather than moralistic fables or blatant, table-thumping political tracts.

Peter Suchin