

DOMOBAAL

John Strutton
Donderslag

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Arthur Brick will be performing songs from their new EP 'Original Swiss Wedding' on the opening night.
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One of the first men to enter Hiroshima after the explosion was a British doctor looking for survivors. He picked up a bowl and a jug, the type eaten out of everyday in Japanese households. Banal and undistinguished, deemed of no cultural value, the bowl and jug were now blackened and broken by the blast. The two household items had been exposed to temperatures exceeding 900°C, their exteriors glazed not once but twice, transforming these functional, throwaway objects into demonstrative phenomena, evocative of the disparate vernaculars of human society.

John Strutton is not a nuclear explosion yet, in his hands, the wealth of ephemera life has presented him is similarly metamorphosed. The beginnings of this evolution is evident over every inch of space on the walls and shelves of his studio. Naked drum skins, and bare guitars line up above books and postcards depicting everything from Donatello to Ian Dury, with a pitstop at Tony Hancock. Every morning, before logic kicks in, Strutton weaves the threads of his subconscious together; Carel Fabritius' goldfinch begins to hum along to The Specials, the skeleton bones of the Misfits shake hands with Dürer, chats from the pub spiralling into the humble form of doodle.

In a saturated cultural landscape, dividers such as genre, era or medium are used to make things comprehensible. Inside a person, these demarcations vanish and everything jumbles up again, a phenomenon Strutton's work stays true to. He proudly exhibits his role as a fan, but not simply by buying into and displaying his devotions. Rather than collating cultural markers as points of reference, he alights upon them as a starting point for the dispersal of his own ideas. 'High' and 'low' brow are set on equal footing – bastardised song lyrics become warped sloganeering, record covers and advertising are satirised in the DIY spirit of punk to warn of psychic ills, the works of early Dutch Masters implode within sci-fi cosmoses. The results have the semblance of something you have been convinced of all your life but are sure you have never seen before.

Strutton catalogues and creates simultaneously, in the same way the Internet works. Anything from PJ Harvey to your mum's knitting circle, from Asda supermarkets to theories on the afterlife has a webpage. Content, which we consider impossible to find similarities between is equalised into a cohesive whole by the format in which it is presented. From here, the Internet finds a life of its own, shaped by users bookmarking pages, creating links between sites, adding comments, deleting information.

Painting is Strutton's great leveller, allowing him to own alien ideas unreservedly and consolidate them seamlessly with his personal efforts. But the old-fashioned craftsmanship intonates a new discord. The perfect brush strokes and immaculate rendering of form is the antithesis of the contemporary practise of collage and re-appropriation, as well as begging the question why, if one is capable of creating such perfect representations of subject, would a painter choose to depict the garish cartoons or brash designed surfaces populating Strutton's surfaces?

The schizophrenic nature of Strutton's work is unrelenting. One could marvel over the fierce three-dimensionality of his characters, if they weren't so busy wondering why an alien is wearing boxing gloves, or a telephone pylon and a wiggly-formed apology bisects a world into halves. If one work surfs happily through countless dimensions, another, beside it chimes with the flat design of propaganda. Just as Strutton refuses to leave other people's attempts alone, so his own creations are put through the mill time after time.

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Madcap mantras float off the page to be heard triumphant in the lyrics of a song. The smooth pencilled lines on a page shirk their responsibilities and are found moonlighting, in thick oils over the voluptuous and functional body of a guitar. Painting borrows from animation, drawings are animated through installation, nothing is sacred, morphing from one form to another. He creates countless constantly shifting realities, worlds constructed of quicksand. This distinct lack of completeness oddly presents a type of entirety. That finite surfaces can be penetrated, shiny two dimensions beget wormholes, which you could burrow through for hours, only to emerge from the point you began. It is a working demonstration of how we rewrite history everyday. Strutton undermines how sure we are of the world. Sure you can see it, you can touch it, you can feel it, you know how it got there, but how, on God's earth did these simple little creations, with no interference from you, get themselves in such an ungodly tangle?

Iphgenia Baal
London, February 2009

Since 1999, John Strutton's practice has taken the form of drawing, installation, video, animation and performance. The work often uses the strategy of accrual to deal with a visual form of veneration and cultural reclamation. The resulting installations, of paintings, drawings and objects become a kind of makeshift memorial, an ex voto offering where nostalgia becomes a form of revenge. The sedimentary process creates a convoluted cosmos of effigies, mandalas, portraits and trophies, a graveyard whose architecture is sustained by anxiety. Sometimes brutal, often absurd, his approach to figuration is fractured, automatic and schizophrenic. He shares a preoccupation with ritualistic process, debased iconographies and compulsive aesthetics with the likes of Austin Osman Spare and Antonin Artaud. He is currently Senior Tutor in Painting at the Royal College of Art, London. He formed The Band of Nod in 1999 and is co founder/director of 39, a project space in London. Since 2005 he has been writing and performing in his band Arthur Brick.

Works:

777"
(2000 – ongoing series)
watercolour and ink on paper
17.5 x 17.5 cm/7" x 7"

Decorations for a lost cause
(2006 – ongoing series)
watercolour and ink on paper
38 x 56 cm

Drumskins
(2008 – ongoing series)
acrylic and watercolour on drumskin
10" - 22"

Sixstrings
(2000 – ongoing series)
gloss paint and collage on 3/4 size acoustic guitar