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Pop's past master

Richard Hamilton

1922-2011



Richard Hamilton self-portrait, *Palaeocene*, 1974

Destined to be remembered as the father of pop art for his 1956 collage, 'Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?', Richard Hamilton was already an innovative voice in the Independent Group that staged the now legendary group show, 'This Is Tomorrow', and helped to launch the Institute of Contemporary Arts.

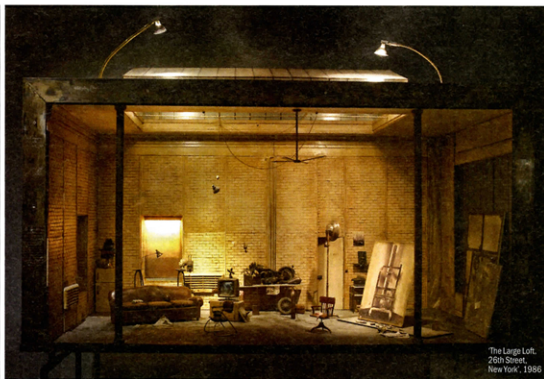
As a solo artist, Hamilton was also resolutely ahead of his time and so remained unfashionable for long periods of his career (although he did design the conceptual sleeve for the Beatles' so-called 'White Album' in 1968). His experiments with painting, collage, photography and computer manipulation (pre-Photoshop) made him a pioneer in the sphere of new media, long before such a term existed.

Hamilton soon emerged as one of art's keenest thinkers and educators, channeling James Joyce and Marcel Duchamp and acting for both as a leading interpreter and scholar, as well as a lifelong friend to the latter. Ever generous of spirit and always keen to put back, he graciously agreed to read and comment on my own postgraduate thesis about his work, despite suffering a bout of ill health.

Still, he lost none of his vigour in later life, devoting time to ever more political work on such thorny subjects as Northern Ireland, Palestine and, recently, the Iraq War: 'I've had a lot of criticism for this work,' he said last year. 'It's a question of timing. I'm sure that it will find its power as time goes by and becomes history. It seems necessary that an artist's attention should be directed at these problems, so I'm not going to give up.' While never as mythical a figure as Lucian Freud, whose lifespan he shared, his reach and influence across the art world was far greater and he will be mourned internationally, not least with a touring retrospective due to visit Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Madrid and London from 2013. **Ossian Ward**



'Swinging London 67, 1968'



'The Large Loft, 26th Street, New York', 1986

Charles Matton: Enclosures

EXHIBITION OF THE WEEK



All Visual Arts Galleries North

There's an undeniably seductive, 'Alice in Wonderland' feel about a world in miniature. It's a quality that certainly seems to have sucked in French artist Charles Matton. On display here, alongside his sculptures, drawings and paintings, in an atmospheric low-lit installation, are 36 wooden boxes, made between 1988-2007, each of which contains a 1:7 scale model of an interior. Some are based on personal spaces such as the Paris flat where the artist lived; some are based on the rooms of well-known individuals such as Francis

Bacon's studio and yet others are more imaginary – libraries are one recurring subject. What they all share is an intricate attention to detail and an evocative mood created through lights and mirrors.

This show is a significant survey for Matton (who died in 2008 aged 77), an artist whose career also included film directing and illustration, but whose figurative fine art never quite seemed to be in step with the times. Matton's now sought-after boxes initially began only as props to photograph and make paintings from, but gradually have come to be regarded as artworks in their own right.

Despite the time and attention he spent on making his boxes – which included moulding and casting objects in a mixture of

marble and resin and painting his own fabrics – Matton wasn't interested so much in representing one reality as trying to encapsulate infinite realities. It's his diminutive libraries – many titled in homage to Matton's literary influences including James Joyce and particularly Jorge Luis Borges – that represent this idea best. In Borges's short story 'The Library of Babel' he describes a seemingly endless library, analogous to the universe, which contains all possible permutations of a 410-page book (with each page containing 40 lines of 80 letters) Through Matton's clever use of reflection, the shelves in his libraries also appear to extend inexorably through time and space. Helen Sumpter

John Wallbank: Masticate



Arcade Galleries East

There's a current generation of artists in London who are obsessed with how processes and materials might become artworks. It would be easy – and lazy – to dismiss it as 'skip art', but there's often a compelling force to the act of cobbling something together from the meanest of means. John Wallbank's engaging sculptures manage to hold their own, partly because the shitty materials are redeemed by the bizarrely counterintuitive methods of their assembly, and the weird elegance of the forms that emerge. The largest of these is an assembly of warped Perspex sheets, chipboard struts,

hardboard and polyurethane foam, forming a set of largish transparent enclosures, like an architectural model for some distant futuristic city.

The oddest aspect of this and another nearby sculpture, made of chipboard and steel bracketing, is that the edges and seams are held together with a 'stitching' of thick plastic strip, which can only have been worked under heat – it would have been impossible to achieve the elaborate twists and knots in their present solid state. This lends them a baroque excess – you wouldn't ever join any two bits of junk this way – and Wallbank's methods signify the

deadpan desire that art is all about turning lead into gold, investing the slightest, most fragile materials with a surplus of technical prowess, wrong-footing our expectations of what we think dumb materials are capable of. A number of little drawings in the office area rehearse this precarious,

hardly there game.

In one, a sheet

with a few inked

lines that barely

add up to any

kind of image, is

adorned with a little

tab of paper, stapled on. It's

these unlooked-for moves

that suggests that Wallbank

is onto something – a poetry

of the prosaic, maybe.

JJ Charlesworth

