



## Throw your House out the Window

Mike Ballard & Michael Weißköppel

19.11.2021 – 08.01.2022

### Mike Ballard

During a roughly two-year period between 2017 and 2019, I became well acquainted with a particular construction site occupying the corner of Acre Lane and Kings Avenue in South London. I had recently moved to the area, and would regularly pass the boarded-up plot - its hoardings frequently plastered with bill posters or tagged with graffiti - while walking down into Brixton town centre. Fast-forward another couple of years, and while construction continues steadily and a sturdier temporary wall borders the site, these original hoardings have been saved from the scrapheap and granted a new lease of life as part of Mike Ballard's latest body of work, alongside East London contemporaries sourced from plots in Dalton and Hackney Wick.

Mike, a prolific graffiti writer since his early teens, is heavily informed and inspired by the enduring, dominant influence of that unique subcultural movement. His early video artworks incorporated performative pierced spray cans, their distinctive discharge dripping down the camera lens and coating the screen, while later series employed primitive analogue printing techniques such as Letraset or photo transfers, both mainstays of many an underground art zine, homemade flyer or pop-up exhibition poster. Repeatedly remixing, recontextualizing and repurposing his earliest experiences with art and art-making, Mike draws from a wealth of archival material and ephemera to create contemporary paintings, sculptures and installations that are imbued with not only a rich personal history but also the ethos and aesthetics of an unconventional, nonconformist art upbringing. After some time pursuing both a series of paintings that sought to recreate the distinctive patterns and colour palette resulting from graffiti removal ('buffing') and a sculptural practice of producing large-scale plywood sculptures seemingly inviting vandalism, Mike realised that a ready-made amalgamation of the two was already lying in wait, enclosing many local building sites.

In Mike's ongoing use of found hoardings, the medium very much is the message. Their facades retain all the marks of a life lived on the street, exposed to the elements, the wants of site managers and the whims of graffiti artists. Well worn by the infamous British weather, each and every hoarding has been bathed and baptised by rain, battered and bruised by wind or blanched and bleached by the sun, their wooden bodies warping, waning and wilting over the course of their custodianship of construction. Every scratch, stain, scuff, speck and screw hole evidence of their service, their time spent standing as sentinels of a site, as barriers separating public from private. Mike embraces and endorses each imperfection, imposing little to no intervention aside from amputating any areas deemed irreparably damp or insect-infested.



Cat and mouse games between graffiti writers and council conservators create oversized abstract expressionist portrayals of law-breaking and reactionary repainting. A boundless back and forth between spray-painted tags and swathes of matt emulsion, an unending one-upmanship played out across each hoardings' visage. The result indicative of each party's own efforts and intentions, one a group of disillusioned youths obsessively and anonymously attempting to claim ownership of their surroundings and take back control of their city, the other a band of equally disgruntled government workers or community service subordinates, low-paid and ill-equipped to combat the furore of the former. Add extended duration, and an exquisite corpse of mismatched colours and geometric markings begins to emerge. Led by the lettering of the latest act of eponymous vandalism, a patchwork quilt of cut-price inconsistent shades and hues builds as the 'buff squad' reciprocate, rightly with no thought given to artistic merit or aesthetics. In Mike's hands, however, both factions unknowingly collaborate in the creation of accidental artworks and unplanned paintings. They both become unwitting participants in an artistic practice that sees their obscured tags or hurried handiwork adorning the defaced facades of sculptures and installations displayed in the likes of the Royal Academy of Art or Sculpture in the City.

But what of the retained recollections of these silent sentries? Their physical, visual past is laid bare for all to see, but we can ascertain little knowledge of their more emotional histories. If only these hoardings could talk? Perhaps they've withstood acts of public urination from late-night revellers, eavesdropped snippets of commuter conversations or witnessed fraught arguments, fumbled fights and crimes being committed. Maybe they have been leant on by amorous couples mid-embrace, hosted hurriedly printed posters for a now-found missing pet or protected passersby from the rubble of a building blunder. While their facades belie a tough life thoroughly lived, we can only imagine and speculate on their true experiences, to project onto them our own understanding of city living, and to seek solace in their found beauty that would ordinarily go unnoticed and unappreciated.

**Hector Campbell, Art Historian, Writer & Curator**



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**Michael Weißköppel**

As a painter, Michael Weißköppel employs a somewhat cautious, even sceptical gaze. Eschewing the historical traditions of picturesque opulence, he prefers to work with the flat application of pastel acrylics, creating „surfaces without user instructions“ (Martin Roman Deppner).

Perspective lines in his works suggest a kind of orientation yet to tend to lead nowhere. Weißköppel is also fascinated by the blank spaces which aren't intended to indicate anything specific and simultaneously question the act of painting pictures. The message of many of his works, especially his more recent ones, seems to be that what's taking shape can easily disappear again. By erasing, overpainting and over-spraying parts of his works, Weißköppel applies gestures that undermine the idea of a finished work of art and convey messages which outlive their time. Despite often appearing cool and unexcited, his interventions in the painting's materials and unusual experiments with presentation are radical. He addresses the question of how to approach the production of pictures with contemporary means, for instance by developing a picture (format) for the low ceiling of the first floor in the Marta known as „damage inside“ which is pressed brutally into the wall and appears to smash it.

By highlighting the fact that his paintings are carefully produced, Weißköppel explicitly demonstrates the functioning of painting. Images frame reality, refer to the position on the wall and keep trying to cross the boundaries which inevitably arise when painting on canvas. Meanwhile, the viewers become something like sparring partners who deliberately face up to the disruptions caused by the artist.

**M.K., „Gegenspieler/antagonists“, Marta Herford**