"your arse, my place"
…Justine Frischmann, former frontwoman & lyricist, Elastica

Bob Nickas' exhibition proposals for Team have been informal. They have also been exact. 2000's *Hex Enduction Hour by the Fall* was put forth in the form of a drawing that very slyly pastiched the record cover of one of the best albums ever released by British band The Fall. Bob put the drawing in an envelope and dropped it on my desk, like a terrorist delivering a letter bomb. Those close to Team, its artists and supporters, still view *Hex…* as one of the gallery's brightest moments.

The proposal for this current show arrived via email in the following form on the 24th of April 2003:

> Jose,
>
> I want to do a show and I think yours is the only gallery were it would make sense...
>
> This is the long list. Hope I'm not putting you on the spot.
>
> My people were fair and had cum in their hair (but now they're content to spray stars from your boughs)
>
> I don't exactly know what this show is about but I think it will be very frisky.

Bob's initial email included the names of 32 artists. In the intervening time one name — Warhol's — was removed from the list, while eight others were added, bringing the total to 39, a rather staggering number for a gallery like Team.

My response was immediate. Yes! After all, one should never decline an offer that includes the word "frisky."

Bob then began to send the following as an invitation, and partial explanation, to the artists involved:

> I guess this is my protest show. The title plays off the title of the first Marc Bolan record: My people were fair and had sky in their hair (but now they're content to wear stars on their brows). The record came out in 1968, the year of global protest. For me, this is one of those rare times when the show really is about the title ... even if I can't exactly say why. Lately, a lot of work by younger artists has brought back ideas revolving around hedonism, liberation, and revolution — sexual energy as a key to the kingdom and entering into a more fluid state between the mind and body.
>
> Hah!

The closing exclamatory remark was the clincher, and Bob's email became the framework for my thinking about the show, and ascribing to it some greater purpose. It was clearly not intended to be a collection of works for sale; nor was it meant to function merely as a trendy selection of buzz artists (although it is certainly not without its share of both). It was

also not a show about Team, for only one of its 39 artists actually shows here. Bob quite obviously had something to say and this "hanging" would do the talking.

In the invitation letter sent to John Waters on the 29th of May, Bob had augmented the closing paragraph, and the preliminary statement for the exhibit was set. The additions which Bob had made also served to reinforce the idea that the show was as much polemic as skin flick.

> I guess this is one of those rare times when the show really is about the title ... even if I can't exactly say why. As usual, I am happy to leave interpretation up to the artists who participate and to the people who visit the show. That said, a lot of work by younger artists has brought back ideas revolving around hedonism, liberation, and revolution — sexual energy as a key to the kingdom. So maybe this is my protest show for these long, dark days of the Bush conspiracy.

So there it was, the "B" word.

Nickas' statement positioned his exhibition as resistant. But what exactly is the show resisting? Certainly not the murderous policies of the Bush administration, for a volley fired from West Chelsea will fall far short of any coordinates in D.C.. Possibly the show is resisting some hegemonic art world construct? But this also can't be the case, for the group of artists assembled by Nickas offer far from centrist views and are clearly ambivalent (at best) about becoming some new power elite.

As a group, the 39 identities offer some good choices for a new and improved canon, while also endorsing a few quirky members of other (and former) canons for advancement. Witness the lineage mapped out here from Larry Clark to Ryan McGinley through Wolfgang Tillmans and Terry Richardson. Or the unique perspective one can glean by reading the recent bohemianisms of Spencer Sweeney and Jules DeBalincourt in a call and response relationship to avant-garde legend Jack Smith. The new-fangled psychedelia of Alex Brown and Nick Mauss are here perfectly complimented by their contextual play with the posters of Charles Henri Ford, while Roe Ethridge's detached idealism sits well with Paul Thek's morbid optimism. Nickas' exhibition affords many such vantage points from which we can see the sweet arc that connects some contemporary art practice to the sought for/fought for freedoms of the sixties and early-seventies.

Although one might have doubts as to the ability of any artwork to function as an instrument of social change, this should certainly never nullify attempts to stir the pot — to try and make a dent in the armor of things. Possibly Nickas' show is just resistant to the malaise of deadened responses. First and foremost, *My people were fair and had cum in their hair…* stands for the possibility of joy in the gallery. Amidst the stupor that has enveloped much recent gallery going, it has become apparent that some art has taken a stand in opposition to an increasingly bland status quo. There is something new afoot and this show is part of it. It also marks the first appearance of a select group of young artists in an exhibition that provides their work with some historical context.

The exhibition's title, clearly ejaculatory, promises a certain engagement with sexual content. And on this promise Nickas delivers. (The show even contains a cum shot.) But again, I'll ask, to what end? Can fine art actually quicken the pulse? Add a flush to the checks? Can it feel dangerous? I sincerely hope so. Michael Meads' images of a young man happily fucking a pumpkin are, in every sense of the word, gorgeous. Here, coupled with John Waters' declarative sign "Shut Up and Blow Me," these artworks gleefully cut to the

chase. Tim Lokiec and Jeff Davis' orgiastic visions are enticing, promising a liberating abandon, while the proffered stars of Walter Pfeiffer would make welcome bedfellows. The sublime subjects of quasi-pornographers as diverse as Jeff Burton and Bruce La Bruce are perfectly haunted by one of Richard Hawkins' sexy, beheaded, glam-rock zombie boys. In this show the selections mate with each other to stoke an environment of desire. We should look and be seen looking, safe in the knowledge that, although someone can catch our gaze, our thoughts are forever our own. After viewing the works on display, one should hardly question the ability of images to incite passion, but what about love? Do we, each and every one of us, truly love art?

It has become increasingly difficult for me to write anything about fine art that in some way does not reference the cinema, but I will exercise some restraint here by indulging myself with only one (partly) filmic anecdote. The Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni was introduced to the American painter Mark Rothko. While visiting Rothko's studio, Antonioni said he was struck by the fact that they both did the same thing: "Nothing with precision." This to me is what Nickas does. This show was put together like breathing; rhythmically, unavoidably, naturally.

I am quite certain that Bob will flinch when he reads this, but he is more artist than curator, and he has always been more curator than critic. He has put together, piece by piece, a body of works that are not only a cohesive investigation of a thematics, but also a diaristic accounting of his private choices made public. It is not only "what I did on my summer vacation," it is also "what I think about the world in which I find myself." Never for a moment, however, has he subverted the individuality of any of the 39 artists.

So here then are pieces of evidence gathered from the field; some forty years old, others made just moments ago. Look around at the work. Look around at each other.

Ultimately, I'd like to think of Bob’s show as an invitation to fuck.

José Freire
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