



59. *Ukraine*, by Stephen Shore. 2013. Chromogenic colour print, 40.6 by 50.8 cm. (Courtesy of the artist; exh. Tate Modern, London).

an unsuspected depth: in softly glowing colour we are shown the interiors of the homes of displaced and resettled Holocaust survivors, seen surrounded by arrays of humble artefacts, an ordinariness belied by his subjects' enigmatic expressions. Things are not what they seem: Julian Rosefeldt's *Hidden city* (1994), shows the elegant recycled 1930s buildings on the outskirts of Munich, built by and for the Nazis as official residences and offices and currently used as high-minded academic institutions, their original purpose only revealed and marked half a century after their inception.

Observation is tempered by interpretation and imagination. Investigation too is deeply shocking in, for example, the sheer blandness of the undistinguished countryside sites in Northern Europe that the photographer Chloe Dewe Matthews has found, where deserters were executed by their own colleagues a hundred years ago. Her series is called forthrightly *Shot at dawn* (2013) and is in 'One Hundred Years On', the final sequence in this provocative, memorable show. A picture, as the cliché has it, may be worth a thousand words, but in this exhibition the eye has to be informed by the accompanying caption for a meaningful comprehension of what it is that we are looking at: we do not recognise what we are seeing unless we are told. Once in the picture, so to speak, the show has a moral charge and, as photography so often demonstrates, a devastating ambivalence. The events, suggested rather than delineated, are of hideous destruction and almost unimaginable suffering, but the appearances can often be so hauntingly beautiful. That is the most disquieting and disturbing aspect of this quietly subversive exhibition.

¹ The most authoritative and comprehensive survey of the entire subject is the magnificent – and pioneering – *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and its Aftermath*, which accompanied an enormous exhibition shown in America, published by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2012). Both the exhibition, shown in

Houston, Los Angeles, Washington DC and Brooklyn, and its publication received surprisingly little media attention, nor is it cited in the bibliography of the catalogue of the exhibition here under review.

² Catalogue: *Conflict, Time, Photography*. Edited by Simon Baker and Shoir Mavlian, with contributions by Alan Mellor, Simon Bolitho, Megan Bullock, Minnie Scott and Corinne Scurr. 224 pp. incl. 200 col. ill. (Tate Publishing, London, 2014), £24.99 (PB). ISBN 978-1-84976-320-2. Reproductions of a selection of each contributor's images are neatly included, following the arrangement of the show. Most facts are buried in the interesting if, at times, oblique essays; an excellent bibliography of the photographers' own books, and general reading around specific histories, is included, but once again there are no succinct artists' biographies, the inclusion of which would have been illuminating and helpful. There are no catalogue numbers, only a list of works alphabetised by photographer.

³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

Post Pop: East meets West

London

by MARTHA BARRATT

SINCE ITS MOVE to its current space near Sloane Square in 2008, the **Saatchi Gallery, London**, has tended to mount exhibitions that are large in scale and mixed in quality. Its loosely themed group shows, illustrative of a taste for the shocking and the novel, are often in line with the international art market rather than following any particular scholarly or critical approach to contemporary art.¹ Its most recent offering, *Post Pop: East meets West* (closed 23rd February) was, for the most part, no exception to this formula. With over 250 works on show from Britain and America, China and Russia, the sprawling exhibition considered the international legacy of Pop art over the last forty years in a post-Pop soup, stimulating in parts, and yet rife with contradiction in the dizzying amount of material it brought together.

The exhibition was divided into six sections: Advertising and Consumerism, Religion and Ideology, Mass Media, Sex and the Body, Art History and Habitat. Nowhere here was there space to define the historic Pop art that was the purported basis for the exhibition, and work that came under the umbrella of 'post-Pop' included Andrea Serrano's votive *Piss Christ* cibachrome (1987), Rachel Whiteread's minimal and barely noticeable casting of a light switch (1994), Emilia and Ilya Kabakov's conceptual deconstruction of art production in *Unfinished installation* (1995), and the more recent performance-based film *Two hands clapping* of 2011 by Kwan Sheung Chi (b.1980, Hong Kong), which documents three minutes of frenzied 'socialist etiquette' hand-clapping. Although it appears from these examples that a great deal of art produced since 1970 might be eligible for 'post-Pop' status, the dominant influence of archetypal American Pop figureheads is immediately recognisable in some of the flashier art on view. Lichtenstein's dots and Warhol's soup tins crop up repeatedly in the work of their post-Pop followers, the images of Marilyn and Elvis reconfigured, degraded or replaced with the equally lionised countenances of Lenin or Mao.

In his catalogue essay, Marco Livingstone, one of the show's three curators, argues that the rationale of the exhibition was not to survey an international 'post-Pop movement' but to celebrate 'some of the many kinds of art produced around the world since the heyday of Pop, and to see them in relation to each other [. . .] without fixating on geographical boundaries or ideological differences'.² This reluctance to 'fixate' on difference resulted in a complete lack of contextual information, where, even at the most basic level, the wall labels stating artist, title and date were often difficult to locate, grouped together and tucked curiously around corners. Given the wide range of work in terms of both chronology and geography, and the politically charged nature of much on view, this was a problem. For example, caught in motion strolling hand-in-hand near the entrance of the first room of the Religion and Ideology section were Lenin, Mickey Mouse and Jesus. These larger than life-size idols were modelled in bright red resin for Alexander Kosolapov's sculpture *Hero, Leader, God* (2014; Fig.60), portrayed in the style of Socialist Realism but here stripped of its monumentality and made farcical. On a nearby wall, four paintings of Mao Zedong by Yu Youhan made an easy comparison. One of these, *The lowly are the most intelligent, the elite are the most ignorant* (1995; Fig.62), which takes its text from an inscription Mao wrote on a visit to a tractor factory in 1958,³ shows the Great Leader as a worker, an image mined from Cultural Revolution propaganda. Both these works illustrate the argument put forward in the brief wall text: that post-Pop developed in the wake of communism as a way to criticise or understand the proliferation of mass media in market-driven capitalism in the West, its emergence in China and Russia since the

60. *Hero, Leader, God*, by Alexander Kosolapov. 2014. Painted resin, 130 by 211 by 115 cm. (Courtesy of the artist; exh. Saatchi Gallery, London).



1970s and the relationship of such media images to Communist propaganda and state-endorsed (Socialist Realist) art.

The problem with this framing is that it presented the work from the East only in opposition to work from the West (where an 'overtly political stance surfaced only occasionally'), and therefore conflated very different approaches to post-Soviet art and failed to illuminate the more nuanced aspects of transfer and influence between the two. For Kosolapov, who emigrated to New York in 1975, Pop art was an immediate and immersive reality. With his fellow 'Sots Art' pioneers, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, he had links to Warhol (in 1979 Komar and Melamid bought Warhol's soul for \$0.00, documentation of which can be seen on the floor below), and took from him a sense of immediacy and iconoclasm that Kosolapov felt was at the heart of Pop's philosophy. *Hero, Leader, God* is – as Warhol advocated – all surface, an easily digested gag that certainly heeds Kosolapov's own warning that the 'inability to express yourself briefly today puts your work at risk of not being comprehended'.⁴

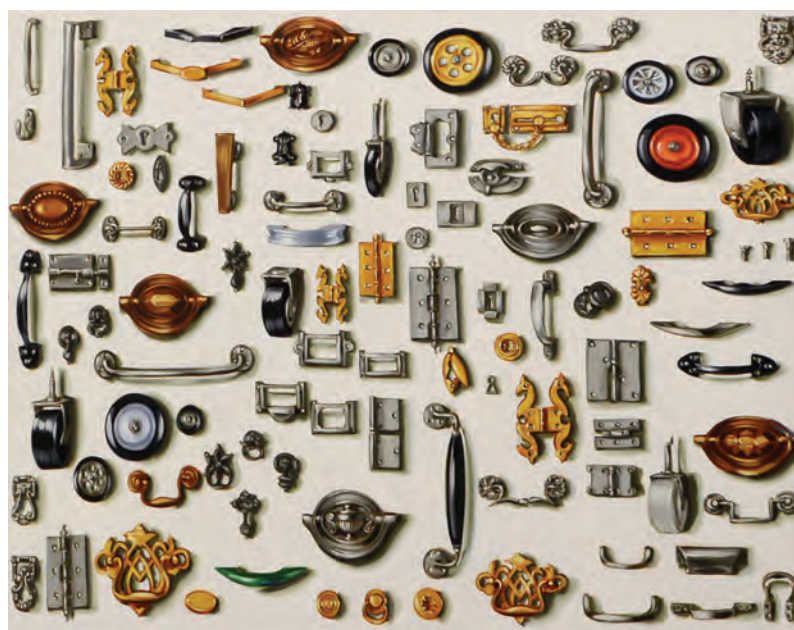
Yu's paintings, made some ten years earlier in mainland China, are more ambiguous in terms of ideology as well as in their relationship to Pop. It was not until the 1980s that Western Pop was brought to Chinese soil, with the 1984 retrospective of Robert Rauschenberg in Beijing, and Yu has primarily accessed the work of the 1950s and 1960s retrospectively, through books and reproductions. Pop, in fact, is just one of many Western styles Yu has adopted in his work, which includes abstract 'circle paintings' and Expressionist portraiture – transposing a historical Western style rather than exclusively applying a Pop methodology. Furthermore, these paintings were made during a period in which the alienating effects of accelerating economic development in China were beginning to be felt, converging with a widespread renewal of popularity for Mao. During this 'Maocraze' of the 1990s, Cultural Revolution propaganda

was reconfigured into consumer items on a massive scale, with Mao pin-badges, playing cards and statues selling in their thousands, a form of kitsch riddled with paradoxes. Yu's paintings reflect this complex context and are not wholly cynical. Mao is shown in one canvas laughing in an armchair, bedecked with flowers. Here is a Mao made human, less monumental, but nevertheless reeking of the nostalgia that converted the violence of the 1960s and 1970s into a marketable cultural phenomenon. These paintings are a far cry from Kosolapov's blunt provocations, and a clear political stance is more difficult to locate than such a comparison might suggest.

The excellent catalogue essay by another of the curators, Chang Tsong-Zung, goes some way to disentangle the confusion of the hang. Perhaps most importantly, he deals directly with the echoes of Socialist Realism that resounded across the galleries, and the difficulty in comparing Russian appropriations of the style with those of Chinese artists.⁵ Despite

some good texts, the catalogue suffers, like the exhibition, from a lack of organisation. Works of art were apt to morph into sections of the catalogue that did not match their placement in the show, and in one case, the work illustrated was simply not the one on view. Michael Sandle's *A twentieth-century memorial* (1971–78) is illustrated, showing a bronze skeletal Mickey Mouse perched behind a highly polished gold machine gun installed on the floor. In the exhibition, however, there was instead a work by Sandle from 1981, *Der Minister für Propaganda*, in which a cyborg-crossed variant of the mouse's head returns, mounted on a black pedestal that bears a swastika.

Despite an overall lack of focus, there were some wonderful moments, in particular in the 'Habitat' section, which stood apart from the rest in its clarity of purpose, the refreshing selection of work and the sensitivity of its installation. The first room includes Ai Weiwei's overstuffed armchair carved in marble (2011), one of Robert Gober's distended sinks (1985), and Whiteread's castings of small household treasures and the space around books (2006; 1996–97). The neutral shades and emphasis on processes of casting, on positive and negative domestic space, does not instantly call to mind the bright comic-book images associated with Pop, but the premise is clearer than elsewhere – that Pop art expanded fine art to use and include the everyday, and that artists in the recent past have developed this to explore the way in which our environments are constructed by us as a way of self-expression, or for us as a manifestation of a larger culture or tradition. In the next room, Lisa Milroy's painting of collected metal fixtures (1991; Fig.61) gleamed with the kinetic desire for objects that characterises Wayne Thiebaud's pastel paintings of consumerist delights, but this is a desire that is wholly personal, of found trolley wheels and hinges celebrated in the most succulent paint. Another of the large galleries



61. *Hardware*, by Lisa Milroy. 1991. Canvas, 193 by 249 cm. (Courtesy of the artist; exh. Saatchi Gallery, London).



62. *The lowly are the most intelligent, the elite are the most ignorant*, by Yu Youhan. 1995. Acrylic on canvas, 149.8 by 113.5 cm. (Private collection, Hong Kong; exh. Saatchi Gallery, London).

in this section showed the block-like paintings of simplified hospital doors by Gary Hume (1989/90), a gridded tower block sculpture and segmented flat-pack furniture by Julian Opie (2001; 1991), and the front of a portakabin that had been peeled from its building and installed in the gallery by Clay Ketter (2001). Here, the social, or built, environment is explored through gridded abstraction, that emblem of Modernist autonomy corrupted by the banality of the everyday and the inescapable mechanisms of capitalist society. It worked beautifully, but perhaps this was because the majority of works in this section was from Britain and America, where the trajectory from an earlier Western movement is easier to map. For some of the Eastern component, however, such a display is nonsensical, and diminishes both the cultural specificity and the political function of the works by forcing them into the ideologically muted framework of the contemporary White Cube.

¹ The first exhibition at the new space was *The Revolution Continues. New Chinese Art* (2008), followed by exhibitions such as *Abstract America. New painting and Sculpture* (2009), *The Empire Strikes Back. Indian Art Today* (2010), *Gesamtkunstwerk: New Art from Germany* (2011 and 2012) and *New Order: British Art Today* (2013 and 2014).

² Catalogue: *Post Pop: East meets West*. Edited by Marco Livingstone with texts by Andrei Erofeev and Chang Tsong-Zung. 450 pp. incl. 300 col. ill. (Tsukanov Family Foundation, London), £29.95. ISBN 978-0-9930954-0-5, p.56.

³ G. Barmé: *Shades of Mao. The Posthumous cult of the great leader*, London 1995, p.227.

⁴ Livingstone, *op. cit.* (note 2), p.166.

⁵ Where Russian Socialist Realism looked backwards to folk forms in order to communicate as effectively as possible with the masses, in China it developed as an essentially avant-garde art that was radical in form as well as content, tied in with the iconoclastic programme of the Cultural Revolution.

William Blake

Oxford

by DAVID SCRASE

WILLIAM BLAKE IS a perennial fascinator. As a poet he attracts students of literature, as a philosopher (of sorts) he attracts thinkers and as a creative artist he attracts art historians and lovers of printmaking. There are many ways of approaching him, and in the exhibition *William Blake: Apprentice & Master* at the **Ashmolean Museum, Oxford** (closed 1st March) Michael Phillips chose to concentrate on Blake's learning processes as a student and as an apprentice engraver to James Basire, and, after giving an overview of his career, to conclude with the influence Blake had on the group of young artists referred to as 'The Ancients', Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert, George Richmond and Welby Sherman. That the exhibition was to be held at the Ashmolean meant that the organisers could rely on Palmer's early work being a focus which could never be so well represented outside Oxford, and for those who love his peculiarly English 'visionary' paintings the opportunity to see nine superb examples was sufficient incentive to visit the exhibition. Phillips has trained as a printmaker in order to better understand Blake's processes, and examples of his journeyman work were included, most notably *Joseph of Arimathea Among the Rocks of Albion*, 1st state, 1773 (pl.25) and stipple engravings after Watteau's *Morning amusement*, this printed in sanguine (pl.66), and Stothard's *Zephyrus and Flora*, colour printed à la poupée (pl.68). Two last examples of Blake's engravings after other artists' work were the stupendous *Head of a Damned Soul or Satan* after Fuseli (pl.85; Fig.65) and *The Beggar's Opera Act III* after Hogarth (pls.86 and 87).

The exhibition was in three rooms. The first put Blake's training into full perspective and included the large copperplate of *Le champ d'or* engraved by Basire's shop during Blake's apprenticeship there (pl.23). This attracted



63. *Los smitten*, by William Blake. 1796. Colour print relief etching with hand colouring on paper, 10.6 by 10 cm. Excerpted from *The first Book of Urizen*, 1794, for *A Small Book of Designs* (British Museum, London; exh. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



64. *Jehovah and his Sons, Satan and Adam*, by William Blake. c.1825-27. Graphite, pen and black ink, coloured wash on paper, 53.7 by 43.5 cm. (The Keynes Family Trust, on loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; exh. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

great attention from the public and it was a pity that the whole of this first section was so poorly displayed. The walls were painted a dark blue which, combined with the low light (50 lux), made the gallery look very sombre. The room was broken up into smaller sections to fit in more objects, but this had the unfortunate result of squeezing large table-cases below items displayed on the walls; the table-cases were too deep to allow the works hanging above to be seen properly and the idea (ingenious) of printing the labels on a copper-coloured card to simulate copperplates made them simply illegible in such a low light (I was told these would be changed). If low light is required, as it is for works of art on paper, the best way of ensuring visibility is to have light-coloured walls. While fascinating to see the antiquarian material associated with the effigies in Westminster – primarily the tombs of Edward III and Queen Philippa – these were among the most difficult objects to view and it was unnecessary to show so many. The section devoted to the Royal Academy Schools, including the beautiful *Academic study of a youth nude whole-length seen from the side* (pl.55), was interesting and was incorporated well into the accompanying catalogue, principally written by Phillips with contributions by Martin Butlin and Colin Harrison. Indeed, at times it seemed as though the exhibition had been mounted to accompany the catalogue.¹

The second and third rooms were better displayed than the first, although the reconstruction of Blake's printing press and the room in 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, which was Blake's etching-painting room, took up a large amount of space and did not add much visually or intellectually to the exhibition. It would perhaps have been more appropriate to publish the whole section of the catalogue on this in *Blake Quarterly*. Particularly irritating was the display of prints inside the