



Michael Dean: *Cope* (Working Title), 2011, digital C-print, 25 1/2 by 21 1/2 inches; at Herald St.

down. This effulgent English muck (recalling Paul Nash as much as Turner) creates the mistily recessive space that habitually houses Allen's abstract follies. By contrast, in *Dofa* (Fornix Highpoint Version), hovering ranks of shieldlike arches create a compressed and more ambiguous pictorial space. Two overlapping foreground figures, like stylized amoebae, appear at once silhouetted against and recessed into this structure, complicating its cartoonish uncertainty.

These new paintings push Allen's wonky mix of tachism and clunky Looney Tunes abstraction to seductive new heights of absurdity, showcasing his virtuosity at elegantly pulling off a painterly gambit.

—Lee Trimming

LONDON MICHAEL DEAN HERALD ST

"Cope" was British artist Michael Dean's debut solo exhibition at Herald St. Five understated concrete sculptures and four digital C-prints (all works 2011), all initially reading as abstract, were accompanied by a small paperback artist's book. This sat open on the floor of the gallery's front space, its first few pages unceremoniously torn out, and its remaining pages bearing botanical drawings in each of which the leaves curl and cross one another to spell out the exhibition's title. This cryptic clue gently suggested that all might not be as it first appeared.

Indeed the four sculptures sharing this front space with Dean's book, all of which are titled *Cope* (Working Title), do become more complex. These modestly

scaled concrete panels, each worked into a low relief of interlocking triangular facets, leaned unobtrusively against the walls like architectural fragments waiting to be fixed to some Brutalist multiplex. When examined up close, their surfaces take on an odd quality, both artificial and organic, recalling polystyrene and textured polystyrene as well as cured animal hide. A tiny fragment of cellophane adhering to one suggests that these surfaces have been carefully smoothed and manipulated by hand, their formalist anonymity invested with an intimate sensuality. Furthermore, the rhythmically folded planes of the objects, organized in imperfect symmetry, recall (and are in fact derived from) the progression of letters in a word. The word "cope," which squirms into clarity in Dean's drawn plant forms, dissolves here into a rudimentary echo, becoming embodied in a surface from which it may once have rebounded.

The four photographs—titled either in *(Working Title)* or *Cope* (Working Title), as if comprising two pairs—exhibited with one further sculpture in the gallery's back space similarly move from apparent simplicity and spare, formal seduction to something more ambiguous and complicated. Each picture shows a single fragment of what at first appears to be dark marble or agate, carved so as to reiterate the pleated forms of Dean's concrete sculptures. These fragments, however, have next to no depth beyond their pleated surfaces, and perch so lightly before the camera that the more you look, the more they seem to be made from folded paper—a photographed marble surface

perhaps, quickly concertinaed to suggest the laborious carving of the absent original? In fact, the origin of this imagery is, according to the press release, "lumps of wet viscera," and they are indeed photographs of photographs, though in the least Sherrie Levine-like deployment of that strategy. Once again, the highly mediated ghost of the body uncoils from the work like a faint, unplaceable odor.

—Lee Trimming

AMSTERDAM LAURENCE AËGERTER C&H ART SPACE AND GALERIE ART AFFAIRS

A conceptualist who utilizes a variety of mediums, Laurence Aëgerter cleverly employed staged photography for the works in this dual exhibition at Amsterdam's recently opened C&H Art Space and old-established Galerie Art Affairs. The French-born, Amsterdam-based artist drew from a strategy she followed for a 2009 artist's book that features photographs of museum visitors observing old master paintings at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Louvre in Paris. This time she secured the use of the Hermitage Amsterdam for two days during the museum's 2010 exhibition "Matisse to Malevich: Pioneers of Modern Art from the Hermitage," positioned people and objects in front of the modernist masterpieces on view and then snapped pictures of the resulting tableau.

Aëgerter met with the participants in advance and selected expressive outfits from their wardrobes to complement the dynamic artworks in the show. Working

with an assistant skilled at handling a medium-format camera and lighting, Aëgerter shot 1,300 pictures over the course of two evenings. She eventually edited them down to the 28 final prints in the series. The resulting photographs capture colorfully clad viewers and whimsically placed curtains, ladders and Serrano hams interacting with canvases by Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Kandinsky and Kees van Dongen—giving these historical gems new meaning.

At C&H, Aëgerter presented eight pictures on two walls of the gallery's project space. *GE 6572-100907-221019* (the titles reference, respectively, the depicted work's inventory code in the museum's collection and the date and time of the intervention) shows a Serrano ham, covered in red cloth and black fishnet, obstructing van Dongen's 1908 *Woman with Black Hat*. In *GE 6569-100906-183601*, a woman with a butterfly tattoo and floral-patterned dress blocks Matisse's 1909 *Still Life with Blue Tablecloth*, while *GE 9660-100907-233355* captures another Matisse canvas, *The Red Room* from 1908, colorfully veiled by the plastic ribbons of a fly curtain, which gives the opulent painting the appearance of being glimpsed through a doorway of a Mediterranean home.

At Art Affairs, Aëgerter exhibited seven prints from the series. *GE 9662-100907-225223* ironically depicts a pair of the museum's beat-up ladders confronting Kandinsky's massive abstract masterpiece *Composition VI* (1913). *GE 9128-100906-202849*, an amusing piece that portrays a young man in

a Bruce Lee T-shirt standing before André Derain's *Portrait of an Unknown Man Reading a Newspaper* (1914), demonstrates Aëgerter's smart layering of information at its best.

—Paul Laster

BERLIN BRUCE MCLEAN TANYA LEIGHTON

Even when the defining characteristic of art is its currentness, it eventually becomes a part of the past. Bruce McLean was originally known for his ability to improvise positions on the fly, but his early performances now survive in the form of photographic relics. For *Early Works* (1965-71), an old-fashioned slide carousel projected documentary images onto a wall. McLean assumed the exotic stance of a live sculpture against the shabby backdrop of London. He might merely be standing there, looking bored or baffled, but the resulting photograph hardens the conceit into enduring form. The cars look ancient; even the trees into which McLean releases a bird (no, it's just a paper cut-out) seem to belong to another age, a more innocent one in which the art world was manageable enough to be effectively sent up by his irreverent gestures.

One of the slides showed a sign stating "NO MORE CONVENTIONAL THOUGHTS/ACTIONS," the didactic formulation and capitalized print an abrupt call out of nostalgia into historical context—a reminder that this is early Conceptual art, and the British version, which was still entrenched in the British obsession with landscape. Hence the many images



Bruce McLean: *Mirror Work*, 1969, black-and-white photograph, approx. 8 inches square; at Tanya Leighton.

of provisional sculptural arrangements of found junk in parks, on beaches and amid building site rubble. Also on view were framed photographs of McLean running in a park (*Running Sculpture*, 1969); lying on a pallet surrounded by shingle (*Fallen Warrior*, 1969); or standing in the shadow of an oak tree with a mirror (*Mirror Work*, 1969). The reflected leaves seem to come rampantly to life, whereas all around him, unmirrored, they are obscured by shadow. It is an allegory for the pictorial transformation of raw reality into the sheerer realm of artifice. Holding the mirror under his arm like a shield which both claims and effaces him, it is as though McLean were acting out the role of the picture rather than the customary sculpture, and, fittingly, the piece is less overt, more elliptical.

The film clip *High Up on a Baroque Palazzo* (1974) presents a performance by Nice Style, "The World's First Pose Band." Three guys in tuxedos strike exaggerated postures, while McLean, offstage, shouts directions in his gruff Glaswegian drawl. This burlesque is an alternative, theatrical response to the same conditions which led his contemporaries to attempt to dematerialize the art object, as though to restart the art game from scratch. The line "Objects, no Concepts"—penciled on an early invitation card—is McLean's reminder to himself to retain thinness in a climate in which objects were clinging to ideas. Consequently, *Pose Work for Plinths* (1971), a grid of 15 photographs, shows him draping himself over plinths of various heights, parodying the clichés of a