

Reviews

Bruce McLean



Installation shot



Chelsea Space Elsewhere

One of the founding fathers of British Conceptualism, Bruce McLean has been a quiet presence in this country since the 1980s. As he puts it, he 'had the nark' – he didn't like the commodity-driven gallery system – but at Chelsea he's showing on

his own terms, regularly rotating a vast accumulation of artworks and archival material. On my visit, the mix was hectic, nervy and unpolished. Suites of documentary photographs led into image-text works and paintings, while tables were covered with curling photographs of performances – McLean contorting his black-clad body over white blocks in the 1960s, and striking poses with his '70s ensemble, the Pose Band, who regularly sent out 'Pose-Cards' looking not unlike Roxy Music.

The transient gesture has long been fundamental to McLean's work; this show closes on the anniversary of the one-day retrospective mounted at the nearby Tate in 1969. Documentary photographs of the performance piece that gave that show its title, 'King for a Day' (of the artist sitting on a bench wearing a paper crown) are typical of his bluff take on conceptualism; his 'Installation for specific part of the body... "Mouth"' features him smoking a cigarette. Cold and splashy abstract paintings from the late '80s accrue weight when one considers them as the residue of performances – bridges between abstract expressionism and Conceptualism – but they are still not good to look at. Fortunately, by the time you read this they'll be gone, replaced by another aspect of McLean's stubbornly individual production, which in the current artistic climate feels pointedly up to date. *Martin Herbert*