

Tanya Leighton

Press Release

Bruce McLean

‘A LAWNMOWER IN THE LOFT (A SCULPTURE OF THE BOOK)’

14 March – 18 April 2020

Tanya Leighton is pleased to announce the gallery’s fourth exhibition with pioneering British conceptual artist, Bruce McLean. Since his days as a rebellious student at Central Saint Martins, McLean has tackled the complexities and contradictions of art—chiselling away at its self-seriousness. His work, which touches nearly every medium from photography, film and performance to painting, drawing and printmaking, has expanded these fields through humour and an unrelenting spirit of creativity. A particular focus in McLean’s long career has been the qualifications of an artwork. The question of what constitutes a sculpture—should a scone or a well-peeled potato also be considered?

The exhibition’s title revisits the first volume of McLean’s memoirs, ‘A Lawnmower in the Loft’, focusing on the crossovers between food and art. The works in the exhibition explore the same expanded field—the sculptural potential of food; eating and drinking as performance. They often make reference to the mentors, friends and colleagues that McLean has eaten with and worked alongside over the years:

In 1963, in the first week of studies to become a sculptor at the great Saint Martin’s School of Art, I was invited alongside my fellow students to work on a project for a week. To break the ice and for us to get to know each other. The project was titled, ‘Charing Cross Road’. A not very inspired title as the school was situated at 109 Charing Cross Road. Anyway, we all spent a week fiddling about, trying this and that. Personally, I hated the whole project thing and didn’t really make much. The crit was on Friday morning and we all assembled in room K with all the sculpture tutors; Mike Bolus, David Annesly, Bill Tucker, Phillip King, Isaac Witkin, Peter Atkins, Monty, maybe the then-to-become Sir Anthony Caro (Britain’s greatest living sculptor). I remember very little of the works presented except one great work by David Bainbridge, a chubby-faced young man from Barnsley. The work he presented was a block of concrete; a lightweight block full of air called Sipperex. This block had all the corners slightly rounded off and the block was filled with Polyfilla and sanded smooth.

It was then painted three colours; light brown, yellow and pink. And in Letraset on one corner, ‘CCR’. This block he passed around to the baffled sculptors. They were totally thrown. The new generation of sculptors who had put sculpture on the floor and off the plinth were dumbfounded at the possibility of a pass-the-sculpture concept. After much umming, and some more umming, I think the intellectual of the group (Bill Tucker,

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the one with the glasses) said, "Okay David, what's the thinking behind this work?" Or in front of the work for that matter, everyone thought (we were all modern sculptors). "Well I was in Charing Cross Road eating a Wall's Neapolitan ice cream and I responded", he replied in his great Barnsley accent. "And why have you put CCR on the block?" asked the bewildered intellectual Tucker. "Because I was eating a Neapolitan ice cream in fucking Charing Cross Road." This important piece of work should, in my opinion, have been included in the Conceptual Art in Britain show at Tate Britain. He also made some very interesting sculptures in Cleopatra colours.

Bruce McLean's work has been included in seminal exhibitions such as 'When Attitudes Become Form' at Kunsthalle Bern, 1969; 'Zeitgeist' at Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, 1982; and three instalments of documenta (1977, 1982 and 1987). In 2015 McLean was the subject of a major retrospective survey at Firstsite, Colchester curated by Michelle Cotton. His paintings are currently featured in 'The Return of the Spirit in Painting' at Whitechapel Gallery, London.

McLean is the subject of a forthcoming BBC Arena programme, directed by Paul Tickell. He is currently completing his new book about sculpture, 'Minimal Invisible Missing', to be published by 21 Publishing. A new feature-length video, co-created with long-time collaborator Gary Chitty, 'A Tie a Suit a Job', will premiere in 2021. Bruce McLean lives and works in London.

For more information and images please contact info@tanyaleighton.com or telephone +49 (0)30 21 972 220.

The gallery is open Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 6pm and by appointment.