

bernard jacobson gallery

Bruce McLean

The Shapes of Sculpture

10th October – 10th November 2012

Bruce McLean has been investigating the condition of sculpture since the late 1960s, creatively interrogating, in an astonishing diversity of media, the nature of its validity, its diverse possibilities of meaning, its propositions and pretensions, its presentations, positionings and re-positionings, its private and public settings, indoor and outdoor, and its critical contexts. The paintings in the forthcoming exhibition at the Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 6 Cork Street, London W1, mark a new direction in this continuously lively, witty and profound inquiry.

They may be regarded as paintings of things that look like sculptures, or in some cases, paintings of paintings of things that look like sculpture, sometimes based on photographs of things in the artist's studio that look like sculpture but are in fact merely two-dimensional representations based on photographs of sculptures; these are thus paintings of paintings of photos of sculptures and paintings of overlapping paintings of sculptures and other studio equipment. At this time when all art ends up as a photograph, especially sculpture, McLean starts with the photograph and works backwards (so to speak) toward discovering the shape and function of (the) sculpture.

Since sculptures (like paintings) exist in space, these new works may be regarded as paintings also of a specific space circumambient to the sculptures, an imagined space for imagined sculptures, or things that in the paintings look like sculptures in a painter's studio. But Bruce McLean is a sculptor, and always has been. He considers his whole oeuvre from performance pieces through photo-works and film works, architectural installations and paintings to be sculpture. Thus, though the new paintings may in fact be sculptures (as designated by the artist, when it suits his mood), they are most certainly paintings as well. They can be hung on walls (nothing un-sculptural about that) if the walls are big enough.

Bruce McLean is a Scottish sculptor, performance artist, filmmaker and painter. He studied at Glasgow School of Art from 1961 to 1963, and from 1963 to 1966 at St. Martin's School of Art, London, where he and others rebelled against what appeared to be the formalist academicism of his teachers, including Anthony Caro and Phillip King. In 1965 he abandoned conventional studio production in favour of impermanent sculptures using materials such as

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water, along with performances of a generally satirical nature directed against the art world. In *Pose Work for Plinths I* (1971; London, Tate), a photographic documentation of one such performance, he used his own body to parody the poses of Henry Moore's celebrated reclining figures. When in 1972 he was offered an exhibition at the Tate Gallery, he opted for a 'retrospective' he titled "King for a Day" which lasted only one day.

In 1971 McLean established Nice Style, billed as 'The World's First Pose Band', while teaching at Maidstone College of Art. With them, and in other collaborative performances (*Academic Board*, 1975; *Sorry! A Minimal Musical in Parts*, 1977; *The Masterwork: Award Winning Fishknife*, 1979), he continued to use humour to confront the pretensions of the art world and wider social issues such as the nature of bureaucracy and institutional politics. From the mid 1970s, while continuing to mount occasional performances, McLean has turned increasingly to paintings/sculpture and film work. In 1985 he won the John Moores Painting Prize. Since retiring from his professorship of painting at the Slade School of Art, McLean has taken on a large studio in west London where he has been making increasingly large paintings and sculptural film works.