

bernard jacobson gallery

Bruce McLean

New Work

9th October – 7th November 2009

Bruce McLean is back with his first exhibition of new paintings in more than 20 years.

McLean has exhibited extensively internationally, participating in such seminal exhibitions as *New Spirit in Painting* at the Royal Academy, London (1981) and *Zeitgeist* at the Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin 1982. In 1985 he won the John Moore's prize for painting and has been head of graduate painting at the Slade for the last seven years. In 2006 he had a critically acclaimed retrospective (or as he called it *Process-spective*) at Chelsea space during which he changed the content of the exhibition on a weekly basis. However he has not shown a new group of paintings since his exhibition at the now closed Anthony D'Offay gallery in 1986.

Collectively entitled "*The Black Garden Paintings*", these works are abstracted paintings of his gardens in Barnes and in Menorca, where he spends part of the year, and of his friend's garden also in Barnes. Bright floral colour is contrasted with large areas of black, which add a sinister, polluted cast to the expected beauty of the garden. In a subtle way these works continue McLean's long running concern with environmental issues.

McLean retires this year as Head of Graduate Painting at the Slade, where he has taught since 1985. His own interest in painting evolved during the '80s when he began to move away from image-making merely as a projection of his performance work. It was with performance that he had first grabbed the attention of the art world. An impulsive, energetic Glaswegian, he became known as an art world 'dare-devil' by critiquing the fashion-oriented, social climbing nature of the contemporary art world in the '70s. At St Martins his tutors included the great sculptors of the day, Anthony Caro and Phillip King, whose work he mocked ruthlessly. In *Pose Work for Plinths I* (1971; London, Tate), he used his own body to parody the poses of Henry Moore's celebrated reclining figures, daring to poke fun at the grand master himself.

The notion of using his whole body as a sculptural vehicle of expression led him to explore performance: 'it was then that I invented the concept of 'pose' so that I could do anything'. Pose was performance art: a cross between mime, theatre and sculpture and McLean created

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Nice Style 'The World's First Pose Band', which performed for several years, offering audiences such priceless gems as the 'semi-domestic spectacular Deep Freeze, a four-part pose opera based on the lifestyle and values of a mid-west American vacuum cleaner operative'. Behind the obvious humour was a desire to break with the establishment, something that he has continued to do throughout his life and work.

In 1972, for instance, he was offered an exhibition at the Tate Gallery, but opted, for a 'retrospective' lasting only one day. 'King for a Day' consisted of catalogue entries for a thousand mock-conceptual works, among them The Society for Making Art Deadly Serious piece, Henry Moore revisited for the 10th Time piece and There's no business like the Art business piece (sung).