

DRAWING ROOM

Pyramid Selling

A solo exhibition by Mick Peter

17 January – 13 March 2016

Entering Mick Peter's *Pyramid Selling* is a little like walking into a latter-day comic strip, with its monochromatic palette and red accents. Life size cartoon figures have been pulled from their two dimensional substrate and made into sculptural objects which are revealed as you walk around the installation. They populate an environment of concrete coloured 'pyramids' that could be under construction – or demolition, somewhat reminiscent of post-war civic centres. The public sculpture that might grace such a scenario is a giant red zip; here it has been multiplied, morphed, coming alive in a variety of anthropomorphic guises. The proliferating giant zips dwarf and menace the human figures like the brooms in Walt Disney's *Fantasia*.

Pyramid Selling is a term that we associate with scams of a bygone era. The instigator of such a scheme, represented as the apex of the pyramid, persuades individuals to invest in the project, thereby forming the lower echelons of the structure, to the benefit, ultimately, of those only at the peak. In Peter's installation we discover, tucked around the corner, a 'boss' figure who leans back comfortably in his chair, overseeing the workers beneath. A flow chart keeps him informed of sales, obviating the need to descend and supervise. It is of course an in-joke – for this installation is a fabrication conceived for an art gallery – and art is the commodity. Peter's installation touches on what it means to make art exhibitions today; and in particular those that incorporate lowbrow visual languages and low fi materials and processes. Peter is seeking the skewed, wonky, and lumpen that we all love in the work of artists like Philip Guston, or Robert Crumb.

The middle part of the 20th century enjoyed an erosion of the strict boundaries between fine and graphic art, and drawing was perhaps the medium that benefited most from the incursion of advertising, illustration and design. *Art without Boundaries: 1950-1970** is a book in the World of Art Series that celebrated the cross-pollination of art forms that distinguished this era, and which shook up the status quo, poking fun at po-faced modernism and introducing irreverence and humour as powerful weapons. Peter's work is a direct descendent of this spirit of art production without boundaries, and like artists such as Judith Hopf and the duo Jos de Gruyter and Harald Thys, his work is one that uses the strategy of self-deprecation and humour to tackle socio-political issues.

Peter's work begins at the drawing board where the analogue materials and techniques of a pre digital 'paste up' graphic culture inform everything he makes. A steady output of quick sketches is his default setting. These are made on small sheets of paper and his favourites are enlarged and printed to be used in the casting process. On this scale, imperfections in the pen work are exaggerated and the variance in these lines – smooth here, broken there, hesitant or insistent – bring the figures to life, despite their disparity of scale. At no stage during Peter's convoluted process of pulling sketches into objects does he defy the two dimensionality of his starting point. The line is traced using pigmented resin, embedding it in the cast surface, much as ink penetrates the weave of paper. The uncanny outcome is that the drawing is the same on both sides, and as we approach the back of a figure, and walk around to its front, we are confronted anew with its back. The economy of the original sketch and the resultant anatomical anomalies are compounded by efforts to make the figure stand, such as folding and creasing.

From the back one figure seems to have lost an arm to enable him to 'carry' one of the zip sculptures. We are accustomed to making subconscious adjustments and filling in missing information when we read drawings and sketches. Here, these mental adjustments take on a highly conscious and unsettling form. The wrinkles and creases in the resin are a constant reminder of the flatness of paper and these enlarged physical details are in turns mind boggling and humorous.

Peter jokes that choosing the zip as the motif for his oversized sculptures is almost incidental – he could have chosen almost any everyday object and blown it up to ridiculous proportions, much as Claes Oldenburg has with his public sculptures. Nonetheless the zip does have very particular characteristics that make it the perfect choice in this instance. We are nearly all intimately acquainted with the functioning of zips. As the pliable, rubbery zip sculptures strut their stuff they are immediately anthropomorphic. Peter exploits this by investing each zip with its own special character; they variously march authoritatively up and down the stairs or slump, legs akimbo, against the wall or in mute exhaustion, over a stray concrete block. Things are not as they might first appear in this strange world of *Pyramid Selling*. As Peter has said, the comic strip is an irreverent art form; here he plays on that quality, whilst setting it free from the page and transforming it into a monumental sculpture.

Peter's long and idiosyncratic reading list* provides an insight into the variety of influences on the formation of his complex and testing artworks. Alongside titles on figures secure within the art historical canon, such as Robert Crumb and Saul Steinberg, we find cartoonists such as Roland Torpor and Willian Stieg. We also discover a dizzying array of novels that challenge this form at all levels and across decades, from the more familiar, such as B.S. Johnson's *Aren't You Rather Too Young to be Writing Your Memoirs* and André Breton's *Anthology of Black Humour**, to *A Perfect Vacuum* by Stanislaw Lem*, selected for its cover by Milton Glaser as much as anything. This inspirational literature, along with a highly idiosyncratic (described by the artist as inefficient) studio practice, has generated Peter's unique and challenging artistic language.

*you can find these titles in the Outset Study Library and listed online at

<https://drawingroom.org.uk/resources/mick-peter-pyramid-selling>

About the artist: Mick Peter (b. 1974, Berlin) lives and works in Glasgow. He studied at Ruskin School of Fine Art, Oxford, 1994-97 and Glasgow School of Art, 1998-2000. His work has been exhibited widely including solo exhibitions in Paris, Glasgow and Amsterdam, and group exhibitions such as *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things*, Nottingham Contemporary, 2013 and *The British Art Show 7: In The Days of The Comet*, The Hayward Gallery, London, 2011. Peter has work in many collections, including Arts Council England, FRAC Pays de la Loire and CAPC Bordeaux. He is represented by Galerie Crèvecoeur, Paris, and Grimm, Amsterdam.

Pyramid Selling was originally commissioned by Tramway, Glasgow in 2015, and the production was funded by The Henry Moore Foundation, Creative Scotland, and Glasgow Arts.



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Opening hours: Tues - Fri 11am - 6pm, Sat and Sun 12 - 6pm