

Michael Stumpf

Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

I imagine the artist hunched over his cast-iron Singer sewing machine like a prissy golem fashioning, with determined fists, plant forms in blue denim curlicues to crown a forked silver object. Despite initial appearances, however, the object he is manufacturing isn't a reflection on the Germanic stag archetype. This object seems to have been chopped up and thrown down some picturesque ravine (good riddance to a lazy folkloristic emblem) and been replaced with animal amputees sprouting fabric tendrils from resin stumps sprinkled with a little movie stardust. Elsewhere, jock emblems appear. Polo shirts – shirts that should really have their collars turned up – sit on a shelf as colour samples only without the usual flowery names for the various emulsions. Again the prissiness creeps into this piece in a delightful way. No sewing machine this time but several chilly hours up to the elbows in fabric dye. It's strange how this kind of craft has been successfully subjugated in the work. Somehow the overall impression is not of a cutting edge boutique in a European capital, though the components could, and almost should, lead to this conclusion, for a spirit of insane application runs through his working process regardless of the outcome. As Josef Hoffman said, 'We are in no position to chase after daydreams. We stand with both feet firmly planted in reality and need tasks to carry out'.

The task in this case is the creation of Michael Stumpf's seasonal collection dedicated to a celluloid muse. His invasion of the Collective Gallery's curious architectural shoe box of a space, presented as part of their innovative New Work Scotland Programme, was an uneasy pairing of filmic rhetoric with a passing glance to the decorative arts. From the street the extravagantly large pane of glass that usually forms the front of the space had been screened off, giving it a fourth wall. This odd assemblage, created in a studiedly half-hearted manner, suddenly becomes something more akin to the flying classroom, though which lesson we're in was anybody's guess. The resultant conceptual mess made sure that his objects eluded the burden of conclusions. The work's narrative framework may be coolly insinuating, but at the same time its cinematic allusions were as much to those of popcorn and hot dogs as any arthouse cinema chic.

'Who cares which picture you see', his work seems to rather unconvincingly insist, as his finicky facture fails to lend itself to the world of drive-ins and multiplexes. A branch which has been heavily coated in silvered resin emanates from an upturned popcorn box. Each face of the carton carries a film advert and a month in chunky text; an enormous scrunched paper-popped piece of corn sits uneasily beside it. Uma Thurman wielding her sword from the side of the box would make little impression on this outsized snack monster.

The mood invoked by the slogans in the wall based pieces is that of the 'new Riviera', a phrase stencilled onto a found poster in one piece. Stumpf's hyperactive carelessness, though, doesn't suggest retired directors puffing on fat cigars in the south of France. Any serenity in his Riviera is corrupted by a sense of lack of control. Just as in J.G Ballard's *Cocaine Nights* (1997), in which the endless balconies of a gated community bake in the sun whilst the residents attempt to keep themselves amused, only working for a decade before they finds themselves with 'fifty years of idleness in front of them', Stumpf's communities of objects suggest endeavour preceding an odd fossil age. Bleached balconies becoming stratified retirement rock. The language of film is as literally bound up with poetic elements in Stumpf's work as the popcorn is tangled with denim ivy. There is time to wait for new movies but this artist has already made a stab at curating a Riviera museum using a Hans Arp text as an invitation to its displays; 'at the edge of the fairy-tale the night knits roses'.

Mick Peter 2005