Painting Fo’Sho!

Lady Beck, Leeds

21st October – 30th October 2016
Painting Fo’Sho! explores what happens when an artist concerned with the shifting cultural signifiers between physical and online space is tasked with curating a show of five painters who share a preoccupation with framing their practice in contemporary parameters? The curatorial strategy seeks to foreground the idea of content, both physical and online. How is a work received? Here, through a series of curatorial games, Jack Fisher invites the audience to question the value of individual utterance and authenticity, challenging the painter to escape what he describes as the branded self. This is an exhibition about fiction, exchange and transformation. In Fisher’s words: ‘the expressions on their faces told the story. The paintings hung, drawn and quartered. A tired painter lay there waiting, tar’d and feathered. There was nothing left but a small reassembled pile of dust, or something to that description. They had been hung out to dry only; they never returned. They h’d been worrying for days and yet no one decided they wanted to eat anymore. They’d eaten to their heart’s content the night before; the paintings went flying. Tempers were high! No one knew what was going on at times. The Dead Professional Artist was NOWhere to be seen. Although they all knew in their eyes exactly what was going on, no one made their engagement public. They’d all got just a little bit fed up of being interested in the whole thing and realised they probably didn’t wanna be ‘ere anyway. A figure enters the room and exclaims ‘You bastard! What have you done? Lady Beck presents Phoebe Ridgway, Rosie Vohra, Tom Palin, Richard Baker and James Quin. Curated and disrupted by Jack Fisher.
Painting Fo’Sho!

Curated by Jack Fisher, at the invitation of Richard Baker and Tom Palin

Richard Baker
Tom Palin
James Quin
Phoebe Ridgway
Rosie Vohra
Review By David Steans

Painting, Fo’ Sho!

- Lady Beck, Leeds

by David Steans

One of Leeds’ newer independent art spaces, Lady Beck, recently presented Painting, Fo’ Sho!, an exhibition of paintings by artists Richard Baker, Tom Palin, James Quin, Phoebe Ridgway and Rosie Vohra. The exhibition was ‘curated and disrupted’ by the artist Jack Fisher. That teasing credit, along with the exhibition’s flippant title (which could also be read as a phonetic play: painting, for show), might have led one to expect the exhibition to constitute a rhetorical critique of contemporary painting. Painting, Fo’ Sho! was finally a more generative, generous endeavour.

Fisher published the Facebook group conversations that took place between those involved, from provisional discussions to opening. This was printed in its entirety and displayed in the exhibition space, as well as compiled in a Google drive document, the link to which was publicised in the lead up to the exhibition. From these conversations, we learn that the painters invited Fisher to curate them as he saw fit. Though they did not specify what Fisher could and could not do, it is tempting to read the invitation itself as a kind of self-flagellation. The invitation characterised Fisher as a non-painter, an artist ‘concerned with the shifting cultural signifiers between physical and online space’ (Painting Fo’ Sho! publicity, 2016). Hence the above-quoted disruption, clearly expected by the painters and implicit in the invitation. In response, Fisher devised an elaborate multi-round game of various actions to which the submitted paintings were then subjected.

It seems beside the point to discuss individual paintings, each one of which the exhibition construed as a cipher, a placeholder for the idea of Painting and by extension that of the Painter. Some paintings turned their backs to us, facing the wall. One was strapped to a ceiling-mounted rotating disco ball; another was reduced to ashes. Where the painted surfaces were visible, the works were battered in less physical ways. For example, several works were accompanied by strings of Google image searches, printed and tacked next to each searched painting. Some of the searches appeared to return us to the painting’s source image (probably found via the same method), whilst others delivered us to the painting’s online item listing, telling us where we can buy it and for how much. The gesture suggested a vast sea of generic images, a sea that each painting, whilst discrete and unique, will eventually be lost in.

The actions that sounded merely silly on paper (paintings were to be tarred and feathered, hung outdoors to weather, printed on underpants, etc.) cumulatively took on symbolic resonance in the exhibition. The ritualistic and therapeutic associations included: purifying fire, to cleanse the Painter, and public humiliation, so that the Painter may atone for their sins. Fisher (and the exhibition’s very premise) certainly riffed on the stereotypical figure of the painter as precious and self-important. However, Fisher’s playful yet systematic approach (and the spirit of curiosity that led to his invitation) prevented the project from becoming overly romantic or overly frivolous. It was akin to a performed group art therapy session, where art and art making are not the means of recovery but the subjects of analysis.

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Installation photo: Jack Fisher

Painting, Fo’ Sho! was on at Lady Beck from 21 to 30 October 2016.

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Tom Palin: Works

1. **The Cock**  
   Selfie with Best work

2. **The Mountain**  
   Boxer shorts with most recent work printed on the back

1. **The Cock**  
   One of above, hung in gallery with plastic cover and a hair clipping

2. **Galapagos**  
   Work entered into Google search and exhibited next to image

3. **Silver Birch**  
   Hung on disco ball

4.  
   Title of a painting for music search (TBC)

5. **The Urn**  
   Potentially burnt and laminated

6. **My Dinosuar**  
   Tarred and feathered

7. **White Cliffs**  
   Hung outside
Hanging
Installation
Paintings/Works (Tom Palin)