fruitmarket
the gallery

# SMITH/STEWART
# Hooded. Bared.

## 1 August – 15 September 1998

**EXHIBITION GUIDE**

***"What is important to us is the vivid enactment of ideas through the use of the direct, intrinsic properties of video. "***

Hooded. Bared. is Smith/Stewart's first major solo exhibition in Scotland and represents a new body of work, five pieces commissioned by The Fruitmarket Gallery and one by Beck's. The new works are White Noise, Part, and Black Out (lower gallery); and Vent, Interference and Head Holes (upper gallery). Also included in the exhibition are two works from 1997 which have never been shown in Scotland, Dual (tower gallery) and Inside Out (upper gallery).

Stephanie Smith and Edward Stewart have been collaborating since they met at the Rijksakadamie in Amsterdam in 1992. As Smith/Stewart they present their bodies as both subject and object of their art, using the immediacy of video to enact performances to the camera. The experiences and images created are metaphorical engagements with primary emotions, using the language of the body, its breathing and interior darkness, to comment on the nature of intimacy, communication and sight.

The title for the exhibition is taken from Samuel Beckett's short novel Company, where a man lies alone in the dark talking to himself. The quotation in full reads:
"There is of course the eye. Alling the whole field. The hood slov.80wn. Or up if down to begin. The globe. All pupil. Staring up. Hooded. Bared. Hooded again. Bared again. "

These lines suggest correspondences with themes and sensations implicit in and provoked by the new work, and at the same time signal certain continuities and innovations in Smith/ Stewart's artistic practice.

***"In a lot of our work the mouth is central, however we like.the fact that Hooded. Bared. talks about the eye; it's more about the viewer's experience... The eye takes it back to the viewer. It's also a very beautiful description of the act of seeing, which is never usually talked about - the physicality of opening your eye to see."*** (Edward Stewart)

"We like this reference in relation to light and darkness; something being revealed or

exposed, hidden or covered... It also has sexual and violent connotations, which are always in the work. [...We are] imagining the darkness within the body itself and thinking of darkness in the viewing space. So the quote has lots of associations for us." (Stephanie Smith)

Attention to the viewer's experience of and total relation to the work of art - visual, acoustic . and physical- has always been characteristic of Smith/Stewart's work. As Iwona Blazwick puts it with regard to an earlier piece, Breathing Space (1997, below): "Smith and Stewart will not allow us to be merely spectators. The scale of their images, their amplification of sound and the denial of any escape route through climax, are strategies that are dangerously mesmeric, making us all struggle for breath." (our emphasis)

In Hooded. Bared. it is not just the image, therefore: it is the scale of the image, its relation both to the viewer and the total space of the installation, and the way in which this space is filled with sound, manipulated in light. Carefully calculated in correspondence to the viewing space, the formal elegance of the framing heightens and acts as a foil to the obsessive and repetitive nature of the acts depicted.

In the double projection of White Noise, for example, a repetitive narrative of a sort ensues (as much acoustic as anything else), but time itself is suspended through the carefully controlled and seamless circularity of real-time action. Such a strategy evokes a prelinguistic moment, an existence lived out in a perceptual and perpetual present where only the body can bear the burden of desire and communication, inchoate and primal. In this suspension, this 'in-between' time, our fundamental drives and compulsions are laid bare in their uninterrupted existence, as is the enigma of communication. But beyond this bodily articulation, there is also the silence and sensation of the body as it breathes, as in Black Out. Here, the decapitated body lies supine and anonymous, a mask with the face removed. Irrespective of identity, it speaks to us all even while it denies our gaze.

In addition, the position of the camera itself in pieces such as Inside out, Part, and Vent reinforces and explores this physicality. The passage from an earlier work like Sustain (see illustration above), where we watch Smith and Stewart enact, to Part or Vent, where the camera is placed within the body looking out, marks a radical shift prefigured by Inside Out.

"We are trying to bring the viewer closer to our experience of events... Inside Out gave us the way to put the viewer in the position of being a part of someone else's body - or in direct relationship to their own." (Smith/Stewart, catalogue interview)

We are thus no longer in the (privileged) position of being able to examine at our leisure the actions of the subjects from a distance, as in Sustain. Instead distance is collapsed; we are denied the possibility of objectification of the image and implicated in its physical experience.
This sudden complicity, the reversal of our most unconscious and automa~lation to 'a work of art' is disconcerting - bringing up the question of the way we look, our gaze. And a further element also comes into play, one which takes us back to the narrator of Company who lies speaking in darkness. In Inside Out, Vent, and Part, the mouth within which the camera is housed opens and closes. Light, like breath, appears and disappears, alternately illuminating and obscuring the cavity of the mouth and hence the installation space. Once again, the distance between image and viewer is collapsed and a direct physical

relationship is established: the reversal is complete. Furthermore, this 'negative space' of the inside of the body is itself another kind of reversal, since we experience what we never can see. In this pun on sight, on knowledge and communication, vision occurs when the mouth opens to gather its life-breath or to speak. But this is a far from easy process. Hedged in with anxiety and menace, it seems to require an enormous concentration of effort. Most strikingly, however, the mouth has acquired a blinding vision. The mouth, so central to Smith/Stewart's work, has become an eye - now hooded, now bared.

Please refer to the exhibition catalogue for essays and further information.

**LIST OF WORKS:**
Lower Gallery

Dual (1997), single monitor installation + sound
White Noise (1998), double projection installation + amplified sound Part (1998), single monitor piece + sound
Black Out (1998), single projection installation + amplified sound

Upper Gallery
Vent (1998), single projection installation + amplified sound Inside Out (1997), single monitor installation + amplified sound
Interference (1998), double monitor piece + sound
Head Holes (1998), two photographs

Sponsored by Beck's

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