

Graham Fagen / Victoria Morton

VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE IV

30 Nov 2002 -11 Jan 2003

Initiated by The Fruitmarket Gallery, *Visions for the Future* is a project to commission and present work from Scotland's leading artistic talent over four years from 1999-2003. The new work created as part of *Visions for the Future* is brought together in six exhibitions, with each exhibition featuring two artists. The project is now at mid-stage, having already features Ross Sinclair, and Martin Boyce, Anne Bevan and Graeme Todd and Annette Heyer and Steve Hollingsworth.

GRAHAM FAGEN, *Love is Lovely, War's Kinda Ugly* (lower gallery)

Graham Fagen was born in Glasgow in 1966, and studied at the Kent Institute of Art and Glasgow School of Art. His work revolves around the way contemporary identity, and its associated myths and fictions, can be expressed and interrogated. Fagen employs a range of disciplines that make classification difficult, working across drawing, painting, textual, neon, video, photography, botany and sculpture mediums in particular combination to explore the matrix of personal and cultural influences that impinge on the individual. His work at first may seem fictional but, on closer examination, deals with social, cultural and historical accuracies.

With the sound of the sea in his ears and his gaze upon the mountains of Jamaica, his life took on a new intensity. Like on condemned to death and standing dull of health and youth before the grave he has dug with his own hands, he was beside himself. He had always dramatised himself. Now he saw himself from the outside as never before, dead and gone and the place where all his life had been spent knowing him no more. In sober prose, a penniless man who went from Scotland to Jamaica was as good as dead and gone.

From *The Life of Robert Burns*, Catherine Carswell (Cannongate Classics)

Fagen's mixed media installation in the left gallery space, *Radio Roselle* (2002), examines and arranges historic and contemporary connections between Scotland and Jamaica, using Robert Burns as the catalyst to explore notions of cultural identity. Fagen posits a pirate radio ship somewhere in the mid-Atlantic in which the historic link becomes a narrative, a seamless cross-channel, cross-centuries broadcast of Afro-Caribbean Reggae tunes, mastered and interpreted by a change of individual voices, and Burns's poems.

Graham Fagen: *My interest in this subject stems from trying to understand the language and work of Burns; learning works off by heart at John Galt, my primary school in Ayrshire. Burns's work, although part of my culture, seemed foreign. I could not understand it, but that allowed a freedom to imagine meaning. Later, at secondary school, whilst looking for a sense of freedom and escape, the same was true of Jamaican music. Having found Burns was going to Jamaica (and made a book of poetry as a lasting memorial, this discovery forged a link between the two, allowing a link between the two, allowing me a rich area of research from which to develop a contemporary narrative of cultural formers, identity and classification.*

There is a further resonance here in which Fagen takes ownership of this cultural milieu and delivers a performance emerging from his own past and imagination and given history: the soundtrack appears to be mastered by a DJ recognisable from a previous work of Fagen's, *Owners* (2000), a series of portrait photographs and texts exploring cultural ownership.

Known as a keen amateur radio ham as a child, he went on to produce the world's first ever broadcast of music and speech in his home state of Massachusetts, USA in December 1906. By the 1920s, his transmitters and receivers were in general use, sending out entertainment programmes to North America and Europe. By 1927 he had established the BBC in the UK, and went on to establish many other broadcasting companies all over the developed world... This portrait – taken in the 1920s when 'radio was king' – shows him at his playful best, demonstrating his passion to entertain.

Excerpt from *Owners* (2000)

In the central space, there appears another arrangement of Fagen's ideas and media: three neon works, titles, *PUNK FUCK, A CROSS, MUM & DAD From the tattoos of bobby Shaftoe*, (2002). They imply an ironic transcendence, appropriating the crude flourish and sentiment of possibly local, novice tattoo work. Their allusion to a sense of place or belonging and both literal and electric elevation accord them a startlingly dramatic organised symbolism.

In the small gallery space, the bronze sculpture, *Where the Heart Is (Bronze Hybrid Tea Rose #1)* (2002) is installed. It is a patinised cast of the rose developed by cockers Nursery (rose growers to the queen) in Aberdeen and purchased by Fagen to form part of *Royston Road Parks* (1999-2002), a public art project to develop two new parks in Glasgow. *Where the Heart Is* is so named by a local schoolgirl who won the

competition Fagen established to name the rose varietal JC30518/A, whose dark pink petals symbolise gratitude.

VICTORIA MORTON, *Plus and Minus* (upper gallery)

Born in Glasgow in 1971, Victoria Morton is based in Glasgow. Although Morton has primarily worked as a painter, in this new exhibition, she is extending her work outside the canvas into the surrounding space, creating a series of abstract paintings that vary from the intimate to the large scale, elements of sculpture and sound installation. She describes her work as being based on an interest in the historical development of painting, coupled with 'a desire to locate existential experience'. Recently, she has begun making paintings that she regards as arrangements of conscious and unconscious thought and action – 'inner landscapes' that can also include ideas and styles from contemporary life.

Victoria Morton: My paintings are designed to be understood by the body. The process of understanding them comes from an internal experience of the figure, and the viewer becomes the figure in the painting. When starting a painting I tend to consider a breaking-down of ordinary objects, clothing, the furniture in a room as well as sensation from the body and imagination. It is a process of abstraction, reconstruction and cognitive response that allows me to build narratives into a painting in a complex and personal manner. The paintings are multi-layered and designed to unfold slowly.

In the main space in the upper gallery, Morton has considered the composition of the separate aspects of the exhibition in the same way that she would compose forms in an individual painting. The imposing sight of *Night Geometry* (2002) fills the upper gallery, standing free of the walls it invites a new approach, allowing you to consider the diptych from all sides, acting as both a painting and a sculpture and creating a centre for the other, smaller interventions.

In the small gallery, we discover a serene room bathed in green light, The 14-minute *Pleasure and Practice* (2002) including metal structures, proffers a harmonized reflection of Morton's chief parallel practices. A musician and performer, Morton cites music as a major influence on her painting. She has created *Pleasure and Practice* (2002), 'an unsynchronised composition', as a complete performance to be experienced in its entirety within the space.

Victoria Morton: Broadly speaking, my main aim is to represent and situate an experience of the space of the body. Body consciousness can

become exaggerated through music, painting and sculpture. The viewer becomes the figure in the painting; the centre of perception. The paintings will form the centre-piece of the exhibition, and provide a context for other more experimental elements, namely sculpture and music.

Publications:

Graham Fagen, *Love is Lovely*, £12, pp96, full colour, 170 x 225mm.

The most comprehensive representation of his work to date, this book documents Fagens' projects carried out from 1993 to the brand new body of work created for this exhibition. Essays by Jeremy Millar and Murdo Macdonald.

Victoria Morton, *Plus and Minus*, £10, pp62, full colour, 170 x 225mm.

A unique reflection of the nature of Morton's practice, with reproductions of all commissioned paintings. Texts by Anne-Marie Copestake, Samantha Murray and Cathy Wilkes.

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45 Market Street
Edinburgh, EH1 1DF, Scotland

P +44 (0)131 225 2383 info@fruitmarket.co.uk
F +44 (0)131 220 3130 www.fruitmarket.co.uk