The Fruitmarket Gallery
Exhibition Archive

Dada's **Boys**

Identity and Play in Contemporary Art

Curated by **David Hopkins**

Knut Åsdam, Matthew Barney, John Bock, Roderick Buchanan, Marcel Duchamp, Angus Fairhurst/Damien Hirst, Keith Farquhar, Douglas Gordon, Martin Kippenberger, Jeff Koons, Sarah Lucas, Man Ray, Paul McCarthy, Lee Miller, Francis Picabia and Richard Prince

Exhibition 27 May — 16 July 2006

Dada's Boys is the brainchild of David Hopkins, Professor of Art History at the University of Glasgow, acknowledged authority on Marcel Duchamp, dada and surrealism and a writer on contemporary art. It takes an idea about the dada work of Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Man Ray and uses it as a lens through which to examine the work of more contemporary artists, asking whether it might be possible for dada to have given rise to a lineage of artists, mostly male, whose art is concerned with developing themes of male identity.

Dada was a randomly-christened movement (the name actually means 'hobby-horse' in French) that exploded into simultaneous life in Zurich and New York in 1916–17, and spread to Cologne, Berlin, Hanover and Paris. More a state of mind than an art movement as such, dada rejected the dominant social and cultural values which were seen as resulting in the destructive chaos of the 1914–18 World War, and prioritised an anti-art impulse, described by Hopkins as 'an attitude of negation which nevertheless co-exists with a desire to produce art by other means'.

Hopkins re-animates the art-historical facts of dada with a vision of artistic camaraderie, in-jokes and affectionate competition, played out in sequences of interrelated works of art. He reminds us that these artists – now among the giants of modern art – were then relatively young (in 1916 Man Ray was 26, Duchamp 29 and Picabia the old man at 37), were good friends, and were dedicated to the irreverent humour, deliberate provocation and wholehearted embrace of all things paradoxical that is dada's primary legacy. Trading mock insults and transgressive artistic gestures (epitomised most pointedly, perhaps by the two mutually-curious dogs on the cover of Duchamp's dada magazine *Rongwrong*), these dada artists were part of what Hopkins terms a 'homosocial male network', its members united in a quest for a new poetics of contemporary masculinity.

The first room of the exhibition brings together a small selection of historical touchstones for male dada attitudes. The works by Duchamp and Picabia are typically succinct provocations, and together set up a sequence of ideas which reverberate in the contemporary art in the rest of the exhibition. Duchamp's *The Non-Dada* evokes the idea of dada as

a club of naughty boys from which the goody-two-shoes in the image, (actually the cover of a brochure, found and used by Duchamp in the dada tradition of the 'ready made' whereby an object existing in the world is appropriated as art), is excluded. The image is signed by Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp's female alter-ego, beginning a play on disguise, display and shifting personal and sexual identity picked up by Douglas Gordon in his passport and polaroid self portrait photographs. Picabia's *La Sainte Vierge* (The Blessed Virgin), a violently iconoclastic and blasphemously titled ink splash illustrated in the dada periodical *391*, is the first of several splashes and stains. It is echoed in Knut Åsdam's *Untitled: Pissing* and by John Bock, whose film *Porzellan Isoschizo Kuchentat des neurodermitischen Brockenfalls im Kaffeestrudel und das alles ganz teuer* (a nonsense title in a language invented by the artist) shows Bock playing at being a messy boy or inept man-in-the-kitchen.

Martin Kippenberger, Angus Fairhurst, Damien Hirst and Richard Prince pick up on dada's love of jokes. Kippenberger, in a curious echo of the machinist drawings Picabia liked to title as portraits of individuals (as in *Voila Elle* (Here She Is) illustrated in the dada periodical *291* in the first room of the exhibition) reveals the inner workings of a joke shop laughing bag. Angus Fairhurst and Damien Hirst, dressed as clowns, compete to tell each other increasingly tasteless anecdotes in a pub, while Richard Prince's majestic text painting is a fine example of his on-going series of works devoted to the tired repertoire of the failing stand-up comedian. The darkness of Prince's aptly-titled *Black Joke* is intensified in Paul McCarthy's *Cultural Soup*, a harsh disturbing performance which ends with the artist intoning a somewhat threatening family lineage:'The son begets the son and the daddy begets the daddy, the son begets the daddy and the daddy begets the son…'.

Upstairs, sport enters the exhibition as a marker for male bonding and identity, with Roderick Buchanan's montage of footage showing footballers swapping shirts at the end of matches in the last World Cup and Jeff Koons' works with footballers and basketballs. Keith Farquhar's new installation also contains references to the sartorial trappings of sport, but here the artist is more concerned with social interaction, his outsize wine glasses, underwear and mirrors standing in for individuals at some kind of enigmatic gathering, with an implied female presence joining the boys at play.

Sarah Lucas is one of only two women in the exhibition (Lee Miller's photograph of Man Ray shaving hangs downstairs). Lucas's self portraits, made over a period of eight years, show her in a variety of guises and disguises, playing around with her own identity and with the markers of femininity more generally. In some images she effectively becomes 'one of the boys' and as such provocatively responds to Duchamp's own gender-bending, as one of the girls.

The exhibition ends with the singular vision of Matthew Barney's *CREMASTER 4*, the first in his epic, five part *Cremaster Cycle*. In the book written to accompany this exhibition, Hopkins describes Barney's film as 'an allegory of male self-definition', and it brings together many of the themes and ideas circulating within *Dada's Boys*. As with so much of the work in the exhibition, it is a self portrait, the artist himself playing the part of the tap-dancing, otherworldly satyr whose efforts to reach 'the Loughton Ram', a potent symbol of unabashed virility, shape the film.

For Hopkins, masculinity is something to be celebrated in an age when men might often be made to feel like underdogs, and the artists whose work he includes in the exhibition seem crucially to enjoy being boys (including at times Sarah Lucas). The male identity explored by the dadaists in the early 1920s was under threat from the mass slaughter of men in the war and the social ascendancy of newly-politicized women, and their work does raise questions about the insufficiencies of masculinity as well as generally revelling in the possibilities offered by male friendship, group identity and loyalty, humour and repartee. Both doubt and delight survive into the contemporary period, and seem embraced by the term 'homosocial' which Hopkins uses.

As a whole, *Dada's Boys* seeks to move between the poles of male arrogance and insufficiency, rejecting a tone of pious political correctness for a more open-ended celebration of humorous self-reflexivity. The keynote for the exhibition is the sophisticated rudery and witty self-questioning that characterised dada at its best.

Hopkins's argument is convincingly explored in the catalogue which accompanies this exhibition, and which is available from the bookshop **£12.95**. Keith Farquhar, who has made a new installation for the exhibition, has also produced a **limited edition print.**

For full details and a list of all events which accompany this exhibition **refer to an Events Calendar**

Artists' Talk: Roderick Buchanan and Keith Farquhar
Tuesday 6 June, 6.30pm. Free.

Making Art: Printmaking Workshop
Sunday 25 June, 2–5pm.
Tickets £7 per child. 8 places available.
Suitable for ages 7–11.

Curator's Talk: David Hopkins and Fiona Bradley
Tuesday 27 June, 6.30–7.30pm. Free.

Performance Poetry: Kevin Henderson and David Hopkins
Wednesday 5 July, 7–9pm, Free.

Ways of Seeing: 60+ Gallery Tour
Thursday 6 July, 11.30–1.30pm. Free.

Adult Workshop: Photomontage
Saturday 8 July, 11am–5pm.
Tickets £12/ £10 concession.
All materials provided.

Young People's Art Workshop
Monday 10 July–Friday 14 July, 11am–4pm. Free.
Suitable for 14–18 year olds.

Booking is essential for all talks and events, contact **the bookshop**
P 0131 226 8181
E bookshop@fruitmarket.co.uk

Reading Room
Resource material and an exhibition interpretation film presentation of Curator David Hopkins discussing the work in the exhibition is available in the Gallery reading room. The exhibition film is available on DVD from the bookshop priced £15.

The Fruitmarket Gallery 2006. All rights reserved.
©The Fruitmarket Gallery, the artist and authors.

All information provided is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of publication.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the publisher, except in the context of reviews.

No responsibility is accepted for information which is out of date or inaccurate.

Supported by The National Lottery® through the Scottish Arts Council | Scottish Arts Council

Dada's Boys installation view
Photos: Alan Dimmick