



OPENING CEREMONY
Est. 2002

OC ♥ NY Art Book Fair: Adam McEwen at Palais de Tokyo

By: Rory Satran Published: October 18, 2010
<https://www.openingceremony.us/entry.asp?pid=1633>

The Palais de Tokyo in Paris has given artist Adam McEwen the full scope of its space to curate a show as part of its "Carte Blanche" series. The preternaturally calm and articulate McEwen gave me a tour of the as-yet installed area, talking me through the rooms as though the pieces were already on display. Pieces include Michael Landy's 1990 'Market,' an actual burgled safe by Maurizio Cattelan, videos by Bruce Nauman & Frank Owen, Nate Lowman paintings, Rob Pruitt's concrete-filled jeans, Georg Herold's 'Mountain of Cocaine,' works by Sarah Lucas, Bas Jan Ader, and Jonathan Borofsky. The NY Art Book fair will feature the special 'Palais' magazine that acts as companion to the exhibition. Presented by Printed Matter, Inc., the fair will be from Nov. 5-7th at MoMA PSi, and sponsored in part by Opening Ceremony.



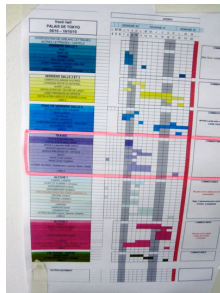
Adam McEwen and crates of potential

Adam McEwen: The show is called "Fresh Hell." It's a group show, and the theme of it is the impossibility of making an artwork, in the sense of, like Bruce Nauman's photograph "Failing to Levitate in My Studio" or Beckett's quotation "I Can't Go On, I'll Go On". This idea that you're an artist and you're trying to make an object that levitates, that is somehow able to communicate your consciousness to the consciousness of the viewer. And it's difficult. And you keep on

trying and you keep on trying. And you fail. And you go back to the studio every day. And the title "Fresh Hell" comes from...I thought it was from Shakespeare..."What fresh hell is this?"...probably from Macbeth. It's very commonly misattributed to Shakespeare, and it's actually from Dorothy Parker. She said, "What fresh hell is this?" Somebody interrupted her working. So the idea was suggested by this interview with Bruce Nauman in the seventies where he talks about how even if you make a successful work of art, when you go back to start again to the next work, you start from scratch. It doesn't take you anywhere. Each time it's this endless starting from zero, and it's depressing and disheartening. So that's where the title came from. The idea that every day you go back to a fresh hell.



The exhibition poster, a photo by Hanna and Klara Liden, which also works as the Palais magazine cover.



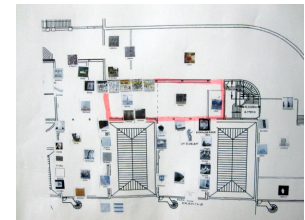
Plans on the wall.

Rory Satran: How did you go about the curating process?

AM: The show is really about the question of why is it so difficult? And history is one reason. There's history on your shoulders of everything being done before. So there's history behind you and death in front of you, and you're trying to negotiate this position of freedom where you can make something that's magic somehow, that's able to transcend yourself. You know, I thought, 'what the fuck am I gonna do in the Palais de Tokyo?' I thought about these rooms, which are not art friendly—which are brutal, really, in fact. And the more I thought about it and how difficult it is, and money, and shipping, and how can you actually make a good show in this situation, I thought, maybe that's the subject of the show, this difficult task that you have.

RS: So the curation of an exhibition mirrors the process of creating art?

AM: It's an analogy or a mirror of the thing that you do every day in your studio, which is trying to invent this new thing from nowhere, from scratch, every time. There is kind of a narrative which is really simple through the show, beginning over there when you come in and you see a wall—which is Rudolph Stingel's silver wall that gets scratched up, it's a famous piece. It starts with a problem, a block. And in front of the wall there are going to be three stone heads from the Medieval Museum that are these ancient kings of Judah that used to be on Notre Dame. In the French Revolution, they



were decapitated and knocked off and thrown away and rediscovered in 1970. They're going to be in front of the wall. So it's, like, you got a problem with history? Decapitate history. Then things can start moving.



(ed. note: Here Adam walks me through the pieces in the exhibition, with fascinating descriptions of each piece that I only wish we had the space to reproduce.)

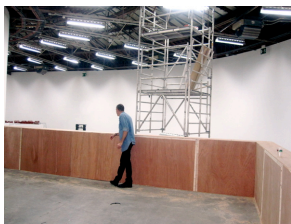


The elements of Michael Landy's 'Market.'

AM: It starts really bleak, but it's based on the premise that you can do it. It's the same with that Beckett line, it's like "I can't go on. I'll go on." It's a pessimistic optimism. I can't go on, but you know what, I've got no choice. Life sucks, we're all going to die, that's a fact. But, if it was really that pessimistic, we'd all kill ourselves right now. But you don't. For some weird reason, you do persist and you do believe that optimism is worth it, even though 95 percent of the time you fail. But for some reason you keep on trying and it's not really clear why. And the last section of the exhibition, is, in fact, more optimistic. There's a sculpture by Martin Creed of a stack of chairs. It's really stupid, really dumb...but for some reason it is magic. Then there's a video by Roman Signer of a helicopter that takes off from a little piece of wood, just as the wood goes over a waterfall. It just happens again and again on a loop. It's asking, 'it is possible to levitate?' There's a painting by Jonathan Borofsky that says "Object of Magic."

RS: If it states that it's an object of magic, then it is.

AM: Exactly, it is. And that's why it's an awesome painting. And then that wall at the end is going to be covered in wallpaper by Agathe Snow, which is this crazy purple mad wallpaper with lots of writing on it, saying: "Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes." So you end the show by walking through this wall that say "Yes." So, that's pretty much it.



A wall built specifically for the show.

RS: Tell me about the 'Palais' magazine.

AM: It's full of lots of work that is not in the show, and it's structured in five sections, and they kind of are a block: history, thinking, deciding, levitating. And it doesn't say it, but at the beginning of each section is a photo of something, really simple things, that sort of suggest those ideas. There are four inserts in the magazine: Rob Pruitt's "101 Art Ideas" is one. And then there's also a text of an Austrian poet named Hugo von Hofmannsthal, which is really amazing, called "The Lord Chandos Letter" and it was written in 1902.

It's a fictional letter, as if written by a 16th century poet to his mentor, his patron, saying why he can't write anymore. He regretfully has to resign his job. He cannot be a poet because language has fallen apart and his identity has fallen apart, and he can't relate to the world. It's about 4,000 words, and it's an amazing text. It's one of the first modernist texts talking about language not functioning anymore. So I just thought fuck it, let's reproduce it. It's not really like a catalog. It's this parallel conversation that matches the show



Maurizio Cattelan's burgled safe.

RS: It sounds really cool. What's on the cover?

AM: It's the poster outside, that image by Hanna and Klara Liden. It's a picture of them standing there in short shorts and plaid shirts in front of a huge construction digger. Klara is holding a shovel, a spade, and Hanna is holding a hammer, and they just look badass. It's an awesome image.

'Fresh Hell' will be at Palais de Tokyo from October 19th to January 16th, 2011. The opening is tonight.

Artists include: Bas Jan Ader, Barbara Bloom, Jonathan Borofsky, Angela Bulloch, Maurizio Cattelan, Anne Collier, Martin Creed, Gino De Dominicis, Walter De Maria, Jessica Diamond, Matias Faldbakken, Isa Genzken, Geert Goiris, Dan Graham, Philip Guston, Raymond Hains, David Hammons, Georg Herold, Martin Kippenberger, Michael Landy, Hanna & Klara Liden, Nate Lowman, Sarah Lucas, Ana Mendieta, Henri Michaux, Reinhard Mucha, Bruce Nauman & Frank Owen, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Rob Pruitt, Steven Shearer, Roman Signer, Agathe Snow, Rudolf Stingel, Rosemarie Trockel, Valie Export, H. C. Westermann, and works from the Musée de Cluny - Musée National du Moyen Âge, Paris.