

Meliksetian MB Briggs

Angus Fairhurst *All Body and Text Removed* April 2 - May 28, 2016

Opening Reception:
Saturday, April 2, 6-8pm



"Keep adding until you can't add anything else. Take everything away until there is nothing left"
-Angus Fairhurst, 2001

Meliksetian | Briggs is pleased to present *All Body and Text Removed*, an exhibition of works by influential British artist Angus Fairhurst (1966-2008). Encompassing several of the key aspects of Fairhurst's practice – including his multilayered collages, photography and cyclical animations – the exhibition bears witness to his enduring fascination with concepts of reduction, repetition and removal. This is the first posthumous exhibition of Fairhurst's work in the United States.

Fairhurst was a key member of a group of post-conceptual artists associated with Goldsmith's College in London that became the phenomenon known as the Young British Artists (or YBAs), beginning in the early 1990s. Working in a wide variety of media, among them painting, photo, performance, music, sculpture, collage, installation and animations, with conceptual rigor and wry humor, Fairhurst eschewed a signature style and his work resisted easy categorization.

Taking a variety of conceptual strategies as a given, from the Dadaist and Surrealist assemblage and collage of Schwitters and Picabia, via "classic"

Conceptualism of the 1960s and 70s, to the 80s advertising appropriation tactics of Prince and Koons, Fairhurst was, as critic Sacha Craddock suggests "too much a member of his generation to believe in art as pure invention (and so) creates a concentrated reality."

The nine works presented in the exhibition - layered magazine collages, bus stop billboard collages, a seminal early photo work, and four looped animations - reveal a number of themes intrinsic to the artist's work. One is his interest in the manipulation of images, through processes of adding, layering, fragmenting, removing, repeating and obscuring - transformative impulses that were central to the artist's work from the very beginning right through to the end of his 20 year career. As critic Claire Bishop has aptly stated, "Fairhurst's work revolves around an epic sense of collapse, of disintegration of form, and renewal."

Handmade - using "analog" media, namely the printed magazine and the bus stop poster - Fairhurst's collages excise the human figure, as well as the text, from glossy advertisements, removing the subject from its context. By a process of layering the cut imagery, the *mise-en-scène*, the idealized and luxurious environments of fashion and consumer culture, is brought to the fore, then collapses again. The layers of brightly colored planes and positive and negative space advance and recede, yet they are part of a coherent whole verging on abstraction that simultaneously draws attention to the human form in its ghostly absence, the silhouette.

This seeming absence of the figure in the collages find a counterpoint in the other works in the exhibition, the self portrait *Pietà* (1996) and the four animated videos in the *Strange Loops* series (1995-96), where the body comes to the forefront. *Pietà* is Fairhurst's contemporary take on the iconographic Christian subject, a figure in a "cheap and ill-fitting Gorilla suit" taking the place of the Virgin Mary and a naked Fairhurst himself as the dead Jesus cradled in her arms. Iconoclastic yet absurd, bordering on surreal, the work has a slapstick pathos, tragic but amusing.

The figure of the Gorilla is a recurring motif in Fairhurst's work appearing in early drawings from the 1990s to his later monumental bronze sculptures and is seen in this exhibition alongside *Pietà* in the *Strange Loop* animations. The Gorilla is a stand in for the self, anthropomorphic, with a form analogous to the human, an alter ego, or animal "other." In *Strange Loops - Stripping*, a gorilla peels the skin away from a human figure like a banana only to reveal the same figure beneath, a Sisyphean task repeated endlessly. In *Strange Loops - Dissecting*, the Gorilla's form fragments into bands of graphic symbols, patterns and marks, a figure reduced to a indecipherable or unknowable code.

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In our high speed image-based culture, Fairhurst's work is more relevant than ever. High sheen, glossy surfaces appear immaculately made yet fragmented, interrupted, decontextualized and dislocated, and are then recombined in a cohesive whole on the one hand; while remaining resolutely low fi on the other. His work might be read as a metaphor for disconnection and alienation in our hyper-connected society, but it never loses its human qualities - beautiful, absurd, ironic, witty and melancholic, yet hopeful and optimistic.

Angus Fairhurst: All Body and Text Removed is presented in association with The Angus Fairhurst Estate and Sadie Coles HQ, London.

Angus Fairhurst's work has been exhibited widely including at the seminal exhibition Freeze, curated by Damien Hirst that introduced the generation that became known as the Young British Artists, and set the tone for contemporary art in the UK over the following two decades. Other important exhibitions include Gambler (1991), Building One, London; Brilliant, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis (1995); Some Went Mad, Some Ran Away, Serpentine Gallery, London (1994); Apocalypse, Royal Academy, London (2000); Casino 2001, SMAK, Ghent (2001) and the 3 person show, In-a-Gadda-da-Vida with Sarah Lucas and Damien Hirst, Tate Britain, London (2004). Significant solo shows include Spacex Gallery, Exeter, UK (2001), and Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal, Germany and Kunsthalle St.Gallen, Switzerland. From 2009-11, a retrospective of his work travelled between Arnolfini, Bristol, UK, Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, UK, M Museum, Leuven, Belgium, and Westfälischer Kunstverein, Muenster, Germany. Sadie Coles HQ has held 6 solo exhibitions of his work, the 2013 exhibition curated by Urs Fischer and Rebecca Warren and the 2015 show focusing on the animations.

Angus Fairhurst's work is included in numerous major collections including that of Tate, which also houses his archive of video and animation, The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, the MoMA/Museum of Modern Art, New York City and the British Council Collection among them.

A monograph with essays by Sacha Craddock and James Cahill with a foreword by Tate director Nicolas Serota and published by Sadie Coles HQ / PWP is available.