

**Liam Gillick. Review: *Wish You Were Here*  
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***WISH YOU WERE HERE***

**Burbage House, London.**

**September 10 to October 2**

'Wish You Were Here'. The devastation of meaning. Stuck in another light industrial space. The proliferation of exhibitions with poor titles is killing me. This has something more than the usual. There is a degree of awareness of the pathetic quality of most exhibition titles. There is a desire to respond in a pragmatic, loose way to 'The Sublime Void'. We are in a period where a great many shows are titled to coincide with a feeling that summons up the 'Uncanny', the 'Post Human'. But this is not an exhibition that deals with representations of the body or psychotic conditions. It is something that attempts to deal with places and events - but it's not too hard. There is some loose attempt to integrate, but not done with any earnestness. There is an admirable attempt to acknowledge the necessity to blur things and not try too hard, unless of course, you really are trying. There are points where the effect of one work runs into another - literally in the case of John Russell's 'near-piss' in which what, at first appears to be urine stains turns out to be varnish runs on the floor. The result of too many evenings out drinking 'near beer', the Soho clip-joint favourite.

Milly Thompson's Disney-esque back-drops are painted onto canvases that fit flush with the wall. They are successful in their dry-painty way. Snow White. That part of the show is interrupted by the sounds coming from a dead-man's record collection. I bought such a collection once. Each album sleeve carefully annotated, here there is a booklet listing the discs and their catalogue numbers. There are the remains of an Indian takeaway and an effective retouched photograph of an engagement supper by Andrew Williamson: in which the really real debris of a private evening that was only spoiled (or heightened) by the presence of the artist, there to take this photograph. The image began black and white and was tinted by hand. The resulting image was re-photographed and enlarged as a white-framed cibachrome. Sonia Boyce has produced a kind of wall paper. It is pasted all over the main space. It could be a close-up of Maoist reverse hand clapping. Where you clap one palm against the top of the other hand rather than palm to palm. It could also be keeping warm or just to indicate embarrassment. There is a small version of the Cabinet Gallery in Brixton that has been roughly copied, reduced by 20% then dropped into the space. It is good to see a whole gallery taking part in a group show.

In one sense we are dealing with an attempt to refer to domestic or homely situations. The Cabinet Gallery is, after all, in an old flat. The comfort and ease of staying in, especially on Sonia Boyce's bed with its eiderdown of black hair. There are rough edges but there is no attempt to angst things into significance. There is lightness of touch here. The effectiveness of any exhibition is determined by context. Yet some shows remain more reactive than others. 'Wish You Were Here' is to a certain extent a complex, misleading and deliberately dead-ended critique of all the shows which present earnest site-specific art. It believes in the notion of reacting to a space but it also seems to reveal a collective distrust of the idea. The works are

not always refined. The message is not always clear. The gap between works is variable and references tumble into each other,

Bob and Roberta Smith have learnt Italian and then produced large clearly marked panels which apparently read as Italian insults. They were also responsible for the dead man's record collection. From *Zoom* by Fat Larry's Band to *Rising Sun* by Medicine Head. They like scatter cushions - which is not unreasonable. Simon Bedwell's photo-panels include cut out sections. So while the content is somewhat profound in the style of eyes-wide-open recent photography, the images have been ruined by the injection of on-the-pier potential participation. This is not really an ironic exhibition. It is just full, so one work can often contradict another.

One of the most, successful pieces in terms of what it records is by Lucy Gunning. The work is viewed on a monitor set into a wall and shows two women dressed in white coats. The coats could be medical or they could be industrial. These friends of the artist came to the space prior to the installation and played a game of football. It is not clear whether it was a regulated game. I couldn't tell if there was a goal or not. They stomp about and tackle each other occasionally. Pillars and other obstacles hold up the play. There is a kind of ease here. It is a familiar activity and there is no sense of peculiarity: in any place it is possible to play around. Maybe there is a metaphor here that wouldn't stand up to much scrutiny, but in the context of this exhibition the work succeeds, bouncing off the rest of the actions and activities that have been interrupted and dropped into the space. Ann Lislegaard is from Denmark. There was no time for her to see the building before the show. Someone sent her a description and she went to a hypnotist who asked her to talk about her (non) experience of the place. The tape sounds convincing and in a way sums up the attitude that underscores the show. This project follows on from Bank's previous exhibitions in New Cross and Kings Cross. It determines the parameters of slacker potential and promises to grow. The whole thing will be dropped into another building in Newcastle soon. That's good. The Cabinet Gallery dropped into a show dropped into another show. 'Wish You Knew Where Here Was'.

**Liam Gillick** is an artist