

ALEX FROST

THE CONNOISSEURS

The Connoisseur might be defined as a laconic art historian, and the art historian as a loquacious connoisseur
Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, 1955

The Connoisseurs is an exhibition defined by the seemingly disparate series', collections and groupings within it. All of these works reference cultural sophistication or a refined taste through their materials, execution or selection. They all borrow an aspect of the classical art form: portrait or still-life image, the outdoor or the domestic scale object.

The Connoisseurs presents an awkward marriage of numerous distinct references: digital technology, food science, community craft workshops, speculative fiction and macro-economics. The title alludes to the somewhere between professional and amateur status of a connoisseur and by extension, an artist and an art lover.

About the Artist

Born in London in 1973, Alex Frost studied fine art at Staffordshire University (BA 1995) and Glasgow School of Art (MFA 1998). His recent projects include: *Venice Biennale 09* (Artsway's New Forest Pavilion); *Adults* (Sandra Burgel, Berlin); Milton Keynes Gallery; *BBQ* (Artsway, Hampshire); *Compassion Fatigue* (Sorcha Dallas, Glasgow), and *Format Wars* (Tramway, Glasgow). After Alex opens *The Connoisseurs* at DCA, he will be embarking on a three month residency at *A.I.R.* Antwerp, Belgium.

Emerging from Scotland's artist led scene in the late 1990s with projects with The Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, Glasgow's Transmission, Radio Tuesday, British Mythic and Switchspace and Generator Projects, Dundee, Alex has developed into a prominent, respected artist exhibiting internationally.

All works courtesy of the artist and Sorcha Dallas, Glasgow unless stated within the exhibition.

Gallery One

WiFi swimming pool mural (unfinished) 2010

www.toppstiles.co.uk, www.seapets.co.uk, www.travisperkins.co.uk, www.argos.co.uk, www.next.co.uk, www.screwfix.co.uk, www.dorsetgifts.com, www.ebay.co.uk, www.fancystitch.co.uk

The WiFi logo that this mural depicts implies a free-roaming selector unbound by cable connections. It is inspired by the 'outsider' environments *The Watts' Towers*, (Los Angeles, California), *Le Palais de Facteur Cheval* (near Valence, France) and *Nek Chand's rock garden* (Chandigarh, India). Wagnerian in scale, these environments were all constructed by an individual within a defined locality. In the large part they have been constructed by a lone man with his wheel barrow, limited to walking distances for the scavenging of materials. *WiFi swimming pool mural (unfinished)* re-imagines these outsider environments, having been made using materials that have been sourced and bought solely from internet retailers. This work mirrors the anti-social aspects of the outsider artists' work but inverts the local bias. A rampant consumerist aesthetic replaces the scavengers aesthetic, the 'virtual shopping basket' replacing the wheel barrow and balanced by the public gallery serving as a replacement to an area of private land.

This large mural features the official logo of the WiFi Alliance, a wireless local area network. The mural is made from a collage of ceramic tiles and aquatic imagery: resin and plastic copies of coral, sea anemones, starfish, alligators and driftwood intended for ornamental use in aquariums in addition to more familiar domestic elements: bathroom fittings and ornaments. The artist regards the work as unfinished in the sense that it may expand in the future.

For the duration of this exhibition, visitors can access free internet through a WiFi connection in the gallery and relax on one of Alex's cushions customised with the virtual shopping trolley logo. Please ask a Gallery Assistant for a password.

Gallery Two

The title piece for this exhibition, a series of giant noses, suggests a flooded dystopian landscape. These submerged figures lie supine, only their noses protrude through the surface of the gallery floor. Initially made as floating sculptures these works are now rendered static standing like totems of refinement, pomp, scent and taste.

Also named *The Connoisseurs*, a series of drawn portraits of a group of adults all strike the same impassive pose. They are a cross-generational, international grouping of individuals (a 'blank' version of a *GAP* or *Benetton* advertising campaign). These drawings are compressed, dithered, perforated and then painted into being. The paper is perforated from behind and then paint is brushed through the holes. This painterly seepage creates the image on what is effectively the back of the paper. The portraits are a reciprocal system of exchange between viewer and artist and between artist and subject. They are made using a unique technique that Alex refers to as 'blind drawing'. This term is part description of the process and allusion to the closed eyes of the subjects and is also a reference to the Braille-like effect of the resulting surface.

A series of still life blind drawings parody the art of Giorgio Morandi. In the film *La Dolce Vita*, Morandi's work was used to signify bourgeois Italian life in the 1960s. These new drawings show a selection of shop bought products that are linked by a common motif - the love heart. Other works within the cluster utilise temporary tattoos evoking the similarity of application between these drawings and a tattooist's technique.

Earlier pixelated drawings from 2004-2005 are also displayed which are built up on grids and comprised of repeated symbols, hovering between representative and abstracted imagery. The symbols used are adapted by the artist from *freeware* knitting pattern software. As is often the case with Alex's work, a digital sensibility is paired with an analogue process.

The gallery also includes *Young Adults (replacers & substitutes) 2008-2010*, a collection of home baked polymer clay sculptures depicting alternatives to meat, sugar and dairy foodstuffs. The sculptures are not direct copies but doughy distortions, playfully misshapen, squeezed out of their stack-able uniformity. These substitutes and replacers make reference through text and/or image to the niche-foodstuffs that they ape whether it be dairy, sweetener or meat. They are stand-ins; facsimiles or crypto-foods pointing to elements of a speculative future that may now exist, for instance in the envisaged 2022 of the science fiction film *Soylent Green* (1973), screening at DCA on 4 May.

Ancillary Galleries and Gallery Garden

In one of the two end galleries, Alex has placed a ceramic sculpture from his *Continuous Profile* series modelled on his own facial profile and in the other he has devised an aperture through which the viewer can see *BBQ (Vege-Burger) 2007*. Occupying a public site yet only visible from within the gallery, continuing an interest by the artist to situate work in interstitial spaces that are part public, part private.

The conscious groupings of all of these artworks are what define the heart of this exhibition. An air of absurdity surrounds all of these objects whether they are murals that celebrate digital communication networks, reproductions of simulated meat and dairy products, drawings that don't readily reveal if they are being viewed from the front or back or beached sculptures of giant noses.

Publication & Edition

To complement the exhibition, Alex has developed a new publication designed by Robert Dallas Gray and a new limited edition print made at the DCA Print Studio. Utilising both the publish-on-demand computer process and the hand made printing process has a certain logic for an artist interested in the intersection of traditional crafts and new technologies.

To view the publication visit: www.dca.org.uk

For details of Alex's print visit the DCA shop or contact Sandra De Rycker on telephone 01382 909 255, email Sandra.derycker@dca.org.uk

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THE CONNOISSEURS

A series of Talks, Tours, Education Events and Screenings to complement Alex's exhibition:
Please reserve a place through the DCA box office on 01382 909 900

Alex Frost and Karla Black

Thursday 18 March, 7pm
DCA Galleries

Join Alex and fellow Glasgow-based artist Karla Black for a gallery discussion. Karla recently exhibited to great acclaim at Inverleith House, Edinburgh and Modern Art, Oxford. Both artists exhibited together in Dundee in 2003 in the Cooper Gallery of Duncan of Jordanstone, revealing shared affinities and also subtle distinctions in their approaches. Limited capacity. Booking is advised.

Gallery Tours

Saturday 27 March, 12pm
Thursday 15 April, 5.30pm
Saturday 8 May, 12pm
DCA Galleries

Join a DCA Gallery Assistant for an insightful tour of Alex Frost's exhibition. Our Gallery Assistants are knowledgeable arts graduates and can offer a keen insight into how the artist developed the exhibition for DCA. Questions are encouraged.

Alex Frost Public Workshops
Why do we love art? Because...

Wednesday 14 April
Thursday 15 April
Friday 16 April
DCA Activity Space

10–11.30am each day: up to 8 years old, must be accompanied by an adult
1–3pm each day: 8–12 year olds

In these sessions we will be making experimental drawings and sculptures inspired by Alex Frost's ideas of combining old and new, hi-tech and handmade, mass produced and individual. Come along to all or just one of the workshops. Each will feature a different making activity. Booking is advisable as places are limited. Children under 8 must be accompanied by an adult.

Price: £3 per person. Juice provided. Email community.education@dca.org.uk for more information.

Information and Activity Spaces

Please visit our Information and Activity Spaces. Alex Frost has selected a wide variety of books and visitors can also access a series of online articles. Our Activity Space is an ideal place for younger audiences to put into practice some of the innovative techniques the artist has explored in the Galleries

Keep up to date with the latest news and information from DCA at www.dca.org.uk
Or through www.twitter.com/DCADundee or find us on Facebook.

Film Programme

We enjoy asking the artists exhibiting in the gallery what films they would like to have screened in our cinema to coincide with their exhibition. The selections are sometimes surprising but consistently illuminating of their practice. For *The Connoisseurs*, Alex Frost proposed the following films.

Safe

Tuesday 6 April 6pm

Dir: Todd Haynes

USA / 1995 / 1hr 59mins / 15

Safe centres around Carol White (Julianne Moore) who develops 'multiple chemical sensitivity' to her environment – a very comfortable middle class California. When Carol's closeted suburban existence eventually leads to a total breakdown, her only salvation seems to be at a 'New Age' retreat for the socially dysfunctional. Haynes's cold and detached tone is ambiguous without any clear resolution of Carol's fate.

At first the story feels like a departure for the director of *Poison and Superstar – The Karen Carpenter Story* but the disintegration of the central character is just a more detached form of provocation to supposed normal society. As the tagline reads ... *'In the 21st century nobody will be... Safe'*.

Les glaneurs et la glaneuse (The Gleaners & I)

Tuesday 20 April 6.15pm

Dir: Agnes Varda

France / 2000 / 1hr 22mins / U

Agnes Varda, the grande dame of the nouvelle vague is the glaneuse of the title. Varda's empathic eye relates her gleanings with a camera to that of the people who collect things which others have discarded. Varda travels across France talking with a variety of gleaners, including an artist who creates his pieces from found objects and a strange man in rubber boots who has lived exclusively on trash for the past 10 years (and has never been ill!).

Moments of humour counter-balance some of the darker truths presented here and Varda herself appears throughout, offering her own unique perspective on world economics, the ageing process and of course filmmaking. A celebration of simple lifestyles over modern consumerism, *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* is itself an antidote to mainstream commercial cinema.

Soylent Green

Tuesday 4 May 6.30pm

Dir: Richard Fleischer

USA / 1973 / 1hr 37mins / PG

A classic sci-fi parable starring Charlton Heston (see also *Omega Man* and the first two *Planet of the Apes* movies). In *Soylent Green*, Heston plays Thorn, a detective investigating a murder but uncovering a whole new can of worms. Thorn shares his dingy apartment with his research assistant Sol (the dignified Edward G. Robinson in his last role). Old Sol is one of the few who can remember the world before it went desperately bad and his presence is a constant reminder of how far man has fallen.

Set in 2022, this future sees chronic overpopulation, food shortages and processed food and euthanasia clinics. Perhaps inevitably, *Soylent Green* is being slated for a remake... proof that cinema as well as pop will eat itself.

Appreciation

The artist would like to thank the staff of DCA, The Scottish Arts Council, Andy Fairgrieve at Glenfiddich, Sorcha Dallas, Robert Dallas Gray, Allison Gibbs, Katy West, Andy Power, Ruth Leask, Nick Evans, Karla Black, Charles Engbretson, Emma Dean and Sophie Macpherson.