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Gabriel Hartley and Appau Junior Boakye-Yiadom
JOSH LILLEY GALLERY, LONDON, UK



Gabriel Hartley *Split Piece*, 2011, Paper, resin and fibreglass

Titled 'Peacock Trousers', this two-person show of work by Gabriel Hartley and Appau Junior Boakye-Yiadom collided distinctive practices, both of which utilize the perennial tropes of parody and slapstick. Hartley's paintings and sculptures focus on the multiplicity of meaning found in the simple gesture or the quickly applied line. His curt titles demonstrate an attentiveness to shape that, through a shedding of figurative detail, result in deft disquisitions on a particular object or thing. Boakye-Yiadom's often absurdist filmed performances, on the other hand, rely on the suspense of the temporal jump from the not-yet to the just-happened. Rather than the parodic levity of Hartley's bulky sculptures, Boakye-Yiadom's sleek staging references the well-thumbed conventions of early cinema. Both artists, who are recent graduates of the Royal Academy Schools, use flashes of colour as an extra comedic gambit.

The strength of a good joke relies on the tension of its set-up and the first room at Josh Lilley Gallery was a nicely judged introduction to the much larger space beneath. In the middle of the gallery stood what looked like a gigantic ice-lolly split down the middle, *Split Piece* (all works 2011) by Hartley. An incongruous pair of lumpily cylindrical monoliths, made from fibreglass-covered sheets of multi-coloured paper, clung to each other in embarrassment at their gaudy outfits. Their dusty sheen and voluminous scale furthered the conceit that these were objects of antiquity, somehow resurrected from some long-forgotten museum collection.

Downstairs, a variety of crumpled appendages drooped similarly self-consciously. This scattering of vaguely figurative objects clung to the safety of the walls, two of which were papered in a tiling of granite-grey and luminous blue paper bearing expressionistic daubs and swirls depicting a murmuring crowd of people observing this dishevelled bunch. Only one of Hartley's sculptures, *Trousers* – a truncated length of fibreglass on coloured paper, folded at the apex and looking as if a stilt-walker had jumped cartoon-like out his multi-coloured pantaloons – seemed confident of its being there.

Implied – and actual – locomotion continued in the work of Boakye-Yiadom. Employing short, sharp, slapstick manoeuvres to disrupt seemingly mundane situations and scenarios, his photographic series 'Peacock' shows a lamp closely positioned over first an empty table – the ghostly sphere of its light curiously suspended against the black backdrop – then, in subsequent shots, emitting a sequence of moody shades over a lightbulb as if mocking it of its own de-plugged impotence. The most memorable work, the looped film *Golden Underground*, played a recording of Scott Joplin's whimsical 'Maple Leaf Rag' (1899) – a musical shorthand for vaudeville if ever there was one – over a static black screen, punctuated by sudden colourful bursts of the artist running a paintbrush loaded with gold paint over the keys of a piano with every improvised run of notes. *Bx2*, a bucket laden with black paint suspended by a rope over another directly beneath it on the floor, was like a Buster Keaton set-up. As it turned out, the viewer was already too late for the gag: the hanging bucket's paint-covered sides and splattering of paint on the gallery floor attesting to the sign-posted slip up.

Both artists' works inhabited the nervous space where only a sudden breeze, or slip of a rope would result in the anticipated raspberry. Hartley's weightless monoliths and Boakye-Yiadom's quickly thought through then carefully staged scenarios owe at least a nod and a wink to conventions made common by Franz West's scruffiness and Rachel Harrison's irreverence. When much recent sculptural practice chooses the anorexic gesture over old-fashioned heft, and when jokes are more often provided by smirky titles than by the works themselves, this exhibition was a welcome throwback – the helpless *Schadenfreude* of watching someone walk towards a banana skin.

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