

DIRK BELL
Made in Germany

10 – 28 October 2010
9 Balfour Mews London W1

This autumn Sadie Coles HQ is delighted to present *Made in Germany*, the gallery's first show with German artist Dirk Bell. This is the second instalment of a touring project whose centrepiece is a 1987 Mercedes 230 that Bell has driven from Berlin to the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead – where it will return, via Glasgow, later this year. The show at 9 Balfour Mews will be marked by a live act by the Haters, a noise performance duo from the USA.

Bell's car is the literal and symbolic embodiment of his journey through the UK. An emblem of roaming escapism in the vein of Caspar David Friedrich, the car also encapsulates the spirit of the road movie or the road trip as evinced by Jack Kerouac's seminal work of the Beat Generation, *On the Road* (1957).

Installed in the vehicle is a specially devised video game, *NyouWone*, based on the cult animated film *Balance* (Wolfgang and Christoph Lauenstein, 1989) in which five individuals totter about on a precarious plateau. The game forms an allegory of the dynamic between love and freedom. Its logo, an ambigram variant of the VW symbol, expresses the ideal of 'New Men' – a romantically idealised state of manhood suggestive of Nietzsche's 'Superman', and a convergence of man and woman.



The car has been branded on the outside with the hybrid word 'Panikearth', its back window bearing the IKEA logo – a bathetic reminder that this it is a utilitarian, as well as aesthetic, object. A light box coated with coloured translucent foil repeats the word in the style of an advertisement. The coinage incorporates several overlapping words: IKEA stands for everyday domesticity – Bell refers to it as the "company of comfort" – while the ancient Greek god Pan personifies terror and sexual abandon. Nike is the Olympian goddess of victory, while "earth" invokes a contrasting sense of the chthonic or subterranean. "Ear", as the organ of the most fundamental of the senses, picks up on the audio elements of the car and the Haters' performance. A concomitant influence is the countercultural Panic Movement founded by filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky. Bell describes this mass of cultural reference points and antithetical psychological states (with "art" at the centre) as summing up the last year of his life. His roaming referentiality mirrors the nomadic nature of the *Made in Germany* project itself.

Now we're talking (2010) takes the form of an inflatable globe into which the genitalia from plastic love dolls have been implanted to form two declivities joined in the middle. The work was made in response to the 2010 climate change conference in Copenhagen, at which the USA and China failed to reach an agreement: the plastic orifices are grafted over the two superpowers. The unloved and artificial body parts symbolise the sham communication of the Copenhagen 'talks', their ineffectiveness comically paralleled by the failure of the 'love doll' to live up to its name as an object of love. *Now we're talking pt 2*, a print of flowers bought from a flea market with two embracing figures painted by Bell into it, furnishes a poetic counterpoint.

FREELOVE (2010) is a steel framework on a glass pedestal that addresses the relationship between love and freedom through use of materials that simultaneously evoke sturdiness and fragility. A similar dualism is at work in *Gate* (2010), a grid of monograms formed from the constituent letters of the word 'Love'. Resembling prototypal constructivist models, the works relate to the writings of the psychologist Eric Fromm, whose works *The Art of Loving* and *The Fear of Freedom* analyse these two forces as imaginative and societal phenomena.

Dirk Bell (b. 1969) has exhibited internationally; solo shows include Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden (2009) and Kunsthalle Bremerhaven (2006). In 2010, his *Made in Germany* project travels between BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, Sadie Coles HQ, London, and The Modern Institute, Glasgow.

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 Opening hours Tuesday – Saturday 10 – 6pm