

Waddesdon Press Release

For Summer 2009, Waddesdon Manor is delighted to be hosting an exhibition of key works by celebrated British artist Angus Fairhurst (1966-2008). This condensed retrospective encompasses the major elements of Fairhurst's eclectic practice – cast bronzes, layered magazine collages and billboards, and the surrealist and tragicomic drawings which sat at the heart of his idiosyncratic art making.

In the bronze maquettes of gorillas, Fairhurst developed upon motifs originating in his early drawings. One bronze gorilla gazes up to heaven; another has been flattened into a rug; another dolefully contemplates its own detached arm. At once anthropomorphic and darkly inscrutable, the figure of the gorilla fascinated Fairhurst with its potential for both cartoonish humour and melancholy.

Several of these choppy surfaced bronzes exist in large-scale versions. Close to the exhibition, on permanent display in Waddesdon's grounds, is a majestic bronze gorilla hoisting an enormous fish under one arm, *A Couple of Differences Between Thinking and Feeling*; the maquette version is on display in the main exhibition. Fairhurst explained that he "wanted to make a classical sculpture that has the lightness of a cartoon. The relationship between the gorilla and fish is ambiguous, one represents thinking and the other represents feeling. One begins where the other ends". This notion of something at once ponderous and comically light also emerges from *Undone*, a giant bronze banana which sends up the idea public sculpture.

One of the centrepieces of the show, *Billboard, Everything but the Outline Blacked-in*, consists of the infamous Opium advert of Sophie Dahl, with all of its detail obliterated so as to isolate her outline and erotic pose. Fairhurst's collages – elaborate layerings of hollowed-out magazine pages, bus-stop posters and billboards – instance a similar process of reduction. Their allusive outlines and shapes also suggest the infinite potentiality inherent in acts of negation or stripping away, whether literal or psychological. Fairhurst progressed to making sculptural objects from disembowelled magazines – for instance *A Magazine with the Body and Text Removed* (Vogue Sept), which is hung from the wall like a paper lantern.

Fairhurst's drawings mirror and anticipate the numerous other facets of his art. We see gorillas in various absurd scenarios – emerging from a full bath smoking a cigarette, or feeding chips to a fish. Disembodied pairs of legs are suspended midair, apparently in endless flux, and closely resemble the gyrating forms of Fairhurst's early animations. A free-floating human colon reflects his interest in cyclical process. As ever, there are uneasy and tantalising dualisms throughout the work – thinking and feeling, wit and poignancy, and the persistence and porosity of memory.

Angus Fairhurst was born in Kent, England. His work featured in numerous landmark shows including *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*, Tate Britain, London, 2004; *Brilliant! New Art from London*, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, 1995; as well as the seminal *Freeze*, PLA Building, London, 1988. In 2009 a monograph, *Angus Fairhurst*, was published by Sadie Coles HQ and Philip Wilson Publishers. Fairhurst's work was the subject of a major retrospective exhibition at the Arnolfini, Bristol, from January – March 2009. The show is set to tour internationally next year.