

Giorgio Sadotti: *One Two*, 1994 (installation view)

## GAVIN BROWN & GIORGIO SADOTTI
## City Racing

The show begins downstairs with fifty truths. They describe the "true artist", and the term gets in the way, until you realise that Sadotti is dealing with those artists whose convictions prevent them from profiting in the art market — the true artists of today. To begin with, we see the outlines of an old myth: a primitive figure emerges who is "loud and enjoys smelling", "shatters tranquillity" and has "wild but protected sex" (the neighbours being rather tame). A super-person is in the offing, with unaccountable insights, who "does not acknowledge truth or fiction", and "knows how to avoid the absolutism of both presence and absence". Tough as nails, this character "does not suffer", and yet has a specialised sensibility, therefore "believes in colour" and "deals with poignant reminders". But the bubble is blown up till it bursts, and out it comes that "the true artist is necessarily so unreasonably pretentious as to cause disgust and pity". A flaky, introspective persona stumbles into view, someone "theoretically based and practically flawed" who "will speak even when action is possible", "defiantly gestural but inevitably ineffective", "morally bankrupt and emotionally shallow". And then, just in case a single pompous strand remains, the figure is debunked. We learn that the true artist is pregnant, is a Capricorn, looks at the floor often and likes to eat ethnic. The structure is undermined, but will not fall down. Some of the allusions stick together, and won't let go of the mind, leaving behind an awkward, suffering person, stretched by talents and weaknesses, representing, warts and all, a notable first: a conceptual self-portrait of the artist.

In the room next-door, Sadotti has installed a complete P.A. (Public Address) System: a gig without players. First impressions reveal black shapes, sleekly gleaming, scintillating metal and coiled wires. Here is a full drum-set, kettle-drum, timpani and cymbals, two electric guitars and their amplifiers; as well as a real-life mixing desk for manipulating sound in the system. There are personal speakers, on which the players can hear themselves, and speakers turned outwards at an absent audience. The amplifiers buzz. Otherwise: silence. The instant effect is the noise of a concert which is not happening, emptiness, almost funereal stillness, in a setting where every detail cries out for movement and life. A gap opens fearfully between life as potential and life as happening which would be enough to satisfy most artists, but that is not what Sadotti is about. For you are told you may now perform. You can sing into the mike and hear your voice transformed; you can pluck the guitars and, best of all, have a go with the drumsticks. The surfaces are unexpectedly lively and helpful. They toss the sticks around with rhythms that seem built into the set. So you are projected alive into your own fantasy. But it doesn't end there. For you have been recorded, and the recording will be edited and issued. Reality has finally caught up with your dreams, another gap between art and life has been closed.

Upstairs the pull on imagination is sustained. Gavin Brown has made a double gallery space by knocking together two rooms, usually separated by plastic board into an outer room and an inner office with shelves which still hold office accessories, to which he has added a heap of muck and scrap: a battered stereo, an Australian wine crate, a piece of carpet, beer cans, a tatty sleeping bag, a pot, a roll of paper, a bag of gypsum, an invitation from the Falkland Island Association, an advert for an autobus, a shopping list, and most incongruous of all, a home-made bedstead, topping, like a corpse in its coffin, a tiny mattress. In other words: junk. Total, irreducible, undifferentiated junk, and the fact that it functions collectively as junk is fundamental, for it cannot be 'read' by proceeding from piece to piece in search of meaning. It is altogether junk, pure junk. That is its role.

Round the walls are colour photos of somebody's home; views of corridors and corners and rooms and furnishings which spell out security and comfort. One additional photo is central: a Maplethorpe print of a nude boy perched on top of a sofa, foreskin dangling against the velvet brocade, the very image of vulnerable innocence, over protected and full of false assumptions about life and the future. It perfectly matches the domestic interiors in the pictures alongside in its elegance — but the suggestion is that real life will transport him into a world of junk. The metaphoric impact of false security is pointed up with actual furnishings from the artist's mother's home, including original artwork by Paolozzi, looking neat, controlled and credible. The centrepiece in the outer room is a tower made by sticking comfy chairs to a mattress, stretching away, upwards and back, as if into a dream. This is a world where all expectations are disappointed, all hopes mistaken, and all beginnings run out in hardship. The artist's world? Perhaps. But not essentially, for in it could equally well portray the life of ordinary people, the wreckage of a chilly post-Thatcherite era.

Two notions have been current since Duchamp: first, that art is whatever the artist intends, and second, that the result is only art when found in a place where art is expected. Thus a urinal is not a work of art in a lavatory. This is the point at which City Racing comes into its own, perching precariously as a recognisable venue. The "City Racing" legend remains outside, still telling you that the building is a betting shop (which it is not any longer). Inside there are only the faintest clues to mark this out as a gallery, but they are there: particularly in the visitor's book with its names of visiting notables from the art establishment, and the necessary signs which tell you what is on offer, and in so doing describe art. But the corridors are dark, the floor-boards worn, the stairs creaky, and the walls marked, and the ambience, particularly upstairs, is that of office and working place. It comes closest as a location for art by being near the Tate Gallery, on the opposite side of the river of course, among the 'readymade' housing estates. So the artwork which is not art, except for its (most discrete) intention and its place, reaches out as far as maybe into life, without prevarication, stuffiness or evasions.

CLIFFORD MYERSON