

Jonathan Monk: *I ♥ 1984*

14 November – 17 January 2015
27 Bell Street, London

For his sixth solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery, Jonathan Monk revisits narratives drawn from his own biography and transforms historical works by artists that have also proved to be personal, formative influences. A new wall-hung assemblage of stitched-together souvenir tea towels, entitled *My Life Within the Lives of Others II* (2014), marks every year and indeed every day since his birth so far, with 46 anachronistic cloth calendars showing different species of Australian birds, Swiss chalet exteriors and other kitsch scenes. Fragments of his parents' 1970s curtain material are rendered in photographic works that return them to framed, window-like settings, despite the fabrics clearly being discarded as drop cloths for subsequent domestic re-decoration. Among the moving portraits of Monk's family is a slideshow that magnifies one image of them 80 times over, through which the artist is reflected in his child's gaze – as titled, Monk is literally *Searching for My Father in My Sister's Eyes* (2002) – while a series of childhood or holiday snaps, *Same Time In A Different Place*, are each juxtaposed with a vintage invitation card, for shows by the likes of Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt or On Kawara, sourced from the same date.

In stark contrast to such close-to-home subject matter, Monk has assembled a monumental installation of seven minimalist metal structures, each of these specially-built and coloured-coded pallets containing a shipment of rocks gathered from seven different contested territories in the Middle East: Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Syria (although no rocks could be gathered from this last location). These enclosed tranches of landscape, culturally displaced and geopolitically charged, relate to Land Art exponent Robert Smithson's *Non-Site* series, for which he re-displayed earth excavated from specific areas in similar, pallet-shaped sculptural containers within a gallery. Other homages to recent heroes of art history include *Blow Up*, Monk's tongue-in-cheek destruction of the photographic work of German couple Bernd and Hilla Becher. Monk mimics their grids of monochromatic studies of industrial architecture, except the cooling towers and gas cylinders are toppling over and imploding in the process of being demolished.

While these two dominant poles of Monk's practice – his familial inheritance and his art historical inheritance – can seem worlds apart, many pieces weave together both strands. The life-sized, white ceramic *Pig* (2012) is both a scaled-up version of a piggy bank from his childhood and an imagining of an unrealised sculpture by Jeff Koons, as noted by the American artist as an alternative for his famous metallic bunny. Similarly, Monk's imposing self-portrait busts inspired by idealised Greco-Roman statuary, has each had its nose smited by a famous Italian artist of the Arte Povera generation, such as Jannis Kounellis, Gilberto Zorio or Emilio Prini, as well as by Monk himself.

Throughout the exhibition, Monk's authentic, artistic authorship variously raises or lowers its head above the parapets, either reaffirming his life's work or else channelling the work of others. The sight of numerous melancholic objects – a discarded piano cover, carved from wood, or a neon lightbox blinking between life and death – suggests a reflective strand in Monk's work, both lamenting time past and lauding bygone art historical heydays, especially so in the nostalgic title that references key literary and musical touchstones, *I ♥ 1984*.

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About the artist

British artist Jonathan Monk replays, revises and re-examines seminal works of Conceptual and Minimal art by variously witty, ingenious and irreverent means. Speaking in 2009, he said, "Appropriation is something I have used or worked with in my art since starting art school in 1987. At this time (and still now) I realised that being original was almost impossible, so I tried using what was already available as source material for my own work." Through wall paintings, monochromes, ephemeral sculpture and photography he reflects on the tendency of contemporary art to devour references, simultaneously paying homage to figures such as Sol LeWitt, Ed Ruscha, Bruce Nauman and Lawrence Weiner, while demystifying the creative process. Monk is constantly asking 'what next?' His stainless steel series entitled *Deflated Sculpture* (2009) refigures Jeff Koon's iconic balloon rabbit in various stages of collapse; letting the air out isn't an act of iconoclasm so much as giving the original idea new life. But his conceptual configurations are also grounded in the personal: 'what next?' takes on a poignancy in the slide projection *In Search of Gregory Peck* (1997), where Monk brought together a collection of photographs taken by his late father in the 1950s, preceding him as a tourist in the US.

Jonathan Monk was born in Leicester in 1969 and lives and works in Berlin and Rome. He has a BFA from Leicester Polytechnic (1988) and an MFA from Glasgow School of Art (1991). Solo exhibitions include Centro De Arte Contemporáneo (CAC) Málaga (2013), Kunstraum Dornbirn, Austria (2013), Palais de Tokyo and Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (2008), Kunstverein Hannover (2006), Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2005) and Museum Kunst Palast, Dusseldorf (2003). His work has been in many group exhibitions, including Whitney Biennial (2006), the 50th and 53rd Venice Biennales (2003, 2009), Berlin Biennale (2001) and Taipei Biennial (2000). He was awarded the Prix du Quartier Des Bains, Geneva in 2012.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Richard Long, as well as those of significant British sculptors from Anish Kapoor and Tony Cragg to a younger generation, led by Ryan Gander and Haroon Mirza. In addition to its two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth gallery to open under the High Line in New York in early 2015, the *Lisson Presents* programme also extends a legacy of curatorial innovation beyond the galleries, working with institutions and artists to present new initiatives around the world.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 11am-5pm

Location: 27 Bell Street, London, NW1 5DA

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Website: <http://www.lissongallery.com>

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