

Sebastian Lloyd Rees

... *alarming* ... *invasive* ... *a violation* ... *lawless* ... *disrespectful*

13 November 2015 – 15 January 2016

"Let the past be considered a sort of great container, a bin in which are located, in order of occurrence, all the events which have ever happened. It is a container that grows moment-by-moment longer in a forward direction, and moment-by-moment fuller, as layer upon layer of events enter its fluid, accommodating maw. The forward lengthening of the past is irrepressible..."

Arthur C. Danto¹

Literally speaking, there is much to admire in the London-based, Norwegian artist, Sebastian Lloyd Rees's 'hoarding sculptures': they can be large. But the scale of their vision is weightless, pivoting in delicate balance with their conceptual and practical endeavours, which unexpectedly counter-weights their physical presence and powerful, visceral, visuality (they also hover, like magic, a delicate 11-13cm above the floor). Like barred gateways, similar in conception to Danto's 'thresholds', as troubled, historical passage-points, they act as meeting places of past and future meaning: their *determination* reaching backwards and forwards simultaneously.

The primary psychological intent of Lloyd Rees's chosen material of retrieved plywood hoardings, from the old French *hourd* - meaning palisade or a temporary wooden (shed-like) construction, originally placed on the exterior of the ramparts of a castle during a siege - is clearly about the head-on confrontation of exclusion. In relation to voices of questionable 'authority', Sebastian Lloyd Rees is not to be trifled with, he is a natural campaigner and pamphleteer²; the fragments of *Americana* talk-show legalise, which form the title of his first solo exhibition for *mother's tankstation*, might suggest such... *alarming*... *invasive*... *a violation*... *lawless*... *disrespectful*...

In a post-industrial world, the presence of hoarded sites shifts the notion, or point, of *protection* to the quintessentially urban or 'liminal'³ urban, being the common bi-product of development and irrepressible change. Perhaps it might be described as the sheltering to and from society at large (or rather, from one form of society to another), shouldering an often-uncomfortable passage from dereliction to gentrification: The transformation from local industry to boutique coffee houses, from artists' studios to luxury, 'investment' condos. Between *this* and *that*, is a necessary pause of desired memory-lapse, coldly indicated by the prolonged presence of parcelled wastelands and fading, empty buildings. The unequivocal message of such urban lockdowns carries a sting: "*keep out*". This has ceased to be for you. In its stead... the future of this past world, is cancelled, certain in someone else's eyes, and not to be determined by you. Your path is, closed. Go look somewhere else.⁴

Over the past few years and in response to the forward lengthening of his chosen, ancient city's past, Lloyd Rees has extensively driven the evolving streets of Greater London, identifying places of socio-political contention as demarcated by aged hoarding and negotiating planned 'lifts' of their perfectly pollution-decayed, colour-coded, repainted and graffiti-obscured, marine-ply boarding. Where possible, he organises seizure by legal and negotiated means, replacing *like* with new, blank, plywood surrogate *like*. When all else fails... lifts are conducted at night, but in plain sight with *hi-vis* gear, stop signs and bollards. All property left, pretty much, as it was found. The captured originals are removed to his Clapham studio⁵, to be cut, remounted and re-assembled as large-format, painterly *collages*, the titles of which indicate their original geographic location and exact date/time of liberation⁶. Like the greater processes they embody, they speak lyrically of past/present, regeneration, of urban existence, destined-to-be-remade into something *old*, irrepressibly lengthened.

Finally, and in completion of a cycle, Lloyd Rees brings the outside in. Constructed like monster modernist abstractions, the painting, painting-out of others, alongside the poetic work of erosion and pollution, perfectly transforms these heavy-handed symbols of exclusion into immersive, masterworks of quasi-spiritual inclusion. On showing two vast works at Frieze, London (October 2015), Lloyd Rees's hoardings halted viewers in their tracks. No longer barring passage, but creating discourse rather than discord; conversations ironically described nature, space, landscape, painting. Lloyd Rees had found a way to 'politic' without politicking, the work *anti-agitates*, yet makes its socio-political point with brevity and clarity, yet forges a link between completely contemporary, urban culture to absolute aesthetics. Accessibility dovetails into the rarefied ideals of Greenberg's high modernist ideal; the colourfied compositions of Newman, Rothko and the late Diebenkorn. In unsaid ways the viewer is simultaneously immersed and swept away, as large, heavy, willingly-dumb things - that in their previous life have only cared for passive obstruction - cave into complex phraseologies, poetics of past becomes present, outside, in, sculptures become painting, wood; canvas, solids; intangibles, certainty irrepressibly evaporates.

"I. Attempt what is not certain. Certainty may or may not come later. It may then be a valuable delusion."

Richard Diebenkorn, extract from: *Notes to myself on beginning a painting*.⁷

¹ Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge University Press, 1965, pg146

² Specifically in relation to his collaborative work with Ali Eisa, as part of *Lloyd Corporation*

³ Liminal (from the Latin; *threshold*)

⁴ By inference: *somewhere you might possibly be able to afford*

⁵ Lamentably, also due for immanent vacation and demolition, alongside the adjacent vehicle repair yards and small family businesses. c.f. *Where have all the artists in central London gone?*

<http://theartnewspaper.com/reports/frieze-london-2015/160216/>

⁶ Subtly, day or night timings indicate the legality (or otherwise) of the hoarding seizures. Here it should also be noted that the Lloyd Rees's new works for ...*alarming...invasive...a violation...lawless...disrespectful...* mark a slight departure from the rigor of his self-imposed regulations; in that they combine scrambled parts of hoardings from different sites, New York (green) and South London (grey), and the spread of dates indicated in their titles covers the period of collective salvage.

⁷ Found amongst the artist's papers following his death in 1993 and first published in a posthumous catalogue in 1997. The notes are considered to relate to his work after his post-1967 return to abstraction and probably date from the 1970s. To conclude with: "10. Be careful only in a perverse way."