

Simon Gush

Sidestep

and other recent work



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MICHAEL STEVENSON

6 August - 26 September 2009

BRODIE/STEVENSON

15 October - 7 November 2009

## Refracting surfaces

Joost Bosland

As light falls through Simon Gush's *Anticipating Ever*, a 28-panel window made for the opening exhibition of Michael Stevenson's new gallery space in Woodstock, it is refracted by the irregular shape of the hand-blown glass. As the day passes and the position of the sun shifts, 28 distorted squares of light crawl across the wall, and then the floor, of the gallery. When one looks out through the window, the buildings on the other side of the street are cut up in small segments, each uniquely and playfully bent.

A little engraving in the bottom-right corner panel is a stylistic reference to the glass industry once prevalent in this part of Cape Town. As a metaphor for gentrification, the piece has a lyricism and simple beauty that are often absent from art with political implications. Sol LeWitt maintained that he did not care for beauty in his work, yet anyone who has stood face-to-face with one of his murals has to doubt the sincerity of this claim. Outwardly, Gush is similarly disdainful of beauty (or 'aesthetics' in the narrow sense of that word). His work is conceptual play, fuelled by a commitment to finding a future for left-wing politics. Yet *Anticipating Ever* and the works in *Sidestep* reveal an acute sense of line, space and surface - of beauty. Underneath his ideas, Gush is a formalist.

If one looks at the conceptual aspect of Gush's work, it is highly controlled. Every reference is researched, footnoted (sometimes literally), and distilled to its essence. Yet, much as LeWitt would leave room for interpretation in his instructions for murals, Gush in large part relinquishes control over production. If beauty does in fact matter, so does chance, because it is chance that often leads to beauty in his works. That the window was to have 28 panels was determined by the maximum size the manufacturer in Cape Town could produce. The gallery sourced a carpenter to make the window frame in consultation with Gush, by email and without visual references. All Gush specified was the image of the engraving, and that the glass had to be handmade.

*The Wolf's Theme*, a sculptural installation with three French horns, came into being in much the same way. Gush was intrigued by the depoliticisation of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*: originally a parable about the can-do spirit of communist Russia, it has become a staple of highbrow children's entertainment in the West. By taking one element and isolating it, Gush draws attention to the work's genesis. In the story the wolf, played by the horn section of the orchestra, illustrates a threat to the order of the day: the world outside Russia when Prokofiev wrote the work, but also communists during the cold

war, and terrorists or anti-revolutionaries today, depending on where one stands and where one lives. Hanging the horns from a noose - the fate that befalls the wolf in the story - suggests the neutralisation of that threat. For Gush, this illustrates how, after the fall of communism, the left appears to have forgotten how to dream, and has become complacent about how liberal democracies fail many segments of society.

But none of the above explains the compelling visual quality of *The Wolf's Theme*. The horns were purchased on eBay and refurbished in Cape Town. During installation, Gush purchased thick, matt black rope from a store near the gallery. When it came to buying the music stands on which he would display a (trilingual) score turned to the page where the wolf gets caught, he asked a gallery assistant to source them cheaply. The score was a booklet slightly smaller than A5, so it was decided to look for a children's music stand. When a store was found, the salesman cautioned: "I'm afraid I only have them in matt black."

Chance occasionally also infiltrates the conceptual aspect of Gush's work. After filming at the Vooruit building in Ghent, a cultural centre founded on utopian socialist ideals in the first half of the 20th century, he noticed an image he recognised in one of its stained glass windows, which became the source material for the mural *Eight Hours*: "There was something about the image in the stained glass that was so familiar. It took me a while to place it, but in the end I remembered it is the same image that appears in the Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions) logo. The coincidence seemed too great, so I tried to discover the source. While most people I consulted thought the image was ubiquitous in Marxist imagery, I only found one other trade union logo that had used it, in the Philippines. I am still trying to find the original."

In another window piece, made for *Perfect Lovers*, a group exhibition at Art Extra (now Brodie/Stevenson), Gush cut out two circular pieces of glass from the storefront window as a tribute to Felix Gonzalez-Torres. (In *Sidestep* Gush pays his respects to this artist again with *Demos (After Felix Gonzalez-Torres)*, a paper stack with two circles cut out.) The intervention is a comment on its context as much as an ode to the late conceptual artist, as continuous awareness of crime has become second nature to the residents of Johannesburg.

Perhaps what draws Gush to Gonzalez-Torres is his covert obsession with aesthetics.

The altered window in Johannesburg was, above all, beautiful in its simplicity. While the glass reflected the parking lot behind, the holes offered an unbroken view of the gallery. Inside, in a vitrine, the two cut-out circles of glass, on a white velvet pillow, continued Gush's play with light and surface. In the exhibition *Sidestep*, the series of transparent plastic stencils recalls the cut-out window. In order to read the stencils, you must find an angle in which the reflection on the surface contrasts with the negative space of the letters. (Chance, again, determined this effect. The stencil manufacturer apologised: "I can only do them in clear plastic.")

The work *Residual Stress* consists of a drop of glass in a display case. A Prince Rupert's drop, it is an object with the peculiar characteristic that, depending on where one applies force, it can be either extremely durable or terribly fragile. Hit on its tail, it explodes into dust. In the gallery in Cape Town, the entire room was reflected, distorted and in miniature, in the drop's head. In the centre of this reflection, one could see the three horns of *The Wolf's Theme* which, in turn, each carried distorted (and brass-coloured) reflections of the objects around them. But, as per its conditions of exhibition, after 21 days the Prince Rupert's drop was removed, leaving an empty case, and a room with one less reflection of itself.

Gush organised a soccer match played on railway tracks for the video piece, *In the Company of*. The way the natural path of the ball is distorted when it hits one of the tracks mimics a textbook diagram of light particles hitting a prism. According to Gush, "Antagonisms cannot be overcome or solved and we therefore need to find ways through which they can be renegotiated. This piece depicts two teams constantly repositioning themselves in relation to each other and the playing surface of railway tracks. The game has a result - that is, a winner - but not necessarily a conclusion." This quote illustrates how closely Gush's political concerns about antagonism and negotiation are bound up with his artistic interest in the concept of surface.

In *Underfoot (Vooruit)*, a video performance in Ghent, and *Underfoot (Cape Town)*, a performance as part of *Sidestep*, the implications of surface are equally important. In these pieces, two ballroom dancers perform on a floor covered in Coca-Cola. The work was inspired by a little-known event in the 1950s when an American basketball team, scheduled to play in a ballroom in Germany, found the floor too slippery and decided to cover it with Coca-Cola to make it sticky (see Appendix).

Gush's work does to culture what his surfaces do to light. The sunlight that hits *Anticipating Ever* has been filtered and distorted, which allows us to discover it anew. Gush's text piece that describes why the railway maintenance workers of a northern European country never appear to be working offers a new way of looking at a situation. In much the same way, *Underfoot* takes history, guides it through a prism and presents a distorted image that opens up new possibilities.

Knowing that Gush essentially refracts culture allows one to decipher works that initially appear hermetic. *PTO (16 November 2009)* is a contract that requires its buyer to take leave (Paid Time Off, or PTO) on 16 November 2009. While its commentary on ownership, performance and labour is readily apparent, one is left wondering about the date's significance. Curious, one might search for what transpired on that day in history that might be of interest to Gush: in 1849, the Russian novelist Dostoevsky was convicted of anti-government activity. Just after the end of the Second World War, in 1945, the United States Army took in 88 German scientists to help develop rocket technology in what was dubbed 'Operation Paperclip.' In 1980, the Marxist theorist Althusser murdered his wife. Seventeen years later, China released Wei Jingsheng, a pro-democracy activist, after 18 years of imprisonment. In 2006 the economist Milton Friedman passed away on 16 November. Gush's audience is left wondering which of these events, if any, were on his mind when he conceived the piece.

Gush sometimes reveals the historical events that lie at a work's roots, as with *Blind Test*. In 1908 a Stradivarius violin was stolen from the famous Belgian violinist, Eugene Ysaye, from his hotel room in St Petersburg, Russia. It has yet to be recovered. The work consists of a violin hidden in the gallery wall (beneath its surface). Because Stradivarius made more violins than are currently accounted for, the seductive idea persists that at any time, and in the most unusual place, one might be found. And the artist reminds us that such stories do in fact exist - in 1951 a soldier found a genuine Stradivarius hidden in the wall of a rundown farmhouse in Korea. Gush explains his interest in musical instruments: "They represent a tool that has no content in and of itself but is key to the success and tone of the content for which it is used."

This statement, inadvertently, explains Gush's formalism. While in his work beauty has no content in and of itself, as a tool it is key to the success and tone of the content for which it is used, causing us to see the world in a new light.

**Longer Than Before**

2009

Extended gallery hours  
(Michael Stevenson, open Sunday  
2pm - 5pm for duration of show)

**Later Than Before**

2009

Extended gallery hours  
(Brodie/Stevenson, open  
Thursday and Friday until 6.30pm  
and Saturday until 4pm for  
duration of show)  
(Not illustrated)



***In the Company of***

2008

Single-channel HD video projection, 10-channel audio

Duration 32'27"

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Installation view, Michael Stevenson



**PTO (16 November 2009)**

2009

Contract on paper

21 x 29.7cm

**MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT**  
**MADE AND ENTERED INTO BETWEEN**  
**SIMON DAVID GUSH**  
**(HEREINAFTER REFERRED TO AS "THE ARTIST")**  
**and**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**(HEREINAFTER REFERRED AS "THE PURCHASER")**

**WHEREAS "THE ARTIST"** wishes to sell an obligation to **"THE PURCHASER"** who wishes to purchase this obligation.  
**AND WHEREAS** the parties wish to record the terms and conditions of this agreement.  
**NOW THEREFORE IT IS AGREED AND RECORDED THAT:**

1.

**"THE ARTIST"** shall sell to **"THE PURCHASER"** who shall purchase from the artist the obligation set out herein which obligation shall constitute an artwork.

2.

**"THE PURCHASER"** in accordance with this agreement, accepts the obligation and undertakes to take one day's leave of absence from work on the 16th of November 2009.

3.

The parties record that this agreement shall be notarially certified on the 16th of November 2009 and **"THE PURCHASER"** duly undertakes to have the agreement notarially certified at his expense.

4.

In consideration for the purchase of this obligation **"THE PURCHASER"** shall pay to **"THE ARTIST"** the agreed amount.

5.

Should **"THE PURCHASER"** be in breach of any of the terms and conditions hereof or fail to comply with the obligation, the artwork shall be deemed not to exist and this agreement shall be null and void.

6.

This document shall serve as record of the artwork. **"THE PURCHASER"** may display this document at any time after compliance with the agreement and obligation.

DATED AT \_\_\_\_\_ THIS \_\_\_\_\_ DAY OF \_\_\_\_\_ 2009.

NOTARY PUBLIC

\_\_\_\_\_  
THE PURCHASER      \_\_\_\_\_  
THE ARTIST





**21 Gun Salute for the Death of a Collector**

2007

Contract on paper

26 x 51cm

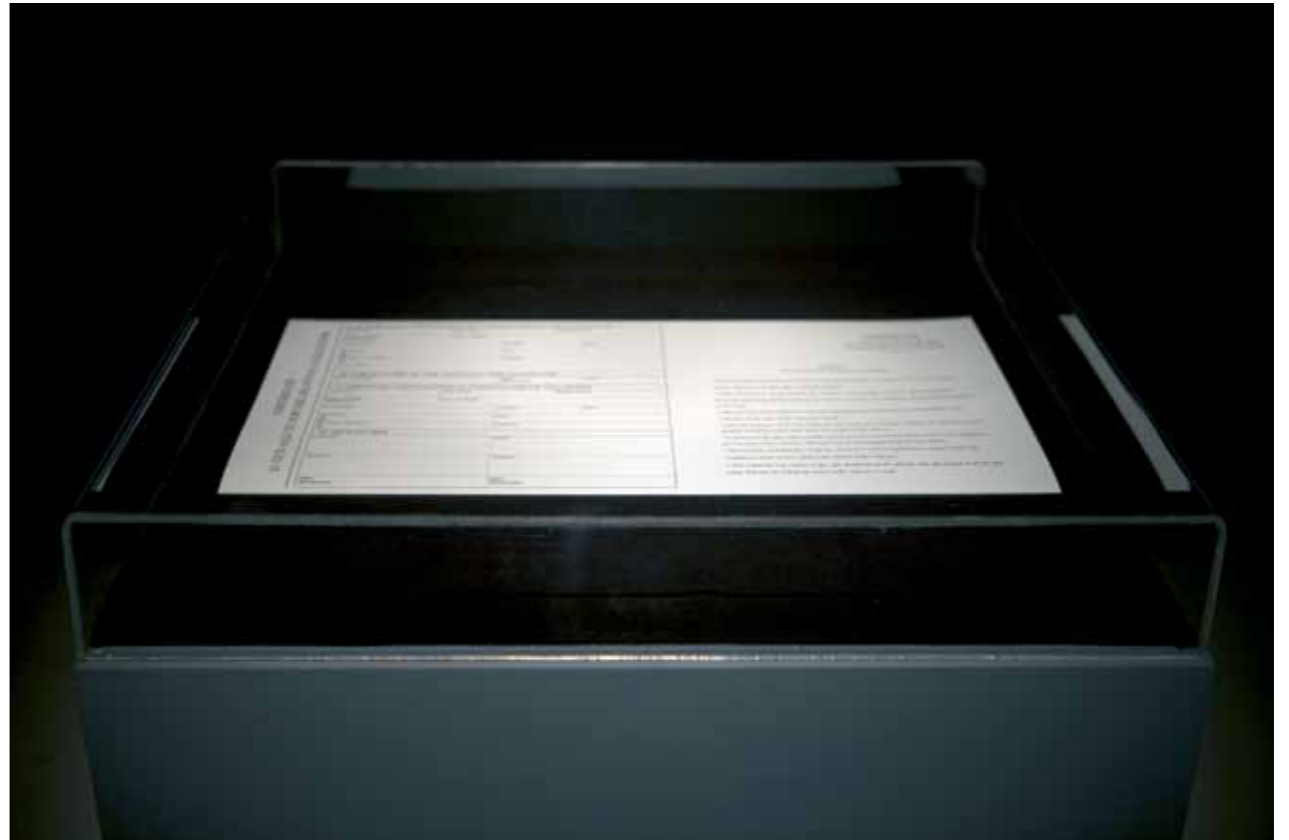
Exhibited at Michael Stevenson side gallery

(25 October - 24 November 2007)

Private collection, Ghent

Left: The collector signing the contract, 29

April 2008, Ghent



**Demos (After Felix Gonzalez-Torres)**

2009

Die-cut paper, endless copies

23cm at ideal height x 84 x 59.4cm



**Residual Stress**

2009

Glass (Prince Rupert's drop)

2 x 25 x 3cm

Condition of sale: The artwork must be displayed for no less and no more than 21 consecutive days per calendar year. The display time cannot be accumulated from one year to the next. The artwork must be kept in a safety deposit box in a designated bank when not on display.



**Untitled (After Felix Gonzalez-Torres)**

2008

Action, glass

Dimensions variable

Exhibited on *Perfect Lovers*, Art Extra  
(now Brodie/Stevenson) (28 February -  
29 March 2008)



**Anticipating Ever**

2008

Handblown glass, wood

140 x 195cm

First exhibited on *Disguise: The art of attracting and deflecting attention*,

Michael Stevenson (15 May - 5 July 2008)



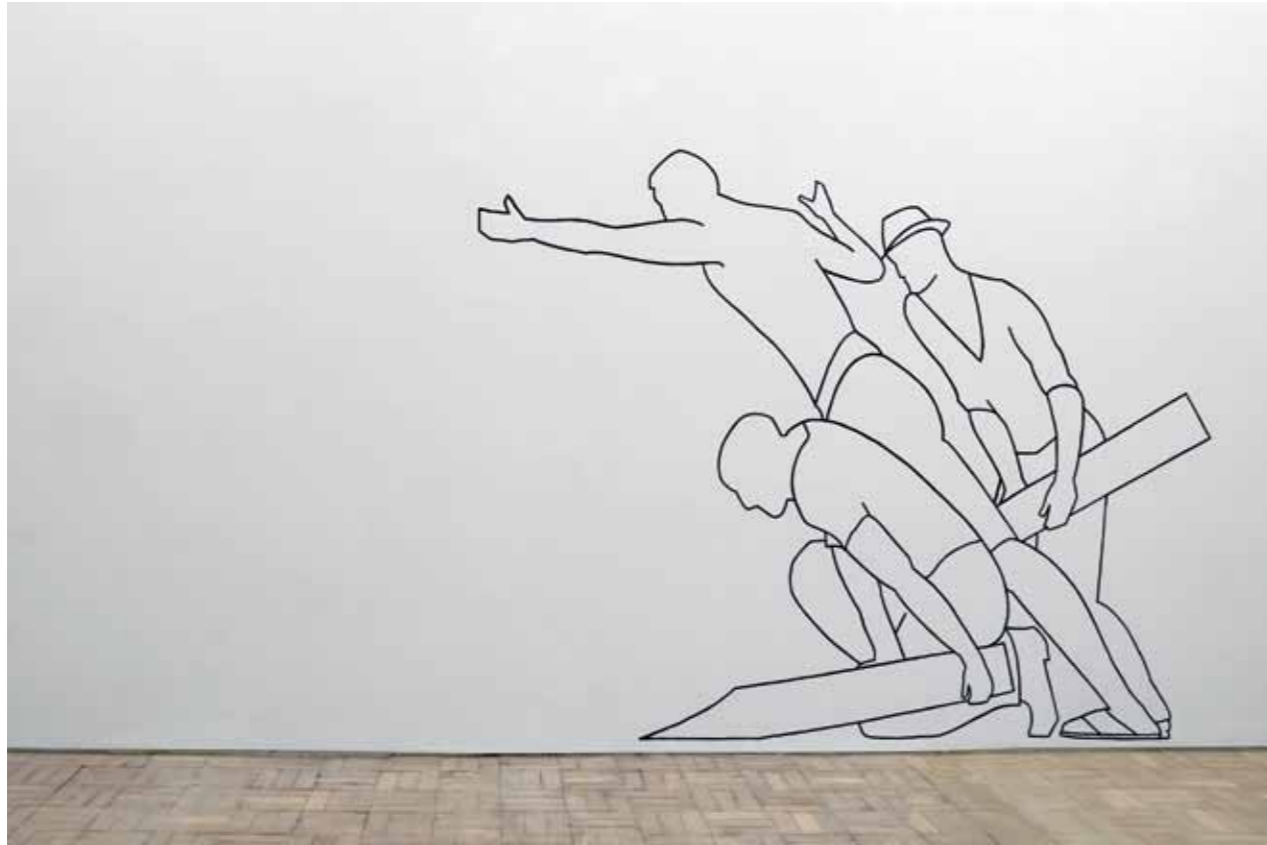
**Eight Hours**

2009

Paint on wall

Dimensions variable

Installation view, Michael Stevenson



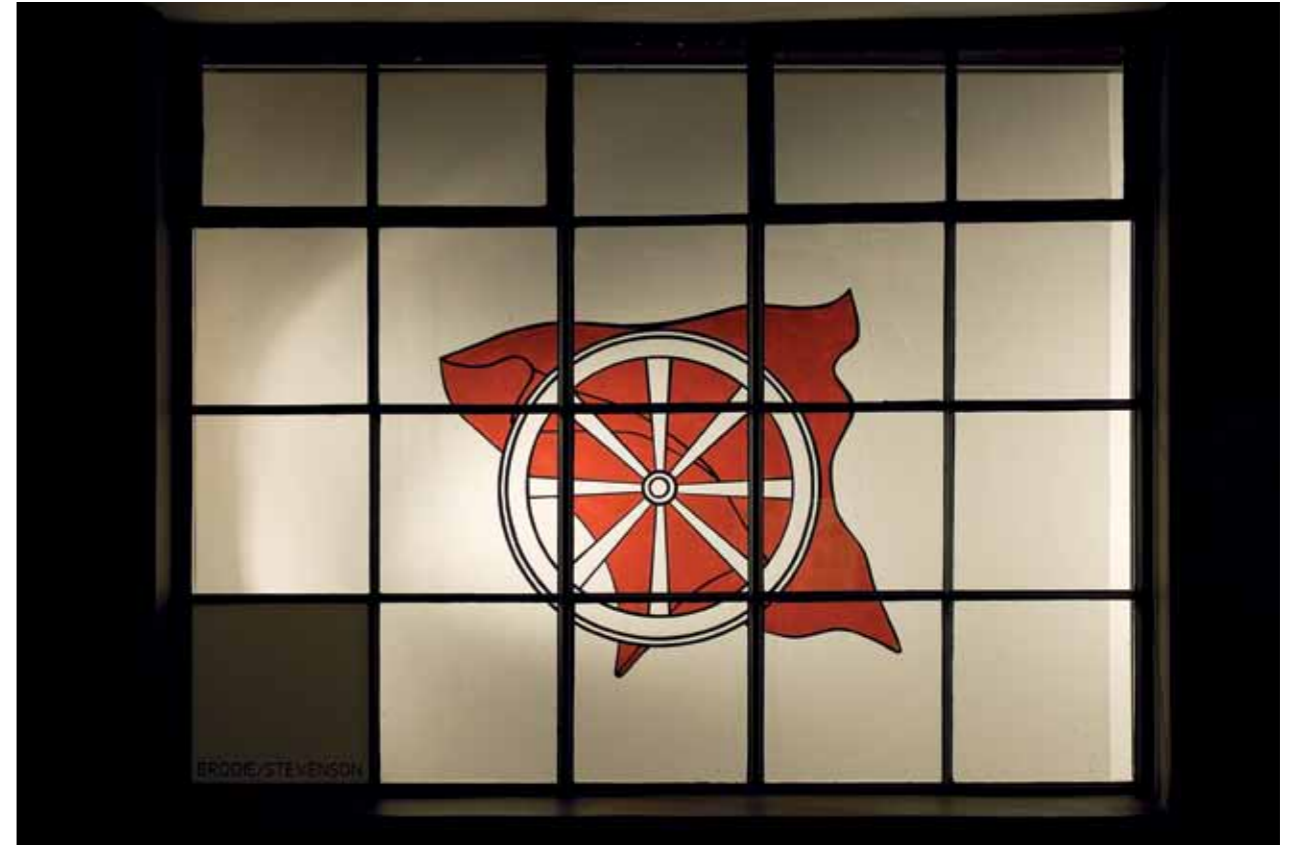
**Lockout**

2009

Paint on wall

Dimensions variable

Installation view, Brodie/Stevenson



***Underfoot (Vooruit)***

2009

Single-channel video projection, single-channel audio

Duration 8'45"

Edition of 5 + 1AP

See Appendix: Notes for *Underfoot (Vooruit)*



**Underfoot (Cape Town)**  
Performance (dancers, Coca-Cola)  
8 August 2009, Cape Town



**Blind Test**

2009

18th-century replica of a Stradivarius

violin concealed within wall

Dimensions variable

Installation view, Brodie/Stevenson



**The Wolf's Theme**

2009

French horns, music stands, scores of Sergei

Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, rope

Dimensions variable

Installation view, Michael Stevenson



An Aeroplane Pilot...

An Employee...

Thirty-nine Children...

A Large Courier Company...

A Road...

A Job Posting...

Over 400 Workers...

2009

Plastic stencils

22 x 43cm each

Editions of 10



AN AEROPLANE PILOT HAS BECOME ANXIOUS ABOUT FLYING WHEN HE IS NOT BEHIND THE CONTROLS. AS A RESULT, HE TRIES TO AVOID DEADHEADING. WHEN IT IS UNAVOIDABLE, HE FINDS HIMSELF IN A DIFFICULT POSITION. HE CANNOT TAKE SLEEPING TABLETS OR DRINK ALCOHOL ON THE FLIGHT BECAUSE OF HIS UPCOMING DUTIES. HE ALSO CANNOT ALLOW HIS ANXIETY TO BECOME OBVIOUS TO HIS FELLOW PASSENGERS OR CO-WORKERS.

AN EMPLOYEE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY PARANOID ABOUT BEING FIRED. THE SOURCE OF HIS FEAR IS A NEW POLICY OF FUN AT THE WORKPLACE, WHICH WAS IMPLEMENTED TO REDUCE STRESS. AT THE FIRST SESSION, HE FOUND THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO JOIN IN AND LAUGH WITH EVERYONE ELSE. NOW, THE MORE HE WORRIES ABOUT HIS LACK OF PARTICIPATION, THE LESS HE IS ABLE TO LAUGH. HE THINKS THAT PEOPLE ARE STARTING TO NOTICE.

THIRTY-NINE CHILDREN BECAME SICK AFTER DRINKING A WELL-KNOWN SOFT DRINK FROM A SCHOOL VENDING MACHINE. WITHIN FOUR DAYS, 210 CHILDREN AT FOUR DIFFERENT SCHOOLS HAD BECOME SICK AFTER CONSUMING THE SAME BEVERAGE. A NATIONAL BAN WAS SOON PLACED ON THE SALE OF THE DRINK AND THE COMPANY WAS FORCED TO WITHDRAW THE PRODUCT. AN ENTIRE FACTORY WAS SET UP FOR THE PURPOSE OF EMPTYING ALL THE BOTTLES. A YEAR LATER, FOLLOWING AN INVESTIGATION, THE SUPREME COURT RULED THAT IT HAD BEEN A MASS SOCIOGENIC ILLNESS.

A LARGE COURIER COMPANY HAS DECIDED TO RELOCATE ITS MAJOR AIRPORT BASE IN EUROPE. AUTHORITIES IMPOSED A LIMIT ON THE COMPANY'S FLIGHTS AFTER A FEW RESIDENTS COMPLAINED ABOUT THE NOISE. THE AREA IS EXPECTED TO EXPERIENCE A MAJOR DECREASE IN EMPLOYMENT AS MOST OF THE RESIDENTS WORK AT THE AIRPORT AND ITS ASSOCIATED COMPANIES.

A ROAD NEXT TO A POPULAR ILLEGAL CAMPSITE HAS FALLEN INTO DISREPAIR, BECOMING A DANGER TO BOTH TRAVELLERS AND LOCAL RESIDENTS. THE COUNCIL REFUSES TO FIX THE POT-HOLE-RIDDEN ROAD BECAUSE IT IS WORRIED THAT THE PRESENCE OF WORKMEN MIGHT MAKE THE TRAVELLERS THINK THEY ARE ABOUT TO BE FORCIBLY REMOVED AND SPARK A RIOT. THE COUNCIL HAS STATED THAT IT WILL ONLY SEND IN WORKERS WITH A POLICE ESCORT. THE POLICE REFUSE TO ESCORT THE WORKERS AS THEY FEAR THEIR PRESENCE WILL BE MET WITH HOSTILITY FROM THE TRAVELLERS, WHO MIGHT THINK THEY ARE ABOUT TO BE EVICTED.

A JOB POSTING FOR A COUNCIL WORKER IN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS HAS BECOME THE SUBJECT OF MUCH COMPLAINT. THE ADVERTISEMENT IS THOUGHT TO BE SO FULL OF JARGON THAT IT HAS LEFT POTENTIAL APPLICANTS STUMPED AS TO THE MEANING OF THE POSITION.

OVER 400 WORKERS RECENTLY WENT ON STRIKE AT A STEEL FACTORY IN EUROPE. THE STRIKE WAS IN SYMPATHY WITH A FELLOW WORKER WHO WAS SUSPENDED FOR REFUSING TO TAKE DOWN A BANNER CELEBRATING THE VICTORY OF HIS FOOTBALL CLUB IN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE THAT YEAR. MANAGEMENT RELEASED A STATEMENT SAYING THE BANNER WAS DISTRACTING THE OTHER WORKERS.

**The Railway Maintenance Workers...**

2008

Paint on wall

Dimensions variable

Installation view, Michael Stevenson



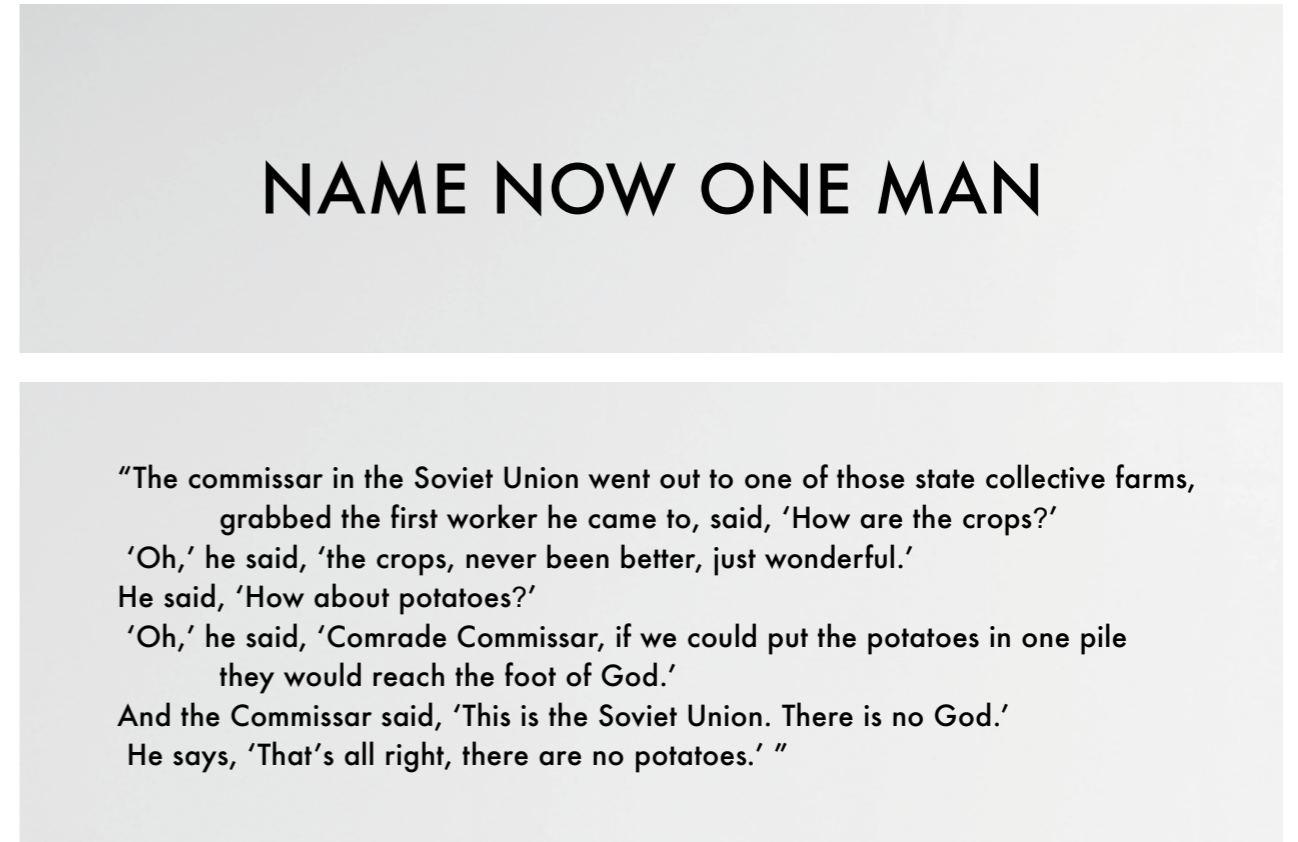
**Name Now One Man**

2009

Paint on two sides of a wall

Exhibited on *Self/Not-self*, Brodie/Stevenson

(26 March - 25 April 2009)



Simon Gush

The idea for this piece arose when I read about a small event that took place in Germany in 1950, which had its roots in the Savoy Ballroom in South Side Chicago 23 years previously. The Savoy, based on its counterpart in Harlem, New York, opened on 23 November 1927. For its first 13 years, it hosted dances every night of the week, with the jazz greats of the era - Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Ella Fitzgerald - gracing its stage. But occasionally the dancing would yield the floor to a diverse range of events including boxing, figure skating, roller skating, mass political meetings and basketball.

According to some accounts, soon after opening the Savoy began to host semi-professional basketball games every two weeks, in an attempt to increase attendance. It is believed that Abe Saperstein was approached to put together a home team.<sup>1</sup> He searched for top African-American players to form the Savoy Big Five.<sup>2</sup> The Big Five's games in the ballroom took place before the dances, with the aim of attracting audiences that might be tempted to stay on for the dancing. The games were unsuccessful in this respect, leading Saperstein and his team, now named the Globe Trotters,<sup>3</sup> to leave their home base and tour South Illinois by the next year.

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1 There are numerous contradictions in accounts of the origins of the Harlem Globetrotters/Savoy Big Five. The official history (<http://www.harlemglobetrotters.com/history/timeline/>) and some books on the topic claim that the team began in 1926 under Saperstein's guidance. But the Savoy Ballroom only opened in 1927, 11 months after the supposed end of their run there. The only documented reference from that time that has been located is for two games from early January 1928. In fact, it is likely that Saperstein took on the role of manager of a team in 1926, before the opening of the Savoy, but this was a previously established team, the South Side Giles Post of the American Legion.

2 The team was largely made up of players who had graduated from the same high school (Wendell Phillips Academy) and lived on the South Side. The players were Tommy Brookins, William Grant, Inman Jackson, Lester Johnson, Joe Lillard, Randolph Ramsey, Walter Wright and William Watson. Jackson, Johnson and Wright would go on to form the core of the first Globetrotter team.

3 It was Abe Saperstein who suggested the name. The decision to call the team after Harlem was to capitalise on the reputation of Harlem as the centre of African-American culture, adding a mystique to the team while touring Illinois. The team would not actually play in Harlem until 1968. The exact progression of the names is also disputed, with variations including Globe Trotters, New York Globe Trotters, Saperstein's New York Globe Trotters, Harlem New York Globe Trotters and New York Harlem Globe Trotters, before it was settled on the Harlem Globe Trotters. The joining of the two words into

In 1927 jazz,<sup>4</sup> and particularly swing, were becoming increasingly popular. It was at this time that the dance performed in this piece, the Lindy Hop, started evolving from popular African-American vernacular dances<sup>5</sup> such as the Charleston, tap and jazz dance at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. The Lindy Hop<sup>6</sup> also incorporated influences from European partner-dance structures, specifically the formal eight-count.

The Jazz Age<sup>7</sup> came to an end with the onset of the Depression in 1929. However, jazz remained popular through the 1930s and 40s, with the 1930s often being the cited as the golden era of swing. In 1941, the USA entered World War II. This brought wider attention to the Lindy Hop in Europe through the presence of American troops on the continent (although jazz had been growing steadily in popularity between the wars in Europe, particularly in Paris).<sup>8</sup>

The music used in the performance is *Sweet Georgia Brown*, written by Ben Bernie, Maceo Pinkard and Kenneth Casey. In 1926, Bernie and his orchestra were the first to record the song and make it popular. It was subsequently covered by numerous artists including Django Reinhardt, Louis Armstrong, the Dave Brubeck Quartet and Count

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one, Globetrotters, would happen still later.

4 Jazz developed out of both African and European traditions, originally coming from the American South, particularly New Orleans. The use of pentatonic scales of West African music led to the development of blue notes and the swung note that are characteristics of jazz. The style also uses the polyrhythm and syncopation of traditional African music. However, its harmonic structures follow a more European concept of harmony. By the late 1920s the jazz scene was increasingly dominated by musicians from New York and Chicago.

5 African-American vernacular dances are dances that developed within African-American communities in informal settings, rather than in dance schools, studios or companies.

6 One theory as to how the name originated is that Charles Lindbergh, whose nickname was 'Lucky Lindy', inspired the Lindy Hop. Lindbergh 'hopped' across the Atlantic in 1927.

7 The Jazz Age usually describes the period from 1918 to 1929 in the USA. The period is characterised by post-war modernist developments such as Art Deco, jazz, the rush of new technologies including automobiles, cinema and radio, as well as the stock market boom. It is also seen as a period of decline in traditional values.

8 The Belgian guitarist Django Reinhardt was important in popularising the swing sound in Europe, particularly with his band, the Quintette du Hot Club de France. The Lindy Hop, along with jazz,

Basie, but is most widely recognised as the theme song of the Globetrotters.<sup>9</sup>

The end of the war in Europe saw America actively promoting its culture and values across the Atlantic. During this period, the Globetrotters went from barnstorming to being a serious team. They won the World Professional Basketball Tournament<sup>10</sup> title in 1940. Over the next decade, the team became increasingly known for the flair and entertainment value for which they are the famed today (although this still took a back seat to their competitiveness at the time).<sup>11</sup> In 1950, the Globetrotters began the World Series of Basketball Tour. They played exhibition matches against a team of college players known as the College All-Americans. The tour took the Globetrotters to Portugal, Switzerland, England, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Morocco and Algeria.<sup>12</sup> Although basketball had been an official Olympic sport since 1936, it was still largely unknown outside the USA. The tour was to create the beginnings of a greater international recognition for the sport.

This tour and subsequent ones presented the Globetrotters with a logistical problem. In countries with little knowledge of the sport, basketball courts were difficult to find.

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had grown a following in Europe in the 1930s through film reels of the period. Jazz was banned in Germany during the Nazi regime, although there were some underground scenes. The 1993 film *Swing Kids*, directed by Thomas Carter, depicts a fictional story about a number of youths involved in the underground swing scene in Germany during that period.

9 The version used by the Globetrotters is a 1949 instrumental by Brother Bones & His Shadow. It was adopted by the Globetrotters in 1952.

10 The World Professional Basketball Tournament existed from 1939 until 1948. The tournament was invitational and was contested by American teams, with most of the teams coming from the National Basketball League (NBL).

11 In 1939, while leading against a local team by a score of 112-5, the Globetrotters began to clown around and show off their skills to entertain the crowd. After the match Saperstein encouraged the team to do so again but only if they had a substantial winning margin.

12 This would be the first of the World Series of Basketball Tours (1950-62). The tour at its peak would be the most popular event in the basketball calendar, overshadowing even the NBA finals.

13 In 1950, Coca-Cola had only recently begun to re-emerge in Germany. Shipping restrictions had prevented the Coca-Cola syrup from being sent to German bottling plants during the war. As a result, the German chemist Schetelig developed the Fanta brand in 1940 in Essen. Coca-Cola was

Bullrings, tennis courts and other surfaces had to be used instead. In one incident in Germany, the team was scheduled to play in a ballroom - the same type of surface on which the then Savoy Big Five played its first games in America. The Globetrotters returned to the dance floor, but this time they found it too slippery to play on. It was decided to cover the floor with Coca-Cola<sup>13</sup> to make it sticky.<sup>14</sup> This is the event that inspired *Underfoot*.

In 1910, the 'Samenwerkende Maatschappij Vooruit',<sup>15</sup> or Vooruit Cooperative, purchased the site of what would become the Vooruit in Ghent, the venue for this performance, with a view to establishing a community centre. Ferdinand Dierkens<sup>16</sup> was commissioned as the architect. The building was scheduled to open in 1913 to coincide with the World Fair in Ghent, but construction was delayed due to strikes. The Vooruit served as a successful socialist community centre from its opening in 1918 up until 1940.<sup>17</sup> After World War II, it entered a period of decline which lasted until 1980. It now serves as a highly successful multi-purpose art centre. The history of the Vooruit - in addition to its ballroom - made it an appropriate setting for this performance of *Underfoot*.

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invented in 1885 by John Pemberton in Columbus, Georgia, USA. Pemberton was supposedly inspired by Vin Mariani. This was the first 'cocawine', a combination of wine and cocaine, invented by the Frenchman Angelo Mariani in 1863. The drink was popular at the end of the 19th century before cocaine was banned.

14 This event was referred to by Tom Friend in 'The Man Who Wanted to be a Globetrotter', ESPN.com, 29 July 2008 (<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=friend/080725>). Besides this mention, I have not found further references to the event. I have been unable to verify the exact city it took place in or if it even happened at all. I attempted to contact the Harlem Globetrotters to verify the event but have not yet received a reply.

15 The 'Samenwerkende Maatschappij Vooruit' was one of the Ghent co-operatives led by the Belgian Workers' Party and the socialist trade union of the time.

16 Ferdinand Dierkens is best known for the Vooruit Cooperative building. His work is largely in the style of 19th-century eclecticism, incorporating elements of Art Nouveau.

17 Although the building was completed in 1914, it was occupied by the German Army during World War I. Its opening thus took place after the war.



**I Hate It When It Rains**

2009

Poster designed in collaboration with  
Roma Publications

**Simon Gush** (born Pietermaritzburg, 1981) graduated with a BA(FA) from the University of the Witwatersrand in 2003, and in 2008 completed his postgraduate studies at the Hoger Instituut van Schone Kunsten in Ghent, Belgium. In 2007 he exhibited at Michael Stevenson as part of the side gallery series. *Underfoot (Vooruit)* was screened as part of RothStauffenberg's *Mobile Cinema* presented by Esther Schipper gallery at Le Temple, Paris, during the 2009 FIAC art fair. Recent group shows include the Luleå Summer Biennial, Sweden (2009); *De Keuze van Koen van den Broek* at Indian Caps, Antwerp (2009); *Self/Not-self* at Brodie/Stevenson, Johannesburg (2009); *Test Patterns: Recent video work from South Africa* at San Francisco Camerawork, San Francisco, (2009); *.za: Giovane arte dal Sudafrica* at Palazzo delle Papesse, Siena (2008); *Disguise: The art of attracting and deflecting attention*, Michael Stevenson, Cape Town (2008); and *Perfect Lovers*, Art Extra, Johannesburg (2008).

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