

belmacz
presents

THE CONFORMIST

'He stuck out his tongue and made devil faces in the glass'

PARTICIPANTS

JONATHAN BALDOCK
AUBREY BEARDSLEY
LEIGH BOWERY
HELEN BULLOCK
JENNIFER CAMPBELL
HELEN CHADWICK
MARVIN GAYE CHETWYND
ERIC GILL
PAUL GORMAN
LADY EMMA HAMILTON
PAUL HOUSLEY

STEPHEN JONES
PAUL KINDERSLEY
MALCOLM McLAREN
JULIA MUGGENBURG
DAVID PARKINSON
ROBERT RUSH
JULIE VERHOEVEN
DENTON WELCH
JAH WOBBLE
ROSE WYLIE

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Costumes by RICHARD MALONE



23 FEBRUARY – 16 APRIL 2016

Belmacz, 45 Davies Street, Mayfair



The Conformist brings together some twenty artists, designers, writers, performers, poseurs, utopians, outsiders, and perverts who have affronted conformity, in different eras and societies. These figures share a desire to probe, invert or flout accepted codes — moral, aesthetic, or sexual. *The Conformist* dispenses with argument or ideology. The exhibition is characterised by intertwining currents of aberration and aestheticism; and in this, it draws inspiration from a suitably obscure source, Denton Welch's 1945 novella *In Youth is Pleasure*. Welch's loosely-plotted, semi-autobiographical story recounts the summer-holiday wanderings of fifteen-year-old Orvil Pym — an introverted boy whose experiences of the world are charged with sensuality, half-sublimated eroticism, and Baroque fantasies.

Suddenly, without knowing why, he lay down at full length on the cold slab and put his lips to the brass lady's face. He kissed her juicily. When he lifted his head, the smell and taste of the brass still hung about his nose and mouth... He laid his cheek against the brass and tried to think through to the stone, through the coffin, to the skeleton.



In the photograph *Ruin* (1986), Helen Chadwick (1953–1996) sits naked beneath a television screen, on which plays a video of one of her own works — an edifice of rotting vegetable matter erected at the ICA in 1986 as part of the exhibition 'Of Mutability'. Under the scene of putrefaction, Chadwick is striking a pose that is alluring and absurd — she turns and flings an arm across her eyes, while resting her other hand on a toffee-coloured skull. A living sculpture, she is supported by a black plinth which bears the work's title ("RUIN") in the glinting letters of a perfume brand. Chadwick is here both a creator and a commodity, a vulnerable body and a confected object. Of her early work, which often used her own naked body in this way, the artist remarked: "I was looking at a vocabulary for desire where I was the subject and the object and the author".

His thoughts were becoming uncontrollable. To stop their unbearable flow he told himself stories in pictures.

Lady Emma Hamilton (1765–1815) was a low-born woman who became the erudite and extravagant wife of Sir William Hamilton, British ambassador to Naples. Emma made herself, like Chadwick,

“the subject and the object and the author” through her performances of classical attitudes. These static recreations of episodes from art and ancient myth were an early efflorescence of ‘performance art’. Hamilton charmed and appalled British high society, embarking on a long love affair with Lord Nelson. After his death, she slid into penury and alcoholism. She is commemorated in *The Conformist* by a torn fragment of an etching. It is a copy of the painting Emma (née Lyon) by society portraitist George Romney, one of her fiercest admirers.



He smirked at the man in imitation of a lady at a vicarage tea...



Paul Kindersley’s (b. 1985) video *Lady Hamilton’s Attitudes* (2014) reimagines Emma Hamilton’s legendary poses plastiques within a makeshift, fabric-draped stage set. Subjecting Emma’s re-enactments of classical stories to an unfaithful pastiche, Kindersley mimes a sequence of emotive yet unidentifiable episodes. He appears in a haywire wig and meagre costumes, wielding a flower or pair of oranges. In contrast to the precise allusions of Lady Hamilton’s attitudes, his performance is one of freewheeling allusiveness, glancing at multiple cultural modes and moments from drag acts to opera, and yet resisting any finite ascription. As he cavorts in an orange dress, in time to the histrionic strains of Luigi Cherubini’s *Démophoon*, Kindersley at once resembles the languid nymph of Lord Leighton’s *Flaming June* (1895) and a white-faced harlequin or geisha.

The walls of his tiny hermitage were entirely encrusted with precious stones, enamel and painting. There would be diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, topazes, carbuncles, garnets, agates, onyxes, aquamarines, jades, quartzes, pearls, amethysts, zircons, chalcedony, carnelian, turquoise, malachite, amber.

Lady Hamilton is also invoked in a gold string of charms, specially designed for *The Conformist* by Julia Muggenburg *Amy Lyons Own*. Her studded girdle invokes the English tradition of the commemorative jewel, at the same time as recalling the linear form of the classical frieze. In Muggenburg’s design, the *metopes* or framed narrative ‘squares’ found in ancient friezes are replaced by gemstones: narrative is supplanted by a symbolic sequence of antique coral, black pearls, citrine drops and antique roman spectacle set coins that betoken the various facets of Emma Hamilton’s personality (whether real or mythologised)



— extravagant, ostentatious, cultivated, crude. In its very form, the belt is an ambiguous symbol — recalling the chastity belt and implying restraint, but also resembling the ankle necklaces of prostitutes.

It was not until he reached the far corner of the window that he came upon the little shelf of oddments: a Victorian sausage bag of rusty steel beads, an ivory back-scratcher in the form of a tiny hand at the end of a long scarlet stick, some mother-of-pearl counters carved with minute Chinamen, a staring blue Egyptian eye strung on a necklace of mummy beads, some sinister-looking old surgical instruments in a small eighteenth-century shagreen case which tried hard to look like a pretty étui.



As a young man in 1980s London, stylist and designer Judy Blame (b. 1960) crafted jewellery from “oddments” he collected in the Thames. *Car Brooch* turns a miniature racing car — a classic boy’s toy — into a ‘readymade’ brooch. While small in scale in comparison with many of Blame’s trinket-like accessories (concoctions of bottle openers, utensils, scrap metal, keys, buttons and other flotsam), *Car Brooch* shares their spur-of-the-moment Punk character. Out of the boyish bravado of the racing car comes the frippery of a brooch. “I don’t think that a diamond is better than a safety pin; to me it’s just a thing or a shape”, Blame has remarked.

‘It’s very cheap lipstick,’ he thought... He put two large circles of red on his cheeks and made himself into a Dutch doll. He frizzed his hair until he looked rather pretty and depraved. Still itching to use the paint, Orvil applied a large boozy crimson blob to the end of his nose... When he had undressed, he absent-mindedly rouged his nipples until they were like two squashed strawberries.



In a similar spirit of Punk appropriation, Malcolm McLaren (1946–2010) and Vivienne Westwood (b. 1941) purloined a fragment of erotic fiction for a 1974 T-shirt design. The T-shirt, made for their King’s Road boutique SEX, is blazoned with a passage beginning “I Groaned With Pain”. The extract is from Alexander Trocchi’s high-flown pornographic novel *Desire And Helen* (1954; written under the pseudonym Frances Lengel). The book’s heroine, Helen, is a small-town Australian girl who

(like Orvil Pym) pursues illicit, uncommon sensations, some of them debasing and agonising. Her new life simultaneously liberates and subjugates her: “I groaned with pain as he eased the pressure in removing the thing which had split me, and then, his huge hands grasping me at the hips, by blonde hair forming a pool on the dark wood beneath his feet, he raised me to doting love, soothing the bleeding lips and causing the tearing commotion at my loins to subside in a soft corrosion.”

Aphra’s dress had slipped down and one of her full breasts lay outside, cushioned on the folds of midnight velvet. Charles had his lips to the large coral nipple.



Photographer David Parkinson (1946–75) chronicled the demi-monde surrounding McLaren and Westwood, and their string of enterprises at 430 King’s Road (changing from Mr Freedom and Paradise Garage to Let It Rock and SEX). Parkinson was also fashion editor of Paul Raymond’s soft-porn mag *Club International*, a mainstay of seventies sleaze. In 1974, the magazine published Parkinson’s shot *The Continental Bentley* in its motoring pages. A young woman — sharp-suited and leather-capped like a dominatrix — poses in front of a saloon car. The image is pure, unashamed objectification — woman and car locked in a sexy stand-off — but it is redeemed by its sultry note of camp. Two rare self-portraits from the 1970s, published in a feature in the *Sunday Times Magazine*, show Parkinson himself, “wearing his reversible jacket he bought in the Portobello Road for 25p four years ago”. Moody, mock-insouciant, buttocks tightly clad, he adopts the casual mode of ‘street fashion’ which his photographs helped to popularise.

Orvil began to laugh. There was something so strange and startling about Aphra’s beautiful face, the sinister black trailing hat, and the music-hall voice and vulgar movements.



Camp takes a more carnivalesque form in Stephen Jones’s (b. 1957) towering, tottering hat composed of flowers, wicker, ears of corn, ribbons of gauze and other festival apparel. He converts the motif of the cornucopia (or horn of plenty), an overflowing abundance of ripe fruits, into an effervescent headdress. Like phantasmagorical vegetation growing on a marble bust, it rears up above the sober white mannequin.

The blackberries were enormous. No one came to pick them, and so they hung, delicious balls of purple juice, until they rotted.



Vegetation is the subject of a painting by Rose Wylie (b. 1934), *Black Cherry (Thin Stalk)* (2013), but blooming colour has here given way to brute monochrome. A single black blot lingers on the white of the page, suspended from a curving stalk. The cherry, simple as a pictogram, is also pregnant with innuendo, its contours as bulbous and taut as Parkinson's firmly-clothed rear in the *Sunday Times Magazine* photograph.

The pêche Melba arrived with its dripping veil of thick red Escoffier sauce. The two slices had been joined together so that the buttock-like shape of the fruit was again apparent.

'It's like a celluloid cupid doll's behind,' said Orvil to himself. 'This cupid doll has burst open and is pouring out lovely snow and great big clots of blood.'



Julie Verhoeven's (b. 1969) video *Phlegm & Fluff* (2015) is a manically-condensed stream of surreal juxtapositions and sensuous aberrations — a magic lantern of beauty, abjection and excess, which continually pirouettes on the threshold between the grotesque and the beguiling. In a scene which recurs throughout the video, a naked female body emerges from soapy bathwater like some figment of a Gothic fantasy, or a dream of Humbert Humbert's. Her buttocks are strewn with a sodden black glove, her midriff is girdled with tulle and a fat cherry, and her hair spreads across her back in dark, dank clumps.

He delighted in the tightening and hardening and aching of his stomach muscles. He lay face-down, his nose buried in the dusty pile, and then raised himself, taking his whole weight on his arms. He twisted his trunk, his neck, his arms, his wrists, his ankles — everything that could he twisted. At the end of the exercises, he went to the wide-open window and took enormous breaths of air, throwing out his arms in a pontifical gesture...



Robert Rush's (b. 1978) *Large orange figure (god/king/tyrant) with pot* (2013) depicts a warped, Picassoesque figure — its hands monstrously bulbous, its body spaghettified — seemingly about to swell beyond the boundaries of the canvas. The unspecified god or king or tyrant is cast in an ambiguous pose, at once a

seated potentate and a gangling buffoon. The figure has a nebulous beard and full breasts, and seems to be evaporating into billowing clouds of golden gas. He, or she, straddles an orb-like vessel which might be a store of gold or a chamber pot.

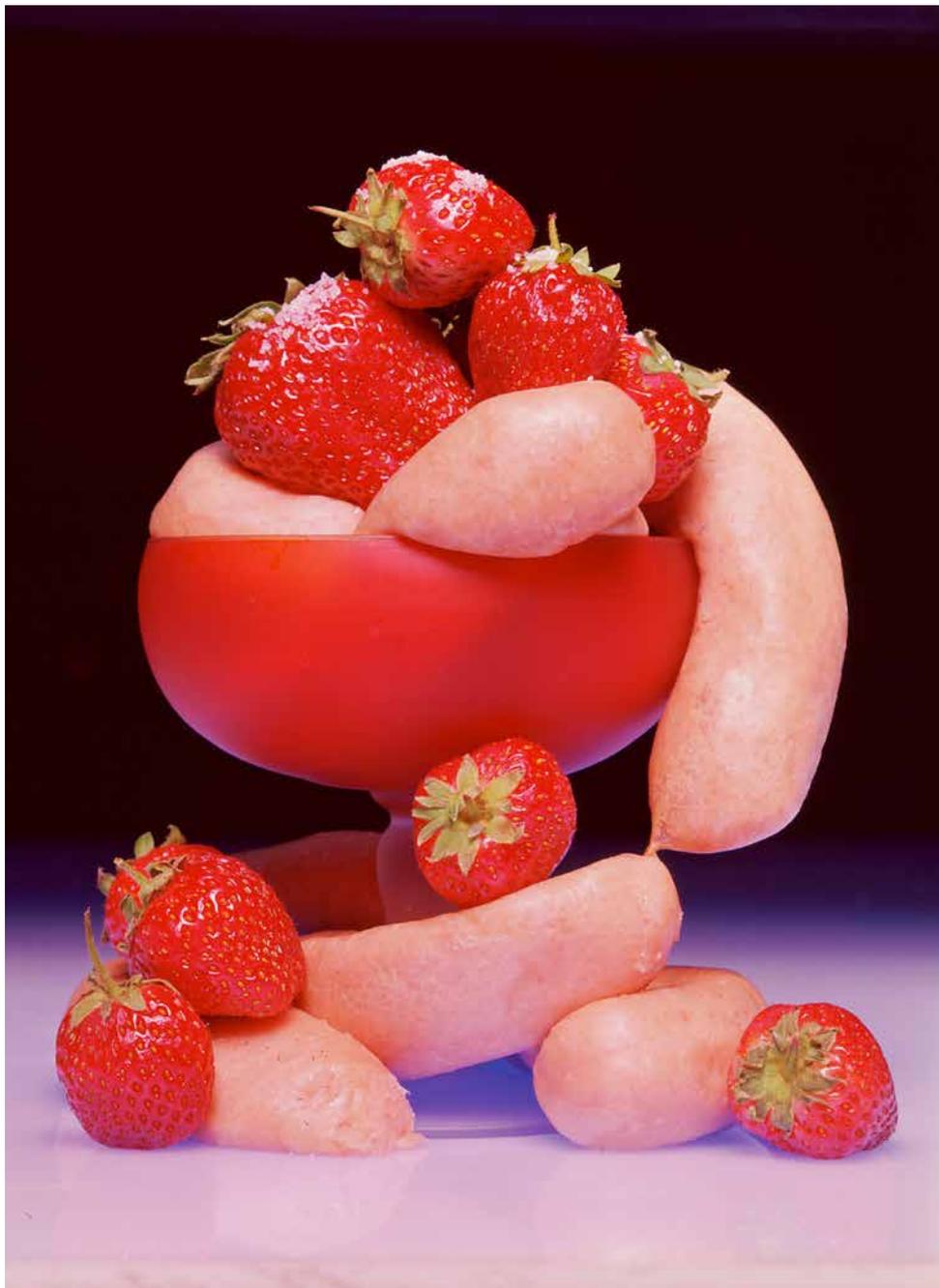
Orvil thought the sight one of the most wonderful he had ever seen. He could not take his eyes from the proud men throwing silver batons into the air, or from the gladiator-like ones draped in leopard skins, beating scarlet drums as big as the largest cheeses. The tramp and swing of the vast flowing river intoxicated him. And there was the delicate-stepping, wicked little goat, with its beautiful powdered hair blowing freely in the wind, leading all these hundreds of meekly obeying men in arrogant scarlet cloth, gold braid and fur. beautiful powdered hair blowing freely in the wind, leading all these hundreds of meekly obeying men in arrogant scarlet cloth, gold braid and fur.



Marvin Gaye Chetwynd's (b. 1973) puppets in red-and-white striped costumes were originally made for a video, *Vision Verticale* (2014) — a commission from Le Consortium, Dijon, to work with the French space agency CNES. Chetwynd's video traces the friendship of two puppets working aboard a space station. They explore a hat shop on earth, reflecting that their aerial domain was superior. But the shop is revealed to contain the pool of eternal youth. The friends use this to enable long-distance space travellers to rejuvenate after sleeping for years. Their outfits recall the pageantry and violence of Punch and Judy, and the older tradition of the mischievous Pulcinello from which the children's puppet show evolved. Delicately crafted hats and dresses are attached to papier-mâché faces that seem at once endearing and grotesque, human and animal.

He ordered strawberry ice-cream and ate it absently, with his eyes still fixed on the objects. The milk in the ice-cream coated his tongue with a thin film. He grated his tongue against his teeth to remove the film and savour it. It seemed to come off in rolls. The line for a poem, "To feast your eyes and feast your stomach too," ran through his head, on and on, in lulling rhythm.





Please note the upcoming talk with Paul Gorman, Paul Kindersley, Lou Stoppard and Jah Wobble, date and location will be confirmed on www.belmacz.com/gallery

Find Jah Wobble's *The Conformist* playlist on www.belmacz.com/press/downloads



Paul Kindersley, Stills from *Lady Hamilton's Attitudes* 2014, Film, 7:02 min



Drawing in red ink on paper by Eric Gill to David Kindersley, 1936

Lady Hamilton, Engraved by J. Conde from an original painting of G. Romney



Helen Chadwick, *Ruin*, 1986
Cibachrome photograph, 91.5 × 46 cm, Edition of 5

The Page 'The Savoy' No. 1, January 1896
Illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley





Marvin Gaye Chetwynd
Hat shop Owner and Long Pants Legs, 2014
mixed media, 25 x 10 x 10 cm
Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London



Drawing by Helen Bullock



Paul Housley, *Head of an English Iconodast*, 2016, Glazed painted clay, 14 x 20 cm

Julia Muggenburg, *Amry Lyons Own*
Red Mediterranean antique coral, black Tahitian cultured perfect round pearls, black Tahitian cultured perfect round pearls, citrine drops, antique Roman spectacle set coins & 18 ct yellow gold



Jonathan Baldock, *A Universal Language*, 2015
Acrylic paint on hessian with eyes



Julie Verhoeven, *Phlegm & Fluff*, 2015
Still from HD film

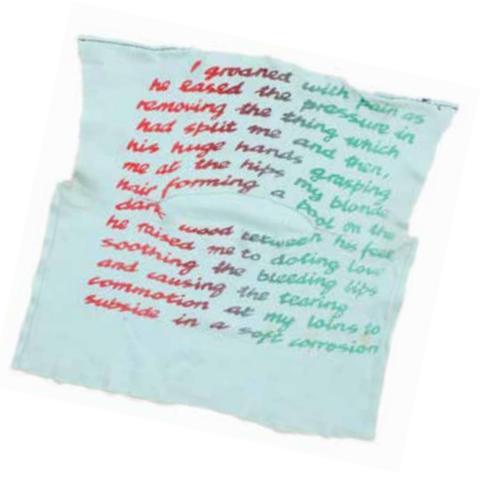


Rose Wylie, *Black Cherry (Thin Stalk)*, 2013, Watercolour on paper, 84 x 59 cm



Jennifer Campbell, *Cold Toast*, 2015
Mixed media, 18 x 16 cm

Malcolm McLaren / Vivienne Westwood
I Groaned With Pain
T-shirt design incorporating text from *Desire And*
Helen by Alexander Trocchi (writing as Frances Lengel)



Sketch by Richard Malone



Judy Blame, *Toy car brooch*
Courtesy of Rellik



David Parkinson, *The Continental Bentley Club International Volume 3, No 5, 1974*

Robert Rush, *Large orange figure (god/king/tyrant)*, 2013
Oil on canvas with handmade hardwood frame, 125 x 94 cm



Sketch by Stephen Jones of R.H.S.