

In conversation

15 June The Residency, Parade Ground:

Beth and Ed Greenacre

Ed Greenacre: The whole project reminds me of the Charge of the Lightbrigade. Not the reality of the dogmatic order following that resulted in the loss of a minor battle but the heroic myth that Tennyson's poem helped create. Graham has approached the fellowship with full knowledge of the task ahead and has managed to create work that is, as always, brave and exciting. Little of the work will survive (unless the wind calms down) but Graham will continue to build on his heroic reputation and inspire debate far beyond Chelsea.

Beth Greenacre: Crikey, I am not sure that I agree with your description of heroic failure, I would rather suggest that the act in itself is heroic. What excites me are the daring gestures played out using far from grand materials; Graham skip dips, trawls B&Q and spends too much time on Ebay, I have images of him riding up and down the Hackney Road sourcing materials off the streets, dipping in and out of Pound Stores. His DIY prowess and his disregard for everything polished and finished makes anything seem possible to me, it is a celebration of possibility...

EG: I like it. We should not have been surprised by the riot goin' on down at the parade ground. When Graham had his show at Rokeby, he moved in for a week and filled the gallery with crap, cable tied it together to make a monumental sculpture that filled the space, touching the ceiling and leaving a narrow gap along one wall. It should have been no surprise that without walls Graham was going wreak havoc, building his own walls and making the college put up fences to ensure he did not spill into the studios or onto the pavement. Remember the ease with which Je regrette rien... could be slightly dismantled to allow wheelchair access that indicated the foresight that he has to ensure that he was not going to fall foul of rules and restrictions.

BG: Sure, I will never forget that installation, it was hugely enjoyable and exciting, can you remember each day coming into the gallery and seeing another element emerging. I would offer to hold cable ties, lug sections about, hold tools as so forth, feeling pretty useless and very small. I also describe the experience of watching Graham work to how I imagine it would feel watching a History painting being composed. And as History Painting tended to be loosely classified as anything that captured heroic actions or whose style was grand, I think this is pretty apt. As you know towards the end of the eighteenth century modern historical subjects were introduced into what was deemed to be high art alongside classical history and mythology and maybe that brings us back to good old Lord Tennyson. Do you see Graham's working method in a similar manner to the construction of History Paintings... and did you employ any of these techniques in your DIY this weekend?

EG: I am not sure I want to talk about my diy... So GH's dealers become his assistants during his mini residency at the gallery, holding cable ties and buying beer, what role do we have during this residency? Tub thumping while he is there I guess, a delivery address for his covert packages, trying to ensure that there is something that lasts beyond his stay - a publication maybe, a series of mutant screws. He leaves us scratching around in the debris he leaves, carefully piled, in his wake. Has GH seen that we all get cash from chaos, or does he just not give a toss? Some of the work he produces - Odysseus, The Sign (sic, check), the frames - work perfectly in a gallery setting and are stunning; how do they fit next to the anarchy in SW7?

BG: I think that that is part of it, a fabulous part of it and I think Graham likes to see us scratching around his debris, looking for meaningful things in his piles of junk. I happen to think though that his Sign and the frames would sit just as happily in SW7 as they do in a gallery, the frames are made from discarded wood, the sign is a reproduction of a sign left to rot in NYC, its emptiness and lack of advertising message can be read in a very similar vein to the abundance and excess of SW7. Advertising is empty, consumption is futile and meaning can be found on the periphery outside of the mainstream in a gallery or on a parade ground.

EG: "Consumption is futile" and Graham's work "a celebration of possibility" sums it up far better than my Tennyson and Sex Pistols quotes.

BG: I remember Graham being interested in McLuhan, who suggested something along the lines that the message is impacted by the delivery system. So the information which we receive, is dependent on or coloured by the way in which it is offered up. In the same breath is Grahams work implicated by the setting - next to the Tate in London on an open public space or in a gallery?

EG: I think that it is and that it is inevitably so. Because of the proximity to the Tate, the Tate is often talked about in relation to GH's fellowship. Predictably some people see the work he is producing as a critique of the Tate as an institution, but I am inclined to think that is bollocks. GH's work is not so self absorbed and far more thoughtful than to be about something as tedious as that. When he is working within the walls of the Tate he may have a bit of fun, but until then the whole '...in the shadow of Tate Britain' is boring.

BG: Yes, I agree, it just so happens that the residency is next to the Tate, what if Chelsea College had not moved to the Embankment, I don't think that Graham would have done things too dissimilarly. Nor do I think that Graham is critical of the art establishment, he scours the contemporary and historical world for sources both high and low, he lifts from art history and the high street, and you could say that he sees no differentiation between the two, they both provide him with information, or rather they inform, and it is this that is his source material. Of course it is opportune that his residency is next to the Tate and all the visitors to the gallery will see his work, I wonder if they will see it differently when they leave the Tate compared to when they arrive?

EG: It would be great to know if the work was viewed differently after a visit to the Tate. But what you also suggest is that Graham's work would stand just as strongly in an Asda car park which would be interesting and I know it would be enjoyed just as much but I fear it may find itself back in a skip slightly quicker than it took to retrieve from a skip.

BG: Great do Asda have a residency program?

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Beth and Ed Greenacre, May/June 2006 Rokeby, London