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Simon Morse

Reckoners/Reckoning

Friday 4 April - Sunday 11 May 2008

VINEspace 25a Vyner Street London E2 9DG

Private View Thursday 3 April 2008 18.30-21.00

Open Thursday-Sunday 12.00-18.00

www.vinespace.net

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Simon Morse's first solo show at VINEspace presents an array of machines whose pragmatic origins and intended uses point to their – and our – tragicomic undoing.

Like the series of systemic derangements, both human and automated, in Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying And Love the Bomb*, the objects in the exhibition appear to exist and operate within entirely rational parameters. Upon closer inspection however, their potential functions describe a world in which expediency has caused the languages of control and the machineries of discourse to become kaleidoscopically self-entangled through doomed attempts to create and maintain literal and metaphorical power structures.

The work asks if it is humanly possible to imagine a way out of this situation any more. Have we indeed passed a moment of 'peak thought', when the perils created via our technologies, our languages, have overtaken and corralled our ability to come up with dependable solutions?

In the tradition of the great satirists, Morse uses his work to fold the crazed logic of our time back in on itself, creating an exponentially skewed reality attuned with precision to the absurdities of its context.

Simon Morse was born in Swindon, England in 1969. He studied at Liverpool Polytechnic (BA Fine Art 1989-92) and Chelsea College of Art and Design (MA Fine Art 1992-3). He has exhibited widely in the UK, and also in the US, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland and Spain. He lives and works in London.

For further information and images please contact Della Gooden

VINEspace, 25a Vyner Street, London E2 9DG

Call: 020 8981 1233 E-mail: info@vinespace.net Web: www.vinespace.net

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"When you've got a bunch of people who believe a bit too much in a 'theory of everything', you're going to end up with a big mess."

SIMON MORSE comes from Swindon and rails somewhat against the petty authority of the workplace. As well as making art, he has worked in advertising and TV, and currently sets questions for the ITV quiz show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* He once developed a rather cynical phrasebook for the art world (<http://homepage.eircom.net/~simonmorse/guide/phrasebook>), featuring definitions such as "Artist's fee: a traditional tune, generally whistled". In recent years he has moved from largely diagrammatic work which deconstructs systems, including the art world's, to the prints of imagined machines featured here. INTERVIEW: Paul Carey-Kent and Vicki MacDonald

Your name suggests you might encode your insights in some way.

I did go through a phase of looking into codes and ciphers, though whether that's because everyone used to ask, "as in Morse code?" when they heard my name, I'm not sure. But these days "Morse" is just as likely to be paired with "Inspector" as "code", so unless I start solving murders in Oxford...

You seem to have an interest in systems – or at least in poking fun at them.

I've always been aware of the style in which things are presented to us as a means of reinforcing messages, and that was really crystallised for me when I got a job in corporate advertising. Like every job it has its own specialised language, which is not just about making business more effective but is also a form of control. And all that was interesting material to me as an artist. The secret is this: the only people capable of really smashing any system are the ones who came up with it in the first place, and the ones who service it.

Does your flowchart *How a Painting Is Made* apply this approach to art?

That's a very cynical – but very true to life – explanation of the pressures which lead to not making work. It also picks up on when everyone at college was trying to be artists and would both create and conform to networks. When the English language was created, the words "art" and "science" ended up in the wrong boxes. As a result, you can break down the act of making a painting into 374 precisely definable causes-and-effects, with an utterly predictable outcome. And it was fun to contradict everyone who was trying to emote with their paintings by saying, "let's grid this up and do it rationally".

Your giant custard pie fight diagram at the Jerwood Space, *We Do What We Do Best Best*, took that to extremes.

Yes, that was about how people interact with

each other in a system, and kind of like a scientific diagram in which you don't know if it's a report on what has happened or a set of instructions on what you must do...

You take on another system with your tales of Marxist magicians who set out to infiltrate capitalism by methods which appear absurd, even before their human weaknesses scupper the plan.

Yes – never let a bunch of paranoid alcoholics run your revolution. History shows that when you've got a bunch of people who believe a bit too much in a "theory of everything", you're going to end up with a big mess. Not just because such an approach can't work, but also because the people who carry it out will always be flawed themselves.

How did the concept of imaginary machines come about?

I've always liked computers but thought I was too close to all that to base my work on it. I was thinking of work about fruit machines: I was interested in how my parents got a new one with new themes every few months in the pubs they had run. It's almost a form of social history. Fruit machines didn't quite work, but things clicked when I thought about how technologies can be combined to solve problems – like searching the internet for a weather forecast. It struck me that as the world is becoming more and more complicated, there'll be more and more specific tasks to be done by one computer which needs to be linked to others. Are we going to have our problems solved, I wondered, or will more and more problems branch out, all needing new solutions?

So you see them as working machines?

Each one has a very complicated function, but don't ask me to say what it is. The fun is to imagine what it might be.

Along with humour, your work includes a

lot of seemingly random references.

Yes, I see comedy as part of the form. An Errauchen-C is a radio control unit which features a yellow map of Luxembourg and has buttons for all the animals in the song I Knew an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly, plus some extra ones. And it also has military buttons. It seems absurd, but so many things in life are unexpectedly connected.

How do you make the images?

I use Adobe InDesign [a page layout program]. Adobe Illustrator has more 3D effects, but InDesign imposes more restrictions on what I can do, and that kind of chimes with what the pieces are about – the erosion of language through specialisation.

Why the retro look?

I source elements from nerdy internet sites on which enthusiasts post pictures of their old computers and radios. I don't want to tie my work to the present typical IT look, which is too organically-shaped and too much like desirable consumer objects. I do imagine the machines as being made today, but there's the thought that current methods might not always work and we'll have to fall back on old methods.

Do the prints come with a set of instructions for the machine?

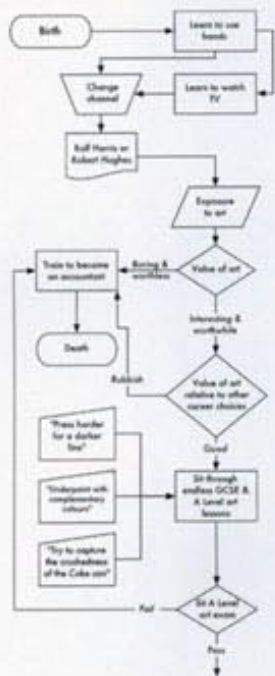
I'm not planning it, but if I did I'd base them on Airfix instruction leaflets.

Who are your favourite artists?

Jasper Johns is an influence, but I probably take more inspiration from a Texas Instruments TI 95 calculator... and Swiss graphic designers of the 50s and 60s, especially Josef Müller-Brockmann. Also Chris Ware, Stanley Kubrick and Jacques Tati.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?

Pollock's *One: Number 31*, Peter Blake's *Self Portrait with Badges* or either of the 2003 Nathan Carter pieces that the Tate owns. ☺



1 *How a Painting Is Made* (2003)
detail, original dimensions
118.9 x 84.1 cm

2 *We Do What We Do Best Best* (2005)
installation view, 348 x 336 cm

3 *The Marxist Magicians Film The Communist Manifesto* (2006)
installation view, dimensions
variable



Born: 1969, Swindon, UK Studied: Liverpool Polytechnic, UK; Chelsea School of Art & Design, UK
Lives and works: Wimbledon, UK Represented: VINEspace, London Artist's website: www.simonmorse.co.uk