

Trouble in Utopia Review

By Paul Stewart for The Alternative Art College



An exhibition called *Trouble in Utopia* which opened recently at *Open Ealing* in West London and comprised of a collaboration of twelve artists, whose work spoke in different ways to the Topic of Utopia. The artworks in this exhibition predominantly used items found outside of the gallery space.

This use of found items is similar to Macbeth's approach to choosing a suitable site within which to create work. This is because, in essence, the buildings can be seen as large scale found items. This is similar to Marcel Duchamp's use of the Woolworths building, he saw the building considered no more than a latent ready-made, a object that was just needing a new title or inscription to become a Duchamp ready-made.² Back to the exhibition at Open most of the pieces have a common appearance or object form that the viewer can, in different scenarios relate to. An example of this is Adam Vass who evaluates his work as...

“...predominantly sign based and deals with issues involving language and power. I borrow heavily from existing public signage in an effort to re-route its original intent [...] Holy Hoxton is a near replica of a window display signage of a failed venture. Is there something to be learned from the aspirations of the recent past?”³

The work in this exhibition attempted to create a sense of ambiguity in relation to the terms utopia and dystopia. For example, pieces like Mak Takahashi's *Road Ahead Closed* worked as a

² Schwartz, Arto (1969) *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. H. N. Abrams, the University of Michigan. p. 31-46.

³ in conversation with Adam Vass following the exhibition opening 4.11.11

slogan or a gimmick to depict dystopia but in ⁴ this setting it did not appear to create the desired impact. The sign was propped up under a window-frame and seemed to become lost in the space. Like what appears to have happened with Takahashi's *Road Ahead Closed* the idea is there but within the environment it was placed and around the work that was in the space it became transparent and lost its intended impact.

It remains to be seen as to whether or not the topic Utopia has become a 'gimmick' for artists or has lost its capability to suggest a way forward? It is obvious that Utopian topics are still an important symbol in art today. What is meant by this is that not all art works, in this context, can be evaluated to offer a proposal for change. In some cases it seems absurd to draw conclusions from works in this exhibition which appear to create more problems rather than solving them.

⁴ Open Ealing (2011) *Trouble in Utopia*. <http://abstractcritical.com/2011/10/trouble-in-utopia/> Accessed 21/11/11