

Jack Strange by Ryan Gander

Jack Strange – it's a name that sounds so good, you would think it had been made up. I was introduced to Jack during studio visits at the Slade School of Art a few years ago – strangely enough by Jonathan Callan, an artist who used to teach me (that is often the way things work – through someone passing on a baton of knowing and appreciation). It was a group crit, and Jack was late. I was a bit disgruntled, imagining a confident and bloodthirstily ambitious posh kid, but in walked a slightly shy bloke whose eloquence came from speaking in examples rather than speaking on air.

He hadn't brought any work, and when I asked if I could see something, he pulled a white iBook from his bag and a small lead ball (about two centimetres in diameter) from his pocket. He opened the laptop and placed the ball very precisely and with great intent on one of its keys. A word-processing application was open, and the laptop began producing strings of 'G's. When I asked him if the work was durational, his reply was that the work was as durational as the space on the hard disk, and at some point, of course, the application would crash or the hard disk would be devoured. He also pointed out that, physically, and in a very real sense, this laptop – which was then being hailed as a revelation in product design – had been made defunct by this primitive-looking lead sphere, because the glowing LCD screen lid could no longer be closed. He'd transformed it into a spasticated clamshell.

That was a few years ago. Jack's not in college anymore – he's out on his own and seems to be benefiting from his distance from the trappings and securities of art school. We were recently in New York, working together (albeit in different capacities) on a group show at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery. Something struck me about the directness of Jack's relationship to the work he makes, and indeed similarly to the artworld in general. Up until the opening, he was working on producing an armour of marbled plasticine colours entitled *Fiend* (2007), a sculptural work that was worn and activated during the opening as a performative work. Amidst the monumental space, superwhite walls, copious gallery assistants and technical staff, ringing phones and cigar-smoking collectors *umm*-ing and *ahh*-ing, it was, for me at least, poignant to see Jack sitting on the floor quietly going about his work. It got me thinking about something that is frequently forgotten in the circus that is the artworld: that in a very basic way everything starts and finishes with the artist, and that knowing that – as Jack does – gives the artist the ability to remove himself from it... to remain unaffected and uninfected. Without Jack, you'd have nothing but an empty room.

He came to my studio the other day and finished the *Quality Streets*. The work he is doing now still has an Aladdin's lamp quality and still gives me stomach cramps as well as enough fear to want to rush to the studio and try to do something brilliant.

from top: *Nigel and Chris*, 2007, paper, cardboard, 42 x 23 cm; *Fiend*, 2007, mixed-media performance; *Tom*, 2007, 4 DVD stills, DVD, 22 min. All images: courtesy the artist

