



Flywheel Nunnery Gallery, London

Too much of the current British art scene takes itself a little too seriously: in addition to the self-conscious Sensation-ism of the YBAs, just think of the media scrum and artistic frenzy of what is now almost euphemistically referred to as The Turner Prize. The trouble is, the only question that dominates any discussion of such work is the tabloids' facile favourite: "(But) is it art?"

Repeated ad nauseum, this question now deserves to be banned.

Providing a welcome (dare I say it) artless little antidote, the Nunnery Gallery in the heart of London's East End recently presented "Flywheel" by the artists' collective of the same name. The British/Canadian, Toronto-based collective consists of six artists: Michael Buchanan, Karen Henderson, Marla Hlady, Tim EtcHELLS, Hugo Glendinning and Gwen MacGregor, and what resulted from this fortuitous meeting of minds turned out to be a playfully complex affair.

It was hard to tell, for example, whether the miniature components of Marla Hlady's untitled installation were sculptural objects or musical instruments, but when these things were switched on, the question was not only drowned out by the chorus of clicking, rattling and squeaking that started up, it also ceased to be relevant. So childishly mesmerizing was their effect, it was easy to miss the fact that they were quite simply the innards of unidentifiable mechanical toys.

The laddishness that has become an almost essential characteristic of recent British culture was decipherable in the collaboration between Hugo Glendinning and Tim EtcHELLS, but there was more to it than that. Glendinning's photographs of "drunken people playing nasty games" were set alongside EtcHELLS's texts, which explained the rules of those games. "For a politician who reads a prepared statement and then refuses to answer questions – boys show their arses" read one panel accompanying an image of just that – a gang of mooning butts. Not only were the rules of politics and televisual journalism being parodied, but equally those of the rugby-bound mindset that has become so *de rigueur* in our "post-feminist" times.

The key to this un-curated show, however, was *my place*, an installation of 1200 photographs and a video projection. Arranged as a massive wall-sized grid, the images formed a disordered inventory of the personal and artistic universe of Gwen MacGregor. The simultaneous screening of the 1970s classic film, *The Prisoner*, added a twist of proto-kitsch humour and a darker note of frustration and confinement. If there was a whiff here of the intimate intensity of Tracey Emin's now infamous bed, this was tempered by MacGregor's refusal to indulge in the raw rhetoric of Britain's current favourite *bête-noire*. The final effect was of a free-flowing association of ideas: circumstantial, tangential and vague. *my place* was, in fact, emblematic of this witty, intelligent show that reminded viewers that there are more intriguing subjects for art to consider than the nature of art itself.

Chris Morgan



Top left: Marla Hlady, untitled, from the *Amusement Machine* series (1995-98), mixed-media installation / Above right: Gwen MacGregor, detail of *my place* (1999), 1200 colour photographs and video projection / Photos by Hugo Glendinning