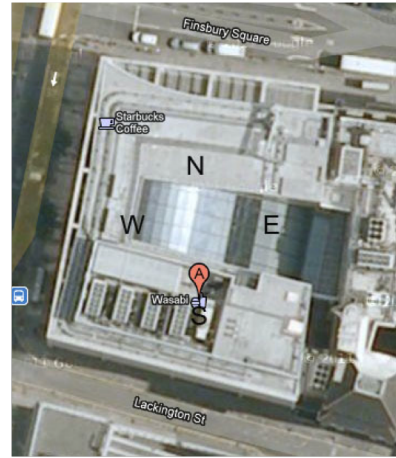


**Artist: Matthew Darbyshire**  
**Commissioning body: Bloomberg**  
**Working title: *Mojo***  
**Date: September 2011**



50 Finsbury Square North elevation



50 Finsbury Square aerial view

## Introduction.

*Mojo* aims to reconcile Bloomberg's three main requirements by creating a new work that is site specific, relocatable, and interactive. It aims to fulfill each of these requirements without compromise to the other and would allow me to make my most ambitious work to date.

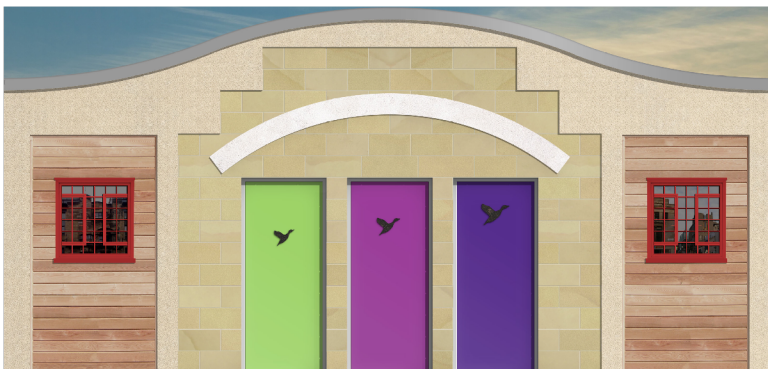
*Mojo* would give me the opportunity to extend and build upon some of my most successful works - the to-the-inch mock up of a domestic interior in *Blades House* at Gasworks; the 50 metre advertising hoarding of *Elis* at Herald Street that depicted a complete architectural makeover of the gallery site; and the 120 metre trompe l'oeil depiction of a mock Mackintosh virtual village, titled *T Rooms*, that I am currently developing for Glasgow's Tramway Gallery next year.



Blades House, Gasworks 2008



Elis, Herald Street 2010



T Rooms, Tramway 2012 (a 3D model of one of the building-wrap facades I am currently working on)





## The General Idea.



Bloombergs atrium – north, south and west glazed elevations



Pembury Estates quadrangle

*Mojo* is the working title for the fictitious rebranding and refurbishment of an existing social housing estate which would see Bloomberg's atrium become Pembury Estate's quadrangle – one of the capital's most notorious and poorest estates that in fact shares similar dimensions with the Fosters & Partners atrium design at 50 Finsbury Square.

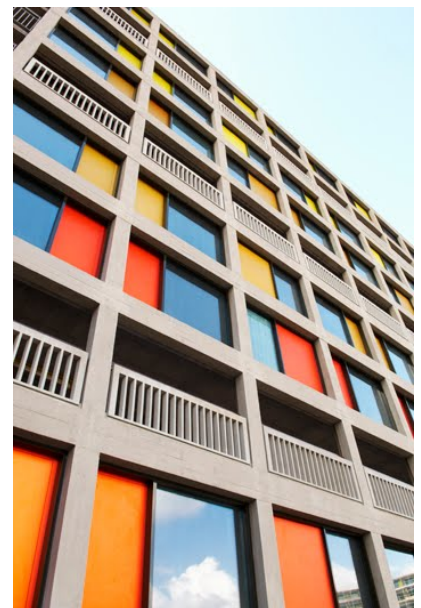
It would also see the tiered east-side of Bloomberg's atrium become a new luxury apartment block with a fully interactive 'show home' environment occupying the north-side mezzanine.

As is increasingly becoming the case, *Mojo* would appear to have transformed the social housing estate with a various tokenistic details such as stained and patchy cedar cladding over cheap unglazed clay tiles, miniscule jutting-out balconies, iridescent coloured glass thrown wherever possible, incongruous galvanised lintels and of course some catchy locationless generic name to confirm its gimmicky status.

The new "shared ownership, affordable and private rental properties combined" offered by *Mojo* would mark yet another scheme that these days comes under the banner of "funky and affordable", and that unfortunately usually sees two-thirds of its inhabitants moved on or evicted as a result.



Park Hill Estate, Sheffield after Urban Splash makeover 2011



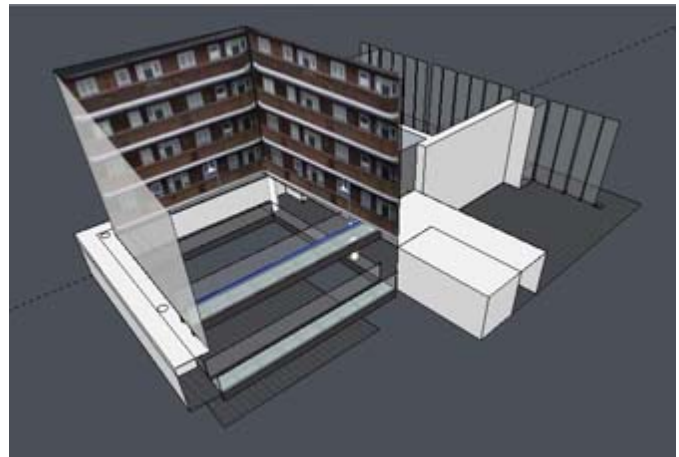


## Technical Details.

On a technical level, this mock up of a “new and improved” Pembury Estate would be achieved by fitting the three glazed north, south and west elevations of Bloombergs atrium with huge ground-to-ceiling ‘building wraps’ (ie. perforated banners that are used to wrap building facades with trompe l’oeil architectural designs) depicting the LCC’s robust 1930’s red brick Pembury Estate.



A building wrap currently overlooking the Thames, London



Mock up of the Pembury Estate building wrap in Bloombergs atrium

The atriums fourth and easterly elevation, which currently boasts one of Foster & Partners signatory, awe-inspiring curved glass constructions would also be draped in individual wraps on each walkway to accentuate its contemporary aesthetic and become the tiered façade of a much newer, high-end, luxury apartment block, more akin to those we’re seeing popping up all over the East End and beyond, leaning in to the Pembury Estate courtyard.



Bloombergs tiered walkways

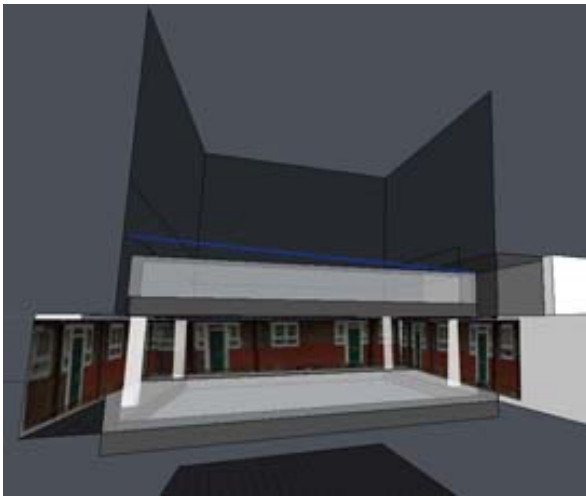


Examples of recent luxury appartments

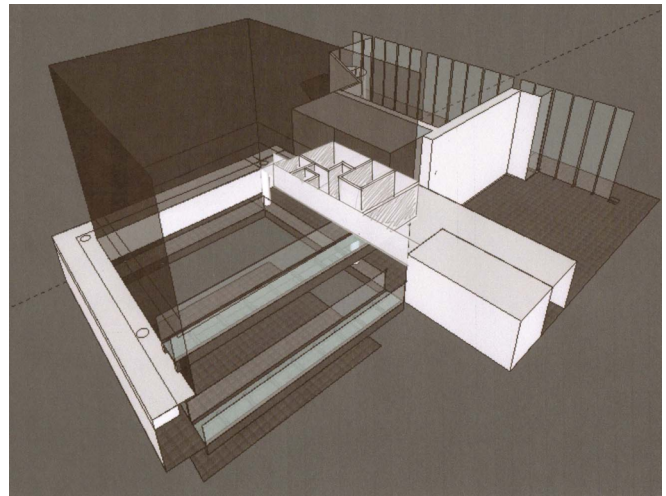




Bloombergs ground floor mezzanine walkways would physically mimic the ‘deck access’ of Pembury Estates balconies enabling viewers to walk around and examine up close the graphic depictions of windows and doors etc. before actually entering in through the front door to a full-scale ‘show home’ that occupies the deeper north mezzanine social area and stretches back to the dividing wall between the first and second gallery space.

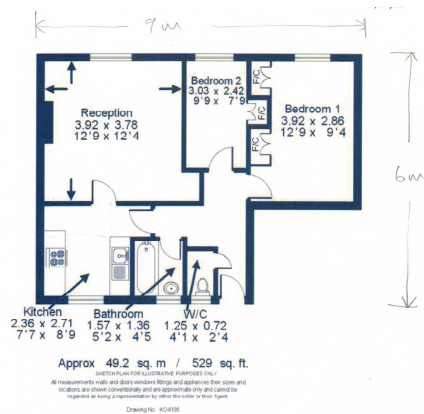


Pembury Estates ‘deck access’ depicted on mezzanine

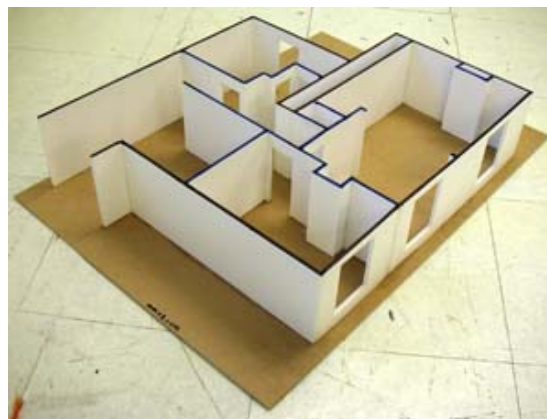


The show home layout on north mezzanine

The interactive or social space of the show home area accommodated on the mezzanine would liken perfectly the 50 square metre layout of a typical Pembury Estate flat and would be built to mirror its exact layout before being furnished to epitomize and critique the aspirations and taste preferences of our time.



A typical LCC house layout



A model of the a typical LCC layout (ie. the ‘social’ space)



3D renders of likely interior design options





## After the event.

After the event the social area/show home would become the transportable work that could potentially tour various venues operating more in the vein of my *Blades House* installation which, although now destroyed, continues to attract requests for its rebuilding, or my more recent *Exhibition for Modern Living* which is currently enjoying its fourth carnation this year and seems to be attracting considerable press.

*Mojo* would enable me to create a brand new work that expands on some of the issues addressed in both to not only bring it up to speed with today's design tendencies but to extend it formally beyond the colour-schemes that I've previously used, and to delve in to the ever-increasing decorative faux pa's of the scary nationalistic; the dubious ethnic and ethnographic; the painfully uncool and obese 1960's retro; the post-Damien Hirst skull obsession with diamante and bling; the cheap foil-mache pseudo-industrial warehouse look; the immortal pretense of mid-century modern; the neutral feet-off-the-furniture oatmeal and the cool whiteness of today's minimalist infinity chambers.



Blades House, Gasworks 2008



An Exhibition for Modern Living, Hayward Gallery 2011

## Budget.

In terms of cost, I think a safe and realistic estimate would be around £52,000. This would be broken down as follows:

- the printed banners £18,000
- the show home furniture and objects £15,000
- structural materials to install both the banners and the show home £4,000
- my artists fee for the conception, design and overseeing of the project £7,500
- architects fee for translating my drawings in to 3D renders £2,500
- rendering service fee £3,000
- studio assistant's fee £1,500
- transport 500



## **Production Timeline.**

I understand that this commission would open around March 2012. If we were to proceed then I would allow October and November for my own conception and formulation of the two main aspects of the project (ie. the banner and the interactive interior). December would be spent sourcing the necessary furniture and objects while an architect translates my drawings in to 3D renders to then submit to a 'render farm' for the month of January. The printing of the banners would take place in February with a view to commencing installation at the end of that month. I estimate the install taking myself and four technicians approx two weeks.

## **Critical Dimension.**

Like all my projects to date, *Mojo* has an inherent pragmatism that begins with the question "what needs to be done?" With this inquiry comes the consideration of the physical characteristics of location and site; the social function of the work; the commissioning bodies remit and my ongoing artistic concerns.

Pembury Estate in Hackney, East London has been chosen partly for its shared proportions with Bloombergs atrium, both in terms of dimension and number of storeys, but above all because it is one of the best examples of the London County Councils most celebrated pre-war housing estates - it is basically the epitome of social housing and *Mojo* wants us to think about exactly that.

Pembury Estate is of course also very pertinent to us all having gasped in disbelief at the grim satire of middle class urban life that we watched unfold on our TV sets earlier this month amidst the riots that saw our cities reduced to territories of unbridled consumption, and this of course also pertains specifically to my ongoing artistic activities which, broadly speaking, focus on consumption and the built environment.

*Mojo* is not critical of its hosting institution, Bloomberg, but rather the broader social institutions and values that effect us all - namely class, race, faith, demographic and gender.

*Mojo* examines the line between the conflicting aspirations of comfort, security, profit and style - deliberately deadpan and squeaky clean, *Mojo* talks of the soulless homogeneity of much of the so-called "regeneration" efforts up and down the country and attributes its wipe-clean sterility to an increasingly uptight and consumer-driven society. Whilst trying to unravel exactly why so many of us allow ourselves to be hoodwinked in to the infantilized candy-coated cool of contemporary times, *Mojo* encourages us to ask ourselves why we accept with this such a degree of compromise - whether it be ergonomic, aesthetic, geographic, social or economic.

*Mojo* looks at recent "urban renaissance" initiatives and hopes to raise questions around the social knock-on effects such as wealth disparity, racial injustice, locale claustrophobia, loneliness and paranoia whilst also simply surveying how these initiatives effect and play out in all of our lives.



## **Philanthropy.**

*Mojo* also encompasses a significant social dimension that unintentionally shares many of its aims with Bloomberg's philanthropy scheme *Kids Company* – both initiatives place emphasis on helping the vulnerable and disadvantaged, and both recognise housing as one of the key areas in need of support.

While this project doesn't embrace any political bias, it does have a strong underlying humanitarian strand that believes nobody deserves to live in overcrowded or squalid conditions, let alone tolerate homelessness. It sees these issues as intertwined with broader social problems that, until properly addressed, fears a yet further broadening of our current social divides.

*Mojo* aims to address these issues through its targeting of short-sighted and self-serving housing initiatives, both social and private, that mask the deeper problems with rhetoric and zing whilst harboring inequality and misery under the upbeat guise of regeneration.

It is a fact that there is simply not enough houses being built across the board to accommodate future generations and of those that have been built 20% are overcrowded (40% of social housing). *Mojo* highlights these facts, warns that things are unfortunately only set to get worse and hopefully encourages its viewers to reflect on their part in all of this – how it might affect them, how they might be implicated or how they might like to help seek an alternative.

*Mojo* believes that as long as developers continue only targeting the young, childless and affluent the city simply won't be able to provide the suitable communities or communal life that it needs to ensure safe, happy and conducive environments for the very young, old and most in need.

Even one of the UK's most popular urban developers (who will remain unnamed) points out in its recent publicity that the days of the stripped back loft apartment in a chic part of derelict downtown are long gone, admitting that they've all already been used up and converted in to luxury apartments long ago, leaving developers like themselves no choice but to look elsewhere when considering what to develop (ie. council estates)

Unfortunately this "refurb" or "moving on" approach obviously doesn't solve the housing shortage problem here in the UK or elsewhere, and in fact by distracting the authorities from the shortfall of new homes it can only exacerbate the problem.

## **Long term legacy of the project.**

If we were to go ahead with this project then Herald Street gallery has agreed that it's first task would be to concentrate on finding a new home for the 'show home' installation aspect of this project. There are also one or two ideas for the re-display of the entire installation (including building wraps etc.) at larger public spaces such as the Frac in Dunkerque where I already have close links with the curator Hilde Teerlinck. The finer contractual details would have to be ironed out between yourselves and Herald Street but it has been agreed that owing to *Mojo's* formal and critical proximity to some of my previous works, the likelihood of them being able to place the 'show home' element, at least, is high.

There has also been the suggestion of us producing an accompanying publication which could coincide with an Acne commission for which I am currently shortlisted for and in the process of looking for additional sponsors in order to make up the remaining money that is needed (approx £5,000). It is intended that the book would be my first monograph and would focus on 10 separate projects to date, the tenth of which could in fact be this Bloomberg commission. The book is intended to feature research material, documentation and essays by myself and the other artists / curators involved respectively. The current list of projects and contributors is as follows and the confirmed editor would be Tom Morton:

### **1. Blades House**, Gasworks, London 2008

Anna Colin – critical text

Ned Beauman – associated material

### **2. Nought to Sixty**, ICA, London 2008

Melissa Gronlund – critical text

Jonathan Griffin – associated material

### **3. Funhouse**, Hayward Project Space, London 2009

Tom Morton – critical text

Owen Hatherley – associated material

### **4. Palac**, Tate Triennial, Tate Britain, London 2009

Nicolas Bourriaud – critical text

Katy Bentall – associated material

### **5. Elis**, Herald Street Gallery, London 2010

Riya Patel – critical text

Mike Sperlinger – associated material

### **6. An Exhibition for Modern Living**, British Art Show 2010

Lisa Le Feuvre – critical text

Alex Coles – associated material

### **7. Everything Everywhere**, Frieze Projects, London 2010

Sarah McCrory – critical text

Mark Fisher - associated material

### **8. Resource Room**, Miro Foundation, Barcelona 2011

Irene Aristizabal – critical text

Scott King – associated response

### **9. The T Rooms**, Tramway, Glasgow 2012

Claire Jackson – critical text

Jacob Farrell – associated response

### **10. tbc**



## Coinciding projects.

At present, this Bloomberg commission would coincide with the exhibitions listed below. I am also short listed and awaiting decisions from FRAC Nord-Pas de Calais for a large-scale permanent commission for their new museum that is due to open in 2013, from The Contemporary Arts Society for a possible new commission for Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead, and from Kettles Yard in Cambridge for a new commission that they've asked me to consider.

Exhibition venues next year include Turner Contemporary (Margate, UK), Tramway (Glasgow, UK), Stanley Picker Gallery (London, UK), Jousse Enterprise (Paris, France), Herald Street (London, UK) and Taro Nasu (Tokyo, Japan).

## Selected Previous Works.



Everything Everywhere, Frieze Projects 2010



Funhouse, Hayward Project Space 2009



Palac, Tate Britain 2008



Woolworth Tower, Zabludowicz Collection 2011

REVIEWS: UK

Scott King, Matthew Darbyshire

Herald St, London  
9 April – 15 May

With brightly coloured knickknacks adorning tastefully sparse furnishings, and what at first appear to be insightful and inspirational quotes from artists and famous figures lining the walls, Scott King and Matthew Darbyshire's dual exhibition could easily be imagined as the reception for some 1990s yuppie executive. While we idly await our meeting, Darbyshire's *Untitled Homeware No. 14* (all works 2011) has the cubicle-jockey's frosted-glass-and-polished-steel coffee-table present us with a flocked-plastic fluorescent-pink elephant vase holding a set of plastic orchids. In the second room is *Untitled Homeware No. 13*, a yellow Buddha with a blue Union Jack tied around his neck – another hip blasphemy emanating that particular sincere ironic cool of recent decades. The unattributed quotes, though, sit off-kilter to your typical corporate aspirational wall texts: plans for a fleet of 'Taliban Library Vans', or the artist of a certain *Angel of the North* describing how, in preparation for creating work, he would 'drink heavily, take coke, crack, LSD, heroin – anything to reach the right transcendental state where one can see right through society'. It's right at the back of the exhibition that you find *Art and Politics: A Reappraisal*, a text decrying a certain kind of 'Wiki-Art' where "rare" but "cool" information is repackaged as art commodity. The texts certainly seem to be just such a beast, choice quotes unearthed and proudly held up – and all of a sudden it's possible that the whole installation is somehow the same, as if Darbyshire and King found online images of the inner sanctum of the chief executive of Urban Outfitters and replicated it here.

The titles of King's text canvases each provide a breadcrumb trail: dutiful searching online to verify their 'Wiki-Art' status reveals that they take their names from a sprawled set of articles and memoirs, but the quotes are King's imaginary insertions and addenda into the lives of Victor Burgin, Irving Kristol, GG Allin, Anish Kapoor and Antony Gormley. King's trail of references is both reading list and hit list; some are whimsical jibes at historical heavy hitters, such as US secretary of state Henry Kissinger describing, in his 1992 memoir, *Years of Upheaval*, accidentally wearing one red sock and one yellow sock to a meeting with Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, or the darkly comic image of French Marxist philosopher – and eventual wife-strangler – Louis Althusser, in his *The Future Lasts a Long Time* (1992), hopping across his spouse's freshly mopped kitchen floor on one foot. The texts could appear as the sort of private jokes that run through your head while you're reading, but instead of making the works more personal, their status as 'fake' found quotes posing as conceptual Pop art increases their distanced self-conscious hipster stance.

Darbyshire and King share the method of inhabiting the garb of commodified Pop, using its remarkably easy back-and-forth absorption and reabsorption of a range of different ideologies. This gives a sense of easy one-liners and quick punchlines, but it is this fluid surface they are willingly skating upon and mapping, in the way Darbyshire's *Homewares*, for all their shouty colours, fade quietly into the background, or how King's texts, even once they slowly unfold, still manage to feel like quick soundbites. Here they provide the decoration for the boardroom where the terms and conditions for how Pop will continue to eat itself are endlessly negotiated. *Chris Fite-Wassilak*



Matthew Darbyshire, *Untitled Homeware No. 13*, 2011, yellow flocked Buddha statue, turquoise flocked vintage Union Jack bag, coloured glass table, glass and steel support, 135 x 98 x 98 cm



LONDON

# "British Art Show 7"

HAYWARD GALLERY

"The best British art show ever," gushed the *The Guardian* when "British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet" opened late last year at Nottingham Contemporary. Could the London outing of forty artists born or resident in the UK live up to the fanfare? Easily, it turns out. Perhaps any exhibition with Christian Marclay's immensely popular video *The Clock*, 2010, is guaranteed success. Marclay's splendid, twenty-four-hour work made of existing film clips displaying the actual time, thus becoming a functioning screen-size clock, relentlessly pictures not just ticking timepieces but our uneasy relationship with time, as characters perpetually wait, rush, panic, or simply find ways to kill time on-screen.

Just as Marclay proves himself a consummate filmmaker—as does Emily Wardill in her tense 16-mm film *The Diamond (Descartes' Daughter)*, 2008—the other artists represent their media like virtuosos. In painting, Phoebe Unwin's unstable yet exacting abstractions were rivaled by George Shaw's exquisite suburban elegies and Michael Fullerton's ventriloquized painting styles. Tris Vonna-Michell's spoken poetics in *balustrade #2*, 2011, were equaled by sound artist Haroon Mirza's uncanny music-making apparatus about the doomed rock star Ian Curtis, *Regaining a Degree of Control*, 2010. Lightness was a leitmotif; near Ian Klier's barely there painting-based installation

*Melnikov project, silver*, 2010, floated Karla Black's irresistibly pink chalk powder and transparent polyethylene hanging sculpture *There Can Be No Arguments*, 2011, which seemed to blow fairy dust as you brushed past. Juliette Blythman's delicate net curtain adorning a concrete window, *and so a day is not really a day because each day is like another day and they begin to have nothing*, 2011, attempts a cozy domestic corner—just as so many Brits have struggled to do for years in their tower-block homes. Sarah Lucas excels with her twisted, intestine-like sculptures from the series "NUDS," 2009—, made of cushion stuffing, wire, and nylons set on heavy cinder blocks and plinths. The pedestals' weight fails to distract from the unnerving realization that, despite their marblelike presence suggesting the innards of a giant Henry Moore figure, they are more like weightless craft projects, begging to be unceremoniously bounced off the wall or borrowed for a game of keepy-uppy on your knee. On the other hand, there was little angst (Nathaniel Mellors's tragicomic *Outhouse*, 2010, being an exception), little autobiography, and almost no politics—save for a nostalgic 1970s throwback in Duncan Campbell's unforgettable *Bernadette*, 2006, about the outspoken Ulster activist-politician Bernadette Devlin. Overall, this is work marked by composure, competence, and an understated knowledge of contemporary artistic discourse, reflecting the intelligence and skill not only of the artists but also of the show's curators.

In the midst of such hearteningly accomplished work, Matthew Darbyshire's showstopping *An Exhibition for Modern Living*, 2010, occupied a central gallery like a Trojan horse. This roomlike installation is lined with shiny new open shelving stocked with scrupulously chosen designer objects, mostly in black, white, pink, and silver. A keffiyeh, once a sign of radical solidarity, hangs neatly ironed and artfully knotted on a novelty coatrack that imitates dripping paint. Politics has been reduced to a color-coordinated arty accessory to be donned or tossed off to suit the mood. Adjacent to sequin-covered Union Jack throw pillows are a few objects eerily reminiscent of artworks from the past: a velvet pink Jesus sharing a strange kinship with Katharina Fritsch's yellow Madonnas, a chromed gnome which hints at Jeff Koons's 1980s silvery stainless steel figurines, and playful bookends not unlike Keith Haring's radiant baby, now toddling upright and cherubically shoving ceramic books together. On the wall label, Darbyshire politely thanked such design companies as Branex and Kartell for kindly lending him these hugely seductive things: a covert name-and-shame exercise brilliantly smuggled in under the guise of institutional gratitude. Among so many uplifting works, Darbyshire's seemed bitterly cynical, prompting one to wonder: By the time "British Art Show 9" rolls around ten years from now, how much of this brilliance will be available, in watered-down and insipid form, at an IKEA near you?

—Gilda Williams



Matthew Darbyshire,  
*An Exhibition for Modern Living*, 2010.  
mixed media.  
8' 2 1/2" x 11' 9 1/2" x  
14' 4 1/2". From  
"British Art Show 7."

## Ned Beauman

*A novelist who lives in London. His novel, **Boxer, Beetle** (Sceptre, 2010), was nominated for the Guardian first book award. His second novel, **The Teleportation Accident**, will be published in 2012.*

In Matthew Darbyshire's *An Exhibition for Modern Living* (2010), taste is the bait and class is the snare. Installed in Nottingham Contemporary's large street-side window like a display of merchandise, the work brings together dozens of items of colourful mid-price interior design: lamps, bookends, hat-stands, telephones, curtains and so on. They are all repellent and depressing, and the effect of being surrounded by such a dense cage of them is unexpectedly powerful. As the narrator observes in Elizabeth Price's video *User Group Disco* (2010), which is shown at the New Art Exchange: 'We are aware that works of art can shock the unwary by their resemblance to accumulated domestic monstrosities.' But what makes *An Exhibition for Modern Living* so much more vicious is the text Darbyshire puts next to it.

'With thanks to the following lenders,' it reads, 'without whom the production of this work would not have been possible,' followed by a list of 19 brands. This is, of course, disingenuous – Darbyshire could just have bought all this stuff if he needed to. The brands participate unwittingly in their own humiliation. But if they aren't in on the joke, you start to think, who else isn't? British Art Show 7 starts off in Nottingham. Not everyone that sees it is going to realize that the installation is supposed to be grotesque; a lot of them probably love this kind of trash. They don't know any better. No, that's not an excusable

thought to have, but if it goes through your head just for a second, then Darbyshire has you. And even the surrounding printed matter seems to be complicit in setting up a notional class divide around the interpretation of his work. The free exhibition booklet gives no hint of *An Exhibition for Modern Living*'s satirical intentions, observing blandly that 'the work explores the mass availability of design classics and the pervasive idea of achieving "tasteful" living through their acquisition', and alluding to an eponymous 1949 exhibition at the Detroit Institute of Arts that well-meaningly 'set out to showcase "modern taste"'. It's only in the exhibition catalogue – priced at a distinctly unproletarian £14.99 – that we get any whispers of 'kitsch' and 'cliché' and 'doubt'.

Inaugurated in 1979, the British Art Show's original mission was to bring contemporary art to the provinces, and Darbyshire – like a more devilish Pierre Bourdieu – begins an interrogation of class, taste and the regional art-going public that seems to taint these good intentions almost indelibly. Apart from as a reference to H.G. Wells' 1906 novel, why is it, one wonders after seeing his work, that curators Lisa Le Feuvre and Tom Morton have titled their show 'In the Days of the Comet'? Is a comet like this five-yearly survey not only in the sense that it blazes across the country at regular intervals, but also in the sense that it establishes a divide between the astronomers,

who recognize it as a celestial phenomenon, and the yokels, who see it only as an omen, a prodigy, an enigma? In Nottingham, to obtain the 'art passport' that allows you to get into the Castle Museum & Art Gallery section of the exhibition free of charge, you first have to get the tram across town to the New Art Exchange, where Duncan Campbell, Christian Marclay and Elizabeth Price are showing. It is almost as if the curators, in a strategy that could have come straight out of David Cameron's patrician 'nudge unit', were bribing the masses £5.50 each to see the part of the show that makes the greatest demands on your curiosity and spare time.

Such speculations might seem mean-spirited, but the alternative is to ascribe to the British Art Show a sort of a sincere democratic optimism about its missionary activities. Well, the products in *An Exhibition for Modern Living* are full of optimism – they're cheerful, affordable, patriotically inscribed with sparkly Union Jacks. They're also dismal. If this is democratic optimism, Darbyshire suggests, perhaps it would be a good thing if curators did have at least a measure of elitist pessimism about Nottingham, Glasgow and Plymouth. Or at least he seems to suggest that. The installation itself, again, is too deadpan to take any position of its own – it's just stuff on some shelves – and all the wrangling above is outsourced to the reluctant brains of its visitors. When BAS7 moves to the metropolitan surroundings of London's Hayward Gallery in February, many of these themes will inevitably fade from view, and that's something to regret, because *An Exhibition for Modern Living* subjects the survey to the sort of ideological stress tests that you won't find anywhere in the catalogue.

**In Matthew Darbyshire's  
*An Exhibition for Modern Living*, taste is the bait  
and class is the snare.**



Matthew Darbyshire  
*An Exhibition for Modern Living*  
2010  
Mixed media  
2.5 x 3.6 x 4.5 m

Courtesy: Herald St, London, and the artist.

## Gameworks, London, UK

Estate agents' brochures drop through the letter box, their design indistinguishable from that of life-style magazines. Newspaper supplements profile the homes of young stylists, galleryists and environmental activists, as though their choice of soft furnishings might provide hard news about their psyches. MTV Cribs shows us around 50 Cent's Connecticut ranch house ('I ain't gonna tell you no lies, these chairs came from Mike Tyson'). Interior designer Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen launches a collection of tableware on his website with the words: 'I've always had a theory that the way we display specific objects in the dining-room is unwittingly or at least subconsciously inspired by Roman altars to the household gods'.

Curated by Anna Cole, Matthew Darbyshire's exhibition 'Blades House' at Gameworks (the title is taken from the name of a nearby social housing development, parts of which are now privately owned) began with a human figure, or rather its absence. Suspended from the ceiling of a silver-walpapered antechamber was a man's suit, its fabric patterned with the logos of various luxury and budget brands, from Ralph Lauren to George at Asda. These empty vestments suggested an invisible man, consumed by consumerism. Who is he? How might we know him? The answer's simple – step inside his beautiful home.

Beyond the dangling suit lay a door which opened onto a mock-up of the interior of a white-walled, windowless and almost oppressively neat one-bedroom apartment, based on the floor

plan of a unit in the exhibition's titular block, and belonging, in Darbyshire's words, to 'a fictitious, urban middle-class professional in his mid-30s'. Paddling across the entrance hall's orange carpets, the visitor was greeted by a Brompton folding bicycle (also orange), framed prints by Patrick Caulfield, Michael Craig-Martin and Henri Matisse, and a hatstand on which was hung a hooded top that seemed snatched from the wardrobe of some Nu-Rave kid from the television youth drama *Skins* (2007-ongoing). This perchance for mixing bright colours with bold shapes (Darbyshire is quietly masterful in his corralling of tone and form) was repeated in the bedroom, where the click-wheel of a tangerine iPod Nano was echoed in a CD logo painted in a rainbow of muddy, Morris Louis-like washes onto the surface of a bedside lamp. Period details proliferated – a Mui bed, a Paul Smith striped shirt, a Robin Day 6-Series chair of recent manufacture – and the room might easily have featured in a magazine piece on the contemporary bachelor pad (combine classic Modernism with a witty Pop sensibility and the acid palette of the Third Summer of Love) or functioned as a museum display depicting a 'nougeities' interior that, characteristically, hasn't quite shrugged off the 1990s, or that decade's preoccupation with retro chic.

Such shuffling of fashions from the recent past was also in play in the living room. Here an outsize graffiti tag provided the backdrop for an anthropomorphic Ikea floor lamp, two prints by Andy Warhol were hung next to one by Takashi Murakami, kitschy statuettes of Jesus and Mary were shelved next to a bust of the Buddha, and – brilliantly –

Arne Jacobson 'Egg' and 'Swan' recliners shared floor space with a pair of contemporary 'Bistro' stacking chairs sold by the British supermarket giant Tesco cheap knock-offs of Jacobson's own 'Series 7' chair from 1955. (Democratic design? As the Tesco slogan says: 'Every little helps'.)

And yet, for all the fun that Darbyshire had with these juxtapositions, 'Blades House' was also a sharply unsettling place. On a plasma TV screen the artist showed a looped video that spliced together dramatic moments and musical numbers taken from a number of Hollywood movies of the rags-to-riches genre, including *Oliver!* (1946), *The Jerk* (1979), *Flashdance* (1983), *Brewster's Millions* (1985) and *Billy Elliot* (2000). We might imagine this jumble of aspirational messages screening in the mind of the flat's absent inhabitant. It's a hard-knock life, sure, but he's reviewing the situation, and sooner or later he'll hit the big time, through talent, blind luck or more daring means.

While 'Blades House' hints at the upwardly-mobile-consumer-turned-killer horror of *16*, Ballard's novel *Rise High* (1975) and Bret Easton Ellis' novel *American Psycho* (1990), it belongs very much to now, in a world in which even supermarkets invite us to 'Taste the Difference', a measure of bought exclusivity is available to all but those of the most modest of means. How, then, might the apartment's owner signal his own apartness? How might he carve the material world into an image of his immaterial soul? Walking through Darbyshire's tense, unsettling installation, it's hard not to feel that somebody's going to get hurt.

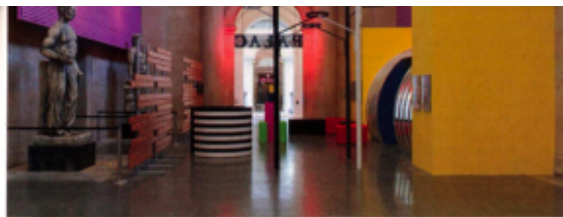
Tom Morton

Matthew Darbyshire  
Blades House  
2008  
Installation view



# Matthew Darbyshire





## Tate Triennial 2009

TATE BRITAIN, LONDON  
Edgar Schmitz

**TRUE TO ITS FUNCTION** as a naming ceremony of sorts, Nicolas Bourriaud's Tate Triennial aimed at nothing less than inaugurating an alternative modernity. It understood itself as both harbinger and incarnation of this new cultural constellation and was premised on what Bourriaud calls "the emerging and ultimately irresistible will to create a form of modernism for the twenty-first century." Fittingly for an exhibition predicated on a ringing declaration of a new epoch, "Altermodern" was surrounded on all sides by gestures of initiation, programmatic statements, and declarations of intent that ostensibly buttressed Bourriaud's assertions. The exhibition was preceded by not one but four "Prologues," daylong events featuring lineups of artists, critics, and theorists and addressing the themes "Altermodern," "Exiles," "Travel," and "Borders." Serving as yet another prologue of sorts was a curatorial manifesto posted on the Tate's website as a primer for the mystified. "POSTMODERNISM IS DEAD," Bourriaud declares emblematically in this text. "A new modernity is emerging, reconfigured to an age of globalization—understood in its economic, political and cultural aspects: an altermodern culture." This grandiose tone is echoed by the ambitious exhibition catalogue, which elaborates the idea that our nascent modernity is coalescing under truly global terms—meaning that the

Western biases of both utopian modernism and the end-of-history condition of postmodern melancholy are being done away with. Or as an unsigned catalogue blurb states: "Art made in the times we live in . . . is conceived and produced as a reaction against standardization and nationalism. The art is characterized by artists' cross-border, cross-cultural negotiations"—negotiations evincing a dynamic of creolization that, Bourriaud states, may finally subsume the outdated paradigm of harmonious multiculturalism. (True to the notion of the artist-traveler, the category of Britishness was erased from the triennial's organizational logic; the twenty-eight artists in the show were from all over the world.)

Physically, too, the viewer's entry into the exhibition was carefully orchestrated via a trio of works that functioned as a kind of drumroll, greeting visitors before they passed through the triennial's ticket barrier. The first of these, encountered on entrance to the museum, was Pascale Marthine Tayou's *Private Collection, Year 3000*, 2008. Fusing African and European pop-culture figurines into a display set up to evoke a private museum of the next millennium, this arrangement of fiction-fetish artifacts collapsed the distance between recent past and imagined future, as well as that between Cameroon and London. Nearby, in the Tate's Duveen Galleries, was Matthew Darbyshire's *Palac*, 2009. This architectural mash-up re-created elements of Warsaw's 1955 Palace of Culture and Science and of a new, Will Alsop-designed community center in England's West Midlands. Here, what was fused were Soviet pomp, echoed in the architecture of the Duveen Galleries (built in 1937), and the anodyne avant-gardism of New Labour's built environment. Against the backdrop of Subodh Gupta's towering, mushroom cloud of stainless-steel dining utensils, Tayou's and Darbyshire's works indicated a kind of multiple sitedness (in London and Cameroon, in Poland and England, in the past and the future). Significantly, a particular concept of sitedness or rootedness is central to Bourriaud's current thinking. In his most recent book,

*The Relational* (Sterberg Press, 2009), he defines his title neologism thus: "To be relational means setting one's roots in motion." Per Bourriaud, relational artists remap the present as a field of temporal and spatial dislocations. It is in this paradoxical notion of racinated mobility, perhaps, that Bourriaud's concept of the altermodern protagonist as cultural nomad—a global flâneur constantly moving across time, space, and signs—acquires whatever actual newness it may possess.

And yet, the almost too-precise correlations between these concepts and Tayou's and Darbyshire's installations underscored the degree to which the exhibition's elaborate discursive apparatus had the effect of predetermining readings of the works. (According to Bourriaud's logic, it was supposed to happen the other way around, with art generating both the discussion and, to a great extent, the shift toward altermodernity itself.) More broadly speaking, all these proclamations and performances of artistic, curatorial, and theoretical concerns had contradictory effects on the show. On the one hand, they dramatically expanded the remit of the triennial, whose previous three editions were considerably less ambitious, by appropriating the kind of discursively expanded exhibition format formulated in 2002 by Okwui Enwezor for Documenta 11 (which was presented as a series of five global platforms, of which the actual exhibition in Kassel was only one). On the other hand, however, there was a kind of narrowing, or shrinking. Bourriaud's very insistence on inventing a new paradigm ended up periodizing the altermodern, ossifying its position as chronological successor to modernism and postmodernism. Bolstering this sense of genealogy was the fact that the curator's theorizing of altermodernity itself lifts key tropes from modernist models (the manifesto, the artist-flâneur, and of course the emphatic notion of the now and its ostensible newness) and postmodernist ones (with the 1990s figure of the nomadic artist standing out as the most prominent and the most consistently disavowed).