

Sympathy for the Devil: Got No Live if You Want It!

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MONTREAL

SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL
GOT NO LIVE IF YOU WANT IT!

John K. Grande

Sympathy for the Devil: Rock 'n Roll Since 1967
Montreal Museum
of Contemporary Art
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www.macm.org
October 10, 2008
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Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art show, *Sympathy for the Devil: Rock 'n Roll Since 1967*, communicates and presents a diversity of artists' process through the medium of Rock 'n Roll. The results can be obscure, and explore the sometimes accidental, always experimental links between Art and Rock 'n Roll. A lot of the 1960s British rock musicians attended art schools before getting their bands together, as did American musicians. The Who's Pete Townsend, for instance, first saw a guitar being destroyed by Gustav Metzger when the artist was at a guest lecturer at Ealing Art College. Metzger was feted at the 2007 Skulptur Projekte Munster show with an entire section for his auto destructive art, and Pete Townsend destroyed guitars at The Who's concerts... While this seems an obvious sound track for art to follow, the show rambles all over.

Rock 'n Roll's live-ness made it what it was, an ongoing experimental social and cultural event. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan, and happening artist Allan Kaprow and Timothy Leary, are a few of the icons of the "Got Live if you Want It" generation's spirit. Robert Longo's large-scale *Men in the City* images of formally dressed businessmen and women with their body stances all twisted and contorted grabs one visually. The objects and artifacts of Rock and Art are thick on the walls, and in the curatorial cabinets, but we long for a feeling of the live culture that Rock 'n Roll is. The show is a smorgasbord of Bits and Pieces (with apologies to the Dave Clark Five). Some of the works seem so far from Rock 'n Roll you wonder... Richard Prince's photo portraits of Brian Eno, David Byrne, Dee Dee Ramone, Laurie Anderson and others, definitely document the links between Rock 'n Roll and art, as do Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* of Nico, Lou Reed, John Cale, and Maureen Tucker. Warhol's unedited recording style really brings out the persona of each subject in film... Pipilotti Rist's *I'm Not the Girl who Misses Much* (1986) video has her dancing to the Beatles song, and the movements go high

speed, as if she were a mario-nette. Richard Hamilton (famous for designing the Beatles double White Album) has a fine newspaper collage in the show, truly of its era and definitely Rock 'n Roll. It's of the moment.

One of the more successful of the newer generation of artist is Jim Lambie. The guy really gets the spirit. Lambie's *Threaded Walking Stick* is a fine blend of craft and manufacture, and his giant corner-sited Pinball Wizard wall sticker, and *The Byrds (Love in a Void)* 2005, are truly live, and finely wrought installation works. The bird-cum-artifact is covered with drippings of paint like bird droppings. *The Byrd* sits on spray paint cans (with sprays emanating outwards like a flower onto a psychedelic Op art floor.) A Lambie wall picture has Nico, from the Velvet Underground; Nico's image faces the bird, the Op floor and the walking stick. Impact-oriented Lambie understands resonance/feedback/distortion. Some of these Rock 'n Roll related works look like they were made by copyists in a monastery of post-Modern art after carefully studying the avant gardes from days gone by. The referential layering can be obscure. Wasn't sex part of the Rock 'n Roll era? Peter Saville's album

cover designs for New Order's *Power, Corruption & Lies* LP (1983) is conceptual, and theory-based... One begins to feel the somewhat over-ambitious curating, covering as it does Europe, North America, Britain and the rest of the world, made the show into something of a behemoth. West Coast artists hold their own, even the more recent, as with Raymond Pettibon's satirical sketches and music promos (worthy of George Grosz but in a PoMo era). Jason Rhoades' wall art of neon sign fragments *Velvet Underground/Perfect World* is a delightful pop signage.

The German scene in the 1980s and 1990s was particular, with artists like Martin Kippenberger and Thomas Zipp (both in this show) adding to the arts/rock cross-fertilization. Christian Marclay's *1476 Records (Louisiana Floor)* (1993) is a lively, accessible installation made of appropriate (real & recycled) materials and captures the instant culture of Rock 'n Roll spirit. So do Christian Marclay's stitched record cover collages like David Bowie from the series *Body Mix* (1991); Tony Oursler's video installation *Sound Digressions in Seven Colours* with its variously placed in space flat screen music-related clips, that includes

