

David Shrigley: Brain Activity at the Hayward Gallery

By Victoria Mendrzyk

British artist David Shrigley is exhibiting his work at the Hayward Gallery.

The Hayward Gallery hold in 2008 an exhibition called *Laughing in a Foreign Language*. Now they present *David Shrigley: Brain Activity*, it is the second time that the Gallery holds an exhibition where the artworks refer to humour. The first exhibition was treating humour from a conceptual point of view. The present exhibition of Shrigley's artworks is simply very amusing. Shrigley is best known for his drawings which are witty comments on everyday situations, on death or on sexuality. However the exhibition which is being held at the moment presents works which range through cartoon, animation, photography, drawing and sculpture to taxidermy.

Death is probably the theme in which the artist is the most humorous. Taxidermy, because it is made of stuffed animals, expresses it best and is used in surprising contexts. Animals are spread in the rooms: first a headless ostrich, then a dog holding a panel on which is simply written: 'I am Dead', further into the exhibition is a rat lying on the floor in the corner of a room and finally a squirrel is gnawing his head instead of a nut. A sculpture is a shopping list solemnly written on a marble gravestone.



David Shrigley *Gravestone*, 2008 Image © the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London



Installation view of *David Shrigley: Brain Activity* at the Hayward Gallery Photo: Linda Nyland

Shrigley also questions life and sexuality. A small sculpture represents dozens of fictitious small animals which are supposed to live between the fridge and the oven. Often Shrigley changes the scale of everyday objects and uses imagination to sculpt them. You suddenly come face to face with these microscopic dirty and colourful creatures and the result is really amusing. An entire floor is devoted to fictional insects having sex in every possible posture. The painting 'Hardcore Pornography' paradoxically shows abstract, geometrical and minimalist patches of colours rather than describing the sexual act as such.

Finally art history is one of his subjects. A drawing of a pipe is called 'This is Nothing' which refers to Magritte's famous painting of a pipe. A drawing of a Medusa's head, whose hairs are snakes, has a text written by Shrigley "This Picture does not do you Justice'. Also, an animation shows a hand switching a light on and off and refers to the contemporary artist Martin Creed. Martin Creed won the Turner Prize with an installation which consisted simply in having the lights turning on and off.

David Shrigley's photographs are probably my favourites. Done while he was a Fine Art student in Glasgow, they are very poetical. They are simply made of a note scribbled on a sheet of paper. The white sheet is then placed outside in a specific location. For instance, 'River for Sale' is an advertisement panelled on a real river, a message to search for a non-identifiable

lost pigeon is stuck on a tree trunk, or 'Imagine the Green is Red' is laid on a lawn.



David Shrigley *Lost*, 1996 Image © the artist and courtesy of the artist

The artist invites us to look at things differently by playing with the space. On the terrace of the Hayward Gallery is a text sculpture saying "Look at this", there is nothing specific to look at. On the contrary, a photograph in the exhibition has a text indicating 'Ignore this Building' in front of a huge edifice. A metallic door is labelled: 'Do not Linger at the Gate'. High up on the wall is a panel on which is written 'Hanging Sign'. On a door is written: "Door". These works are self-referential.

To me, his works can be hit and miss, sometimes hilarious sometimes overdone. However it is refreshing and has an interesting display. Definitely worth seeing.

David Shrigley: Brain Activity is exhibited at the Hayward Gallery until the 13 May 2012.

Victoria Mendrzyk is the founder of CATIL- Contemporary Art Tours in London (www.catil.co.uk (<http://www.catil.co.uk/>)).

<http://artyparade.com/en/flash-news/63>