

Visual art review: Wright | Meese | Michael



by **MOIRA JEFFREY**

From Styrofoam statues to totalitarian top trumps, Gregor Wright, Jonathan Meese and Alan Michael are three artists who take diverse approaches.

Gregor Wright: Dinosaur Expert I'm Feeling Lucky

CCA, Glasgow

Jonathan Meese

The Glue Factory, Glasgow

**

Alan Michael: Syn

Tramway, Glasgow

Dinosaurs still roam the earth: odd folk who make things by hand, who touch and feel, squeeze and stroke art works into existence. Gregor Wright is one of them. At the Glasgow International Festival this year he opened up the warren of rooms in a Victorian block in Buchanan Street where he worked. Now his primitive tendencies have taken over the white cube spaces of CCA.

The main gallery is a barren landscape of rubble, populated by giant men, part Easter Island statues, part neo-expressionist sculptures circa 1986. They should be hand-hewn from wood or stone; instead they are crudely constructed from chipped Styrofoam. Their googly eyes are pingpong balls or luridly luminous plastic bottles; they weep skeins of brightly coloured wool. At your feet are dozens, possibly hundreds of little earthenware dinosaurs, each hand-crafted from clay, fired and loosely spray painted with metallic lustre. Each tiny, spiny stegosaurus shows the squeeze of human fingers. Tread softly for you tread on my dreams.

Wright is no Neanderthal. He knows the inside and the outside of a computer. But he still paints and the crude, unsettling abstracts that go along with the sculpture have odd, staccato rhythms.

One gallery is dedicated to a series of works in which a wooden frame is sprayed to look like a metallic tray and splashes of pigment sit beneath clear resin, like images floating beneath a screen. In the corner an old venetian blind is paint splattered: another screen of sorts. In the Herculean effort required to put technology in its place it has become the thing for artists to treat digital knick-knacks like any other found objects. The painter Alex Dordoy did it recently with his laptop, an old MacBook Pro. Wright has wedged his iPad into one of his works. It is determinedly facing away from us. A new way of seeing the world? Or just another lump of plastic waiting for the rubbish heap?

What to say about Jonathan Meese, an artist who is part Russell Brand and part Francis Bacon, all raging hair and sticky fingers? He has intensity and a comedic performance persona, if tin helmets and iron crosses are your kind of fun. In his performances, sometimes captured on video, he is the Nietzschean superman with his knickers in a twist, a Wagnerian character whose wagon has become unhitched.

For about a decade now in Hamburg and Berlin and ultimately on the international art circuit, Meese has played the kind of annoying kid brother to the grown-up art world. He is all for art and dead against culture. He loathes museums unless he is showing in one. He's a necessary evil and an arresting personality and it's a nice coup for the young curator Linsey Young, who has brought him to the Glue Factory, one of Glasgow's more rough and ready venues.

Meese can paint and knows one of Germany's historical problems has been its artists. All those myths, all that mythologising. So he sabotages his own abilities, smearing his romantic landscapes with monsters. Cutting up and reassembling his apparently vast pornography collection to produce new hybrid creatures that aren't rude so much as emphatically flesh-toned.

At the Glue Factory, where Meese hunkered down for a period to prepare his show, it is as though you have stumbled into the HQ of an art cult run by a crazy dictator. There are abandoned tents, odd shrines, an inflatable SpongeBob Squarepants that may have been crucified, or perhaps just animated. It's not clear. The walls are daubed with graffiti. There's a bit of swearing, some plastic balls pretending to be breasts. He seems to have found a Top Trumps card game that focuses on great totalitarians: look there's General Pinochet, pinned to a wall! There's Lenin and Stalin! There is local colour in the shape of Caramel Wafer wrappers. I'm glad Meese exists, every culture needs its tricksters – some cultures more than others – but I don't want to spend much time with him in his bunker.

It would be hard to find a character more opposite in paint and persona to Meese than Alan Michael. Based in London, Michael is a Glaswegian who trained at Glasgow School of Art. If Meese is all pumping adrenaline, Michael's painting dances to an electronic drumbeat, a rhythm that is quiet, ruthlessly disciplined, oddly sexy, just a shade short of camp.

His new exhibition has a kind of refrigerator hum to it. There are two sequences of work. The first is a series of laser prints, a monochrome version of the logo of the Italian beer Peroni, rendered in various shades of grey on white. If you see the words can they make the image appear? Or are they simply words adrift? Does repetition create emphasis or drain meaning? When we can conjure words and images with a single touch, what does it mean to spend hours rigorously rendering them?

The other work is a series of acrylic paintings all drawn from a single photographic image of a row of animal carcasses, chilled and clinical in storage. In each there is a difference: a green shadow turns rust red, a complex pattern of fat marbling the surface is suddenly thrown into such contrast that it looks like a constructivist fantasy. A silver version reminds us of a Warhol screen print or a 19th-century platinum process photograph. Are we seeing the painter's hand and eye, or the kind of filter we use every day on our smartphones? Michael is canny and elusive. How better to counter the obvious accusation that his cool art is somehow bloodless than with all this industrial meat?

•Gregor Wright and Jonathan Meese both until 2 November; Alan Michael until tomorrow