

SHOPPING AND COLLECTING

Loss leaders win out

ANTHONY HADEN-GUEST
ON THE ART WORLD

In art as in any other enterprise, giving stuff away free can be the canniest sort of business. Selling goes on all the time

It's the month of Janus, the backwards and forwards-looking god, and a fine time to contemplate a couple of recent projects undertaken by Michael Hue-Williams's Albion Gallery, and one that lies some weeks ahead. Which may cast light on a subject many find baffling. How can dealers profit from enormously ambitious, seemingly un-saleable shows?

The Siwa Project, first. Hue-Williams made this possible for the Russian artist, Ilya Kabakov and his collaborator-wife, Emilia. Siwa is a town on a lake in the Egyptian Sahara. "It's a Berber town that's been in existence for 4,000 years," says Hue-Williams. "It exists for the simple reason that there's water there. The lake is huge – 12 kilometres long. But there are no fish in it. And Ilya was fascinated that the people have never been on the lake and they've never seen a boat. The Nile is 500, 600 kilometres away

"So he decided that he would change that. And enlisted the help of several hundred schoolchildren. They built this very beautiful boat. I think it's about 90 feet long. And the children painted square sheets of canvas with images of the boat. And they were all stitched together and turned into a sail and the boat sailed across the lake in the early evening. It was like the imagination of the children was helping power the boat across the lake."

That was at the end of last October. The project lasted six days. Simultaneously Kabakov's *The Utopian City and other projects*, opened in the 11,000-sq ft gallery on the Thames opposite Cheyne Walk. This show of drawings and models included "The Palace of Projects",

which dealt with dream and fantasy, and "Realised Utopias", which recorded real-world endeavours. This poignant, beautifully realised show ran until just before Christmas.

"The Snow Show", which is being curated for Albion by Lance Fung, will be at Sestriere, Italy, during February's Winter Olympics. Six pairs of artists and architects will make buildings from ice and snow. Yoko Ono has been paired with the Japanese architect and museum-builder, Arata Isozaki, for instance, and Jaume Plensa, a Spanish artist, will be working with the Brit, Norman Foster (The gallery is on the ground floor of a Foster building). Athletes and tourists will be free to explore the neo-igloos for as long as they last. Which will be?

"Six weeks. Then they come down," Hue-Williams says. These shows, which might seem as distinct as chalk and cheese, have something in common.

What did Siwa cost? "Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars all told."

Did it generate any saleable art? "No."

How did he cover his costs? "We didn't. That project was funded by the gallery. And it was a loss leader. And it was also funded by a group of friends of mine who are patrons of the project. It's a bit mad. But I love it. We have ended up building a house there. I like the desert very, very much. It's on the Egyptian side of the Western desert very near to the Libyan border. We will do these projects every two years. We have done two now. There is a third one in the making for 2007. And we do them for fun. Because the artists want to and because it's a great pleasure to do those kinds of things."

What did he sell from the Utopia show?

"There was nothing for sale. They'll all be returned."

And the Snow Show? "That project has absolutely no financial ramifications whatsoever," Hue-Williams said.

In art, though, as in any other enterprise, giving stuff away free can be the canniest sort of business. And Hue-Williams has no problem with discussing the nuts and bolts.

"We have never made an effort to sell work at a show," he says. "I've always made an effort to make the best shows so that people want to come and look at the work. So we

are selling all of our artists all the time. It's not that we just put something on the wall and sell it that way. That's not how I work."

Jaume Plensa, for instance, one of the Snow Show duos, is now finishing off a sculpture for the top of the BBC building. It will be up later this year. Albion will take a cut, as it does for all its artists' commissions. Hue-Williams notes that Plensa is also making "a major piece in Cincinnati. And another one in Raleigh, in North Carolina. I mean huge projects."

James Turrell, the American, who makes extraordinary works using natural light, and has spent years hollowing out the crest of an extinct volcano, the Roden Crater, in Flagstaff, Arizona, is another Albion artist.

"We've got a show at a sculpture park for James that's been in gestation for eight years. He'll be doing a London project in '09. And these things attract substantial fees. Because they are an enormous amount of work. And a long-term commitment on James's behalf. He works very well with architects.

Six pairs of artists and architects, including Yoko Ono, will make buildings from ice and snow

And some architects realise that they would be much better advised to work with artists from the outset rather than have their buildings finished and have something plonked on top.

"We work a lot with projects where they are not physically in the gallery. They are commissions for the artists out and about. We work with Andy Goldsworthy. His work is also very expensive. Much of that is to do with the pure cost of making the work. We're doing quite a large piece with him for the Grosvenor estate in SW1."

And Ilya and Emilia Kabakov? "We are doing other things with them where there's a commercial aspect," Hue-Williams says. "In 2006 this operation should turn over 25 or 30 million dollars."

Baerfax, the on-line art world subscription newsletter, is put up

almost weekly by the private dealer Josh Baer, and has been since 1994. It's a very New Yorkish phenomenon because Baer is a New Yorker, if a highly peripatetic one, and he runs the newsletter almost wholly as a one-man band. It is not a tip sheet, or very seldom, in the sense of suggesting good buys and sells. Rather it runs nuggets of hard news – job changes, deaths – but perhaps the meat of it is the auction coverage. Baer not only names the buyers but, crucially, for people in the trade and for collectors, whenever he can he names the underbidders. So it's a shoe-leather operation and Baer, a slight 50-year-old, can be seen in the closing phases of any serious Manhattan auction, bolting around like a collie among ambling sheep.

I asked Baer, who is the son of the artist, Jo Baer, and himself a former gallerist, what kind of feedback he gets?

"Instantaneous feedback!" he said. "Recently I wrote about somebody's job change. They were in the middle of negotiations and they weren't too happy. Or I'll get a phone call from Larry Gagosian two minutes after I publish a story. He'll want more information when most people are still reading it."

This is the time of year when the usually nuts-and-bolts Baerfax permits itself some jollity: namely their readers' poll of the Best and Worst of the art year. For 2005 the Favourite Museum Shows were Richard Tuttle, at the Whitney and in San Francisco, and Jean-Michel Basquiat in Brooklyn. The Least Favourite were Elizabeth Murray at MoMA, New York, with "Dishonorable Mentions" to the sprawling Russia show at the New York Guggenheim and the Greater New York show at PS1 in Long Island City.

The Favourite Gallery Show was Mike Kelley at the Gagosian gallery in Chelsea. The Least Favourite was the Damien Hirst show, earlier last year in the same venue. "And I suspect some of the voters may have even been people who bought Damians from the show. I suspect," Baer says, with relish. It's remarkable. As once with Julian Schnabel and as still with Jeff Koons, any Damien Hirst show now becomes a media psychodrama, some kind of a subliminal portal for generalised hopes and fears.

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Concealed charms

EDWINA INGS-CHAMBERS
ON BEAUTY

The best make-up is barely noticeable but makes a notable difference – just don't slap it on in public

Call me old-fashioned – and there are some that will – but it seems to me that a certain etiquette should surround the application of a woman's beauty products: let us call it *beautiquette*. And this does not include applying foundation, blusher, plucking eyebrows (a practice many friends have noticed) or clipping fingernails (again, this has been observed) on public transport in front of complete strangers.

It's curious that in the past few years it has become acceptable for women to carry out such personal routines in public.

The development matters on two levels. Firstly, make-up is not just about the art of enhancement but also of concealment. It's meant to be unnoticed, almost surreptitious. It requires an element of falsehood, not brazenness. It is all about secrecy, about a woman knowing what she's applied to her own face but almost pretending that she hasn't done a thing ("Ah, just a spot of blush, that's all"). It is, in other words, private.

Cosmetics companies take great pains to produce make-up that gives a natural flawless complexion. Prada's tinted moisturiser or Prescriptives' personal blend foundation service both aim to give skin a youthful glow, not an obvious layer of glamorous icing. Jo Malone's finishing blush stick is barely noticeable and yet it makes

a noticeable difference, leaving Jane Austen-style healthy, rosy cheeks in its wake. Even make-up artists, such as Bobbi Brown, have gained celebrity status for showing us how to look natural while actually coating ourselves with a not negligible amount of make-up. It's a skill – as well as a marketing tool – and a revered one at that.

Secondly, the practice of applying make-up in public is unhygienic, unpleasant to watch and simply impractical. Make-up artist Ruby Hammer, half of the cosmetics brand Ruby & Millie, says it's really not a great way to apply your war paint.

"The most important thing when first doing your face is good, ambient lighting. The best thing is to be in daylight but, whatever lighting you have, you must see yourself evenly – one side of your face can't be darker than the other."

Aside from that, Hammer believes women should keep their grooming rituals in the home – "it's about discretion and some sort of decorum". Besides which "you'll get a better effect if you sit down and do it properly, where your hands are free and your tools are right there."

Just why this exhibitionist trend has sprung up is hard to fathom. Perhaps Lynne Truss, in her latest book *Talk to the Hand: The Utter Bloody Rudeness of Everyday Life* (Profile Books) hits on the key factor in her chapter entitled "My Bubble, My Rules".

"Academic friends say their students answer calls during lectures. Lovers lolling on the public grass on a sunny day glare at you if you look at them, as if you have just walked into their living room. People chat in the cinema during the film, and sometimes in the theatre during the play. Air travellers on long-haul flights change into pyjamas in the lavatories. It's as if we now believe, in some

spooky virtual way, that wherever we are, it's home."

But ladies, the train, the bus, the Underground or Subway or Metro is not home. It's about time we took our grooming back to the bathroom – after all, this is where men manage to contain theirs. And they do lead busy lives too.

There is, however, one part of our make-up ritual that can be displayed publicly without breaking *beautiquette* rules: applying lipstick. If applied at the table at the end of a meal using a dazzling compact, this ritual becomes a statement rather than a mere grooming point.

"There's something alluring about it," says Hammer. "To apply something confidently like that can be very disarming." (This does not extend to lipgloss. There's something more haphazard and gloopy about it that means it doesn't lend itself to observation. Lip balm in stick form could be allowed.)

But be warned: lipstick application is not without its hazards. In some US states, doing this while driving is now against the law and considered to be on a par with mobile phones in terms of motoring danger.

While no one can claim that doing your face on the train could come under the heading of criminal negligence (unless you're driving it), the reality is it breaks the unwritten codes of conduct and feminine (grooming) concealment.

If you're still not convinced, mutter to yourself – as I have started to do each morning as I watch women blend and shape – the immortal line from *Macbeth*: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

For there are times our hearts, whether false or not, must remember to guard the secrets of enhancing our not always perfect faces. It's not being dishonest, it's *beautiquette*.

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