

Rob Churm Parasite Rex

CCA: Centre for
Contemporary Arts

Fri 26 May – Sun 9 July 2017

Tue-Sat: 11am-6pm // Sun: 12noon-6pm // Free

In his book *Heart of the Original*, writer Steve Aylett discusses the representation of originality - how humans often dress up old ideas as new ones, how we quickly forget or erase our own histories, or forget to acknowledge what came before us. He describes how the genuinely new is often too much for our culture to cope with, and so we continue to perpetuate myths and falsehoods of originality to our own social and political ruin:

“True creativity, the making of a thing which has *not* been in the world previously, is originality by definition. It increases the options, not merely the products. But while many claim to crave originality, they feel an obscure revulsion when confronted by it. They have no receptor point to plug it into. Attempts to fore it result in the sort of fire that burned Tesla’s wonder-lab to the ground. Repetition of familiar forms is preferred.”

In this exhibition of new works by Glasgow artist Rob Churm, a series of prints, illustrations and drawings explore this process of claimed originality whereby the artist makes evident the history of his own making - where every decision, reference, process, altercation and anxiety is made clear in the form of each work and in the space of the gallery. These drawings, prints, comic strips and moving image works explore new ways of seeing and describing the world, wherein options and possibilities are created and histories mapped. Attempts to organise the flow of imagery become symbolic of Churm’s inner dialectic where complex compositions are generated by consistently breaking a simple set of rules and where strange stories and characters emerge as actors.

In these works, Churm utilises a range of references from science and weird-fiction, cult film and culture, psychology and neurology. He layers these footnotes to construct stories that echo the life he lives as an artist. His comic strips and drawings elaborate on research into the workings of the brain - psychological phenomena and scientific experimentation – forming semi-fictionalised narratives about artists’ and practitioners’ obsessions and working processes.

The expanded series of large comic strip pages *Jonah* drawings makes reference to the former Beano comic book character Jonah, the gormless sailor known for accidentally sinking ships. Each comic strip in the series creates a narrative surrounding a lesser known history of comic book drawing and art practice, with stories of characters journeys - fictional and real - into psychological turmoil. The American landscape painter Charles Burchfield is footnoted, an artist known for his hallucinatory and distressed paintings in later life – which are said to be the outcome of a psychological breakdown. Wilder Penfield, the Canadian neurosurgeon is also referenced in the series, famed for his scientific interest in illusions, neural simulation and mental processes.

The newer work focuses on the sequential aspects of his drawing practice, allowing ideas to cascade and weirdness to grow. A new series of prints has been developed in collaboration with Glasgow Print Studio, which play with neural network software to produce hybrid images of existing drawings. In *Inbred*, *Decorated* and *Perforated*, Churm uses an algorithm to combine two of his own drawings to create digital offspring, again playing with the value of the reproduction versus original. This resulting image has been printed to create duplicates, which Churm reworks and obscures with drawing. A similar process is repeated in a series of large-scale works *Chewed*

Up, copying and merging existing drawings by hand. Scaled up in this way, the process creates an immersive field that is teeming with parts but hard to read as a whole.

A new series of prints *Light Knife in the Brainbow*, takes as a starting point a neurological procedure, which produces a colourful image of the brain known as a Brainbow. Brainbow imaging occurs when individual neurons illuminate as individual colours on brain scanning equipment, creating a complex fluorescent images of the brain and the interrelations between neurons. The Brainbow was first witnessed in the animal testing of mice, and observed by inflicting pain to examine the reaction of the mice's pain receptors in the brain. With sinister beginnings, this process is nevertheless identified by its beautiful, psychedelic emotive visual result. Churm plays with this paradox, wherein the works expunge stories of weird and ominous inner-brain workings, memory and cognition, with reference to other researchers and artists who suffered or gained through their psychological traumas.

Collaboration is key within Churm's work. CCA1 is a resource room of sorts, displaying works associated with previous collaborative projects and experiments, including book covers, posters, signs and video documentation. His collective works co-programming *Fantom Cinema*, events at *The Old Hairdressers*, documentation of performances and the co-produced publication *Prawn's Pee* are reflected and acknowledged, as important facets of his practice. In CCA2, an ongoing film collaboration with sound artist Joe Howe is presented as a twin projection, wherein the artists construct layers of moving image and animation with the aid of a digital environment, playing with improvisation, mishap and delay.

The exhibition also includes the launch of a new comic book *Exhaustion Hook*, an ongoing narrative project that functions as 'a place to put all the in-between goop, performance anxieties, alter egos, interviews, etc'. In CCA3, an expanded display of the comic book is laid out on tables and in frames on the walls. The final comic is also available to purchase at CCA's box office for £5 and is on display in book form in CCA1.

In the title of show, Churm touches upon the idea or role of the parasite - an unknown entity that might live inside us - as a separate being, but nonetheless still making us what we are. *Parasite Rex* refers to a 2004 book of the same name by science writer Carl Zimmer, which looks at the history and perception of parasitic life forms – the ubiquity and banality, as well as the gruesome details of their existence. It explains how parasites are not simply unwelcome monsters, but how the ecology of life often relies on these organisms to survive. In certain sections, the book describes how some parasites alter the DNA of their host in order to shape that environment to their needs. A parasite changes the destiny of the host without it ever knowing, controlling it to its own ends. For Churm, this show is about questioning relationships of autonomy, decision-making and the original source of ideas, questioning the agency of humans, artists and relationships. The parasite becomes a weird metaphor looking at the potential of these obscure, intuitive and unknown powers to surface, inform and shape.

Events

- Thu 1 June 2017, 6.30pm // free but ticketed // CCA Cinema

Film screening: Andrew Bujalksi's *Computer Chess* and Peter Burr's *Pattern Language*, introduced by Rob Churm

- Fri 16 June 2017 7pm // free but ticketed // CCA Gallery

Performance with Kathryn Elkin, *City Vegetables & Blood Stereo*

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