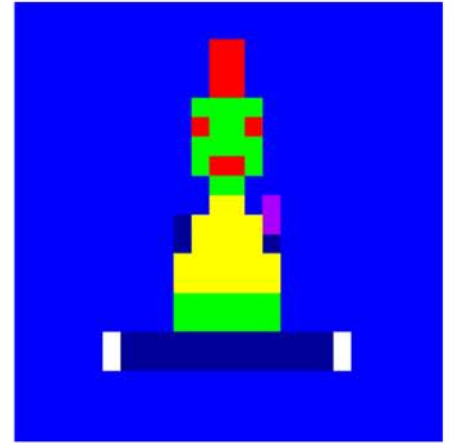


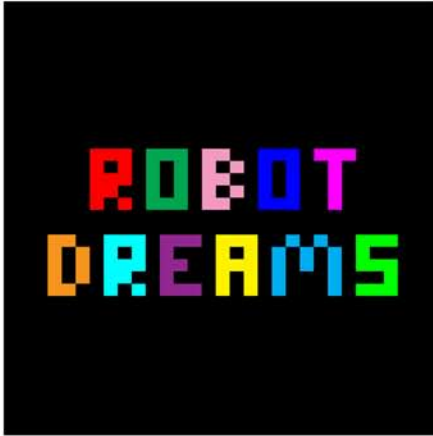
ROBOT

DREAMS





James Johnson-Perkins
ROBOT DREAMS



Reminiscing about childhood is a practice routinely explored by those after a whimsical slice of the past, but it's something not regularly investigated in art...Offering a nostalgic gaze at pop culture, James Johnson-Perkins' art looks at subject matter related to his adolescent experiences, including Lego models and 1980s computer games and TV programmes.

Metro

"I suspect that this collection of 'robots' by James Johnson-Perkins is a self-portrait. A collection of super-heroes, who are all versions of the artist."

James Johnson-Perkins retains a focus on the possibilities of playfulness as art in his practice. This is increasingly overt in his work and never more so than in the choice of Lego as his modernist referencing material.

Helen Smith

Director - Waygood Gallery, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne

As a devotee of dawdling and daydreaming, I enjoyed the brash exuberant displays...
...A knowing nod towards the Pop Art of yesterday.

Philip Wincolmlee-Barnes

**Interview with James Johnson-Perkins by Andrew Quinn, a Director of Red Gallery, Hull
Saturday 28th June 2008
Worthing Street, Hull**

AQ : Thematically in the broadest sense, what's your work about...

JJ-P : There's definite themes and influences in my work... My recent work is influenced by my relationship to childhood nostalgia, particularly the 80s. Choosing materials that are poignant - like Lego, 80s television programmes, 80s films and the themes within those... I recently had a film made for me, of Knight Rider - but it's made from ASCII characters, which look like Teletext...

AQ : [agreeing]

JJ-P : It's also saturated so it looks like it's just made out of eight colours...

AQ : ...It's also the same palette physically as a ZX Spectrum computer display

JJ-P : It's very close to this. I also made a film before that, which was... the A-Team using ZX Spectrum graphics. So I'm trying to use a subject matter that relates time-wise to the theme of the television programme that I'm using... there's also whole lot of references to computer games and the names of computer games in my work. I make these floor pieces and call them things like Jet Set Willy...

AQ :Yes

JJ-P : And the word pieces make references to other 80's things... like Tron... or.... songs like... Blue Monday, a New Order song. The next thing I want to use is Action Men... I can see the Action Men in the same space as the robots...Up until now I have been making robots out of Lego... I suppose we grew up in a generation where ... there was a lot of science fiction...

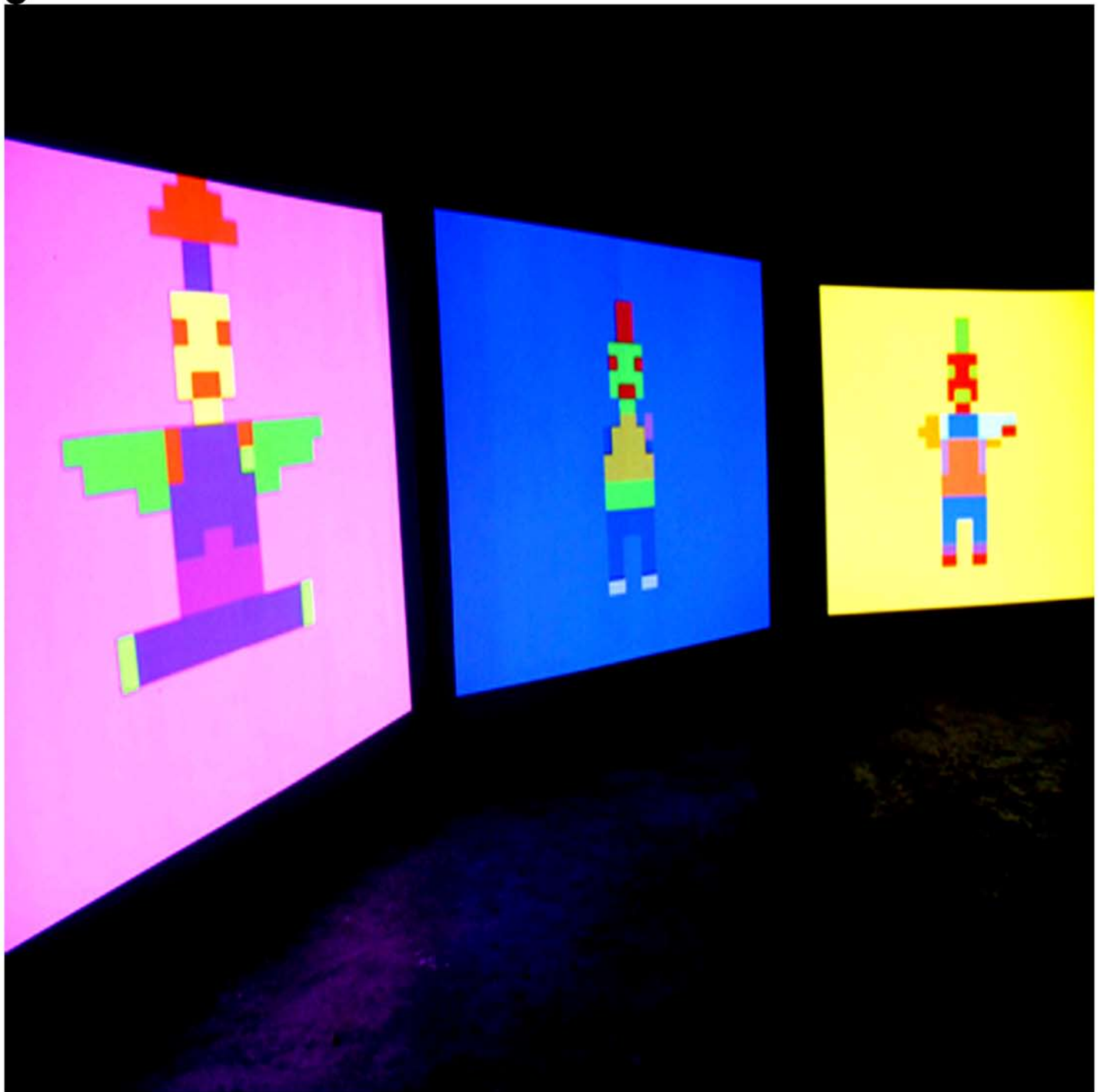
AQ : And science fiction cartoons as well...Like Transformers... and other kids TV programmes with a character which would have a pet robot assistant...

JJ-P : Yes...there was. Twiki... from Buck Rogers and a robot in The Black Hole and Battlestar Galactica.

AQ :Yes.

JJ-P : ... I also do a performance work called John Peel where I wear a mask and become a robot myself - I DJ as this robot, play 80s music and I do robotics...So in my exhibitions there's lots of different things happening simultaneously... There's music, things to look at and things that move... like my geometric and robot animations... One of the things I've really enjoyed in my practice and in other people's work is when it is playful and skews boundaries of how we would normally see or present something... you know, for example, Wolfgang Tillmans, when he puts his photographs onto the wall they are in very different places... like posters... and sometimes the edges a poster are ripped or slightly skewed, so you view them in a very different way to the standard idea of framed works which are hung at the same level...for me now, when I have an exhibition, there's no definitive way of how things will to be shown, it's like an experiment...

3



AQ : ... as long as there's enough... space to interact with it...

JJ-P : Because of the way that I work, I'm not precious about that. I guess what I'm trying to say is - if someone wants to come in and break a piece off, I'd be quite happy to patch it in a different way...

AQ : If a child comes in and picks up one of the things and runs round and puts it down somewhere... then...

JJ-P :... well yes, to a point... that's OK.

AQ : [laughs]

JJ-P : So in essence I like to think that people will relate to what I do in a very childlike way... a lot of people have actually brought this up...my exhibitions are like a...

AQ : ... a children's playroom?

JJ-P :...yes, so it doesn't matter if the robots are nicely composed in the middle of the room. What actually matters is that there's a mass of things that people get a sensation that triggers particular thoughts of their own childhood or they might be reminded of playing games with their own children...I end up having lots of conversations with grown men and women about... when they were... ten...I think everyone enjoys a nostalgia trip...

AQ : Yes when I went to university for instance...one pub conversation that was guaranteed to get everybody involved was to be talking about... 1980s television programmes or something... it was a conversation everyone could engage with... and enjoy... remembering the theme tunes and what the characters were called.

JJ-P :... yes, 'cause it triggers an emotive response of a time where... possibly you they happy. [both laugh]

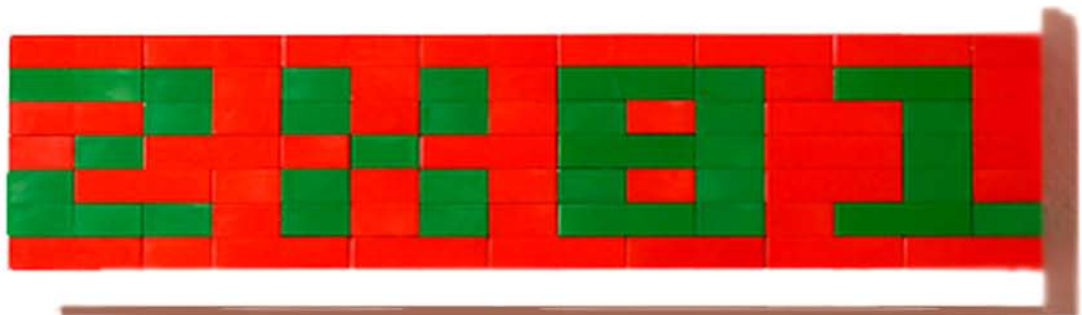
JJ-P :...well they were not burdened by responsibility, well, not everyone is... When I was thirteen years old, I went to a youth club and we used to watch the A-Team on the TV and play ping-pong and it would be... really fun...I end up telling similar stories at art galleries with people who are used to spending time talking seriously about art.. I end up going to these places to show work and listening to curators... like a counsellor... about their childhood experiences...

AQ : [laughs]

JJ-P : I meet these important art people and we end up sitting on the floor, surrounded by loads of Lego bricks, talking about Action Men and Cindy or Madonna. [both laugh]... I also relate my work to the history of art e.g. pop-art and architecture and quite serious things but at the same time I also like to just...play...There's of an interesting dichotomy between those two things. You know Picasso was very much interested in making art as a child would... I think this notion is really important. I'm also fascinated with the mythology behind stories of childhood...my favourite is He-Man. He-Man is the master of the universe, has a magic sword and he can turn a cat... into...a battle cat. He's fighting against Skeletor, who... is Death... you know he's got a skull for a face.

AQ : ... and a black hood...

5



JJ-P : You know, this is telling children, symbolically, that they have to be really strong, believe in magic. To avoid death... when I look at children's stories now I think, well, they're a bit crazy, and to think we grew up with all these... and... I wonder how does that affect us as adults when we reinterpret these tales? In some ways the stories are not necessarily a bad thing, teaching children to believe in magic. But in other ways, we live in a culture where there are wars, and maybe these stories have programmed in us into a sort of acceptance, you know... with good guys fighting the bad guys and then...

AQ : ...if they win, they're the hero...

JJ-P : ...yes, and the politicians happily tell us that we're fighting against the bad guys and that makes you feel alright about it, 'cause we're like He-Man and we're all on the side of the good, but it's not that simple...

AQ : ...did anyone ever ask Skeletor if he had a difficult childhood... you know... Did he get bullied for having a skull for a face...[both laugh]

JJ-P : ... but there are good stories too like Star Wars... the great thing in Star Wars, is the bad guy, Darth Vader...has got a good side too...

AQ : ... it's less simple than just saying 'he's a baddie, he's just a baddie'...

JJ-P : ... yes... it's not so black and white... that's why I like it. I think I'm not specifically trying to address those types of things within my work, but I think that with my robots, they're different sizes, have guns and some of them are bigger and smaller, and there's power ratios between them and I sort of see them as having an essence of these stories and...

AQ : ... character...

JJ-P : ... yes they're different characters, some of them are women, some of them are men, some of them have got two heads – and I use my own symbolic language. If one's got two heads it means something very different to one with a hole in its body... These qualities also relate to sculpture in different cultures and times.

AQ : So is there particular model of the robots which is yourself.

JJ-P : ... They're all me. They're all just aspects of my psyche... well, one of them might be me, but I wouldn't tell you which one... [both laugh]

AQ : ...it's the one wearing the dress, with the wings...

JJ-P : ... well, if you want to look at them like little fetishes... then... you don't want to give away your secret robot, do you...

AQ : ... yes... [laughs]



JJ-P : ...I don't want to have someone come along and do voodoo on it. [both laugh]

AQ : how did you relate or treat your Lego when you were playing with it for the first time as a child?

JJP : The reason I chose Lego initially as an artist, to make sculpture, is, it's the most basic material. I suppose what's nice about Lego bricks and with drawing too, is there are no boundaries - you can draw what you want, and you can imagine things up. Also I'm probably living out a fantasy... that I probably would have liked to have fulfilled as a kid, but never had enough Lego... [both laugh]

JJP : As a child I remember building these tiny little spaceships and we built...

AQ : ... them out of three bricks, so you could make a full fleet of them...

JJP : ... yes, so we'd have a hundred of them, and it was so good having so many...

AQ : I remember, strangely my own Lego playing, I'd make something that my parents we're really proud of and I've got these in a photo album.

JJP : You've got some photos of these?

AQ : Yes... amongst those I've got pictures of some Lego models I made when I was four or six or ten...

JJP : Aww... that's lovely... I'd have liked that...

AQ : But what's funny, is there's no record of any of the drawings or paintings... just the Lego. So the ones that were really good would stay on this little shelf in the bedroom as it was 'finished'... until, I needed the bricks again... for a while I would try and keep it, keep it there as "I'd made this beautiful ornament" and put it on a shelf for... two days... and then go "ohh... I need one of those flat four bricks off it"...

JJP : That's similar to what I do now... but I don't need to break them down... and these things have become artworks...

AQ : ...and you can keep them forever and just get more bricks.

JJP : But what's different about what I do now is I'm playing around with... a whole sort of schematic... of art and the history of art ...and lot of artists I am interested in are using similar nostalgic references, like Mark Wallinger's silver Tardis or Jim Lambie's floor pieces, which are very 80's.

AQ : Where will your work develop onwards... from...the 80's. In ten years time will you start looking at... nineties nostalgia from when you were in your late teens or early twenties...

JJP : ... I don't know whether I'll stick to the eighties or go into the nineties...but I can definitely see myself over the next ten years making five hundred robots... so there's even more of a critical mass... I can imagine huge spaces just totally filled with them... I can also see myself making more of the video works based on eighties programmes, so I could go on for the rest of my career exploring the eighties, or exploring childhood and using these particular materials.

Page	Title
Inside front	Robot Dreams, Lego/Mega Bloks, 2008 Red Gallery, Hull, UK
1	Introduction
2	Inteview
3	How Does It Feel? Video Installation 2008 Nospace Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand (Photo: Yoko Sakamoto)
4	Interview
5	ZX 81/Atari/Tron, Lego/Mega Bloks 2008 Red Gallery, Hull, UK (Photo: Conor Lawless)
6	Interview
7	King's Lynn Art Centre Exhibition, UK, 2007
8	Interview
9	ZX Ateam/Teletext Knight Rider, DVD, 2008
Inside back	James Johnson-Perkins, John Peel 80's Robot DJ Performance Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK (Photo: Matthew Cowan)

Selected Exhibitions

2008

Robot Dreams (solo show), Red Gallery, Hull, UK
Exhibit Gallery (solo show), London, UK
How does it feel? (solo show), Nospace Gallery, Thailand
Giant Robot Angel Commission, Baltic Gallery of Contemporary Art,
Angel of the North Anniversary Event. Gateshead, UK
15 - Feature Film (Dir. James Johnson-Perkins), The Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK
Harry Smith Anthology Remixed, Sensoria Festival, Sheffield, UK
The Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA), Glasgow, UK.
Urban Identity, Monkey town, Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York, USA
Liquid Room, National Center for Contemporary Arts (NCCA), Moscow, Russia
Play - Pause, Fishmarket Gallery, Northampton, UK

2007

Play (solo show), Fermoy Gallery, King's Lynn Art Centre, UK
Turn Me On (solo show), Waygood Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK
Digital Long Island Media Festival, IMAC Theatre, New York, USA
The International Experimental Film Festival,
Carbunari, Florean Museum, Baia Mare, Romania
I Won The Maths Prize At School, Rednile Project Space, Sunderland, UK
Do Billboards Dream of Electric Sheep,
Royal Centre/Nottingham, Big Market Place/Derby, Phoenix Arts Centre/Leicester. UK
Video Art & Architecture, Cultural Communication Centre of Klaipeda, Lithuania
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA & Cultural Center of Spain, El Salvador, Spain
NOMAD Urban Video Festival, Tineretului Park, Herastrau Park, Bucharest, Romania

2006

Jet Pack (solo show), Arts Council, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK
ZX A Team, First Play Berlin, HAU 2, Berlin, Germany
Make Your Own Damn Art World, Middlesbrough Museum of Modern Art (MIMA), UK

2005

Nostos (Dir. James Johnson-Perkins), Northern Lights Film Festival,
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, UK

2004

Selected Films, D-Form Festival, L'antic Teatre Associaccio,
Culteral el Molino Atomic, Barcelona, Spain
Selected Films, Chateau NW1, The Barfly, Camden, London, UK

2003

Crossovers Japan, Toyota Museum of Art, Toyota & International House, Kyoto, Japan
Selected Films, Lux Artist Film, The Royal College of Art, London, UK

2002

Crossovers UK - Mile End Centre/ Matts Gallery/ Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK
Seminar @ Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK

www.johnson-perkins.co.uk

Exhibition Catalogue
James Johnson-Perkins
ROBOT DREAMS
Red Gallery 2008



Red Gallery
19 Osbourne St
Hull
UK
www.red-gallery.com

James Johnson-Perkins

Robot Dreams

Red Gallery

Hull, UK

27 June - 27 July 2008