

## Satellites Programme

### *Emotional Need*

An exhibition by Adam Lewis Jacob, with works by Donald Rooom.

27.05.17 – 02.07.17

*Emotional Need* is a new exhibition by Glasgow-based artist Adam Lewis Jacob, that explores the life and work of anarchist cartoonist Donald Rooom. Donald's involvement, since the late 1940s, in political organising, publishing and comic illustration is the catalyst for a new film and soft sculpture. These new works are exhibited alongside a selection of Donald's original drawings related to his famous *Wildcat Comics* series. This long-running political satire published by Freedom Press, features a small cast of characters centred around the short-tempered anarchist Wildcat and an intellectual bird called Free-range Egg Head, who take on familiar targets such as bosses, government officials, the monarchy and police.

Over six months, Adam filmed a collection of informal interviews with Donald, which alongside his cartoons, form the basis for a new film work. Adam constructs films rhythmically as a series of collage-like fragments. In the film *Wildcat*, observational scenes of Donald drawing and talking about the development of Wildcat the character are combined with performed extracts of *What is Anarchism?*, animated cartoons that point to the changing vocabulary and internal struggles within the anarchist movement, and staged encounters in various locations including Freedom Press. Adam has collaborated with friends and peers to develop a soft toy, animations and musical interruptions that disrupt the interview format, while using the camera to listen to Donald's experiences. The overlapping of comparatively different scenes and visual frictions builds on an interest in how the form of a film can embody its subject matter.

The new film is shown with a selection of Donald's own drawings, brought together from his personal

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archive, and a soft-sculpture constructed from a patchwork of fabrics made with Katy White. Cartoonish and architectural, the sculpture is covered in a surplus of images, patches, stickers, newspaper clippings, and extracts of research relating to Donald's life. These materials extend from Adam's interest in DIY culture, fanzines and adolescent rebellion as a formative process in which teenagers' appropriate symbols and customise clothes, disrupting and partaking in collective identities.

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Adam Lewis Jacob graduated from the MFA at the Glasgow School of Art in 2015. He studied at Piet Zwart Institute in 2015 and took part in the Mountain School of Arts in Los Angeles in 2011. Recent exhibitions include: *Double Parrhesia*, Catalyst, Belfast and *FFWD*, Duolun Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, as part of *CURRENT: Contemporary Art from Scotland*. Adam is co-founder of the artist-run exhibition space Celine and a recent committee member at Transmission.

Donald Rooom was born in 1928 and became an anarchist in 1944. He has contributed to the anarchist paper *Freedom* since 1947 and his cartoons have appeared in *The Syndicalist*, *Private Eye* and *Peace News*. He has written and illustrated several books, including *What is Anarchism?*. The comic series *Wildcat* has been published by Freedom Press since the 1980s and his work is held in the British Cartoon Archives.



Everyone knows that the Sex Pistols weren't real anarchists but...

Timothea Armour

My first encounter with the idea of anarchy or indeed anarchism was through the Sex Pistols' first single, *Anarchy in the UK*. Thirty years after its release, my friends and I performed a cover version of it in a music class when we were twelve or thirteen, in which the inclusion of a triangle solo possibly made for a performance more 'punk' than the Sex Pistols' own. We drew ☺ in biro on bags and school books, and although I don't recall having any conception of anarchism as anything other than apolitical chaos, we wanted to be punks.<sup>1</sup> Whilst one meaning of 'anarchy' is chaos, confusion and disorder, this isn't necessarily what 'anarchism' intends; it incorporates a whole school of social thought directed towards replacing the state with non-governmental cooperation between free individuals. However, *Anarchy in the UK*'s anarchist posturing has no doubt been formative in terms of the way anarchism is perceived by a lot of people, especially, y'know, in the UK. Even what an anarchist looks like in the popular consciousness, probably resembles the Sex Pistols – torn clothes, spiked hair, safety pins.

Because of this, I feel that *Anarchy in the UK* ought not to be dismissed because it is popular, it appropriates anarchist ideas or lacks political commitment. Rather, it is more interesting because of these things. As cartoonist Donald Rooum's Revolting Pussycat observes: those 'who write ☺ might not all be real anarchists and people who write ☹ are not always real fascists, but still I prefer the ones who write ☺'. She hits upon something here that is particularly pertinent to the anarchist imagery used in Adam's work, with its oft-repeated visual signifiers and scrawlable symbol; the slippage between the practice and the performance of a politics, and the subsequent slide into stereotyping. *Anarchy in the UK* offers a good demonstration of this slippage, wavering between alignment with anarchist politics and compliance with a tabloid

notion of an anarchist as a destructive pariah – an antichrist.

This can be seen by looking more closely at the lyrics. For instance, distaste shown at the idea of being a 'dogsbody' does seem to have some recourse to a key tenet of anarchism, that of self-determinacy; the idea that no human being is fit to tell another what to do. Meanwhile, a generous reading of the wish to 'give a wrong time, stop a traffic line' could argue that it is invoking 'the positive, intensive, social bonds forged through street confrontation'; the shared gestures and interactions of bodies in the street favoured amongst more insurrectionist anarchists, although the intention of this direct action is somewhat vague.<sup>2</sup>

RIGHT NOW HA HA HA HA  
I AM AN ANTICHRIST  
I AM AN ANARCHIST  
DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT  
BUT I KNOW HOW TO GET IT  
I WANT TO DESTROY THE PASSERBY  
'CAUSE I WANT TO BE ANARCHY  
NO DOGSBODY  
ANARCHY FOR THE UK.  
IT'S COMING SOMETIME AND MAYBE  
I GIVE A WRONG TIME STOP A TRAFFIC LINE  
YOUR FUTURE DREAM IS A SHOPPING SCHEME  
'CAUSE I WANT TO BE ANARCHY  
IN THE CITY  
HOW MANY WAYS TO GET WHAT YOU WANT  
I USE THE BEST, I USE THE REST  
I USE THE NAME. I USE ANARCHY  
IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO BE  
IS THIS THE MPLA?  
OR IS THIS THE UDA. OR IS THIS THE IRA.  
I THOUGHT IT WAS THE UK.  
OR JUST ANOTHER COUNTRY  
ANOTHER COUNCIL TENANCY  
I WANT TO BE ANARCHY  
AND I WANT TO BE ANARCHY (OH WHAT A NAME)  
AND I WANT TO BE AN ANARCHIST  
I GET PISSED, DESTROY!

GLEN MATLOCK, JOHN LYDON, PAUL THOMAS  
COOK, STEVE JONES. E.M.I. 1976

The listing and dismissal of various political organisations – the MPLA, the UDA and the IRA – does potentially reflect an anarchist perspective; that any kind of government is the wrong kind to have, no matter how revolutionary their policies claim to be.<sup>3</sup> And what if ‘Destroy the passerby’ is intended as ‘the destruction of the subjectifying processes that reproduce society daily, [...] the institutions and practices that racialize and engender bodies [the passerby] within the social order’ but coming from a place so embedded in all this, all that is communicable is the necessity of some sort of destruction?<sup>4</sup> Maybe.

That last point perhaps begins to touch on why the politics of *Anarchy in the UK* bears resemblance to anarchist thought, yet also misrepresents it and in doing so, subdues it. The Sex Pistols and their image were cannily managed by Malcolm McLaren. Whilst at art school McLaren came into contact with the work of the Situationist International, a grouping of artists whose practices included creating structured encounters in urban settings, happening in everyday life, with a view to its imaginative transformation. Theorist Guy Debord, who came to dominate the movement, prophesied in his 1962 text *Society of the Spectacle* that ‘in the second half of this century, culture will hold the key role in the development of the economy’.<sup>5</sup> This in turn borrows from Marxist thinking; the idea of ‘real subsumption’, under which ‘everything produced by human beings, whether manually or intellectually, is mediated by value-form’.<sup>6</sup> The Situationists themselves had ties to the anarchist movement in Paris in 1968, and their literature would have been available alongside Donald Rooum’s comics at Freedom Press. However, by the time *Anarchy in the UK* was released, these strands of utopian agitation had largely already lapsed into Debord’s prophecy or gone totally underground, with groups engaging

in violent direct action being rounded up by police allegedly using a copy of *Society of the Spectacle* as a guide.<sup>7</sup> As such, although both the aesthetic of, and the concept behind, the Sex Pistols were genuinely influenced by this movement, as with many forms of subculture under ‘real subsumption’, being an anarchist had already become cool, and therefore eminently marketable.

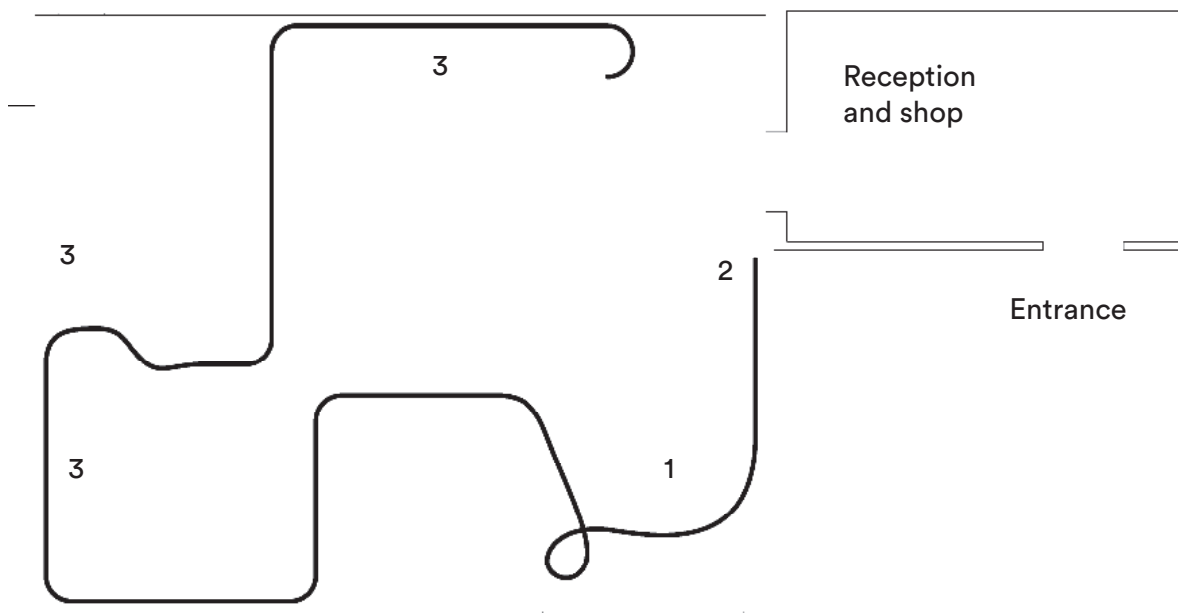
Is a performance of rebellion better than no rebellion at all? Try asking a thirteen year-old that question.

## Endnotes

1. Sometimes I think this is partly down to the satisfaction of drawing a symbol, felt especially by teenagers. See also: ♀; ☆; ♡; ♣; ♠; ♂.
2. Aarons, K. ‘No Selves to Abolish: Afropessimism, Anti-Politics and the end of the world’, online journal article. URL: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abstraction#sdfootnote3sym> (19/05/2017). As an aside, I always thought that holding up traffic sounded a bit feeble, whatever ideology it was being enacted in the name of.
3. The People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola; most likely the Ulster Defence Association; the Irish Republican Army. All of these would have been present in current affairs when *Anarchy in the UK* was written. Probably not the Islamabad Rugby Association.
4. Aarons, K.
5. Debord, G., quoted in Savage, J., *England’s Dreaming*, (New York: St Martin’s Griffin 2001). p.31
6. Brassier, R., ‘Wandering Abstraction’, online journal article, URL: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wandering-abstraction#sdfootnote3sym> (19/05/2017)
7. Savage, J., p.42.

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**Timothea Armour** is an artist and bartender. She is a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art and a committee member at Rhubaba Gallery and Studios. Timothea is the second Associate Producer at Collective in 2017 and has been commissioned to develop texts in response to the exhibitions as part of Satellites Programme 2017.



1. Adam Lewis Jacob, *Wildcat*, HD video, 25 minutes, looped, 2017.

Performers: Sukana Kubba and Anya Liko Cheong Nicol

Animation and music: Jason Kerley

Music: Anxiety, Crass, Laps, Mumdance, Position Normal

2. Adam Lewis Jacob (made with Katy White), *Soft Noise (Issue 1, May 2017)*, fabric, handmatches patches, buttons, studs, pen and soft toy, 2017.

3. Donald Room, original drawings for comic strip, 1975 – 2014.

Adam would like to thank: Benjie Cluness, Emily McFarland and Catalyst Arts, Elizabeth Murphy, Freedom Press, Tim Sandys, Susanna Stark, Michael White, Katy White. With special thanks to Donald Room.

*Emotional Need* is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artists and producers based in Scotland. Satellites includes three solo presentations by artists and two projects presented by Associate Producers. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events. The 2017 programme includes new exhibitions and projects by Grace Johnston, Timothea Armour, Alex Impey, Ross Little, Adam Lewis Jacob.

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