MERLIN CARPENTER
MEDIA GUY

~~Avant~~

~~Disclaimer: I am in Matthew Collings's new book Art Crazy Nation and his Art Crazy Nation Show in Milton Keynes. So it maybe a bit ungrateful for me to suggest that he is an art buffoon. Collings has presented a vast number of TV programmes in the UK over the last fifteen years and also written dodgy books and magazine articles about contemporary art. He writes in a journalistic, diaristic style derived from Andy Warhol, Bob Dylan, Richard Branson, Jack Kerouac, Tama Janowitz, Jay McInerny, Tom Wolfe and Nicky Haslam. He talks over the head of art world insiders direct to an imaginary bourgeois audience who retain their common sense about "Modern Art's" supposed excesses. This has become more and more pronounced over the course of Matthew's career. The privatised official culture represented by Channel 4 needed someone to translate emerging art contexts into more of the same fun, to rewrite history for the new Blairite ruling class. He has become a national institution. I regret that I see Matthew's work as being right wing these days since I like him and I feel attracted towards his insane speediness. But it is so normal for journalists and critics to drift rightwards in the UK that you can't fail to notice.~~

MATTHEW COLLINGS
OUR PAINTINGS

This review from eleven years ago claims I am a right-wing backslider incapable of genuine criticality. I disagree and I will explain why. I should say initially that in the past, with the books and TV programmes Carpenter mentions, my practice was negation. I was commenting on a scene dominated by conceptual concerns antithetical to my interest in the history of form. My collaborative practice with Emma Biggs, which has been going on for fifteen years, also says no to something, but proposes something as well. I plan to examine and explain what that proposition is. Carpenter's original text is in grey. My interruptions are colour-coded.

challenging misrepresentation
self explanation
world-view Biggs and I share.
social, political and aesthetic explanation of our paintings

~~His opinions on art are occasionally spot on, the type of things you do not see written down but always hear people say. For instance he talks about Gallery owner Maureen Paley's foreign accent when speaking to German collectors. I also like his explanation of why his photo is always on the cover of his own books: to make them like cookery books, with Matthew as celebrity chef Delia Smith. Food, Art and Lifestyle are joined at the hip.~~

Our paintings and graphics throw down the glove to what's going on now. They are not nihilistic. They are not ironic. They can't be read as an expression of dematerialised, post-industrial production. They start from a conceptual basis, two people from diverse fields turn over and look at lost knowledge, a lost interest – colour. It used to be part of what an artist knew. It doesn't have to be anymore. Is that a by-product of alienation and atomisation, or the radical overturning of an exclusive field of knowledge? We think it's the former. And our work, via a tortuously complex procedure of balancing and harmonizing, sets out the terms of this visual argument.

~~Collings is infamous for naming Richie Edwards lead singer of Manic Street Preachers on national TV.~~

"Infamous" suggests mass comment. I could say Carpenter is "infamous" for writing an article full of idiotic claims.

~~A mistake that must have rung alarm bells for his non-art audiences. One would only have to signal the many inaccuracies and casual disregard for facts in his new book, including the part on myself where there are eight errors in four pages, to render it more or less useless as an archival document.~~

All publishing and broadcasting is susceptible to errors, as evidenced by misspelt and missing words throughout Carpenter's review. He even misspells Richey Edwards' first name at this sensitive point. (Perhaps while polishing his halo of populist know-how he slipped to an association with Lionel.) His sensational count of "eight" in four pages seems to win all arguments. In fact there are two, both trivial. The year of Kippenberger's death is stated as 1998. And the printers have flipped a photograph so abstract paintings by Carpenter appear reversed, as if in a mirror reflection. Mistakes are regrettable. But the second does no harm to a reading of the paintings, any more than the same accident would harm paintings by Biggs and me.
And to return to them, they are achieved by a procedure in which revisions must be made, and colours altered, but we don't see these alterations as a matter of diagnosing mistakes. Instead, the aim is to bring out multiple visual rhythms and produce patterns that constantly change. The paintings are not immutable statements. First a pattern seems to be put together in a certain way, then another configuration appears, then another. We don't do it by drawing up charts or plans – the subtlety of the differences we work with would make it impossible. It's a direct process. I paint; Biggs creates the colours, decides where to put them, and how to amend them. Success in terms of the finished result is efficiency: order and surprise. Failure is chaos: too much surprise. Too much openness, with the formal enquiry we're doing, ends up looking dull. The discourse of "medium specificity" is an intellectual talking shop full of ingenious possibilities. Somewhere in it is an idea about time as material. This has tangibility for us as we struggle with colour-leads we've set up but not yet adequately followed through.

~~It therefore cannot serve an informative purpose of any kind for art history, let alone for a critically informed analysis. Moreover his own standpoint becomes indistinguishable in a self imposed morass of indifference between ironic critique and celebration of celebrity.~~

My standpoint is clearly signalled in this exchange: "She asked, 'What's the line of the book again?' I said it was a description of the art world from the point of view of someone who wishes it could be better." (p 219) As for celebrity, situations involving it are featured, but the mood is disturbing not fun, and celebrity culture is characterised as a new kind of national "sickness." This comment continues: "Instead of avoiding the plague, people want to touch others who might have it." (p 196)

~~Collings developed his basic ideas in the mid-eighties as editor of Artscribe, a specialist publication mainly concerned with German and American art. The explosion of art into mainstream culture in nineties London was rather a surprise for his generation, even though they were instrumental in creating the conditions for it all to go off. Matthew and Sarah Kent might be seen as the parents of the popularization process having audiences approaching half a million each, Sarah with Time Out and Matthew with the chattering classes who had tuned in to BBC 2's Newsnight and drifted into The Late Show (1989–1995). The art features he made for this programme were a curiosity. They were not quite a celebration of young British art but did introduce some of the key themes and players as well as cover relatively serious art history like Donald Judd.~~

"Not quite" is an ambiguity that asks to be examined. Out of sixty items I wrote and presented for *The Late Show*, many of them forty minutes long, only four of short duration were about figures connected to young British art (yBa).

~~The style became gradually more relaxed and chatty in line with wider changes in the UK media.~~

From on high, Carpenter produces a transformation and then finds a suitably awesome world-historic force to appear to cause it: the media. In reality my writing and presenting on *The Late Show* was conventional for highbrow TV. Years after I left that programme I changed to a different approach with the TV series *This Is Modern Art*, whose playfully anarchic tone was a development out of a book I had written in the meantime, called *Blimey!*, an account of life lived in an art scene.

~~Whether his generation of critics paved the way inadvertently or strategically, initially it was not clear for them how to respond to the success of the big push. In 1987 Matthew Collings and Stuart Morgan were still saying that there was no such thing as 'British art' (True Brit: An Enquiry into National Character, Artscribe no. 61, 1987). The market-led lifestyle culture embodied in Frieze could only have been a Frankenstein monster in the eighties dreams of Collings and Morgan (his successor as editor). Where Artscribe had been terrified of "theory" and reverential towards art,~~

Artscribe was hospitable to theory; as editor I brought in a range of writers as frequent contributors, including Art & Language, Diedrich Diederichsen, Jutta Koether and John Miller, who could not be said to be unaware of it, or cowed by the majesty of art.
I think theory, as the philosophical context in which the difference between art and not-art is explored, is important to any artist. It was present in the jokes and playfulness of my criticism, and it's there in the refusals Biggs and I make in producing our work. Biggs refuses the rhetoric of the individual and the spiritual. I refuse excess.

~~Frieze instrumentalized both for the sake of design, style and apolitical effectiveness. The change in Matthew was gradual but obvious. In 1990 he made the bizarre decision to go back to art school, to do an postgraduate MA at Goldsmiths. This represented a desire to be a "Goldsmith's artist" on the most pathetic level.~~

It's not bizarre to do an MA; it might be to do it for the reason Carpenter states, but since he has manufactured this reason himself it only highlights the subjectivity of his narrative.

~~But more importantly, it was his turning point between being a consumer of foreign art theory~~

Consuming theory, even one as recklessly formulated as "foreign art theory," contradicts the earlier assertion about fearing theory.

~~and slowly starting to pick up support for the attempt to become an actor in the emerging London scene. After some more years at The Late Show, which publicly played out his shift from international consumer to national player on the celebrity circuit, Matthew eventually came out and supported yBa with gusto in his 1997 book Blimey!.~~

The comedy of *Blimey!* deflates gusto. When it says artists are "top" or "very good" it's clear it wouldn't serve any useful function as a quote in the artist's CV.

~~However his work has always simultaneously carried a kind of "atmosphere" of criticism towards yBa. The breathless enthusiasm of Blimey! was quite easily readable as bad faith: Tracey, isn't it amazing, ha ha.~~

Blimey! looks at the problem of subjectivity in ritual occasions like private views, for example, where fitting in with a crowd is important. It fights the powers with jokes, and embarrassment, rather than grand seriousness. A scene arrives that demands only enthusiasm. There's something people aren't saying. The book fleshes out the unsaid by picturing the scene almost entirely in terms of hilarious discomfort.

~~But, since he has never specified this, only implied it by over celebration, it has all been rather less useful than venturing a single clear opinion, even a wrong one. He went through the whole nineties without ever once saying "stop".~~

Saying "stop" isn't necessary to the enquiry that both books engage in, which is neither conventional explanation of artworks, nor description and analysis of gallery finances, but instead is about elevating the parts of the scene that are ambiguous.

~~True, in the new book, there is more criticism. He rips into Michael Landy and Tacita Dean, and not before time. "A gate, that's interesting, I must photograph it," he imagines her thinking. But it is not that simple. The wind has changed. Collings is trying to respond to a backlash against the first two generations of yBa that already happened four years ago and was brewing before that (see Poster Studio, "They're All Going Down," tzk no. 22, 1996). Art Crazy Nation seeks to include post-yBa critical groupings within a revamped third or fourth Generation yBa culture, which I am also now apparently part of. But in fact these later developments had already terminated yBa, which leaves Matthew looking quite exposed.~~

The book doesn't celebrate importance when one-liner sensationalism changes to sensationalism with an addition of one-liner politics. Since he wrote this review Carpenter has achieved high status in fashion-conscious sectors of the global art world, through stunts in which a comically abject version of institution critique plays a role.
The fact that the object fall-out of widely noticed events such as "The Opening" and "Tate Café," is just as visually bereft as anything he has done in the past, is a problem for Biggs and me, in contrast to the critical proposals inherent in our paintings.

~~In order to include these developments he now has to write about "Marxists" and "politically correct" artists and writers (like John Roberts, Julian Stallabrass and JJ Charlesworth) with the same cynical tone previously reserved for moronic entrepreneurs. I think this has confused him, and puts him very close to Sunday Times/Rupert Murdoch territory. This outdated skepticism~~

Scepticism doesn't have a date; it has a relationship to an idea or set of ideas. Not for the last time Carpenter reveals anxiety about keeping up with fashion. Without exception the book's subjects are teased, but in the case he refers to here, as it happens, they are also recommended: "Anyone wanting to offer a social or economic framework for analysing art's popularity is worth reading." (p 124)

~~makes his judgements irrelevant for a serious discussion about and within the contexts he addresses. Not accidentally, the "Marxists" he chooses to mention are Marxists lite whose main concept is self promotion.~~

It might be helpful to consult a psychotherapist about the content of this insult.

~~Perhaps he guesses that amongst these opportunists could be the Matthew of the future. One can see Art Crazy Nation as an attempt to lasso various parts of post yBa London art-related subculture (including ones I am attached to) and drag them back inside the old killer fences. But not only do these scenes anyhow not coalesce, unfortunately he does not know enough about any particular one of them to explain who any of these people are and why they do what they do. All he sees are the images put out by public relations departments~~

Press releases are mocked in *Art Crazy Nation*, but the logic that suggests it is from this kind of material that the book gets its content is contorted.

~~and jacket blurbs. He sees what he is allowed to see, which he writes down, plus errors. In the few cases where there is more to be seen he has lost his way entirely.~~

The book is criticized for its irrelevance to issues Carpenter considers urgent. I can't argue with this.
From my point of view, Carpenter's art practice is often funny. New jet skis are exhibited in front of his paintings of fashion models, to demonstrate that art is a luxury commodity. Students assist him at one of his private views by dressing up in colourful versions of Abu Ghraib outfits, to show the connection between consumerism and atrocity. Banks are Bad is definitely a good joke. Critique is critiqued. And of course banks really are bad. But the implication is never-ending futility.
Irony has limitations; it can only go hand in hand with despair, and despair isn't necessarily a good prompt for any kind of revolutionary motivation. Art that only reflects despair, as his does, is a problem. Also, its jokes tend to be appreciated by those who already agree with them. Passivity isn't really disturbed.
If our paintings avoid jokes they are not nostalgic for a form of artistic sincerity that is already well known. The viewer is confronted by configurations that appear to be constantly on the move. Perception is challenged. Passive consumption is resisted. More on this in the next section, as Carpenter turns to reviewing an exhibition.

~~Garde~~

~~Today I saw the Art Crazy Nation Show at Milton Keynes Gallery. I immediately recognised it as, well, bullshit.~~

It featured work by a handful of figures discussed in the book, with fashionable and unfashionable artworks hung together.

~~Nice, light and fashionable, though.~~

Carpenter ironises perceived vacuity.

~~Milton Keynes is a city designed twenty five years ago, resembling a cross between Liam Gillick sculpture and Argos. I was struck by how it had to built be sufficiently far away for there to be no chance it could merge into London. But it is nevertheless a satellite, full of family houses all the more depressing since they were built a couple of years after the death of utopian planning. A suitable testbed for a new type of curatorial amnesia. According to the press release it is the first show Matthew has curated for an institution, and he seems to have enjoyed it. He has managed to convey his idea that art is a serious form of light entertainment. Nothing jarred or felt too heavy. Sarah Staton's Krazy and Gilbert and George's Loafers looked great. My work looked all right, but maybe out of place. But even the bad art was semi OK looking. The Sarah Lucas and Jake and Dinos Chapman pieces were dumb but not really annoying. Contributions by Bank and John Russell/Fabienne Audéoud offered a feeble whiff of alternativeness. However, I ask myself whether Matthew's style produces any serious results in terms of actual thought, and not only the kind produced by accident and against the grain. Compare Collings to Benjamin H.D. Buchloh. Does the former's adherence to the surface actually change the terms of the artistic paradigm, as Buchloh demanded of Warhol, or preserve at least the hope of doing so? And there is a more general question. Who could police a notion of history that is more ideologically rigorous? Who controls history after a bourgeois gossip history which fully includes its own opposite and is Teflon-coated?~~

If Carpenter is going to be this policeman it might be worth looking at his website. Writing about fashion and the artworld over a period of many years, he appears Teflon-coated to a startling degree. The latest addition is a *cris de coeur* about the meta-politics of his politicised practice. He quotes Heidegger; then asks himself who on earth is Heidegger. He scratches his head about the difference between the concept that collectors are scum who must die, and the fact that, "kindly enough," they buy his work. Perhaps a truly rigorous outburst is the one that goes, "All this art is crap anyway!" Until recently, when it was removed, the earliest article in the sequence was this review of *Art Crazy Nation*. He constructs a transparently self-serving explanation of the book but *Art Crazy Nation* isn't a laudatory critique of the brilliance and perspicacity of Carpenter and his cronies, plus the more commercially successful ones he regards as his intellectual inferiors in the rigour of his practice. (It's no accident that Liam Gillick meets Argos in the same sentence, or that he enjoys giving a sly kick to Tacita Dean). Instead it expresses what it's like to have to hear about their obedient disobedience all the time. The critical sensibility behind my books interrogates authority, even when that authority is interrogating the art-world (as it continues to do so, with its controversial assertion that Kunst = Capital).
It was in that same spirit that I made the decision to collaborate with Biggs. But why do we run on to the battlefield of contemporary art, to impale ourselves on the bayonets of irony and despair, and exhibit our wounds? Because some battles are worth having. There has to be something better, something more transformative than Carpenter's obedient nihilistic knowingness. Be brave artist warriors – rise up and fight!

~~Matthew tries to see himself from all sides and imagine criticisms like "breezy liberal." But his self-criticism is manic self-vaccination. It also does not work as dialectics because there is no initial proposition. We live with the media, but the directions from which you observe and involve yourself with that world can be very different. Buchloh centre stages this area in his recent book. He describes the moment after the negations of conceptual art when a space opened up within the media: "a space where the avant garde's former claim to disregard the persistence of social memory embedded in institutional practices and discursive conventions has been exchanged for the recognition that it is precisely from the reflection of these conventions that the only remaining potentials for resistance can be mobilized" (Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry, p 335). But far from negotiating this space, on the soft border from where a dialectic can be tracked, Collings slips into relations of authority, following a line that proceeds from Bob Dylan to The Guardian, from Tony Blair to George W. Bush.~~

This line up is the same in its unexplained arbitrary disconnectedness as the list at the beginning of the review, of supposed literary influences, which contains a hairdresser as well as the UK's fourth richest citizen.

~~What is art history? This book, part published by David Bowie and launched in Selfridges, only serves to commodify a snapshot of a conjuncture. What it fails to do is play out in the text the contradictions inherent in the relationships involved. For all Buchloh's limitations at least he tries to stay on top of the conditions of his own ennunciation.~~

Limitations? It's great to be hit round the head with borrowed ideas while in the same instant those ideas are said to be deficient. Carpenter may mean that Buchloh is authoritarian (or his eyes are the wrong colour). It is certain that Buchloh's language is deliberately and strenuously bourgeois-resistant where Carpenter's is virtually indistinguishable from mine. The only exception is when he directly quotes a heavyweight. Or else incorporates phrases and terms immediately recognisable as belonging to a heavyweight's armoury, whether it be Buchloh or, in later passages, Homi Bhaba.

~~For example Collings allows himself to talk about "punky, working class origins" in the Art Crazy Nation Show booklet. What does he mean? Punk or working class? The landscape he points is terribly ill-defined.~~

Carpenter is getting carried away. Rather than a "landscape" of art, the quote refers to a chain of associations set up by a particular series of installations. Repeated in the brochure it comes originally from the book, which isn't about class relations but often comments non-theoretically on class distinction. Post-yBa figures whose family names grace bottles of fine wine, are contrasted with artists of the same wave whose immediate response to something they don't understand is to want to punch it.

~~And he never says which artists are able to articulate this landscape and which ones are just fodder.~~

Language like "fodder" puts Carpenter in the weird position of tastemaker. He may be complaining that artists included in the show are outside his mutual support group. In this review he often seems to be communicating to friends who share a set of shorthand expressions, enigmatic beyond the circle. The hierarchical implications clash with statements hinting at revolutionary egalitarianism. He might mean that some of the work criticises the social conditions in which art is seen and understood, while others are blind to them, but the show forgot to mention it. But the exhibition was about opening up a different kind of distinction: formal or visual connectedness: a single unity created out of different self-contained parts, like a collage.

~~Being an example of something is not the same as thinking about it.~~

I agree that according to a certain set of concerns, being an example of a hegemonic reality principle (as Buchloh calls postmodernism) is not the same as reflecting on hegemony. Our paintings reflect on a hegemonic knowledge system that operates in the spotlit, centre-stage part of the artworld, which is where we want to achieve something: to criticise a consensus, based on marketing ideas and academic ones, about what abstract art is allowed to do today. We do not make parodies of formalism. We produce patterns that multiply. You can only see one at a time, but they are all there simultaneously in the same object.

~~He talks about "us" a lot. "Us Brits" "As a society, we" "A Nation of art lovers" "Art Crazy Nation"~~

~~Surely society was abolished by Thatcher? I am not defined by nationhood and do not want to be. Out of the three problematic concepts "Art", "Crazy" and "Nation", the third is most illuminating about Collings's milieu.~~

It's clear that the "us" element in the booklet doesn't mean "nationalism" but, "Today one is often asked to see art in such-and-such a way…" It is useful to look at localism here. Carpenter is against the idea of Nation, but the form of work that Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin made in the mid-1990s would not have been possible without the Murdoch Press, without Wapping, without Thatcherism, without local culturally specific expressions of the operations of capital. His argument expresses an element of neo-liberal thinking: the pessimistic conclusion that capital has already succeeded in making us all identical, which doesn't leave anyone much to fight for.

~~He is right to point out the neo-Darwinistic notion that anybody has potentially more cultural power than anyone else: "Banal ideas, wrong ideas, popular ideas – anything will do as long as its plugged directly into the present and there are sparks coming out of the wires" (This is Modern Art, 1999, p 34).~~

As Carpenter knows, this is a satirical assessment of the institutional propaganda that justified the rise of yBa in the 1990s, and not the premise of the exhibition he is looking at.

~~But when is this "present"? And for what audience? This process obviously breaks down outside a certain middle-class culture and its related economic conditions. You do not lose anything, certainly not aesthetically, by clearly stating the contingency of the bubble. The offensiveness of yBa, which Matthew only partly recognised, was that it installed low-resolution fake alternative cultures in the place of a dead culture and expected "the nation" — meaning people — to accept it. People did accept the sense of ideological clearing, the Mr Blobby moment, but not what was put in its place. And the point Matthew misses today is that trying to keep Damien Hirst's 1988 Freeze alive with all its ideological inconsistencies is just impossible fourteen years later. Trying to keep something open closes it down.~~

Hirst's ability to create sophisticated visual effects through a collage aesthetic is praised in *Art Crazy Nation*, but the book laughs at the aura of artistic genius constructed around him by a PR team.

~~Collings tells us that people like Sarah Lucas retain some charisma. That just proves the opposite.~~

I'm not sure I use this word, but I am sure that in relation to artists it's meaningless, as they are the same as anyone else.
A myth of personal specialness is often employed to explain importance in art that would otherwise be baffling to people who don't know much about it, but I never go in for this. Carpenter may be referring to a story about Lucas involving an accident with a piano, or one where a follower of Carpenter's (trained by the master, after the book came out, to turn away with a shudder if we ever accidentally met) agrees with me in a frivolous chat, that yBa "still rules." (p 197)

~~You can portray him as BritArt's Judas or defender. It doesn't matter. He repeats time and time again the eighties commonplace that art has changed, that it has jettisoned history and that anything is possible. It is not that this is untrue, it just depends where you see things from. Commonplaces like these are hangovers from previous more significant shifts. Unless there is a critical relation to the moment of conceptual art and/or its modernist antecedents, and a complementary attempt to unearth the genesis and development of postmodernism in the sense of the media's overtaking of the meaning functions of art, then to even address the subject of a historical break becomes tautologous. There is nothing to compare it to. You can't describe art from within art.~~

There is seriousness and seriousness. In Carpenter's world, visual paucity is compensated for by massed hints of substance in the dimension of the Idea, which rather than genuinely energising a feeble object, cannot easily be separated from the realm of promotion. As painters Biggs and I bow before the inevitable. We are forced to accept that bullshit is as natural as breathing and as vital to existence. His bullshit is strong. Yet surely there must be a more transformative way to engage with art.

~~This tautology leads to mythologisation and the reintroduction of notions of quality on another level. The amnesiac closed circle has an inevitable side-effect: an actual swing towards the old fashioned that occurs once the historical contradictions are buried. So what are the signs of this? The nicest one is that Collings has included three old fart abstract painters in the book and show. They are described as "marginalised" and "non-ironic". The possibility of this inclusion could be seen as a positive result of Collings's shift to the right. The assistant at Milton Keynes Gallery told me that one of these three, Gary Wragg, was my teacher at art school. This is another Collings inaccuracy, but it is true I spoke to him one afternoon in 1986~~

In an art school environment this would constitute "teaching."

~~and he seemed quite nice.~~

What is striking behind the play of false coyness is the recurring theme of offensive exclusivity, (notwithstanding piety at the end of the article about intersubjectivity). You can't come from the media and comment on art. You can't paint in a style unacknowledged by fashion. You can't have an art gallery in an ugly town.

~~His paintings are brutal abstracts that do little for a renewal of painting, but their inclusion does at least nod towards half recognised and nearly repressed surplus value. In the book Wragg struts in front of his paintings like a pre-ironic rooster. Significantly, too, Matthew has now become a fan of superconservative Evening Standard art critic Brian Sewell; he is warmly praised in Art Crazy Nation. He also crops up in the show as a waxwork made by two ex-St. Martins students.~~

This artwork mocks Sewell, as Carpenter is aware. The book describes his criticism as "reactionary" but says his attacks on contemporary art's sacred cows can be "quite effective." (pp 179–180)

~~Another change is Matthew's recent affirmations of unexplained retinal or formal qualities.~~

At this point Carpenter says something about the subject that most interests Biggs and me.
Interest in formal qualities is not a change of heart. It is the core of the scenarios I'm in, in my books and TV shows, where I'm confronted by something alienating instead of something I might find worthwhile. Affirmation of a kind occurs frequently in *Blimey!* published five years before the *Art Crazy Nation* exhibition was put on. (For example, a one-word heading, "Formalism," followed by the question: "Is it so bad?" p34)

~~"The works in this show are very different to one another. Some are more aesthetic. Some are more poetic. But with all of them I think that there is a secret visual quality which is important. The nation is crazy about art now, but they don't know what it is they are looking at" (Milton Keynes Gallery Bulletin).~~

The passage continues: "Or they're horrified by it and they don't know what they're looking at either. They believe what they're told because they don't have any culture of art, only a thoughtless attraction to it from seeing it in the media."
Our paintings fight ignorance.

~~In the early eighties UK art critic Peter Fuller rejected all modernist art, replacing it with an unbroken tradition of English Romanticism and the "sacred". Is Matthew tiptoeing in the same direction? For several years he has written a diary for Modern Painters, the magazine Fuller founded.~~

Carpenter is aware the diary mocked Fuller's rosy-spectacled view of a revived British tradition based on Samuel Palmer and Henry Moore.

~~And this "secret visual quality" is very dubious. Such qualities exist, but are not necessarily carriers of anything except money.~~

I feel sorry for Merlin.
It is convenient to have this notion of the ambiguity of formal meaning if your idea of making is to shove a few things together quickly. The problem isn't the speed of course but the purely derisory nature of the object.
Our paintings are against this approach but we don't refute the idea that the entire world of appearances is an epiphenomenon of the movements of capital. It fuels our interest in heightened seeing.
Our work is careful and laborious, with the aim of producing an image in which there is no pictorial absolute.

~~For them to be more one would have to start by saying what they are. Collings just follows and totally simplifies the recent shifts in art historical discourse towards visuality and medium specificity.~~

Carpenter doesn't give an example of the unoriginality or over-simplification of thoughts expressed in *Art Crazy Nation* about the work of artists he calls old farts.
Our ideas of resistance differ from his comic, dematerialised ones. We identify with Islamic decoration in mosques, but also with paintings done in ten minutes by Bob and Roberta Smith. We are fascinated by art's past and can see that in alienation from the rich vocabulary of making, is loss.
Our work reflects on the way the baby of making has been thrown out with the critical bathwater, and is a critique of that loss.

Matthew Collings 2013

~~What sort of tradition of art writing are we actually dealing with here? Matthew is a writer, maybe a good one. But should writing be about a relation to history and a specific notion of cultural political potentialities or about serving up a salad of interestingly ironic Great British compost? For some of "us" the challenge in all of this is not to find a language that is invisible to Collings. This has already happened. It is more to find a language that obliterates him when it surfaces. It needs to track the inevitable contortions of the media as shamelessly as he does, but never make his right turns. In this book intentions are lost and become examples of intentionality. More sophisticated models of intersubjectivity and work within and around the media are already active. These models depend on precisely the kind of detailed, contextual knowledge that Matthew denies.~~

Merlin Carpenter 2002

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