

ARTISTS ANONYMOUS: DRUGS

32A VYNER STREET, LONDON
12 JANUARY - 12 FEBRUARY



Drugs, afterimage, 2007, c-print,
190 x 150 cm. Courtesy Sander
Collection, Berlin

Artists Anonymous have moved over from Berlin to make an assault on the London art scene. A ploy of deliberate obtuseness and the construction of meandering mythologies ensure that their biographical details remain murky. They eschew aspirations to individual celebrity and instead live together in a vortex of cross-contamination. The first show at their new space in Vyner Street is called *Drugs*. It's garish, dirty and irreverent. The dissolution of the individual ego and the formation of a collective opens up a realm of anarchic experimentation where disciplines collide in dystopian dream sequences. Their paintings possess a familiar acid-saturated loopiness, the afterglow of photographic negatives are referenced to set up heterotopic worlds, Day-Glo imagery conjures up the pulsating vistas of apocalypse.

The show induces auditory hallucinations; I imagine the raucous strains of Black Flag fused with Acid anthem 'Voodoo Ray'. There's a ghost-train aesthetic in a back room, the sixth-former's bedroom door thrown open to reveal an obsession with Atari Teenage Riot and dropping tabs. The installation harnesses some of the orgiastic excess of Bataille and the sociopathic derangement of Mike Kelley. Black walls, smashed-up guitars, a demented clown bashing a drum kit: the viewer is hurled headlong into a retinal pile-up.

It becomes reminiscent of the late 1980s at a point of cultural unravelling, the first exuberant throes of Acid House culture, the mayhem of Kreuzberg squatlands and Spiral Tribe picking up abandoned military hardware in East Berlin. It's unclear how AA position themselves in relation to all this, or the recent New Rave phenomenon, where Christopher Kane's catwalk neon and bands like Klaxons revive a depoliticised 1989 Summer of Love aesthetic.

AA throw a squat party but don't invite the audience in until the euphoria starts to dissipate and panic and paranoia set in. There is a world of perceptual distortions, drugs as avoidance of direct engagement. As the geopolitical situation worsens, the lure of psychic disorientation increases; the world is perilous, fragmented and chaotic, but within that are flare-ups of micro-euphorias and pockets of pills encapsulating the biochemistry of joy. This subjective retreat is different to the neo-romanticism plaguing the London art circuit in recent years, more akin to the ragged edges of party culture thriving in East London's Hackney Wick, and closer to a radical refusal to partake in a mainstream culture that offers tacit support to war. It can't be overlooked, though, that this space isn't a disused factory in Leyton but a gallery in the nexus of the London art scene, and AA have sold several paintings to Saatchi.

The first ravers experienced a sense of a shared commonality that moved beyond clubbing, to convoy culture, anti-Criminal Justice Bill protests, Reclaim the Streets parties and motorway blockades. It is difficult to say whether this current resurgence of interest in a historical moment is an indication of some emergent radical shift or merely the rich pickings of a lost socio-political scene.

Laura Oldfield Ford