

A PAINTING AND A SCULPTURE - JOHN NIXON, MARTIN CREED

A PAINTING AND A PHOTOGRAPH - DARREN SYLVESTER, REUBEN KEEHAN

Curated by Nick Chambers

Fun

Yes, the exhibition was a joke, but a well crafted, immaculately executed, beautiful, thoughtful joke. A minimal tour de force – a mini set of works and another mini set of works – combined to create a mini series of shows. All in all four works, two: *A Painting and A Sculpture*, by well-known artists Martin Creed and John Nixon, and two: *A Painting and A Photograph* by emerging Australian artists Reuben Keehan and Darren Sylvester.

Win

Riding fortuitously on the success of Martin Creed winning the highest profile international art award possible, the Turner Prize, just weeks before the exhibition opened, the show received vast quantities of media and audience attention. A classic example of the media's ability to instantly propel an artist into the stratosphere of international fame, Creed's Turner win turned on the hype and expectation of the prize itself, with the twist being that Creed's work was never the sort of art to be epic, momentous, or even particularly noticeable much of the time. His work has always been more like the disruptive kid at the back of the class, giving cheek to his classmates, rather than the one out the front getting the award. Presented the blockbuster award by none less than Madonna herself, Creed appeared bemused, a little silly, somewhat stunned.

Big

After the collective frenzy surrounding the Turner prize, placing a Martin Creed work in a gallery as small as the Physics Room was bound to cause trouble. During the course of the show, the work (a screwed up piece of blank A4 paper) was occasionally assaulted and attacked by members of the public – kicked around, stolen and at one point joined by an array of similar crinkled up pieces of paper, rendering the 'original' indistinguishable. The work developed a life of its own, constantly evolving and shifting, then replaced new and pristine again every morning by gallery staff.

Small

For the exhibition itself was a great disappointment to those expecting the spectacular glamour of an international blockbuster. Instead the show offered contemplation and reflection. Each gallery with two artworks presented simply, intimately, without fuss or pretension. Inside the gallery and removed from the hype of the media, the works gave out a sense of air or space around them for audiences to sit and contemplate. In an exhibiting environment where audiences expect a work to move, shout, be interactive, be media savvy, look like a video game or a shopping mall, these works spoke of a return of the intimate moment, of the small scale and the unobtrusive. From the simplicity and banality of Creed's crumpled paper and John Nixon's monochromatic canvas, to the more loaded terrain of Reuben Keehan's handpainted situationist slogan etched on the gallery wall and Darren Sylvester's photograph of a hospital corridor; the work was the message was the work.

Emma Bugden

