

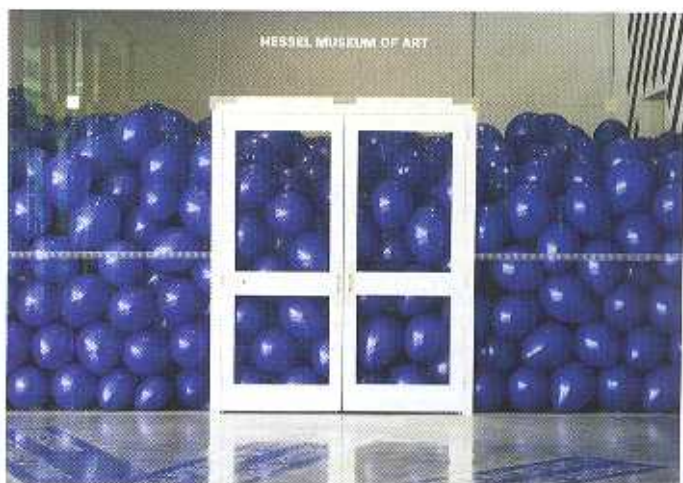
Martin Creed

CENTER FOR CURATORIAL STUDIES AT BARD
COLLEGE/508 WEST 25TH STREET

"Feelings," British artist Martin Creed's first retrospective in North America, was noisy, chaotic, hyperactive, circuslike, funny, stupid, clever, provocative, elegant, and annoying—none of which qualities jibe with the sensitivity alluded to by the title. Creed's verbal and visual jokes, far from simply describing physical sensations or emotional states, often mark the distance between historically informed maneuvers and genial allusions to intimate personal experience.

Presented in two concurrent parts (at Bard College's Center for Curatorial Studies [CCS], along with a two-work Manhattan component titled "Small Things," installed in a Chelsea parking lot), the show featured a few early works—a pair of unassuming paintings, a modest brass sculpture, and an early neon—that give no hint of the raucousness to come. Most of the work was recent and included drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, performance, video, sound, outdoor projects—and music, if we count the opening-night performance by the artist and his band. In the Hessel Museum, the new wing of the CCS, Creed (in conjunction with the curator, Trevor Smith) selected an eclectic mix of art from the institution's permanent collection to install alongside his own, illustrating a dialogue with influences and noting or establishing other resonances along the way.

Work No. 336, 2005, consisting of the word FEELINGS spelled out in six-inch-high neon letters, was paired with a ferocious George Baselitz painting, *Frau am Strand*, 1981, and read, by comparison, as ironically sterile. Bruce Nauman's video *Violin Tuned D.E.A.D.*, 1968, in which the artist stands with his back to the camera and repetitively draws a bow across a violin's strings, underscored Creed's absorption with the body, movement, and sound, as well as his slightly warped sense of humor. Equally apt was the deadpan absurdism of John Baldessari's video *Teaching a Plant the Alphabet*, 1973. Veering



Martin Creed, *Work No. 628: Half the air in a given space* (detail), 2007, balloons, dimensions variable.

from highbrow humor to a decidedly dumber sensibility, Creed paired his *Work No. 264: Two protrusions from a wall*, 2001, with John Currin's *Big Lady*, 1993, a portrait of a young woman with grotesquely large breasts. There is plenty of adolescent energy in Creed's art, and it underwrites his interest in gross-out material. *Work No. 600*, 2006, an unblinking video projection, shows a woman defecating. In *Work No. 548*, 2006, a woman vomits convulsively. There's also an audio piece, *Work No. 401*, 2005, that emits a sound like farting.

The mood of the retrospective was playful, but never lacked for edge. In order to enter and exit the Hessel Museum, willing viewers were directed to wade through *Work No. 628: Half the air in a given space*, 2007, a room crammed to the rafters with big blue balloons. The room reverberated with events staged throughout the exhibition, some with the assistance of a busy corps of attendants who performed various actions—keeping the balloons contained, for one thing, winding up metronomes, and literally running around (*Work No. 570*, 2006, in fact, consists of “people running”). The infamous *Work No. 127: Lights going on and off*, 1995 (which garnered much public attention as part of Creed's Turner Prize show at Tate Britain in 2004 for its perceived emperor's-new-clothes quality) only added to the mayhem.

Across the atrium from the Hessel Museum in the CCS galleries, *Work No. 112: Thirty-nine metronomes beating, one at every speed*, 1995–98, tick-tocked continually while *Work No. 122*, 1999, blared, as clarified by its subtitle, “*All the sounds on a drum machine one after the other, in their given order, at a speed which makes the piece last for one minute.*” Layered in were the aforementioned sounds of farting and vomiting, a snippet of opera, and much more.

Besides the borderline arrogance evident in gestures so slim as to call into question their value as art—*Work No. 79: Some Blu-tak kneaded, rolled into a ball, and depressed against a wall*, 1993, for example—there were extended quiet moments. Monochromatic works on paper produced by simply filling all the space with marker or highlighter ink were hung throughout the exhibition, as were a number of spare-looking pencil drawings. Both series attest to a singularity of focus akin to the meditative act of marking and re-marking a spot. All of them are flukes of a kind: unique, but related in their differences. Banality is an important, considered aspect of Creed's production, present throughout as an aspect of a critical—but oddly entertaining—restraint.

—Jan Avgikos