

BEN BROWN

- *Press Release for immediate release* -

Martin Mull: The Pursuit of Happiness

29 November – 25 January 2008
Private View 28 November 2007 6-8pm

In this affectionately derisive series of works in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, Martin Mull takes a voyeuristic peak over the white picket fence, and penetrates through niceties of post-war suburban culture. A concrete extension of his previous endeavours to engage with the complexities lurking beneath the façade of life "keeping up with the Jones'," Ben Brown Fine Arts is pleased to present these previously unseen new works.

Being quite the Renaissance man, Mull is known as much for his successes in music, comedy and television as he is for establishing a reputation as an artist. Armed with a sense of surreal humour and a working knowledge of the film making process, Mull delivers paintings which compactly distil complex emotional interchanges with objective clarity and wit. *The Lure of Real Estate* betrays the ideal of domestic bliss with a kiss, in *Performing Husband*, the notion of husband as bread winner is turned in to an absurd reality.

Based as much on lifestyle magazines as on life experience, and using visual material from both, Mull's works are windows in to the lost 'golden years' of the 1950s with a knowing backward glance. Painting an assembled montage of cut-outs from fifties advertisements, chintz and photographs taken in his childhood, *String Theory for Dummies* is representative of the impact these visual and textural phenomena impose on our consciousness, and how Mull uses these evocative materials to stimulate our senses in to re-visiting that specific time.

Born in 1943 Mull lived out the period he affectionately mocks. He knows the existing Sub-text of Cold War tensions behind this resolute image of the cosy suburban ideal. Beneath the veneer of pastel paint and comforting smiles lay a muscular governmental propaganda machine set on concocting the antidote to an unsettled public. With repeated crises threatening to escalate into world wars the public needed as much reassurance as possible, and the government unqualified control.

The painted frame with in a frame device serves to distance the moment, and to draw our attention to how staged the unfolding narrative is. Mull's compositions are not trying to re-create reality, they are self consciously synthetic; compact cinematic snap-shots playing out a warped sitcom. Characters like Mrs Baselitz in *Mrs Baselitz Defies the Elements* are deliberately flattened to evince their two-dimensionality, and absurdity. *Fully Dressed Woman Descending a Staircase* is captured cinematically in black and white, not to mention referencing one of the leading protagonists of Modern art, Marcel Duchamp.

This series of works by Mull peel away the layers of falsity to reveal humankind at its most vulnerable. As his best Mull offers a new dimension to our own lives, encouraging us to stand back from the fray, and witness life as a stage, and all the men in it merely players.

Mull's work is in the permanent collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, The Columbus Museum of Fine Art, Columbus, Total Contemporary Art Museum, Seoul, The Cleveland Centre for Contemporary Art, Cleveland, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, Harvard Museum of Fine Art, Boston, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. He has also had solo shows in the Las Vegas Art Museum, University Art Gallery, San Diego, Rena Bransten Gallery, San Francisco, Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the Spike Gallery in New York. Ben Brown Fine Arts is proud to show his work here in the London for the first time.

Catalogue available with a text by James Putnam

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