

Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London



Mark Titchner

Born 1973

Lives London

Scavenged from crumbling philosophies and ruined ideals, the high-key graphic wall texts that form the spine of Mark Titchner's practice scrutinize the ways in which belief systems function. 'IF YOU CAN DREAM IT YOU MUST DO IT'; 'BE ANGRY BUT DON'T STOP BREATHING' – these stirring epigrams are somewhere between the slick diktats of the advertising strap-line and the galvanizing ideals of Situationist sloganeering. Devices from influential counter-cultural fringes are also reworked – Brion Gysin's 'Dreammachine' and Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Accumulator, for example, are roughly carved from wood, resembling the clunky detritus of dead ideologies. Titchner's work serves as a warning against pick 'n' mix cultural appropriation: 'THE NIHILISM OF THE HIP WILL DESTROY CIVILISATION'. (DF)

Represented by Vilma Gold G5

Resolving Conflict by Superficial Means

2002

Concrete, carved wood, electric motor

160×200×80cm

Courtesy Vilma Gold

Selected Bibliography

2003 *Art Now*, Lizzie Carey-Thomas, Tate Britain, London
 'Earache My Ear' (Mark Beasley),
 'Powers of Ten', (Colin Ledworth)
Electric Earth, British Council, London
Talking Pieces, Ute Riess, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen
 'Black Magic', Mark Beasley, *frieze*, 74, April

2001 *Playing Amongst the Ruins*, Mark Dickenson, Royal College of Art, London

Selected Exhibitions

2003 *Art Now*, Tate Britain, London
 'Do not attempt to reform man. We are what we are', Galerie Jorg Hasenbach, Antwerp
 'We Were Thinking of Evolving', Vilma Gold, London
 'Talking Pieces', Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen
 'Film and Video from Britain', British Council, State Russian Museum, St Petersburg
 'Strange Messengers', The Breeder Projects, Athens

2002 'The Movement began with scandal', Lenbachhaus Museum, Munich

2001 'City Racing (A Partial History)', ICA, London
 'Playing amongst the Ruins', Royal College of Art, London
 'Heart and Soul', Long Lane, London; Sandroni Ray, Los Angeles

Black magic mind war

Mark Beasley on Mark Titchner

'The Outsider's case against society is very clear. All men and women have these dangerous, unnameable impulses, yet they keep up a pretence, to themselves, to others; their respectability, their philosophy, their religion, are all attempts to gloss over, to make look civilized and rational, something that is savage, unorganized, irrational. He is an outsider because he stands for truth.'

Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (1956)

A poster in an advertising lightbox depicts two skeletal figures, bony hands clasped as their empty sockets stare out into the street. The text reads: 'We Were Thinking of Evolving', which is also the title of the work (2003). It's a casual-sounding proposition, yet at its bleakest it recognizes a possible evolutionary phase entirely dependent on humanity's demise. Simply put, Mark Titchner's work is about belief, a recognition that the human spirit has infinite potential but is for the most part making do in a crappy world.

It's a practice that has strong parallels with Wilson's exploration of alienation and the modern mind-set in his seminal text *The Outsider*. As Wilson explored the possibility of alternative truths and hidden timelines, so too does Titchner. The eclectic philosophies of William Burroughs, the S. F. Diggers, Brion Gysin and Philip K. Dick – to name just a few – are thrown into the mix, held aloft for re-examination. Chosen texts are equally eclectic; sources range from the *New Scientist*, the lyrics of Frankie Sparo and Sebadoh to the aphorisms of Friedrich Nietzsche. It's an intriguing search for answers, a peculiar act of redemption in the margins of history.

The tools for Titchner's project are many and varied, from wall paintings, vinyl banners, lightboxes, seven-inch records and digital animation to crafted wooden sculpture. Yet the impetus remains the same. If, as William Burroughs surmised, the 'written word was actually a virus that made the spoken word possible', then simply put, how are our actions manipulated by it? What are the consequences of a world swamped in text? What is discarded and what is acted on?

A series of recent poster works boldly state: 'In our infinite ignorance we are all equal.'; 'The nihilism of the hip will destroy civilization.'; 'W-w-work is love made solid. Do not attempt to reform man.'; 'We are what we are.'; 'Begin now.' Exulted pithy aphorisms and directives float over abstract geometric forms. Who are the hip, and what's their problem with the world? Can work ever be thought of as love? In *If You Can Dream It, You Must Do It* (2002) a hand reaches out to the viewer, inviting us to act on the statement. Saturated colour glows with the certainty of digital rendering, a graphic encounter that's a little like the schizophrenic hearing voices pre-action. Imagine Lawrence Weiner employing the tripped-out graphics of psychedelic poster art and the suburban extremism of Heavy Metal.

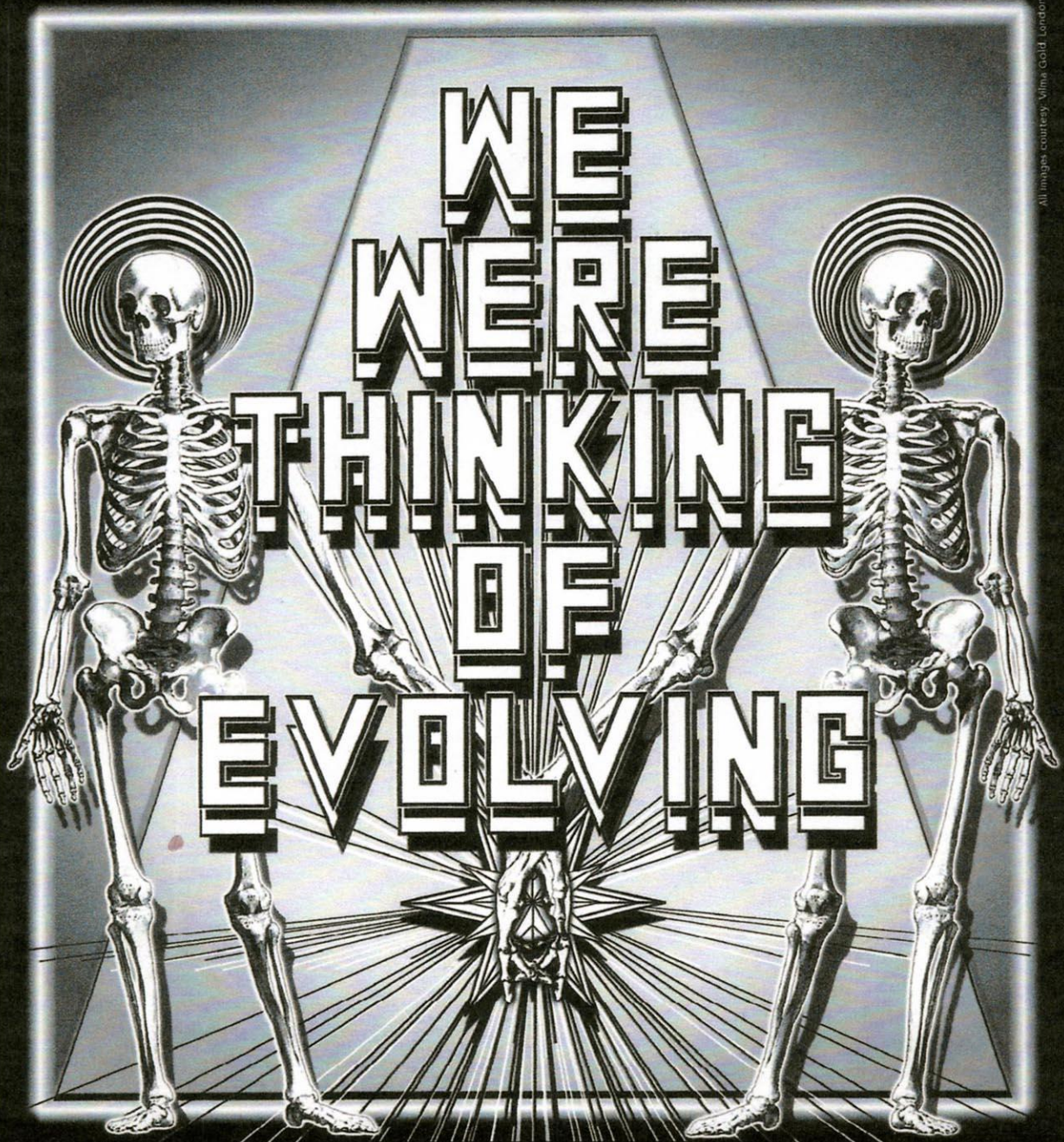
Beyond their immediate context as art Titchner's posters assault the senses with all the unshakeable earnestness of evangelical literature, in which the desperate attempt to picture a state of rapture or spiritual excess is reduced to the lens flare filter of Adobe Photoshop. A reminder that, for all the advancement in modern image technology, we are still equipped with such bad tools to express our inner life. Maybe this explains the peculiar feeling of absence at the heart of Titchner's images. They offer so much, yet leave the viewer in a state of perplexed anxiety. What is it we are being sold? Maybe they're an elaborate form of Post-it note, held over by history to gnaw at the mind of subsequent generations; a call for the renewal of purpose for a largely apolitical and spiritually absent generation. For Titchner it's a Nietzschean exercise in free will, a recognition that without application the text is nothing more than an empty catch-phrase.

The proposal of activity is again central to Titchner's latest sculptural work. A laboriously carved wooden structure reads *Everything Beautiful Is Far Away* (2002). An improvised methane-production kit sits at its base, its plastic tubing connected to a lead lotus flower. At the risk of appearing over-reductive, it takes a lot of shovelling shit to see the beauty of the flame. In *Resolving*

Conflict by Superficial Means (2002) a spinning Op art disc provides a hypnotic backboard for an outstretched concrete hand connected to a lump of rock. The viewer is invited to grasp the hand and release all inner angst into the stone. A kind of karmic sublimation, an open offer to complete the work that is both generous and ridiculous in equal measure. Mixing the paranoid ramblings of Burroughs' *Black Magic Mind War* (1976) – in which he suggests the CIA have developed psychic warfare machines – with the Constructivists' 'Art into Life' Agit-prop, Titchner returns to a pre-Modern, totemistic form of sculpture in an attempt to side step a use-value based solely on economics. It's a beguiling thought.

The seemingly opposed states of activity and stasis are again key in *Artists Are Cowards* (2002). A migraine-inducing series of digital images and half-registered texts revolve and flash on screen. A goldfish circles endlessly – a lesser-known Duchamp Rotorelief – overlaid with Beckett's text 'Fail Again, Fail Better'. The logo of the Vertigo record label – home of Black Sabbath – spins anti-clockwise, an unlikely backdrop for Hegel's vicious tautology 'The rational is real. The real is rational.' A conflict of ideologies that conflates the urban myth of certain Vertigo records played backwards summoning the devil, with the static certainty of philosophic thought. An attempt to rewire seemingly irreconcilable texts, to believe two things you are told are contradictory.

To borrow the words of Marxist theorist Ernst Fischer, 'Form is conservative; content is revolutionary'. If, as it appears, Titchner's world takes many forms, this is not the world of empty gloss or pop spin. Objects are not easily consumed; rather, they infiltrate with the slow arrow of beauty, almost unnoticed, like the refrain from a favoured song repeated in the mind like a mantra. It's a world in which the science of the bong shares its hit with the conviction that, as Wilson puts it, 'a new religion is needed'. What form that religion should take is unclear, but perhaps for Titchner freedom of choice or response is the only authentic freedom.



• We Were Thinking of Evolving 2003 Poster 150x120 cm



Photograph: Daniel Brooks

• Resolving Conflict by Superficial Means 2002 Concrete, carved wood 160x200x80 cm

There is a peculiar feeling of absence at the heart of Titchner's images. They offer so much, yet leave the viewer in a state of perplexed anxiety. What is it we are being sold?

MARK TITCHNER

17th January – 15th February 2003

Notes on three sculptures.

Resolving conflict by superficial means

Imagine a new daily routine.

Go out onto the streets, choose a face amongst the crowd and into this stranger pour all of your fear, pain and hatred. Now begin your day

(There are, however, implications of such random psychic warfare.)

Imagine a new daily routine. Upon waking rise and take hold of an object of your choosing. Into this inanimate object pour all of your fear, pain and hatred. Now begin the day.

An invitation. Grasp this cold concrete hand and into it pour all of your fear, pain and hatred, let it wash down into the rock below. (A rock that was taken from poisoned soil of what was once the world's largest munitions factory). Inside this rock our woes will meet and mix and be housed. And as more hands find there way here and pass their troubles downwards, ours will shrink and be lost within the expanding whole. Until, eventually the day comes when this rock can hold no more. But perhaps this day will never come, for in the end who knows how much pain one small rock can take.

Analogue Fountain

(The Dreamachine and its principles.)

1. The Dreamachine, a device developed by artist Brion Gysin and mathematician Ian Sommerville, was designed to stimulate brain activity by corresponding a frequency of flickered light with the brain's intrinsic electrical activity. The device can be simply constructed with only a cardboard cylinder, a light bulb and a record player.

The Dreamachine requires extended and concentrated use.

The Dreamachine is viewed with eyes shut.

2. Language and the world are one. Our possibilities and our potential are locked within the fold of a few abstract marks and there permutations.

Was this mankind's greatest act of will or greatest act of submission?

As has been said many times before the universe is nothing but a huge permutation but let us consider a smaller proposition. Does a word mark its corresponding action? By unravelling and permutating a word are we able to stimulate or instigate action?

As the man said, "Rub out the word!"

3. Discussion dissuades action.

A simple interaction.

Turn the handle!
Begin the permutation!
Let the cylinder spin!
See the light dance!

Everything Beautiful is far away

1. Anaerobic action during the decomposition of organic material produces the combustible gas methane.

2. The lotus flower grows from the swamp.

3. For a moment the flame flickers.

4. Everything beautiful is far away.

mark titchner

Vilma Gold
London

In his notes on the sculpture *Resolving Conflict By Superficial Means*, Mark Titchner invites us to "grasp this cold concrete hand and into it pour all of your fear, pain and hatred, let it wash down into the rock below." The rock lies at the foot of a wooden structure supporting a spinning hypnotic disc, which lends an air of sideshow mystery to the work. Allegedly rubble from a decommissioned munitions factory, the rock seems an unlikely receptacle for so much negative energy, and the artist plays with the irony when he muses "...who knows how much pain one small rock can take." The new age mysticism and theosophy that Titchner lampoons is an important touchstone throughout his diverse body of work that encompasses sculpture, print, video, and music. Outmoded objects, images, and styles become ciphers for the ideologies and beliefs that gave birth to them. For the sculpture *Analogue Fountain*, the artist constructed a *Dreamachine*, a rotating light intended to enhance brain activity through a hypnotic strobe. Developed in 1958 by an artist and a mathematician it became, like the lava lamp and concept album, an iconic product of a psychedelic generation. Titchner's

rustic carved wood version seems to be the product of an aging back-to-nature commune harking back to its heyday. Growing up in the fallout from this generation, Titchner traces a history of ideological failure and its impact on their offspring. Appropriating the aesthetics of contemporary club flyers, he draws parallels and divergences from the politically charged psychedelic '60s through to a present day club culture. Like a piece of nightclub décor, a banner proclaims *We Will Not Follow, We Will Not Lead* against a computer generated backdrop. Full of anti-authoritarian impulse, yet ultimately ambivalent, it is a manifestation of apathetic resistance. Further nihilistic disobedience is encouraged in the video projection *Artists Are Cowards*. Doctrines such as "Fail Again, Fail Better" appear over animated images of a dilating pupil, a pair of lips, and tranquil landscapes bathed in golden sun. Periodically, subliminal images flash across the screen carrying messages such as "Tomorrow Is A Travesty." With an obsolete past and a futile future, Titchner conveys the frustrated search for meaning shared by an ironic modern generation. Chris Hammonds



Mark Titchner *Resolving Conflict By Superficial Means*, 2002,
concrete, carved wood.