

Peter Harris

I'd Laugh, But There's No Punchline - Version

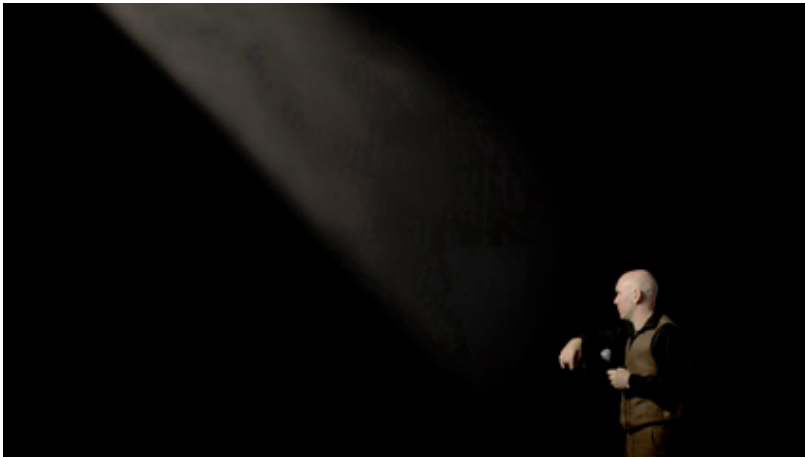
Screenings:

Wednesday 29 June – Saturday 2 July 2011

Opening hours:

Wednesday – Saturday 11am – 6pm

Private View: Wednesday 29 June, 6 – 8pm



Mummery + Schnelle is pleased to be screening Peter Harris's new film *I'd Laugh, But There's No Punchline – Version*, with audio played through the Terrortone sound system. A series of prints that further explore the issues raised in the film will also be shown.

As with many of the seemingly mysterious connections that have arisen in my professional/personal life during the last 25 years, I first had the pleasure of meeting Peter Harris through our mutual involvement with Lee 'Scratch' Perry, the shamanic music producer and walking performance art piece that has created an incredible body of recorded music since the early 1960s. The initial link between Perry and Harris came about when Harris sought Perry's contribution for his film *Higher Powers*, which explored the possibilities surrounding the existence (or non-existence) of a Higher Power (or Powers) with a number of exceptional contemporary figures. A next link in the chain came through Adrian Sherwood, the inventive producer whose On-U Sound label has remained at the vanguard of experimental British music during the last 30 years by merging the talents of transplanted Jamaican artists with local post-punk players, and with whom Perry's best post-Jamaican work has been recorded.

In September 2009, *Higher Powers* was given a special screening in the hallowed ground of the Tabernacle in Ladbroke Grove, accompanied by an exhibition of large-scale collaborative artworks made by Perry and Harris. Perry gave a live dub performance dressed as a kind of anti-Pope, aided and abetted by a sterling mix from Sherwood, while manipulated filmic backdrops created specially by Harris and animated by Llyr Williams formed a *doppelgänger* visual enhancement which served to underline the messages of Perry's partially ad-libbed lyrics, acting as a counterbalance to the gig's inevitable unpredictability. On the night, it was a real pleasure to see quotes from Perry, as first published in my authorised biography of the man, *People Funny Boy*, beamed onto the wall behind him during the performance, and meeting Peter somehow felt like re-connecting with an old friend, especially since the last time I had visited Perry at his home in Switzerland, he had the *Higher Powers* film screening on an endless loop on his computer, as he worked on his ever-changing sculptures and collages (most of which were glued to the wall, ceaselessly plastered on top of each other).

Peter Harris' previous work has typically involved 'proxy' creations, making use of the words of others to define himself. His latest project, which takes the form of the short film *I'd Laugh, But There's No Punchline – Version*, is something of a departure in that he narrates everything in it himself, appearing as a virtual 'version' of himself, this time in the form of a stand-up comedian, with special dub effects on the soundtrack enhancing the overall feeling of anxiety, rootlessness, and despair. As with Adrian Sherwood, Harris says that reggae and dub have long been sources of fascination for him; indeed, the reggae form had twin elements of particular appeal: there was the humour so often evident in lyrics and song titles that referenced in-jokes and made use of peculiar punning, often incorporating cartoonish, over-the-top sound effects, while conversely, there was astute social commentary by artists such as Big Youth and Doctor Alimantado, who railed against social injustices and racism of 'Babylon', which perpetually victimizes the poor.

The assumption of such obscure names by reggae artists, pointing to a problematised identity, is another element that held resonance for Harris, providing another layer of inspiration for this new work. Perhaps most importantly, there is also the intangible quality of dub music, which opens up new spaces through the reinterpretation of a piece of recorded music by dropping out its original vocal, and then subjecting the raw rhythm to manipulative mixing, as well as echo, delay, and other types of mesmerising sound effects that impart a feeling of infiniteness—the cavernous sound of limitless space, as well as a bottomless abyss.

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In dub music, through an inverse process, the accepted mask as presented on a standard vocal recording is stripped away to reveal a truer sense of the core that lies beneath it, often revealing the song's protagonist to be vulnerable or helpless. Harris says that a particular point of reference for his latest project was the work crafted by the forward-thinking Jamaican producer, Keith Hudson, who was one of a handful of noteworthy Kingston innovators that began issuing dubs during the early 1970s; on his tense and emotionally-laden releases (as heard on both the vocal and dub cuts of tracks such as 'Satan Side,' 'True To My Heart,' 'Jonah,' and 'Darkest Night On A Wet Looking Road'), Hudson yielded an other-worldly and somewhat tortured feeling, as though he was not at peace with himself, or felt that all was not right with the world.

With such elements in mind, in *I'd Laugh, But There's No Punchline – Version*, Peter Harris draws on the altered format of the version B-side, to give an alternate reading of himself as a stand-up comedian, who is here revealed to be an angst-ridden figure, beset by neurosis and potential personal calamities, which are intrinsically linked to the essence of his vocation, or indeed, to that of an artist, or perhaps simply to anyone that finds themselves with the misfortune of being of a certain age, living in our contemporary falsified reality. By reworking and subverting a range of traditional joking forms and turning them in on himself (with occasional visual effects from Llyr Williams adding to the tension), Harris seeks to present an alternate kaleidoscope of his own identity, a splintered anti-comic reflected through dub's fractured lens. Thus, the dub sound effects that rapidly appear and disappear behind Harris' troubled monologue (drawn from Adrian Sherwood's personal archive, but here reconfigured by Harris and sound engineer Riccardo Carbone) form a sonic filter for Harris' alternate funhouse-mirror portrait of himself as a manic depressive stand-up comic, subsumed by an ongoing identity crisis.

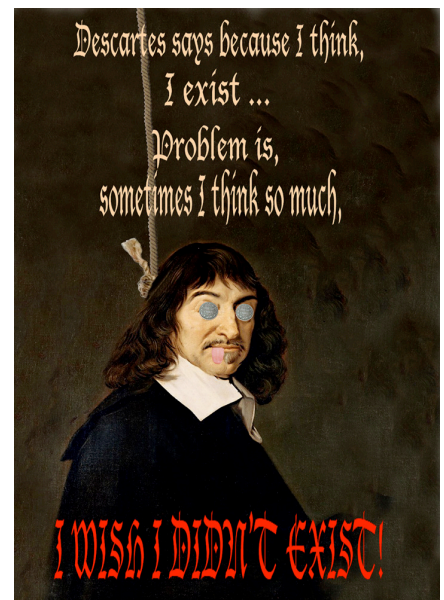
Text by David Katz

After leaving Chelsea College of Art Peter Harris (b. 1967) co-founded the exhibition space Uncle Grey Presents with Charles Avery in 1996. He has since exhibited widely, including the presentation of *Higher Powers* with Lee 'Scratch' Perry at The Tabernacle, London (2009); solo exhibitions at Kunsthalle Lüneburg (2007), Andrew Mummery Gallery (1999, 2000, 2002) and group exhibitions at Laura Bartlett Gallery, London (*Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, 2008), National Film Theatre, London (*Artists' Films on Music Culture*, 2004), Earl Lu Gallery, Singapore (*Contemporary Self-Portraiture / Re-assessing Identity*, 2004), Kettle's Yard Cambridge (*Face Off*, 2002), Milton Keynes Gallery (*Air Guitar*, 2002). Peter Harris's collaborative work with Lee 'Scratch' Perry will feature in the forthcoming exhibition *Self Determination = Power* at Sorcha Dallas Gallery, Glasgow. Further information about his work can be found at: www.mummeryschnelle.com and: www.peterharrisart.co.uk

David Katz is author of *People Funny Boy: The Genius of Lee 'Scratch' Perry* and *Solid Foundation: An Oral History of Reggae*. Further information about David Katz can be found at: www.davidkatz.r8.org



I burned all my bridges and now I live on an island, 2011
framed digital print
31 x 41 cm
Edition of 12



Descartes says because I think, I exist, 2011
framed digital print
41 x 31 cm
Edition of 12

For further information, please contact Laurent Cottier at: laurent@mummeryschnelle.com