



Jason Shulman Illuminates Movies by Photographing Them

The toughest part of any creative process is giving its outcome a title. Jason Shulman found that naming his upcoming exhibition was no exception.

“What do you think about ‘The sickle in whimsical?’” he said one morning in his London studio.

“No,” he answered himself. “No bad jokes.”

He settled on “Some Work,” which is exactly what the exhibition will be: an assortment of some of his work spanning the past 10 years.

Shulman is a sculptor and photographer who has been based in East London since 2004. He previously had a successful career as a graphic designer and art director employed by Harpers & Queen and the Harvey Nichols magazine. His decision to become a full-time artist was informed by his interest in mirrors, magnets, and substances usually confined to laboratories: his work pays tribute to the physics of things, exploring the intangible and invisible worlds of light, balance, and optical illusion.

Tricks of the eye

His first exhibition at London’s Madder Rose Gallery in 2006 treated visitors to a sequence of mixed-media pieces related to or inspired by the pain-relief medication Solpadeine, as well as a sculpture made from his father’s stratified, color-coded, and magnetized ashes. It won him the admiration of fellow artists like Marc Quinn and Gavin Turk.

Hailing from the uncharted realm where art and science meet, Shulman’s work has an unassuming magical quality. Whether his pieces are a product of the play of light, an improbable balance, or a trick of the eye, all retain the pristine aesthetic of simple colour palettes and impeccable lines that denote the unerring precision of numbers and an eye for perfection.

The tendency towards understatement in Shulman’s titles belies the complexities of his artwork. Each piece is a product of esoteric studies in light, engineering, and everyday technologies, variously constructed, painted, and sculpted over months of trial and error using precise calculations, dogged determination, and wit.

Take “Photographs of Films,” a series of photographic images of movies.

Rediscover the magic

“It was such a simple idea,” Shulman explained. “Put a camera in front of a high-resolution screen and run the exposure for as long as the film’s duration.”

The result is movies as never seen before: each image an amorphous impressionistic blur of colour, shapes, and arrested movement. Together they draw viewers into a new kind of relationship with the moving image, a medium that has become overly familiar and commodified to the extent that the magic enjoyed by early cinemagoers has been lost.

Looking at the photograph of *Trainspotting*, a film familiar to me from my teenage years, I had a sense of that part of my life flashing before my eyes. In a single moment, I relived the film and experienced all the emotions it originally provoked.

Feelings recovered

Again, I was hemmed inside the set’s garishly painted rooms with Danny Boyle’s characters and their relentless paranoia. In a moment of apophenia—the experience of seeing connections that may not be there—I even thought I spotted a train hurtling through the image’s nebula. Reconfigured as a still, the film offered a chance to feel sensations that are overlooked when one is trying to keep pace with the action. For Shulman, this is what creating art is about—reinstating details that are lost in the act of day-to-day living.

“Some Work” goes beyond photographs of films to display a potpourri of familiar objects newly revealed as bizarre or mysterious phenomena. Across the *mélange* of mindbending curiosities, viewers will notice a singular motif—a Martini glass. So pervasive is it throughout Shulman’s work, it even finds its way into printed stills from the 1933 version of *King Kong*. In *Ann Darrow II*, Ann (who was played by Fay Wray) is posed in a Y-shape before the mighty ape. By scratching into the ink, Shulman transforms Darrow’s surroundings into a dazzle of splashed-Martini-shaped light.

Cherished item

There is reason behind the randomness. After several Martini-doused years, Shulman saw in *King Kong* a personal, if unflattering, reflection. In the great ape’s beguilement over the “lemon-haired beauty” that he yearned to have in his hand, Shulman recognised the cravings of a man pawing at the stem of a lemon-dressed Martini glass. So began a new relationship with the drink receptacle.

“Using the figure of the Martini glass as a muse became a way to recoup the months I’d wasted in bars and turn them into a cherished item,” he explained.

Applying his fascination with chemistry, physics and engineering to what he describes as “this most unrepossessing of objects,” Shulman conjures a pageant of “Martinis” fit not for the hotel bar but art galleries and science museums, from the playful Marilyn Martini and the illusory Grail to the eccentric Sway (see it in action in *Dance*).

Everyday wonderment

Shulman avoids imbuing his work with a message, claiming it is no more than creativity born of curiosity and stupidity. For me, therein lies the message: never stop asking questions, or playing with things grown-ups tell you not to play with, or finding wonderment in everyday objects. Take them

apart, reconstruct them, discover where reality ends and perception begins, and let your human brain do what it does best—learn.

Some Work is in exhibition from September 29 to October 21 at The Cob Gallery, 205 Royal College Street, London NW1 0SG. Tel: +44 (0) 207 209 9110. Wednesday-Saturday, 12-6pm.