

## 'Factual Nonsense – The Art and Death of Joshua Compston'

Exhibition & Book Launch

Private View: 20 June 6 – 9pm / Exhibition: 21 June – 31 August 2013

'My guns are directed at the banality of Modern culture. It needs to be massively reinvented' Joshua Compston

Paul Stolper Gallery is proud to announce the exhibition 'Factual Nonsense – The Art and Death of Joshua Compston' curated by Darren Coffield as well as the launch of Coffield's book by the same name. For Joshua Compston (1970 – 1996), life was a special kind of nonsense; Factual Nonsense. Seen by some as the romantic martyr of his generation and by others, as a prankster, sending up the art establishment, Compston's gallery 'Factual Nonsense' (FN) was quite unlike any other. Called a 'crazy powerhouse of ideas', Factual Nonsense was a cultural think-tank located in a then run-down area of the East End. Determined to change the world through art, he was a driving force that helped turn the East End of London into the cultural hub that it is today.

'Factual Nonsense – The Art and Death of Joshua Compston' is both a biography and an alternative portrait of the 1990's art scene in London's East End. It is also a guide to living fast and dying young in the contemporary art world; Joshua Compston helped make Hoxton hip and Shoreditch sexy. The list of the seventy or so names of people in the book and exhibition reads like a who's who of the contemporary art world, with contributions from the likes of Jay Jopling, Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gary Hume, Gavin Turk, Maureen Paley, and Sir Peter Blake.

Compston is perhaps best remembered for his collaborative street events, the first of which was 'The Fete Worse than Death', an anarchic swipe at the notion of a traditional village fête staged in Hoxton in the summer of 1993. Several artists, including Gavin Turk, Gillian Wearing, Mat Collishaw, Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas and Gary Hume manned stalls selling art and providing entertainment. The fête included some of the biggest, yet still then unknown, stars of the art world, including Damien Hirst and Angus Fairhurst, who famously dressed as clowns producing the first spin paintings at the fête (for sale at the princely sum of £1). In 1994, his second 'Fete Worse Than Death' featured performances that included Gavin Turk's 'Killers and Cannibals', Cerith Wyn Evans' 'People should beg God to stop' and Leigh Bowery's neo punk band Minty.

'The Hanging Picnic', Compston's third and final summer event, was an art exhibition and picnic. Compston selected objects by 25 artists, including Iain Forsythe, Jane Pollard, Tim Noble and Sue Webster, to hang on the railings of Hoxton Square. The cover of the flyer had an image of Gary Hume's feet coated in strawberry jam, a fitting image for a curated picnic.

"I knew in Joshua's lifetime that he was going to become this sort of fascinating figure posthumously. I knew that he was always going to be the dandy romantic of that time as well. And I think he knew that too" (Sam Taylor-Wood). Towards the end, Joshua became used to being shunned and, feeling discarded, he would often say, "I am like an aircraft carrier people land on me then take off". If no man is an island, Joshua was the next best thing, an aircraft carrier that could reposition itself amid the choppy cultural seas of the 1990s. With his immaculate white suit and shock of blonde hair, he was reminiscent of Klaus Kinski's character, Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*, wanting to bring culture to the jungle, considered laughable and mad by many, but motivated by the 'noblest of intentions', his task as herculean as hauling a boat over a mountain in hostile territory. He will to some extent always remain an enigma. Although Joshua never achieved the recognition that he deserved in his lifetime, he was a pivotal figure in the London art scene during the early 1990s. His energetic and dynamic public events and happenings were without parallel, and his lasting legacy was to help bring together the group of artists and gallerists that is now known as the YBA's.

The exhibition and book consist of previously unseen artworks, photographs, letters, and extracts from Joshua's diaries, which give insight into his thought process as well as the deterioration of his mental state towards the end of his brief but eventful life. Also included are works by artists who exhibited at his events such as Don Brown, Helen Chadwick, Mat Collishaw, Itai Doron, Tracey Emin, Angus Fairhurst, Liam Gillick, Damien Hirst, Andrew Herman, Gary Hume, Sarah Staton, Sam Taylor-Wood, David Taborn, Gavin Turk, Jessica Voorsanger, Max Wigram and Sebastian Wrong. Original exhibition posters and ephemera, including Compston's iconic white suit will also be on view. A percentage of proceeds from sales made during the exhibition will go to raise funds for a memorial to Joshua in Hoxton Square.

Darren Coffield was born in London in 1969. He studied at Goldsmiths College, Camberwell School of Art and the Slade School of Art in London where he received his Bachelor of Fine Art in 1993. He has exhibited widely in the company of many leading artists at venues ranging from the Courtauld Institute, Somerset House to Voloshin Museum, Crimea. His work can be found in collections around the world. Coffield lives and works in London.

'The Art and Death of Joshua Compston' will be on view at Paul Stolper gallery from the 21<sup>st</sup> of June to the 31<sup>st</sup> of August. For more information please contact the [alexandra@paulstolper.com](mailto:alexandra@paulstolper.com) or visit [www.factualnonsense.com](http://www.factualnonsense.com).