

And the beak shall inherit the earth

At long last, a new exhibition pays due homage to the humble chicken

ART

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A Shot in the Head Lisson Gallery, London NW1

THERE'S A pronounced animal theme to the Lisson Gallery's mixed summer show, 'A Shot in the Head'. The first intimation is heard as a cock crow as you walk up the street. Never mind you're in the centre of London, and no matter that the cock, a handsome Mecklese Bresse, is upstairs, fussing round his three Redcap females - he makes his presence felt.

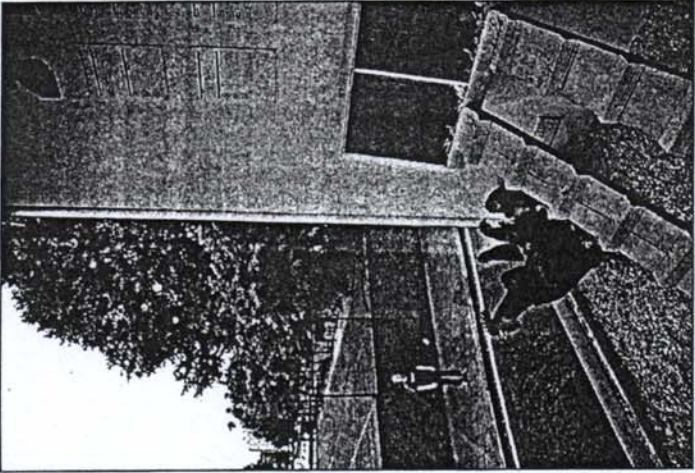
Koen VanMechelen's *The Cosmopolitan Chickens* comprises the roomy, occupied chicken run complete with nesting boxes, a neighbouring chick cage, incubator and warm cabinet for just-hatched chicks, of which there were a great many on the day I visited. Chicken portraits adorn the outside of the run, and their breeding lineage is neatly listed on the wall. The hens lay, eggs are collected, incubated, hatched, chicks reared.

By September, when the show ends, the first floor should be awash with poultry. Perhaps there'll be a farewell barbecue. The whole neat cycle is reminiscent of the Damien Hirst installation at the Saatchi Gallery some years ago. There's a fly in this show, too. Jeroen Offerman's *Fly* lives in a tiny metal cage just above eye level on one white wall, with a plentiful supply of rotten fruit and live bait. Across the room, to the great joy of local schoolchildren

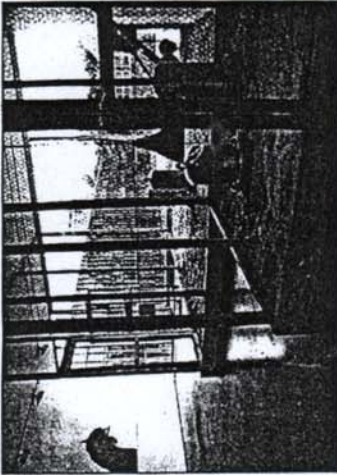
who come to visit daily, is John Latham's *They're Learning Fast*, a tank containing two piranhas swimming around some very dull looking pages from *Surveyor's Report*, containing such pompous phrases as 'nonextended state is logical and necessary'. Is it the fish who are learning a little more on each circuit? Do surveyors and piranhas share the same traits? Has the artist suffered a bad experience? One gallery assistant still pales at the memory of the initial installation when the piranhas had bitten through the plastic net between carrying can and studio tank.

The final animal-related work is dead but by far the most unsettling. A stuffed white cockatoo is chained to a perch. Food and water are within his reach, and so too is the painting on which his fierce, black eyes are trained on the wall in front of him. It is of a recumbent, naked woman, legs apart, with the focus on her public area. And the title that John Murphy has given his installation is *Making Do With His Beak*.

However, the overall tone of the show is exuberant. It's lively, ebullient, witty, thoughtful and fun and does credit to this consistently innovative gallery. The tone is set as soon as you walk through the door by a pair of sawn-off shoe soles nailed to the wall. At 3.30pm on 13 July, Hayley Newman bought a new pair of shoes and set off from her East End studio to walk to the Lisson, aiming to arrive by 6.30pm



Above and top right: Koen VanMechelen's *The Cosmopolitan Chickens*.



Bottom right: *Search and Rescue* by Matt O'Dell.

Nikolay's *Holidays From Myself*. High on a wall is a shower cubicle, its white plastic curtains drawn tight but from which emerge the sounds of pounding water and the artist's tuneless singing. On the floor below is a pair of flipflops.

Across the way is Jemima Stehli's *Strip* series of seven sets of photographs. Each strip is just that. The same woman, with her back to the camera, takes off her clothes in front of a different man who is seated in a chair, holding a remote-control that you assume can only be activating the model. The men all react differently.

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for the opening of the show. The marks picked up on the wall (plenty of scuffing and a large tack) were the impression of the cross-city journey that constitute the exhibit, which she then cut up, installed and named after the style of shoe - *Bubble*. I laughed aloud at Stefan

Some never move their pose; others shift quite noticeably from frame to frame; one looks the model boldly in the face; two make no eye contact at all; one is clearly very uncomfortable with the whole process.

No discomfiture is apparent, however, with Jonathan Hernandez and Fernando Ortega's *Untitled* contribution via a set of headphones. They wrote three sets of lyrics, hired an unknown composer, a band from Yelow Pages and then recorded the somewhat discordant, hilarious results.

Nothing so far that you'd probably be able to accom-

date in your house, although the little fly cage would be fine. But given a lofty loft and a hefty budget, I'd cart home Petroc Sesti's *Untitled* (too many 'Untitleds' in this show; sloppy and cowardly I think), a large, suspended, water-filled Latex globe with a sinuous jellyfish shape that is glorious to behold. Or you might just be able to fit Matt O'Dell's *Search and Rescue*, a curiously moving cardboard sculpture of a little, shatterer plane wrecked in the Alps. This is an outstanding multi-discipline show which I strongly urge you to see.

Laura Cumming is away.