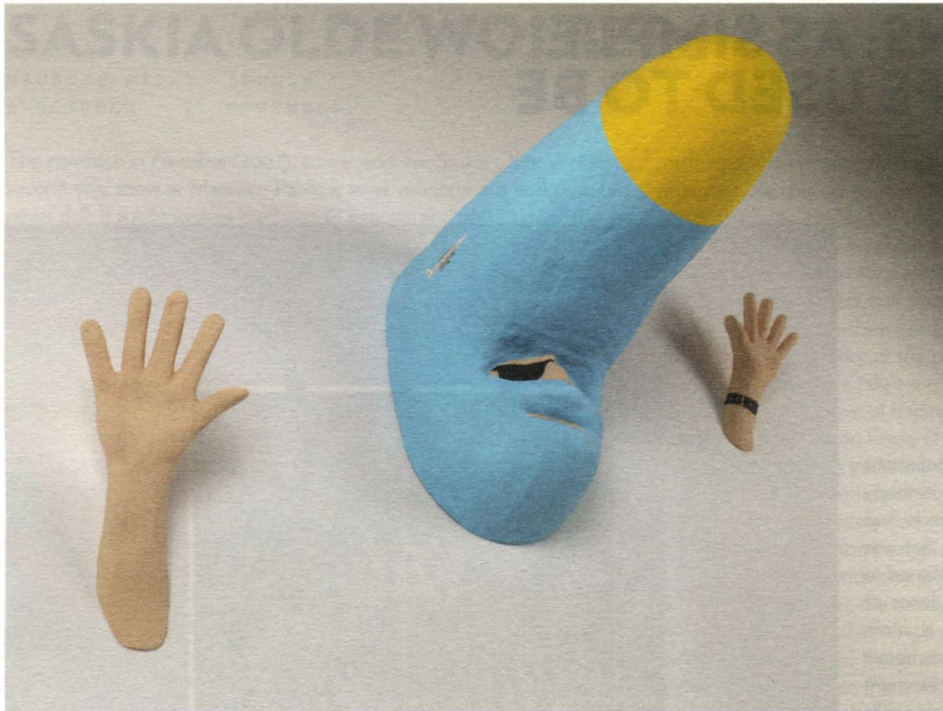


REVIEWS [PETER MCDONALD](#)



*High Sun, 2007 (detail),  
acrylic gouache on jesmonite,  
200 x 105 x 60 cm.  
Courtesy Kate MacGarry, London*

## PETER MCDONALD

KATE MACGARRY, LONDON  
7 SEPTEMBER - 14 OCTOBER

Peter McDonald's exhibition at Kate MacGarry ended during the London art fair frenzy. It seemed appropriate. McDonald's painterly protagonists with their oversize see-through heads and drifting intent seem a gentle, prescient footnote to the sensory and verbal exhaustion induced by those few days in October.

McDonald's paintings start by attempting to describe everyday, self-conscious performative acts and end after a stylistic journey through figuration, abstraction and cartoon animation. If Philip Guston, Miró and Gary Hume all collaborated on teaching a painting workshop to a team of abandoned characters from a 1970s French comic, the results would look similar to McDonald's doughy, amorphous asexual forays. This unique aesthetic is particularly satisfying when one of McDonald's characters encounters an art object (either as viewer or maker), and in *Artist in Studio* (2006) he avoids the trap of overt self-reflection through the amusement of the scene's droll execution and the application of a colourist's palette.

On further examination the new works on display have an overall sense of displacement, offering fleeting explorations of self-conscious acts within differing nonplaces. Airports interact with bland shopping trips, and as viewers, we're invited to peer anonymously through the slight introspection of the artist's eyes into worlds of beautiful awkwardness. The looming light, transparent heads of McDonald's central figures have a happily inane quality to them, and yet, paradoxically, you can imagine that their joy is often countered by bouts of severe vomiting and the odd faint. They feel slightly queasy, punch-drunk and likeably dumb – even the gun-wielding copper in *Airport Security* (2006) looks like he would happily let off a few rounds just to impress the waving child in the background.

There is then a theme of disjointed happiness at play throughout McDonald's work, and it is this sensibility that enables him to take the short step from the humorous observation of everyday performance into the realm of pathos and satire. In *Radio Phone-In* (2007) we witness a scene in split screen: a radio DJ speaking on the phone to a listener who has called in for an undefined purpose. The descriptive presence of the listener's living room and the DJ's booth is cleverly understated, and we are left with an illustration of a private scene that comes to life in a public sphere. It's a scene, however, that's destined to fail – the feedback from the radio on the listener's table would result in a howl that would stop any conversation in its tracks. This is a seriously funny painting.

In *High Sun, Heavy Moon* and *Crying Mountain* (all 2007), McDonald's characters leave the canvas and puncture the gallery walls and floor as jesmonite sculptures. They hover like demigods over McDonald's increasingly sophisticated attempts to describe the world around him. At odds with the ephemeral nature of his weightless painted characters, these figures offer a (literally) new dimension to the exhibition. Just as the paintings envision a world whose motives are transparently legible, the sculptures seem to want to bring that mutability into our hard and opaque reality. *Alasdair Hopwood*