

'The Indignity of Speaking for Others': A Small History of the Artist Group Common Culture

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'The Indignity of Speaking for Others': A Small History of the Artist Group Common Culture

A short history of the artist group Common Culture, reflecting upon their influences, struggles, successes and critical engagement with the art world, academia and celebrity culture. Beginning with their critical and humorous response to the roving biennale Manifesta, the narrative gives insight into their shifting working practice, as they adopt a variety of strategies to reflect upon class, Britishness, consumer culture and the art school.

Keywords: Comedy, Celebrity Culture, Influencers Art Schools, Artificial Intelligence, Britishness

The British artist group, Common Culture was founded in 1996 by four artists teaching and studying fine art in an art school, Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent: David Campbell, Mark Durden, Paul Rooney and Anna Vickery. Using research money to rent a gallery in New York City, it was an art school that provided a supportive context for their emergence and initial success. Vickery left in 1997, with Rooney leaving in the early 2000s to pursue a solo career as an artist and musician, and after a few years working and exhibiting together, Campbell and Durden invited Ian Brown, another lecturer at Staffordshire University, to join the group. Brown has remained at Staffordshire throughout the collaboration, while Campbell and Durden have gone on to teach at a number of other art schools. But as their history reveals, art schools are now not what they once were. And these changes are also reflected in their most recent practice, a fictional portrait of an art school riven by the collisions between a corporate profit-driven culture and the creative ideals and beliefs of its lecturers.

To mark their thirty-year anniversary, what follows is a short history of their practice, reflecting upon their influences, struggles, successes and critical engagement with the art world, consumerism, celebrity culture and academia. Beginning with their critical and humorous response to an invitation to participate in the roving biennale Manifesta, this narrative gives insight into their shifting working practice, as they adopt a variety of strategies to reflect upon class, Britishness, consumer culture and the art school.

'The Indignity of Speaking for Others' is a quote from Gilles Deleuze and something he said to Michel Foucault, highlighting how Foucault had been the first to teach us this fundamental point. We used the quote in a parodic single-channel video work, *The New El Dorado*, made in 2010

for the roving European biennale Manifesta 8, when it was held in Murcia and Cartagena, Spain, and in supposed dialogue with Northern Africa.

The whole premise behind Manifesta was to bring international art to poorer European regions – having formerly dealt with the west-east divide, Manifesta 8 was billed in terms of engagement with the north-south divide, specifically with Europe’s present-day boundaries with northern Africa and its interrelations with the Maghreb region. We were reluctant to make art about a cultural situation we knew little about. Instead, we decided to turn the problem of that engagement into our subject, the problem of speaking for others when artists are parachuted into communities other than their own. We also openly addressed the problems posed by Manifesta’s project, and our own participation in an exhibition which confidently championed art both as a catalyst for economic rejuvenation and a healer of social divisions and ills. Local responses to Manifesta were not necessarily celebratory – violently borne out by an attack on the minister for culture for the Murcia region, purportedly for wasting valuable city funds on this biennale.



Common Culture, *The New El Dorado*, Video Still, 2010.

For our video *The New El Dorado*, we worked with a Spanish film crew, and hired local actors with definable regional and class-inflected accents, in order to ventriloquize our critique of Manifesta to a local audience: non-Spanish-speaking members of the international biennale audience were able to access the narrative by English subtitles. Our video centred on the fictional interaction of three artists attending Manifesta’s opening party, fractiously arguing about the problem of making socially engaged and politically responsive art.

In an effort to both address our apparent endorsement of Manifesta’s rationale and register our own sceptical engagement in the exhibition, we deployed a range of parodic strategies to create a sense of feeling ‘out of place’. On an empty, but noisy, dance floor, attired in colourful 1970s-styled disco outfits, our three surrogates squabbled over the problems they had with Manifesta, their garbled theory speak comically fractured and disrupted by the incessant disco beat. The promise of cultural and economic regeneration underpinning

Manifesta's project was teasingly woven into the exchanges between the actors in the video as they joked about the cultural tourism, of which they themselves were a part, mocking the collision between the supposed better class of tourists who flocked to Murcia for art at Manifesta and the tourists on the beach in Alicante.

The New El Dorado was well received and deemed a highlight of Manifesta and led to other commissions. But it also had allowed us as a collective to start to really speak about cultural difference. Our work before this had been rooted more within a specific British cultural context and set of references. *The New El Dorado* nevertheless had still played out and fixated upon the conflicts over that British context, but in the comic format of three British artists played by Spanish actors – it was us speaking through our problems and issues with the globalizing biennale trend and the casual way artists can assume to engage and understand other communities and cultures. (Our critical relationship to art festivals has continued but in the form of the more traditional format of review articles in academic journals, and has encompassed so far, responses to Documenta, the Liverpool Biennial and the Venice Biennale.)

Class was always a determining feature of our work in coming from Midlands-based and Northern British working-class contexts and we were, and still are, drawn to the tensions arising from the fact that the art world is a world of privilege, centred in London in the UK, and that we are located elsewhere. Academia has given us a space from which we can function, and it was in an art school that we were formed – Staffordshire University, Stoke-on-Trent. That was in 1996. Out of a collective frustration with our marginality and the inflated notions of British cultural identity underpinning the promotion and phenomenal success of what were then the Young British Artists, many of whom peddled their Britishness, working-class and popular cultural affiliations – Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst in particular – we decided to work collaboratively.

Our name Common Culture was lifted from Thomas Crow's book of essays, *Modern Art in the Common Culture*. Common Culture for Crow meant vernacular or mass culture and his excellent book is a history of how modernism was inextricably tied to forms of common culture. The term had been used by Raymond Williams much earlier and specifically, but our use of it, following Crow, was in terms of a low or popular culture, a culture that was common in that it was ordinary, everyday, and we revelled in the term's judgemental class inflection.

Academia and art schools then were freer spaces. It was the beginning of funding for research and Staffordshire University's fine art department had done well in this. With Vice Chancellor's approval, the head of fine art was allowed to use the money to rent a gallery space in Chelsea, New York and use it to promote its staff's art. So, Common Culture's first show was in New York where we decided to develop our interest in the rituals of consumption by displaying configurations of fast-food menu lightboxes: *New Menus* (1997). We had a real interest in, and knowledge of, American Minimalism and Neo Geo and saw our work as responsive to this art. Hirst had effectively reprised the Minimalist/Neo Geo trajectory into a British context. We were interested in the way the fast-food lightbox, as a form, acknowledged American Minimalism but brought in specific British cultural references through the dishes listed upon it, cuisines that also reflected both the cultural diversity of the UK and its legacy of colonial rule.

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Common Culture, Counter Culture, Cornerhouse, Manchester, 1999.

The collision of taste was played out through competing forms of cultural consumption: the promotion of different variants of British fast food, and the compositional aesthetics of late modernist artworks alluded to when set in the gallery context. The white cube has, as a setting, always been intended to cut out the world outside it and to establish a space for the experience of an art separate from that world. But as Brian O'Doherty has shown, the history of the white cube has also involved the intrusions and disruptions made by common and ordinary objects within it, from collaged everyday objects in Cubism onwards. Our Menus were displayed as single units in New York. On the back of that show, we had solo shows at Manchester Cornerhouse (1998) and Gasworks, London (2000). The Menu work has also been shown at Tate Liverpool (2002–3) and at the National Museum, Cardiff, for which we remade the Menus (2011) and they are now in the museum's collection.

Our work so far had been object based, and our activity countered the conservative romantic premise of individual art-making and production. Our art is systematic and mechanical, not expressive. The fabrication of the menus was subcontracted to a sign making company. We selected the colours and the range of national dishes, but they determined the format of the design based on typical cuisine signage. We also supplemented these designs with examples that featured aesthetic and semiotic glitches, menus consisting of only blank, coloured displays or barely readable white on white text. Such delegated art production was arguably initiated by Andy Warhol – who worked with different teams and groups of people in the production of his extraordinarily expanded range of art outputs. He has become an increasingly central reference point for us. But Warhol also constructed his self-image and was canny and savvy with his self-image production and promotion. We remain hidden under the name of the collective. He played it deadpan as an artist. We write, review, curate, rant and often argue among ourselves, and this became the motivator for the comedy of the script for *The New El Dorado*.



Common Culture, Kiosk, Gasworks, London, 2000.

During the show at Gasworks, London (2000) these arguments and tensions were coming to a head. At this time, we were working with Paul Rooney, who was also establishing his own career as a musician and making videos under his own name. Gasworks wanted to exhibit our menu work. But instead, we used funds to buy a minimalist white burger kiosk and tow it down to London and instal it in the gallery, where it was kept locked for the duration of the show. In an accompanying space, the gallery floor was littered with 'merch' spilling out of cardboard boxes: scaled down versions of the Menus, silver plated chip trays and a Naumanesque neon sculpture of a figure vomiting into a white cube. The show spoke of our own position as 'provincial' artists working in the North of England and the experience of vassalage created by this relationship to London as the centre of political, economic and cultural power. With the Gasworks' show, we performed a deliberate and truculent refusal of this relationship. The Gasworks show did not go down well and not long after Paul left Common Culture, and Ian Brown, a former student at Staffordshire University and who had now started teaching fine art there, was invited to join Common Culture.

We had by then already started making video works, which began with us recording the routines and acts of performers without an audience. It began with the video *Mobile Disco* (2002) which explored industrialized entertainment and the invisibility of human labour in the process of commodity production. In *Mobile Disco* a DJ was hired and filmed performing his typical three-hour set in an empty gallery. Desolately stationed behind his decks, he performs to an empty dance floor: wooing the non-existent audience with pop classics, dry ice, disco lights, and lame banter. For *Local Comics* (2004) we recorded British comedians delivering their stand-up routine, alone on stage. Bereft of an audience, the comedians' routines responded to this absence and in some cases began to unravel. Common Culture was appropriating other people's acts, located in a historical moment and borne out by particular contexts. These unpolished routines offered disquieting portraits, warped and crazed perspectives on local and global events mixed with personal anecdotes. It was comedy under duress, straining to be funny. The work also revealed the fragile line between the comic and tragic. Samuel Beckett became a pointed reference for two commissions in 2016 our title, *I Can't Go On, I'll Go On, I Can't Go On, I'll Go On*, was adapted from the last line of his *Unnameable*. For one variant of this body of work, *Comic Battle* (2008) three cameras were set up side by side so that each would record one of the three comedians on stage. We filmed them competing to tell jokes prompted by subjects we announced on signs, unseen by the camera.



Common Culture, Bouncers, Bluecoat, Liverpool, 2008.

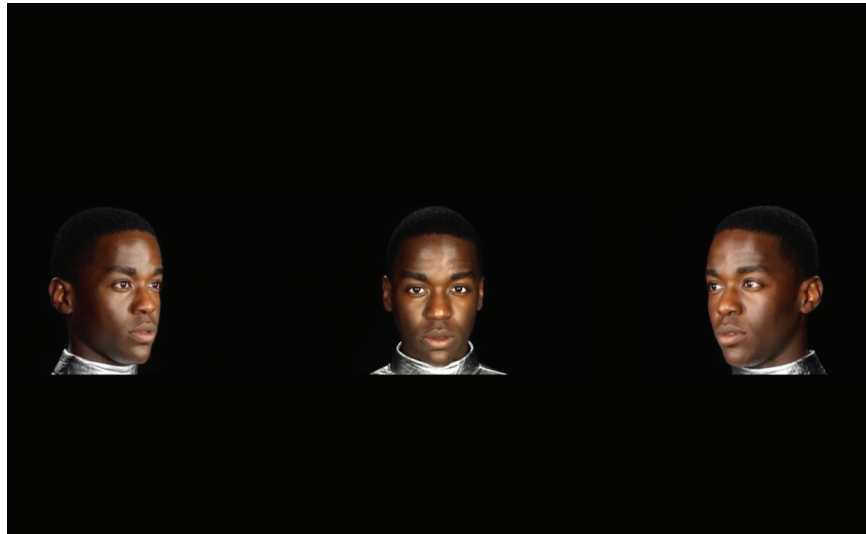
Bouncers (2005) presented live performances, which collided the polite social etiquette of the gallery going with the presence of people paid to monitor and control unsocial behaviour. As with *Mobile Disco* and *Local Comics*, we were dealing with an act of appropriation and dislocation – bringing a familiar aspect of the night club into the gallery setting. Our interest was with the power of the look, pitting the stare of the bouncers against the gaze of the gallery goer. This was further explored in the video and photographs related to these performances. For the live events, the bouncers were arranged into particular group formations that set up a confrontational relationship with those in the gallery.

In relation to a performance of *Bouncers* at The Void, Derry, we produced a book of our work to date, *Pop Trauma* (2006). Ceding Keith Connolly of Tonic Design free rein to design a response to our work from the images and texts we sent him. We combined different discourses and texts. We commissioned a critical theoretical response to our work, and this serious, sober reflection was disrupted by quotations from jokes taken from some of the stand-up comedy routines we had filmed. For the book's launch at The Photographers' Gallery, London, we made a new video for the event, *Book Launch* (2007), hiring a TV personality to talk through the merits of our publication *Pop Trauma* and adopting the televisual format of a shopping channel. It was filmed in the foyer of the gallery and screened during the launch.

For the video, *Adorno's Disco* (2004) we hired a DJ to try and synchronize the lights in an empty club to Arnold Schoenberg's atonal music. Both Adorno and Schoenberg championed a difficult modernist musical form distinct from the standardized entertainment of popular music. We saw the video as a bit like a one-line gag, at the expense of defenders of a pure modernist form, a collision between supposedly 'high' and 'low' culture, a collision further enhanced on learning that while in LA, Schoenberg lived opposite Shirley Temple and would get irate when passing guided bus tours would stop and point out her home and not his.

In relation to *Adorno's Disco*, our book *Modern Cumbrian Jokes* (2014) set the jokes we had collected from people in this northern region in the UK in relation to a modernist typographic form. The book rested on the collision set up between its graphic design and the popular, and common jokes, it was combined with. In collecting jokes from a particular area, we wanted to test how local and specific jokes could be. In the making of this book, we did discover some jokes that only made sense in this region: jokes based on people in Whitehaven calling people in Workington jam eaters, initially a term of abuse in reference to miners too poor to have meat on their sandwiches, but now a term of solidarity for people of West Cumbria. Some jokes depended on this particular cultural knowledge – ‘The History of Workington is Preserved’, for example – and would remain opaque without it. But the majority of jokes collected reproduced national and international comedic conventions, reflecting the influence of transnational mass media consumption.

Comedy and music were becoming important recurring points of reference in our practice. *The New El Dorado* set the banter and theory speak between its three characters within a noisy night club, with shifts in the background pop music keyed to the build-up in dramatic intensity between them. Our four-channel video *Not Necessarily in the Right Order* (2013) was commissioned by the New Art Exchange, Nottingham. Set in the future, our video used the premise of carnival to reflect upon the instabilities of cultural identities. Our science fiction musical combined different musical traditions with a speech delivered in multiple accents by the Rwandan-born Scottish actor, Ncuti Gatwa, now a recognized film and TV star for having played the role of *Doctor Who* and having appeared in *Barbie*, amongst others.



Common Culture, *Not Necessarily in the Right Order*, Video Still, 2013.

Not Necessarily ... concerns both immigration and the tensions around the activity of carnival as a potential site of transgression. Solo performances by musicians, singers and dancers were combined and collided with each other through the multiple screen projections. The sense of being out of place and a resistance to being fixed and contained were echoed in the title of the work that played with both Jean-Luc Godard's famous quip about his films having a beginning, middle and end but not necessarily in that order, and Eric Morecambe's joke to Andre Previn about him playing all the wrong notes on the piano: 'I'm playing all the right notes but not necessarily in the right order'. These lines were adapted to form lyrics sung in Farsi and English, through different musical conventions, from Hip-Hop to Folk.

The three-screen installation *Vent* (2016) signalled a certain shift in focus for our work, in that we drew upon celebrity interviews for our narrative and adapted the TV chat show format to a Ventriloquist act. In particular, the work concentrated on the revelatory celebratory interview undertaken after a moment of public indiscretion, where the equally public apology becomes a newly commodified form of the entertainment industry. The interviews provided readymade texts shot through with narcissism, vanity, greed and the generally warped perspective on the world, opened up by the indulgent and extreme lives led by celebrities. The 'vent' we employed was a voice-over artist and mimic. This allowed us to give the dummy the voices of different well-known but older generation actors: Christopher Walken, Woody Allen, James Mason and Sean Connery. As you viewed the strained and obviously fake ventriloquist routine presented across two separate screens, a third screen behind the gallery viewer showed an audience going through various collective reactions, often in discord with the confessions being recounted. Our overt use of the Ventriloquist routine in *Vent* was inevitable. Much of our work had involved 'throwing voices' and speaking through others.

Our work was becoming more complicated and discordant, creating more bemusement and uncertainty on the part of the limited audience we were having at the time. In some senses it was mirroring the absurd nature of the celebrity culture we were immersing ourselves in. *The Age of Chopping of Heads* (2017) involved us writing and performing songs with lyrics based upon those celebrity interviews. The music we were making was generic and standardized, mirroring the celebrity confessional interview using publicly available loops and clips. Unlike many other artists' engagement with music, we did not set out to make good alternative music. Ours was a middle-aged crisis pop. We thought about producing a CD compilation of our songs and still might do so. We were interested in the way a popular form could carry lyrics about crazed visions of the world. Interest in celebrity also extended to the darker realm of notoriety through police interviews with murderers that were available online. This resulted in the deliberate collision between a jaunty tune and the lyrics for *I'm Dead*.

Tips for Artists (2013) was initially commissioned as a small publication by Grizedale Arts for the *Now I Gotta Reason* project for Jerwood Arts. We were particularly struck by the problems of some of Grizedale Arts' attempts to make art useful – a shop for selling bread and making cheese, their deployment of a local sign maker. *Tips for Artists* was an opportunity for us to reflect our collective irritations with the art world and the supposed political worthiness of Grizedale's social practices. One of our first tips was pitched against Relational Art. In many senses, *Tips for Artists* reflected our own marginalization within the art world, the fact that we were not where we thought we should be. They were whingeing, arrogant and indulgent. It was also an opportunity for us to test our own comedy writing skills in the format of short pithy paragraphs. In exhibition format they were presented as large posters and deliberately deployed the aesthetic of Joseph Kosuth's Conceptual text works. We also adapted them for use as animated Instagram posts, using a garish readymade online aesthetic, combining the standard backgrounds available for Instagram messages with stickers and gifs that we thought suited the messages.

Some critical responses we had to these Instagram posts spoke of their cynicism and negativity, prompting us to amend and rework them so they became positive and affirmative. But despite their newly revised tone and messages, few followers took them as sincere. Many saw them as even more sarcastic and cynical. We cannot easily shake off the sense that we do things with mordant humour.

For Common Culture art production is not an expressive and subjective activity. It cannot be in a collective. It can however be fuelled by collective frustrations and anger. This is where the internet celebrity Connor Franta comes in. A few years ago, we found out our Common Culture website was not running. When our website designer got us back online, he indicated that our website had been hacked. It was at this time we came across a link to

a Common Culture online store, behind which was Connor Franta, a celebrity vlogger who had a fanbase of millions. He had branded Common Culture to merchandise clothing, curated coffee, candles and music compilations. There was a great quote he used about his Common Culture, replete with hypocrisy – ‘It looks cool, it sounds cool ... a unified culture anyone can enjoy’.

If much of our art was all about appropriation and ventriloquism, here was someone appropriating our name to peddle over-priced merchandise. The transactional intimacy built by this internet personality was being deployed to convert followers into consumers.

For *OMG I Love Common Culture!* (2020), we started to collect the online feedback that both he and his Common Culture products were getting on his YouTube channel, via his followers’ comments. Much of it was gushing and excessive adulation. We worked with Tonic Design to turn these declarations into physical graphic stickers and animated gifs that could pepper different public spaces.



Common Culture, *OMG, I Love Common Culture!*, Die Raum, Berlin 2020.

OMG ... was initially shown at Die Raum gallery in Berlin. We bought a domain name similar to Connor Franta’s *commonculture.store* and blacked out the gallery front so that it resembled a shop. The ambiguous frontage carried only our Common Culture logo, the new internet link and the collection of specially designed stickers based on the adulatory responses to his vlogs. These stickers mimicked those plastered around many cities, advertising bands or club nights, part of an underground promotion network. On the opening night we played a video featuring a compilation of all the stylized greetings Franta gave his viewers at the start of each of his vlogs, highlighting the development of both his individual look and his online brand as a celebrity commodity. The sequence of introductory ‘Hellos’ to his vlogs was edited together from all of his online videos up to the point he introduced, giddy with excitement, his launch of his ‘common culture’ products. Tee shirts featuring a selection of the sticker designs were displayed on the opening night. Apart from the opening night, we closed the physical gallery space for the duration of the exhibition, with viewers offered only the sticker-covered frontage of the locked gallery. The weblink for the common culture store, displayed on the gallery front, directed interested viewers to the online version of our video.

The graphic emphasis of the stickers has a formal continuity with the menus, the tacky, pop sensibility that is there in much of our work, combined with a dialectic with the late-modernist form of minimalism, here evident through the shopfront black backdrop. Of course, the work may seem to be hermetic, but that is in part its deadpan joke and point of critique. It critically repositions the expressive loving language of a global youth culture beguiled by a young internet sensation.

Online adulatory comments are reactive, throwaway, made in the moment. The turns of phrase and language, the use of emojis, are particular and idiomatic. Fixed as art, their identity and meaning change. We are playing back and embellishing the praise someone else has been given – it is the language of manipulated followers who have become consumers. We can never be part of that internet celebrity fan base culture, we do not speak for these fans. Instead, the discovery of finding that our own Common Culture name had been appropriated and branded, has led us to explore the weird realm of the attention economy and internet culture, and use art to hold it up for scrutiny and reflection. When shows seem few and far between, the production of stickers and gifs singing the praises of common culture, also helps us get by and carry on.

Since *OMG . . .* in Berlin, we have had a solo show at Rampa, (2021) in Porto. An exhibition that we never saw because of COVID. It was in effect a reworking of *OMG . . .* in the form of a multimedia installation, *Me, The Total Show*. The idea was that we would model the gallery on a contemporary clothes shop, with distinct units of entertainment. We had T-shirts and Tote Bags specially made for the show and displayed them on tables. Each bore our branded Minimalist Common Culture logo, inaugurated for *OMG . . .* Synched video screens presented animated gifs celebrating common culture and video compilations of Franta's greetings of 'Hi, What's Up You Guys? It's Connor', only this time gradually slowed down so his voice became diabolical. We also had set up a portable disco unit, whose mobile lights lit up the predominantly empty space – emptied by the fear of COVID, one should add.



Common Culture, me the total Show,_7.

Writing the narrative of our history as we have done here led us to think about scriptwriting our experiences at art school and pitching them as a TV comedy. During COVID we started drawing on our collective experience of art schools, by developing

characters and scenarios within a fictitious northern art school. The process has led to the writing of many scripts, which we thought would make a great comedy TV series. It was an arrogant assumption that we could simply turn our skills into writing for TV. In our encounters and discussions with people from the industry we realized the gulf between what we had written and what was needed for TV comedy. There were also tensions between us over what was written, Mark and David initiated the scripts, which initially Ian found boring and not funny (though to be fair his academic life during this period was having an impact on his health and wellbeing). But he does find them funny now. We currently have over 15 scripts and are developing these into a range of audio, video and graphic works. Using the limited graphic forms of AI, one script, *Emergency Staff Meeting*, has been developed into a cartoon strip for an online academic publication. It has now been further adapted into an animated AI video Teams meeting, first presented in Iceland as part of a conference on flux and instabilities (2025). Using a basic AI template, as opposed to more traditional drawing skills, creates a certain look that suits CC's delegated mode of art making. It is a synthetic, artificial form that strains and glitches as a result of the expressive and communicational demands we have put it under. It becomes a fitting allegory of the mismatch within an art school trying to exist within an institute run as a neoliberal commercial enterprise.

Rumours, also shown in Iceland, drew from our art school scripts to produce individual text-based graphic works. Presented on screens, they collided the bland corporate advertising that now populates spaces in universities with art school rumours, gossip and news.

By the time of this presentation things had also changed in the experience and lives of the members of Common Culture, especially in relation to academia. At the start of writing the art school scripts, Campbell, the oldest member of CC, retired, having had enough of spending his time in front of a screen during a succession of meetings during COVID. And having thought he would teach until he died, Durden was also suddenly made redundant by his university, the result of a financial crisis at his institution and the fact the MA he was teaching on was deemed economically unviable. He should have known it was coming. Asked about what would happen to professors, as the university restructured, the VC had remarked, in a chilling but garbled quote from Mao, that he 'could not continue to let 100 flowers bloom'. Ian remains tied to an institution, the same institution that facilitated and supported Common Culture's emergence, 30 years ago. But one which has very recently rebranded itself from Staffordshire University to the University of Staffordshire, and no longer has the finances to pay for the costs associated in presenting at conferences such as the one in Iceland. Ironically, two days before he left for Iceland to present an animated version of the *Emergency Staff Meeting*, he had to attend his own emergency staff meeting where his university informed staff that many of their jobs were at risk. This is a scenario that many academics are only too familiar with across the sector. How things have changed. In many senses the Art School work is a comedic response to this change, a lament for some of the good things that have been lost within UK art schools and universities, and at the same time an opportunity to revel in all the absurdities and excesses involved in both teaching and making art.

From their Menu work to their more recent art school projects Common Culture's point of reference shifted towards a critical focus upon academia itself. They see the hollowing-out of art schools as symptomatic of broader destructive changes within the UK, as precarious conditions of employment, the accelerated commodification of the learning experience and the diminution of criticality, only look to further increase.

The Menu work established a dialectic centred on issues of cultural value, playing Minimalist/Modernist forms against a more garish and pop, vernacular street aesthetic. Since December 2025, Common Culture has had a studio at Bluecoat, Liverpool. They have returned to a Minimalist/Pop dynamic, painting geometric forms drawn from the Minimalist canon by artists such as, Judd, Andre and Serra. Such succinct, formal artworks provide an important counterpoint to their ongoing

more garrulous, wordy longwinded works. Painted on discarded cardboard, once used to protect and promote consumer commodities, the introduction of gaudy glitter encrusts a kitsch glamour to the austere minimalist form, a tawdry enhancement appropriate to our bleak times.



Common Culture, New Painting Number Five, 2026.

Acknowledgments

All artworks are documented on our website: commonculture.co.uk.

Common Culture are David Campbell, Mark Durden and Ian Brown.

*For the OMG, Die Raum image, please add a credit for the photographer: Jan Windszus.

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David Campbell is an artist, writer and curator. He is Emeritus Professor of Fine Art at Northumbria University where he was Director of the Northumbria - Sunderland AHRC Centre for Doctoral Training. As a member of Common Culture he makes art exploring issues of social engagement in the context of contemporary cultures of consumption. The artist group, Common Culture, is David Campbell, Mark Durden and Ian Brown. Common Culture explores how contemporary social identity is constructed through the rituals of consumption within popular culture and investigate how venerated and vernacular cultural forms are unequivocally bound up with issues of taste, class and notions of national identity. They have exhibited extensively in the UK and internationally, including solo exhibitions in Athens, Berlin, Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Derry, Derby, Lisbon, London, Manchester, Miami, New York, Nottingham and Porto. Major group exhibitions include: The Laughable Enigma of Ordinary Life, Arquipélago, Centro de Artes Contemporâneas in São Miguel, the Azores, Portugal; Double Act: Art & Comedy, Bluecoat, Liverpool & MAC, Belfast; Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain; The Bienal Cerveira, Portugal; Grin & Bear It – Cruel Humour in Art and Life, The Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork; The 6th Shanghai Biennale; Shopping – A Century of Art and Consumer Culture, Tate Liverpool.

Mark Durden is a writer, artist and Emeritus Professor at University of South Wales. He has published extensively on photography and contemporary art. *Photography Today* has been translated into French, Spanish, Turkish and Chinese. With João Leal he is photographing the architecture of Alvaro Siza, Carlo Scarpa and Aldo Rossi.

Ian Brown is an artist, curator and writer. He is Professor of Fine Art at University of Staffordshire, where he is the research lead for art and design. Alongside his work with Common Culture he explores the human interface with the invented world and the natural world and plant/human relations.