

Tom Marioni tells the story of sitting around with some mates enjoying beer, raising a bottle of local brew and declaring, “Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art”. Since 1970, this work has evolved into a touring bar that temporarily finds its home in galleries and museums around the world. Marioni is something of a wizard, a crazy alchemist and conceptual artist who can turn beer drinking into art. When he speaks it’s so convincing - and what’s not to like about this shameless re-appropriation of good times and drunken revelry into gallery-ready installation, ripe for consumption.

In *Green & Gold* Wybraniec and Attwood are effecting a similar kind of shamanic art ritual, combining their appreciation of Emu Export and hard-edge sculpture to conjure up their own form of Aussie Minimalism. The transformation across mediums is a conversion from Wybraniec’s signature palette of blue and pink into a symbolic green and gold; and a transition from Attwood’s dirty minimalism and comic reductivism into an additive tower of parts. Attwood had been inspired by Wybraniec’s work for many years, and proposed the collaboration. Rather than being a cross-generational passing of the baton (or wizard stick), which would cast Wybraniec as the magus and Attwood as the sorcerer’s apprentice, there is a sense of mateship here. Theirs is a game of art making and beer drinking that can take place by the barbecue or on the couch, and after a bit of bonding and wood carving in the studio, be enjoyed in the gallery. It’s the type of matey minimalism that you can’t help enjoy and want to get amongst, and the only thing that is cold in this installation was the beer.

Everyone - but mostly men - has played a game similar to the wizard stick – a kind of primitive sport where the phallocentric stacking of drained tins attests to macho prowess. Going back to the Roman convivium, where the host would decide how much his guests would drink, according to strict etiquette everyone would follow suit in ritualized form. Those who couldn’t keep up were banned from the next gathering in a strange version of survival of the fittest (liver). In fact, the ‘symposium’, in ancient Greek times, was typically a gathering of men for an evening of conversation, entertainment and drinking ending in intoxication.

Jurek and Dave seem to play into this, but take all the competitive elements out of the game. What would have been obvious is for each artist to make their own wizard stick, to compete across generations, across drinking sessions, to document the performance of losing it - inhibitions, sobriety, self-respect - but winning at the same time. Where control and composure fall away, the tower of gleaming cans piles up, a measure of manliness that can be quantified the next day when everything else is forgotten.

Instead they chose a methodical, though still measured, approach – a year long undertaking of systematically working through as much Emu Export as they could, no cheating! And whilst doing so, using the exchange as a way of making new works together, such as the accompanying woodcarvings and Binky Palermo inspired paintings.

I like this story; it’s artistic, atypical and speaks of collective, or shared authorship. Like most utopian projects, the idea was to let everyone in, have a beer or two or three, or a carton, and add to the wizard stick, but this probably wasn’t the type of community engagement that the public program at FAC had in mind. And being conceptual formalists, their installation still needs to look like it wasn’t completely made on a bender at a party by a bunch of teenagers. What’s more, the idea of just leaving the residue of what is effectively a boozy group performance is far less interesting to look at that the project that Green & Gold actually is.

Their installation, however, still involves the viewer in form and provocation, creating a 3D maze, a Möbius strip which twists and turns, threatening to spiral out of control or lose its shape. Whilst without an internal structure or logic, it’s not legless, it is an infinity loop of ideas and references that folds back on itself. It performs a feat of aluminium wizardry, repurposing and celebrating the once humble, once local Emu Export. The beer is now brewed in South Australia; its iconic local “authenticity” has been eroded by its absorption into a multinational, multi-brand conglomerate. But there is still a lingering hangover of local specificity, the beer is forever tied to WA lad culture, to wizard sticks and burn-outs in supermarket car parks. The Emu Export story is an allegory for the gradual change of Western Australian culture, but that doesn’t make this project a parochial one: Green & Gold can have multiple permutations, and take other forms, using other ‘local’ iconic beers in other cities. What is the root behind this long-standing link between booze and identity?

For all its seemingly blokey allusions, Green & Gold asks some big questions. It can be contextualised amongst recent forms of relational aesthetics, socially engaged and collaborative arts practices. It serves up a critique of capitalism and globalisation’s erosion of the home-grown and the humble. It is also rife with connections that reach back into art history, from Duchamp’s urinal, Fountain (1917); to Bruce Nauman’s Self Portrait as a Fountain (1966), Green & Gold belongs to a line of irreverent, iconoclastic artworks. Like Marioni’s booze-fests; Gilbert & George’s binge drinking Singing Sculpture (1970) and Gregory & Watt’s Cocktail Hour (2011-13), the J-train and Dat-dog are drawing on a history of not just getting pissed, but taking the piss.

– Leigh Robb (Curator, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts)

Poster image: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-qRTHpILmY/Uor-b8jGwzI/AAAAAAANfo/M95xU56xxoc/s1600/MG_9145.JPG

David Attwood is an emerging local artist. Recent exhibitions include Dirty at Kings ARI (2014), Bunbury Biennale, Bunbury Regional Arts Gallery (2013) and Hatched at PICA (2012). Jurek Wybraniec has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally and his work is represented in collections across Australia. Recent exhibitions include ACQCA at Fabrikulture, Hegenheim, France (2012) and Yonder, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (2012). This is Attwood and Wybraniec’s first collaborative project.

BIOS

who drank beer with us. Thank you.
Centre, Ric Spencer, Leigh Robb, Wayan Darmadi and everyone
Dave and Jurek would like to thank the team at Fremantle Arts

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the People of Western Australia
Polymer paint, aluminium
Sequence 1, 89 x 12 cm | Sequence 2, 89 x 12 cm
70 x 30 cm
VinyI
Wizard Stick
38.4 x 6.5 cm
Wood, polymer paint
Red Can Forever
6500 cm
Export cans, gaffer tape
Monument to Emu

LIST OF WORKS

Colours of Western Australia
540 x 400 cm
Polymer paint

GREEN & GOLD
JUREK WYBRANIEC & DAVID ATTWOOD (WA)
SAT 9 AUG – SAT 20 SEPT



