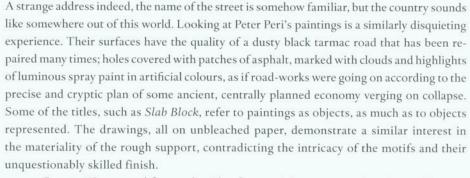


ADAM SZYMCZYK



Country 10 appeared first as the title of one painting, representing a lone pale green globe locked in a tenebrous, box-like space, delineated with a few, very fine lines of bright colour that glisten from beneath the thick, crumpled layers of solid black paint. This piece also lends a common name to all the works in the exhibition. There are further titles of individual works – such as *Greenville*, *Madeloc* and *Hostage City* – which may refer to locations, real or imaginary, deserted or inhabited. The titles establish a relationship to many literary texts and, by way of allegory, point towards some events in recent history. The paintings reiterate generalised forms of modernist abstraction – mostly planar structures, which bring to mind modular elevations of buildings (*Madeloc*) or aerial views of urban grids (*Greenville*), but which can also be read as faces or human figures (*Head Hunter*, *Poor Thing*), reminiscent of works by Paul Klee.

The more obviously representational drawings are often built of abstract forms (*Head*), or depict fragile, latticed objects, ranging from a bouquet of flowers that hints at language structures (*Le Langage des Fleurs*) to *Sun Monstrance*, which represents a monstrance. In the drawing *Country of the Blind*, a rectangular platform is set on a pedestal hovering in a space, holding a small agglomeration of sky-high – or perhaps miniature – pyramids, some truncated, some topped with smaller pyramids or a sphere. The hard-cut blocks are rendered with a densely tangled, organic mesh of pencil lines. As is often the case in Peri's drawings, the central group of volumes appears isolated on the picture plane, and very slightly off-centre, which suggests a movement of the mass in space – however, since it lacks a reference point, the movement paradoxically lacks a vector. The drawing is reminiscent of Robert Smithson's atopic project *Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island* (1970), but in Peri's project it is a Manhattan that is drifting. A circular opening pierces one of the pyramids like an eyehole, as if perverting the eye-on-a-pyramid symbol on the US dollar bill. The pyramids cast regular shadows, strictly within the limit of the platform and in one direction, but the sun has been kept away from the scene, in Country 10.





Alle Film Stills aus / All film stills from: Peter Peri 28B Camden Street, 2006

28B Camden Street is a fragment of black-and-white documentary footage, showing the destruction of a group of buildings that are home to artists' studios. In a bleak, foggy landscape, the demolition professionals are doing their job with simple tools and heavy equipment, while the artists and their helpers are carefully removing works of art from the danger zone or, almost ritually, destroying the pieces that cannot be rescued. The workers break doors and climb rooftops to prepare the site, the walls bulge, crumble and fall, the wrecking ball and bulldozers raze the houses to the ground and reduce them to piles of smouldering rubble. Soon, small fires burn between the ruins, and the scene is now the perfect image of desolation and chaos, where artists and workers are finally united in the aimless and frantic activity of salvaging some objects or materials for future use, or just scrapping them. The film ends with original credits, which start "The artists were:" – implying that they were all gone at the time of the film's release – and go on to list Peter Peri, several other sculptors, a painter, a potter, and last of all Jeff Elbur, "demolition contractor".

The title of the film – which is Peter Peri's edit from David Gladwell's BBC documentary of 1965 – locates the event seemingly without doubt as having taken place at 28B Camden Street, but the camera work and editing lend it a trans-historical dimension. The film tells the story in a slow-paced, silent sequence of powerful, iconic images – an artist destroying the figure of an angel with a hammer; an elderly man carefully dusting the books in a studio before packing them into boxes; the same man contemplating the devastation; a small concrete sculpture of a man holding a peace sign, being carried out from the studio; a procession of people carrying sculptures on their heads or under their arms, while the heavy machinery is in operation in the background, and a worker is breaking the door of a house with a pickaxe. These scenes of destruction could have been recorded in any place and at any time, then and now. Isolated images accumulate and gradually converge to become an allegory of war. Country 10 takes over 28B Camden Street.

The exhibition *Country 10* combines three bodies of work: paintings, drawings and film. The show starts with paintings presented in a spacious sky-lit room, immediately followed by the second room, of more domestic size, containing several drawings. The third space is a dark, low and narrow annex, an appendix showcasing the film. The three spaces, which have distinctly different architecture and a correspondingly different emotional charge, can be interpreted as three stages in the process of apprehending reality. At first sight, this process seems to be organised as a linear development played out in the progression of three different media throughout the exhibition, leading from non-representational to narrative structure. This interpretational scheme, however, is unable to acknowledge the importance of the issue addressed simultaneously by all three groups of work, the medium notwithstanding: the difficulty and impossibility of seeing as a cipher of repression. The paintings bear descriptive



