

Introduction to Dave Beech's New facts Emerge

Matthew Collings

I received a print-out of visual and textual material, which Dave Beech sent. Out of its tube I found it was about four feet in length and maybe three wide. I thought the fragmented imagery was exciting. It looked like ideas and life. I took it to a framer and a few days later paid, picked up the work and took it home. I thought it had more going for it than visual art I mostly encounter. I really liked it. I'm looking at it now. It has ambiguity and openness, geometry and meaning.

I would say he references things he doesn't show and these make total sense in relation to what he does show — crudely scalped bits of photo-imagery with edges cut differently, either diagonal or straight up-and-down and across.

Some stuff is black and white, some is colour. The colour is simplified, drained. The text can be in a certain colour and font or it might be different.

The juxtaposition of fragments is exciting like surrealism. Old woman at a hairdressers/ black almost naked muscular men hauling up or lowering down something wrapped in patterned fabric. (They might be workers or at a funeral. It might a wrapped body.). A few lines of text. I don't know if they come from books or he makes them up, or if they do come from books if it's the same ones he cuts up to make collages. Some of the words suggest a protest demo. Punk Devil feminist carnival. I see the word hair and there's the old lady I already mentioned, hair in curlers.

The image of black workers, if they are workers, in their orange tonal photo, is snipped off in a sharp upside down triangular point, which cuts through black and white imagery of an old public statue in a garden with contemporary people walking by or sitting around.

This public garden image is in two parts, one is right way up, the other leans over. The tilt is conceptually loaded because it makes a public statue of a dignified white man from history appear to be falling, and this is next to imagery of black toil.

Now I see a different historic period, is it the 20s? A fragment of a photo, it contains a middle aged man and a young woman, close up. They look at something distant, their expressions make whatever it is seem important and concerning.

I didn't feel confident writing about these works before because I couldn't entirely read them on a computer screen. I don't know if I'm entirely reading this one now. Its openness is attractive.

I gradually got the message from online research of what it is he does, at least in literal terms. He buys second hand books (occasionally pays for a new one), cuts bits up, makes collages, then

digitally processes that physical thing. He puts bits of text which also come from the books, I'm assuming, into the mix. He prints out the results and makes them into shows.

There are different themes. Groups of works. I don't know what group the print-out I'm talking about is in. I'll be glad when I know but I don't think appreciating it is a matter of knowing all possible literal things that can be known about it.

He prints the works out at different scales ranging from postcard to billboard. I've never seen a real show of them. In an interview he makes a point which is indisputable and ought to be obvious but is still striking, that most of the art we know we've never seen for real.

He displays the work on walls, laid on tables, and on the floor. Some are in rolls on their side, stood up on the floor, short fat tubes that might be bins when you first see an image of a show. When I consider this print-out framed before me now, and think of it as fragments making a whole, I realise each of the shows he puts on in their whole entirety will always have a similar feel to this work I'm looking at, of meaning gliding away or just about to glide into focus — but maybe about to disappear.

It has ideas which I sympathise with. We are helpless if we don't know about history. We find out and we realise it isn't impartial. It's loaded. You find a focus. You keep hacking away. You hold onto certain things. We can change how things are. The ambiguity and openness I mentioned, I meant that the work has got something to do with the modern world without saying "buy me."

Matthew Collings, 2021

Matthew Collings is a British art critic, writer, broadcaster, and artist.

Dave Beech is an artist and writer. His exhibition *New facts Emerge* was at Exeter Phoenix in December 2020.