

## Cocaine Orgasm, curated by BANK

Cocaine Orgasm was the best group show I've ever seen, honest. Or at least it was the most enjoyable art experience I've ever had— and I'm still grateful to BANK for it. If every art opening came even close to the excitement of Cocaine Orgasm, every young beautiful thing on earth would be clamouring to get into this art racket, instead of pop music or movies or fashion or whatever it is they're all clamouring to get into. It would be a different world.

The invitation to the show was rubberstamped on the cheapest Christmas card I've ever held in my hands, the kind with sandpapery glitter glued over a seasonal illustration on see-through paper, setting the enticingly tainted Xmas mood. It was December. The show was on or near Curtain Road; it was a real dump at the time, though I suspect it's been developed to unrecognizability by now.

First thing when you got there faux paparazzi sprang out at you in this richly mirrored entrance and called you by name, snapping your picture! Everybody was a star! I was enjoying myself already. Next you went up your basic East End rickety staircase, crowded with two-way traffic and heavy coats (it was really cold that night), everybody carrying a beer. As you neared the top of the stairs you noticed more and more these roly little balls of white polystyrene (polystyrene?), littering the stairs, sticking to your shoes, like snow. Did this stuff spill from out of a crate or something? Then you got it: a-ha, the white powder connection with the show's title. You kept climbing up, to the beer table.

The main room was crammed with art: painting, sculpture, all kinds of stuff. There was a kind of machine made out of cardboard, plugged into a courgette, I think by Bob and Roberta Smith. It was the first time I saw work by Chris Ofili. I seem to remember a Partridge Family work by Jessica Voorsanger which I really liked. Lots of good stuff. The piece de resistance was a giant, white, papier mache rock in the middle of the room – I innocently thought iceberg, my companions said no, cocaine crystal – bearing more (slightly lopsided) sculpture. The paintings had heaps of the little polystyrene balls piled up on the top edge of the canvas, very festive. It was great to see the artwork looking so relaxed for a change; you felt connected to the work. Do artists like that? Do they prefer sanctimoniousness? I don't know, but it was such a break. This shockingly informal, utterly adolescent presentation made me like every single work in the show, even the ones I can't remember. I've seen work by these artists so many times since then – Bob and Roberta Smith, Voorsanger, Dave Burrows, Ofili – but it's never looked so alive, as good as it did that night.

But the best bit was this weird little side room, papier mached hideously to replicate a mysterious Arctic cave, as if carved out of the ice (Santa's grotto, I guess), with little collages by John Stezaker, who is so good. You really got to look at the work up close, in fact you *had* to look at them nose-to-nose, packed as you were in a closet with the papier mache, more art-viewers, the beer bottles and the tiny balls of polystyrene. This was a truly intimate encounter with some really good work, and I loved it.

Afterwards, feeling genuinely elated, excited about art, excited about the possibilities of how it can be shown, about how much good work we'd seen, we all spilled out into the street, with everybody drinking at I think the Bricklayer's Arms, actually talking *about art all night*. Sounds awful, I know, but it wasn't. Some guy in a tacky red sports car was making his way slowly, slowly down Rivington Street, separating the crowd of impoverished, carless art lovers who were all jeering at him in a more or less good-natured way. Was this part of the show? Was everything in the world part of the show? Where did Cocaine Orgasm end? It was impossible to tell.

**Gilda Williams**