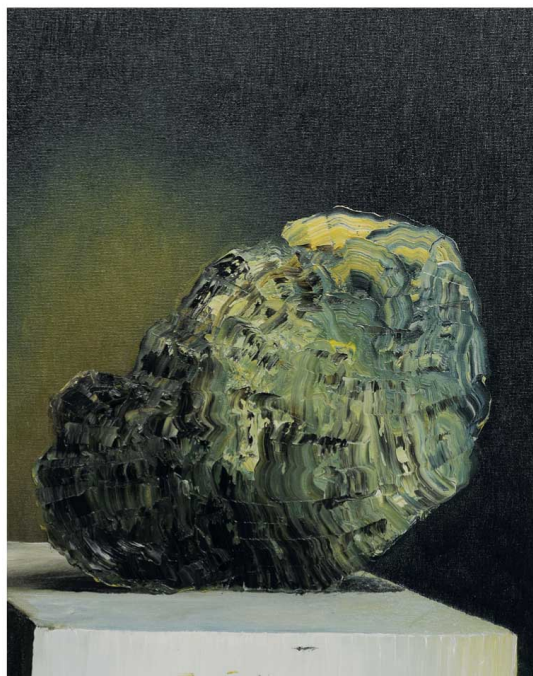




Ivan Seal *Drughences Visented* (2011)



Ivan Seal *Rogrograinte* (2011)

Ivan Seal Personality disorders

Ivan Seal's art is subtly unsettling. Readers of *The Wire* might be familiar with his paintings via their use on fellow Berlin resident The Caretaker's album sleeves, yet the relationship to sound in Seal's work goes beyond illustration. As Seal sees it, he "builds exhibitions using improvisation games and processes to create open structures, a bit like music in many ways". For a recent show at the Krome gallery in Berlin, Seal created a series of paintings, then invited people involved in psychology and Gestalt therapy to respond to the images; these responses then became the basis for a new set of 11 paintings. They also formed the basis of a sound piece, *Constructed Stream Of Consciousness – Narrative Mode Using Six People In The Field Of Psychology*, in which he recorded himself speaking the respondents' words, and then fed the sound into a computer that cut up and randomised the phrases. The method here recalls Thomas De Quincey's conjecture that new literature could be created by merely translating work from one language to another and then back again, ad infinitum.

Although such processes are playful and aleatory, they assume troubling dimensions in Seal's work. The Krome show included another spoken word piece, *Inventory*, which consisted of his deadpan recording of the 500 questions from one of the

most frequently used personality tests, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2. Such work points to the interpenetration of psychology and art in the so-called creative industries. It also recalls the questionnaire used to recruit assassins in Alan J Pakula's *The Parallax View*, or the disturbingly flat tone of the reports on extreme psychiatric conditions in JG Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

The questions posed by the sound pieces are also raised by Seal's paintings. They often feature pedestals, with blocks of clay seemingly half way through the process of sculpture, displayed against a black background. His paintings invite us to speculate about this shadowy space, which seems to exist not so much *in* the paintings as behind and between them. Is it a darkened museum, a psychiatric institution, some combination of the two, or something even more sinister?

His forthcoming exhibition at the Carl Freedman Gallery in East London – which Seal says will feature "brand new paintings continuing the use of improvisation techniques to create unpredictable results and combinations" – will no doubt allow us to explore this strange terrain from yet another angle. □
Ivan Seal, Carl Freedman Gallery, London, 19 May–18 June. carlfreedman.com

Mark Fisher