

## Phil Collins: the return of the real

6 October – 10 November 2007

*Private View, Saturday 6 October, 6 – 8pm*

### **The true stories of television betrayal that 2006 Turner Prize nominee Phil Collins has made into art in his exhibition the return of the real.**

From the fixed phone-in quiz to the manipulated reality show, from *Richard and Judy* to *A Year with the Queen*, it has been a turbulent year for television. Indeed, Jeremy Paxman chose to devote this year's MacTaggart lecture to a controversial "plea for the soul of television." Many believe this crisis of trust has at last opened the door on the smoke and mirrors world of TV production, which has always relied on an element of artifice and cunning to engineer a sense of reality. In his new and timely exhibition - *the return of the real* - Phil Collins investigates the post-documentary culture which reality television has come to epitomise, and the accompanying issues of authenticity and illusion, intimacy and inaccuracy, expectation and betrayal.

Popular factual programming has been the central focus of Collins' multifaceted practice for the last four years. When the artist was nominated for the 2006 Turner Prize, he decided to use the world's highest profile art award to directly engage with the media, and in particular with the talk-show, makeover and reality-show formats which dominate 21st century television. In the galleries at Tate Britain Collins set up *shady lane productions*, a working office and HQ for his own production company, to create a film in which former participants who feel their lives have been profoundly affected by appearing on reality television came forward to tell their stories - uncensored and unedited.

A year later and Collins is presenting the various outcomes of the project in an exhibition, which opens on 6 October at Victoria Miro Gallery. The culmination of Collins' Turner Prize show was a press conference organised at the Café Royal and attended by national TV crews and news correspondents, there to hear nine veterans of reality television talk about their experiences. Installed in the ground floor gallery at Victoria Miro, the real-time film of the conference is the pivotal element of the exhibition, in which, along with Collins' subjects, familiar faces and names from broadcast and print media have the camera turned on them to become part of the art work. Upstairs, a six-screen video installation brings together a selection of one-on-one interviews with the contributors. Former participants from shows as diverse as *Wife Swap*, *Brand New You*, and *Supernanny*, seize the opportunity to openly recount their grievances in unedited conversations with renowned media lawyer Mark Stephens.

"I am troubled by the way in which television has exploited its subjects in the cynical pursuit of commercial gain and infotainment. My interest in this project arises from those concerns and I was pleased to be able to help facilitate the voices of those involved, voices which are so often censored by the media which has already misrepresented them." *Mark Stephens*

The exhibition will also include a series of anonymous testimonies from leading industry professionals, revealing some of the hidden tricks and sleights of hand often employed by television in "getting the story." Presented as scrolling text on teleprompting machines, the works function both as actual studio equipment and pseudo-sculptural objects. A suite of screenprints, based on the portraits of participants by street artists employed by Collins, adds a subjective angle and the trace of the human hand against the mechanical apparatus of studio production.

# Press Release

# Victoria Miro

In the current climate in Britain of questionable 'trust' between broadcasters, producers, participants and audiences, the return of the real raises serious questions about the dramatisation employed in the world of television to contrive a sense of 'reality'.

Relating to performance-based and conceptual approaches to video and photography, the art of Phil Collins employs elements of popular culture, low-budget television and reportage-style documentary to address the camera as an instrument of both truth and deception. Investigating the inherent problems of representation within different media, it repeatedly underlines the complex and unpredictable transferences that occur between reality and its mediation in television, film, or, indeed, art.

## Notes to editors:

### Background to project

Collins began researching *the return of the real* in 2004. The first manifestation of the project – *gercegin geri donusu* – was conceived in Turkey in 2005 and exhibited as part of the 9th International Istanbul Biennial. Since then, the work has taken various forms, from press conferences for the national media in Turkey and Britain, to a low-level internet campaign in Spain, to the production company and research office *shady lane productions*. The exhibition at Victoria Miro Gallery is the premiere of the British episode of *the return of the real*.

### Contributors

The stories of nine contributors were first voiced at a press conference organised by Collins and held at London's Café Royal in November 2006. Included are a woman with a post-operative plastic surgery horror story, a mother whose children were repeatedly bullied after the family appeared on a life-swap show, and a father whose autistic son was presented as a 'wild teen' with no mention of the child's medical condition. During the last year, Collins worked with an extended circle of contributors and some of these new stories are presented in a six-channel video installation in the upper gallery.

### Mark Stephens

Mark Stephens is a top media lawyer and partner in firm Finers Stephens Innocent. He has an interest in and commitment to fundamental human rights, and regularly practises before the European Court of Human Rights – principally on freedom of expression issues. Mark is the Chair of the Management Board of the Programme in Comparative Media Law and Social Policy at Wolfson College, Oxford. He regularly writes, talks and lectures on media, arts and human rights.

### Phil Collins

Phil Collins is currently based in Glasgow. Recent solo exhibitions include *Austellungshalle zeitgenössische Kunst, Münster* (2007); *Forum 59: Phil Collins, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh* (2007), *New Work: Phil Collins, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art* (2006); *they shoot horses, Tate Britain, London* (2006-07); *Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent* (2006); *phil collins: they shoot horses, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus*; and *yeah. . . . you, baby you, Milton Keynes Gallery* (2005). Collins was nominated for the 2006 Turner Prize and has a forthcoming solo show at the Dallas Museum of Art in November 2007.

Kathy Stephenson  
Director of Communications  
kathy@victoria-miro.com  
Direct Line: 0207 549 0422

Bryony McLennan  
Press & Events  
bryony@victoria-miro.com  
Direct Line 0207: 549 0490

Victoria Miro Gallery  
16 Wharf Road  
London N1 7RW  
www.victoria-miro.com

open Tuesday to Saturday  
10am to 6pm, admission free  
info@victoria-miro.com  
tubes, Old Street and Angel