

THE ARGA

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Liverpool
Gets
Stuff
Done!

Paul Rooney and the
Positivity of Boredom

What is Evil?

Paul Rooney Strange Music and the Positivity of Boredom

Paul Rooney is one of Liverpool's strangest recording artists, but also one of it's most relatable. His LPs and singles are generally hits with the critics, though I've never seen one in a shop. I've just brought his new release (and partial re-release) called *Different Types of Road Signs*, and it was hand delivered before I got up the next day.



2023's *Surface Industries* was given to me as a free download by Owd Scrat records and is a better place to start. As usual, Paul gives us a set of short stories and narratives that often have a mundane premise yet take us to some very interesting and often funny places. Different voices tell us about their jobs in the service industry – but a passionate attention to detail and absurdity makes it quite riveting, while a montage of odd and catchy music brings out the beautiful melancholy of people who keep the world going round with their tedious jobs. It feels like a less bizarre version of 2017's *Futile Exorcise*, in which the voices belong to dead people and inanimate objects.

one project military veterans tell moving stories through a filtered rendition of one of my favourite old folk songs. In another, the disembodied voices of children recreate a juvenile shoplifting trial in 1853; autotuned snippets of lovely pop suggest a sad gulf between different conceptions of what childhood can be about. These both feel like community projects, involving lots of people alongside all the interesting noises. Paul consistently pushes the opposite of a globalised, formula culture and keeps things nice and scouse, so I approached our little interview with a beef that he isn't talked about more in his own town.

Paul probably has more status in the field of multi-media gallery art and is no stranger to places like the Liverpool Tate. His website gives a good taste. In

Hi Paul, You seem to be a successful and popular multi-media artist and an under appreciated musical talent. Which one describes you best?

'I think I have been very lucky to be able to be creative in the ways I want to be, in art and music, so whether that's 'successful' in general terms it is success for me. Unfortunately lots of people more talented than me aren't so lucky, so I'm very grateful for my own luck. Even if I don't sell shed loads of CDs the audience for that work is probably as big if not bigger than an art installation in a gallery. The main thing for anyone is to be able to do what you want to do in any creative field, fulfil your potential such as it is, whether it is widely appreciated is less of an issue!'

'I've recently had contact with teenagers through work and I can't decide if the young generation is in real trouble, culturally speaking. These people seem more passive and unimpressed with their cultural heritage, and it's hard to see a place like Liverpool returning to it's cultural peaks. At the same time there is a surprising well of local slang and humour which would defeat the very best culture smashing AI programme. Do you have faith in these kids? Will humour save us? Do you think Liverpool can keep it's soul as we see the next round of money laundering, high rise development?'

'Yes of course you have to have faith, I have two teenagers boys so I have no choice! I think every older generation is disappointed or worried for the younger generation,

it has happened since the year dot, things always seem to work out somehow. I do worry about social media, gaming addiction and so on but I am hoping it is just the equivalent of smoking dope or being obsessed by a music subculture was when I was younger. Hopefully kids will be able to take it on board and still be normal adults with a normal Scouse sense of humour. One of the problems with Liverpool since the fifties onwards, was people leaving in droves, so the fact that people now want to move here is a big shift and you can't really knock it. It has to be good for the culture generally,

'I'm interested in how people make creative things happen instead of just



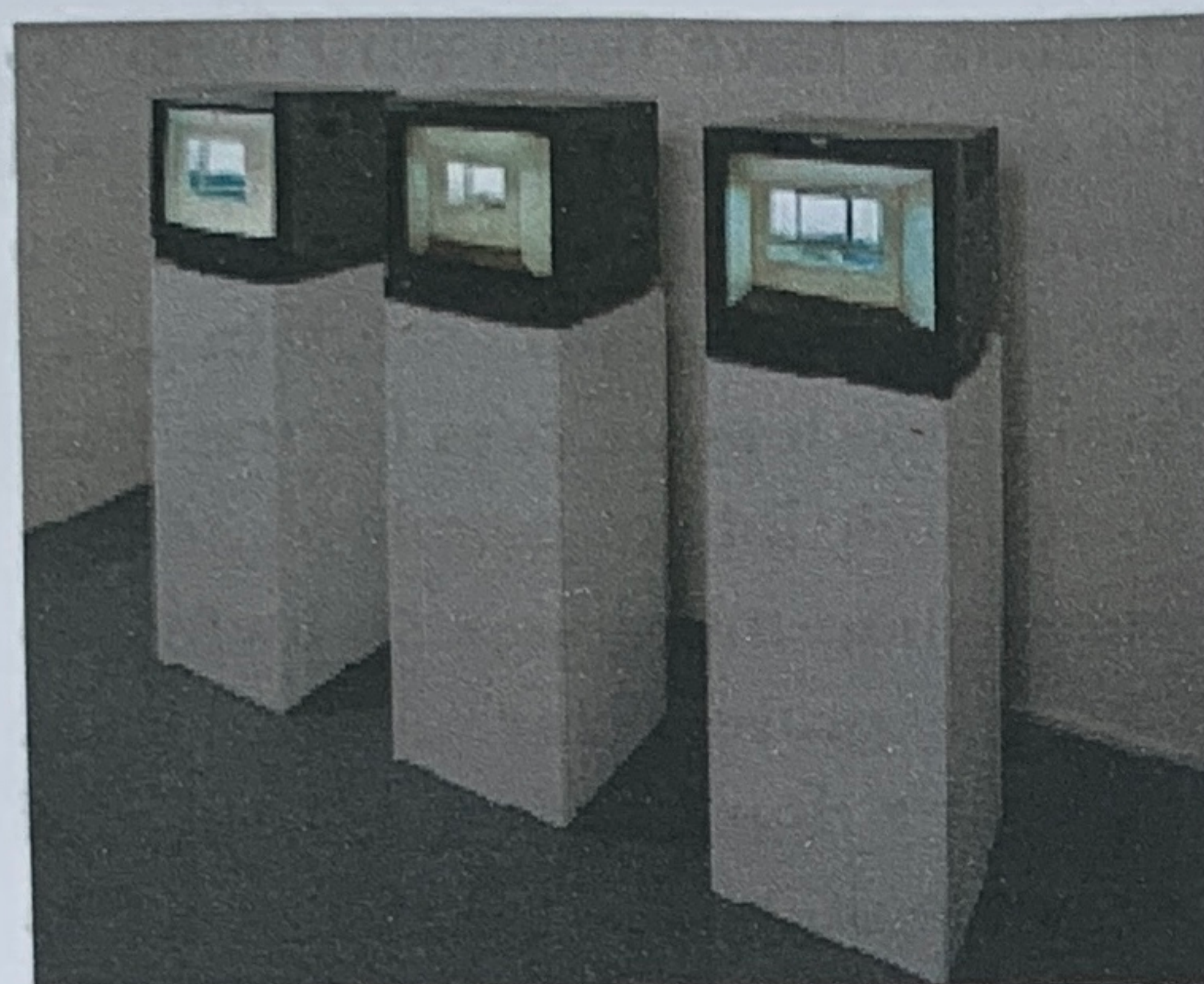
'Eileen talks us through it all... she says we have to retrain our selves to stop and look at the places we visit, but the bus keeps going. She's perverse like that.'
The LP Futile Exorcise, pictured above, features a bus tour that never ends.

talking about it. How hard was it to get to where you are? Did it require a stint of grueling poverty before things came good?’

‘I was lucky getting into art when you could get teaching jobs on art courses, make connections through that, and there were more opportunities generally, so I have some resources from those jobs to put out my own records. I tend to focus on record releasing because it is harder to apply for funding or opportunities in the art installation line of work. Income wise it worked the other way round, I had a period where things were good financially with commissions and University fellowships, and the period of grinding poverty is now! What you have to do as a freelance creative person is plan, financially, for those ups and downs. At the minute things are not so bad, largely because of that planning.’

‘Did you set up Owd Scrat record label yourself?’

‘Yes, I set up Owd Scrat myself as it’s just what you do if you make ‘independent music’, for want of a better phrase. Since punk, most bands at least initially put out their own records. Then if you get some radio play and reviews it’s easier to get them distributed, which is via 51stState in my case. I also had a label in the 1990s to put out



stuff by my band Rooney, one of which I have just re-released.’

‘Did you ever have a really boring job?’

‘I worked at Jacobs Biscuits in Aintree sorting broken Club biscuits but that was only for a summer so wasn’t as bad as it could have been!’

‘Although you do tackle some important issues, what stands out for me is the way you make ordinary things come alive, or a gallery with no objects in it become interesting. It feels like an antidote to the ADHD inducing, attention grabbing culture that we have now. Have you always been interested in out of place paving stones and the inner life of bored hotel workers?’

‘Yes a lot of my work, from the Rooney CDs in the 1990s onwards, has been about very ordinary, everyday things. I did an exhibition with lots of artists (and which included musicians Arab Strap also) about ‘music and the everyday’. The idea was that the music or the performances

transform the banal, images, material or lyrics into something strange, something extraordinary. There are also moments even in a hotel job where you can daydream, for instance, or make a small moment into something more, into a creative thoughtful space. The positivity of boredom.’

‘Is this attentiveness good for you?’

‘So those moments can be positive, as opposed to doom scrolling for hours where you are too distracted to actually think for yourself, to be ‘in’ yourself. There is more money

to be made by corporations if we are constantly distracted and unhappy because of it, and need to consume goods we can’t afford to feel ‘happier’!

‘What are you up to now?’

New Paul Rooney vinyl album called *Axing For It and Other Stories*, with lots of longer spoken word pieces, will be out in autumn time so check Owd Scrat Bandcamp for that. I have a video in an exhibition called ‘This 26’, at RSA in Edinburgh, in the autumn also.’



WHAT IF TRAINS WERE GIANT
WORMS THAT ONLY ME AND
MY FRIENDS COULD TALK TO?



MARIE, 25,
CUSTOMER SERVICE ASSISTANT

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