

UTOPIA PARKWAY

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« Paper, scissors, stone... a fountain and a little spoon: Leon Vranken at Z33 (Hasselt)

Art people. It's all about the art. Isn't it? »

How to turn a car into a work of art in 15 minutes? Richard Jackson unveils his 'Car Wash' at CAB (Brussels)



'Art is a documentation of how a person spends his time. That's all it is.' You just have to like [Richard Jackson](#) (75). Funny and honest. Fresh off his recent retrospective at [Orange County Museum](#) (California) and [S.M.A.K.](#) (Ghent) the renowned American artist unveiled a new radical project at [CAB](#), Brussels: *Car Wash*. A fully automatic car wash, modified and designed to transform cars into works of art (through October 25). The cars that come out of Jackson's machine are completely destroyed, but have a clean coat of red, yellow and blue paint. A day after the opening of the show Jackson made his machine attack a helpless looking little white Fiat 500 and offered some explanation afterwards. 'It's fun. When you get a little success, you want to do the things you wanted to do as a kid.'

No wonder he was wearing earplugs. Richard Jackson's *Car Wash* – the

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soft brushes on the top and sides have been replaced by a 1 ton spiked metal drum and solid metal rotating balls – makes a hellish noise. Those who were present could consider themselves lucky, Jackson explained. 'Normally I don't do this with people watching, because it demystifies the whole process. It's better if you just see the result, the works. Then you have to use your imagination to figure out how the machine works. I've taken that away tonight.'

But Jackson is not stupid, of course. He knows how it works. 'But the good thing is: you will tell what you've witnessed tonight to someone else, and they will tell it so someone else.' And pretty soon, it will seem as if the whole Brussels' art scene was present at the demolishing of one poor, little white Fiat 500.

Afterwards, Jackson talked about his career, while showing a series of slides. Funny how the American artists, who started creating his signature *painting machines* early nineties, is anti-painting.

'Abstract painters have exhausted everything that could be done. So when one of them walks around in his studio and accidentally tips over his cup of coffee over a painting, he will say: *now this is interesting!* And before you know it, you have 500 coffee paintings. What do you do as a painter? You're given a rectangle, and the only thing you can do is trying to make it look a bit different. You're looking for a different effect. Not a *new* effect, because everything has already been done before.' Needless to say Jackson likes being a tiny bit provocative. Which he underlined by adding: 'I can't draw. So I have to do this (*kind of work*).'

Anti-art history Jackson proved to be as well. Of course, there are artists he admires – Jasper Johns, for instance: 'When I saw his *Painting with 2 balls* in New York, I thought: *boy, am I glad I left Sacramento*' – but in his opinion art history doesn't make sense anymore these days. If it means: trying to keep track of everything.

'While I am talking, at least 60.000 paintings are made. Everybody goes to art school these days. Everybody can make a pretty good painting. It's not modern to try to keep track. You just can't save it. You don't archive computers either. When they break down, you throw them away. That's what we should do in museums too: recycle the art.' Adding smilingly: 'I'm just offering it as a suggestion.'

And then, about his art, his craft: 'It's alchemy, basically. That's what artists do.' And I couldn't help but thinking that in the case of this *Car Wash*, this act of alchemy must give him a perverse sort of pleasure. Knowing that collectors will pay a big sum of money to let him destroy a brand new, good car and turn it into something utterly useless. A big red-blue-yellow painted chunk of metal, signed: Richard Jackson, 2014.

Richard Jackson 'Car Wash', CAB (32-34 Rue Borrens, 1050 Brussels, near Flagey), through October 25 (Wed-Sat, 2-6 pm, admission free).

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