I recently interviewed artist Graham Dolphin. Mr. Dolphin exhibited at the New York and Miami Scope Art Fairs last year. His work was represented by SEVENTEEN, a London based gallery. Graham is also represented by Vane Contemporary Art.

Mr. Dolphin’s work appropriates objects and icons of the fashion and music industries, reforming them into assemblages that reveal the obsessions and formulas underwriting the temporal world of mass culture. These compulsive actions transform and disrupt the surface aspirations of popular culture and the glamour industry.

Q. Mr. Dolphin, on top of exhibiting internationally your work has also been exhibited Scope. It seems you received a lot of recognition during that years art fair. How did you feel going into that fair? Does success still come as a shock?

A. “I exhibited with SEVENTEEN, a London based gallery at both the New York and Miami Scope Art Fairs last year, but I didn’t attend either events. In the past I’ve been to fairs where I have been exhibiting and found them very dry and uncomfortable places. The amount of art splattered onto every surface very dispiriting. Just the amount of it, not necessarily the quality of work.

The response to both fairs was very positive and it has led to a dialogues with a number of collectors and galleries that I am hoping to be able to work with in the future. The series of lyric drawings is still relatively new, making the success of those pieces quite unexpected.”
Q. The work you exhibited at Scope involved employing seemingly-compulsive writing as the centerpiece. It is amazing to observe the meticulous miniature penmanship of these works. You used lyrics from various songs... what was your motivation behind these works? How long did they take to create?

A. "All my work starts with a secondary source from popular culture which I attempt to shift so I am able to view them again as art in a new context. Most of the time this requires a repetitious act carried out onto or into the surface of the object, which is the case with the lyric drawings. With these I wanted to puncture the meaning and power of the words, reducing them to marks. The longest piece was the Sonic Youth Daydream Nation cover which was scratched into, it took around nine months."

Q. Some of your earlier work from this decade involved alterations of magazine pages. Kate Moss Tipp-ex (2001- image above) comes to mind. What was your motivation behind manipulating pages from fashion magazines?
A. "It is the same motivation as the lyric drawings, the attempt to shift these very familiar objects and images so I can look at them again in a new context. The manipulated magazines were a long series of work and fashion, the imagery and products it produces, play an important part of my work."

Q. Has your art ever been published? Where?

A. "The work has been featured in a number of catalogues for group shows, the most recent of which was called Excess at Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham UK (http://www.angelrowgallery.com/). I also produced a book to accompany my solo exhibition, Thirty Three and a Third, at SEVENTEEN, London which is available from the gallery (http://www.sevengallery.com/). There is also a book entitled Everything in Vogue, published by Art Editions North in the UK which is a summary of my fashion work, this is distributed worldwide by Cornerhouse press (www.cornerhouse.org/books)."

Q. What was your most important exhibition? Care to share that experience?

A. "In terms of personal development it would be my last solo exhibition Thirty Three and a Third. It enabled me to focus on a body of work and think about them in terms of how they would hang together in a coherent way in an exhibition. I'm still uncertain as to how successful the exhibition was, this in itself is useful in thinking about new work."

Q. Do you have any 'studio rituals'? As in, do you listen to certain types of music, have a certain order to your tools, etc.

A. (Spiral Scratch by Buzzcocks, 25 Buzzcocks Songs)

Q. Have you ever had a mentor? Someone who helped you with your work or career.

A. (Untitled, Vogue, January 2006 - Scratch)
music while working? What helps to get you in the mood for working?

A. "I work a regular day, starting at 8am and working through to 7 or 8 in the evening. My studio is at home, which I prefer as I have everything around me, most importantly music. I listen to a large selection of music and spoken word radio via the internet which takes my mind off the tedium of making some of the work."

Q. Where can we see more of your art?

A. "The two galleries I work with have websites; http://www.seventeengallery.com/ and vane.org.uk .

There will also be a podcast and information on the BALTIC website once the REPEATER exhibition has opened in May 2007- http://www.balticmill.com/ .

I have my own website http://www.grahamdolphin.co.uk/ which I’m really bad at updating."

Q. Are you represented by a gallery? Do you have any upcoming exhibits? 

A. "I’m represented by SEVENTEEN in London and also work with Vane based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. I have a solo exhibition entitled REPEATER opening in May at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, UK. This will feature a number of new works and existing objects and drawings."

(Star Spangled Banner Recurring)
Q. What was the toughest point in your career as an artist? Have you ever hit rock-bottom?

A. "The time right after graduation was pretty poor in every sense - no money and no idea as to how to get by in the world. My partner and I traveled for a while which helped, and then moved to London, we both studied in the southwest of England in Bath. Sponging off the state there for a while before landing a dead-end job and getting a studio. Looking back those times were hard and it took about ten years to really get anywhere with my work."

Q. In one sentence... why do you create art?

A. "So I can see what my ideas will look like."

Q. What can you tell our readers about the art scene in your area?

A. "I live the North East of England in Newcastle upon Tyne. The art scene, although small, is quite vibrant with a lot of people making work on a range of
different levels. The opening of the BALTIC in Gateshead has appeared to crystalize this scene and the ambition of the artists’ here has risen.

There are a growing number of artists spaces, galleries and organisations including Vane, Locus+, mima, Vardy Gallery and Workplace which are doing very interesting projects and exhibitions, helping to create a scene not dependent on the larger cities of London and Glasgow for their culture.

I am also part of the steering group for a new space called AltGallery, situated in the best record store in Newcastle (http://www.altvinyl.com/) which will focus on the the cross overs with sound and visual artists. The first exhibition, Harry Smith Anthology Remixed, has invited 84 artists and musicians to respond with a visual artwork to 1 track each from Harry Smiths’ The Anthology of American Folk Music collection. This will open on 8 May and run until 30 June 2007.”

I hope that you have enjoyed my interview with Graham Dolphin. Feel free to critique or discuss his work.