



Broadway 1602, New York, USA

It was Charles Dickens' Pip who genially greeted us at the outset of Matthew Chambers' recent show. Captured at the moment when he arrives at his new lodgings in London, in David Lean's 1946 film of *Great Expectations* (1860), Pip, played by John Mills, finds his name already on the door. Never mind that he's an orphan boy: unknown persons have great expectations of him and, as though to demonstrate their certainty, these benefactors have ensured that his accommodation will be very comfortable. Like Pip, Chambers was, in some sense, also arriving to test himself in the big city, this being the first New York show for the 20-something artist. However, instead of emerging humble and ignorant from the Kent

Matthew Chambers  
1983 (*Brooke*)  
(detail)  
2007  
Pencil on paper  
42x42 cm

marshes, Chambers marauded into New York from his native Los Angeles blaring his intention to conquer with all the subtlety you would expect from an overeducated skater punk with a mean reputation back home.

In Chambers' debut show at the Angstrom Gallery in Los Angeles, which took place earlier this year, he took on the voice of a semi-fictional gang-cum-art gallery called Trudi (Chambers runs a Chinatown gallery of that name, although the gang was an invention). Mavis was the name of the leader of this outfit, and also the title of Chambers' New York show: it was rather as though he had put his group identity aside and adopted the persona of this new individual, who has decided to go solo. The problem Mavis faces, however, is the need to find a voice. Chambers

is entirely befuddled by the possibilities open to him, and all he can do is reprocess what has gone before. Thus the centrepiece of the New York show was a series of gaudy, slapdash paintings entitled 'What Do You Do after an Exorcism, What You Deal With, and Cathy Comics' (all works 2007). They draw on various sources: *Exorcism Johnny* delivered a cartoon Garbage Pail Kid in the style of Jonathan Meese, to create a flat, gravelly painting of a chubby young girl; *Venusia* borrows from the cover of Mark von Schlegell's eponymous novel from 2005; and *Outlaw Arnolfini/Snowflake* is a ham-fisted version of Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), in which the groom, who is flipping us the bird, appears to have been possessed by the spirit of Clint Eastwood, whose face appears in a shadow.

Mavis isn't suffering from anxiety of influence so much as from serious post-influence stress disorder, a disorder so completely unHINGING that it has put him/her in mind to flee: thus we have a concluding diptych, *Searching for My Baby, and My Baby's Name a Hundred Years Ago Was Miraculous*, which references, on one side, Peter Doig's memorable island dream of a man in a canoe, *100 Hundred Years Ago (Carrera)* (2001), and, on the other, Bas Jan Ader's *Farewell to Faraway Friends* (1971), one of his ironic, saccharine images of loss and longing that became all the more poignant when the artist himself disappeared.

Unfortunately, much of the subtler intention behind these pictures was throttled by the sheer pile-up of reference. The accompanying graphite drawings, *Some Untitled Shit*, didn't help, but they did at least point to the nature of the dilemma of influence and over-determination with which Chambers is struggling. All of them referred back to the late 1970s and early '80s, and particularly to a period in New York when not only was contemporary art raiding popular culture with a newly relaxed ease (one image, 1983 (*Brooke*), revisits Richard Prince's seminal *Spiritual America*, 1983), but popular music was also led by culturally literate musicians who were raiding older art to furnish their self-images (thus 1981 (*Bow Wow Wow*), revisits the cover of that band's single 'Go Wild in the Country', which has them restaging Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1862-3). Of course, many of these source images had their own source image, which in turn had its own source image - all in an endless chain of recursion that has clearly given Mavis an almighty migraine. Add to this some more images culled from press coverage of the punk band Crass (these pair with that opening image of Pip) and *See You in Court Honkeys!*, which takes the form of a tower of teddy bears, an old jacket with some pin badges and a jaded pair of sneakers, and, well, you've got something truly youthful: wild, energetic, full of grand plans and great expectations, and a whole lot of confusion.

Morgan Falconer

# Matthew Chambers