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## The Jolly (Good) Show: Light and shade in contemporary art practice

Collyer Bristow, London  
22 September – 1 December

Reviewed by: [Tamarin Norwood »](#)

People don't like it when you get your shoes lost under the desk and you slope around the office in your tights. It's not professional. You can spend the best part of your waking life at work but relations with the fitted carpet remain smart casual. Drawing a somewhat permeable line between what counts as professional and what doesn't, corporate environments set themselves apart from everyday life.

Adding artwork into the equation redoubles the separation because art too, in quite a different way, is a thing set apart from day-to-day being. Contending with this complication, corporate galleries oscillate between the isolated white cube – the vast Bloomberg Space is a flagship example – and the uninterrupted working office with well-behaved hangings to brighten things up. What is striking, challenging and ultimately most successful about the Day+Gluckman curatorial partnership at the Collyer Bristow Gallery is their decision to depart from framed and contained wall-based artwork without the safety frame of a white cube space to contain it.

The law firm's substantial gallery comprises its reception, lobby and several adjoining meeting rooms, making for an articulated space with both enclosed areas and open floors for plinths, installations and sizeable wall hangs. Eight-strong group exhibition 'The Jolly (Good) Show' makes daring use of much of this space, and is a valuable exhibition specifically because it unflinchingly sites vernacular artwork in a space which itself wavers between the formal and the familiar. Enjoying the heady provocation of visible handiwork at every turn, the show has the decisive feel of having willfully kicked off its shoes.

Mounted over the fitted carpet on trestle legs and impeccably coordinated with the bright red of the reception suite, Dylan Shipton's unsteady structures of Formica and rough-cut coloured tape are gloriously reverted from artworks to real-life things, reactivated as touchable, down-to-earth constructions like helter-skelter toys or furniture gone berserk. Propped in another corner and poised for a quick getaway, a kid's bike covered top to toe in sugar strands (*The Pursuit of Happiness*, Dominic Allan, 2009), plays on the sticky prospect of taking it out for a ride. Throughout the exhibition such reflexes betray a far-flung permeability in the line between art and life.

And it works both ways. The meeting rooms are open to gallery visitors but with their lights switched off and notepads, pens and refreshments laid out with exaggerated stillness on each table. Following the lead of Sarah Bridgland's deft



[\[enlarge\]](#)

Dominic Allan, 'The Pursuit of Happiness', Kid's bike, sugar strands, 130x98x63cm, 2009. Photo: Stephanie Rushton



[\[enlarge\]](#)

Alison Gill, 'Trophy', Wood, paper, electrical cable, resin eyes, 190x50x50cm, 2007. Photo: Stephanie Rushton

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and lovely balsa wood cut-outs on the surrounding walls, a thoughtfully arranged saucer of biscuits seems to call out for aesthetic appraisal of its own, offering itself as a three-dimensional foil to Bridgland's meticulous accretions of found logos, letters and images. Time and again such strategies of appropriation gleefully spill from the artworks into the real-life articles occupying these static rooms, turning them into unwitting theatres of the everyday.

The cumulative effect is to deny the reality of everyday life its authority. Alison Gill's abstracted portrait *From Life - Trophy* (2009), reveals by its side the very bust that modelled for it, yet the bust turns out to be no less abstracted itself. In the play of representation and reconfiguration, figures shuffle forth as figments of departed memories, themselves modeled on figments no less displaced than the artworks that result. Among the extensive collections of bric-a-brac uncomfortably reconfigured into sugar-candy figurines (*On the Make* and *That's what you do*, Laura White, both 2010), items of cracked tableware are left unrepaired with their broken edges highlighted in cheery painted lines, celebrating an irreconcilability in the nostalgic turn of so many of the works exhibited. For all the making-do, mending and recuperating of things past, the things decisively refuse to return.

"Ride me," comes a giddy invitation from the door. An upturned carousel horse covered in joggle eyes, its saddle at almost ninety degrees with the floor (Allan, 2009), promises to fell anyone game enough to take up the dare, and roll them right back out onto the pavement. The invitation is to grab hold, join in, kick off your shoes – but with it comes a rebuttal: you'll fall off if you try.

Writer detail:

Tamarin Norwood is an artist and writer.

[www.homologue.co.uk](http://www.homologue.co.uk)

[tamarin@kulturfabric.org](mailto:tamarin@kulturfabric.org) | [www.homologue.co.uk](http://www.homologue.co.uk)

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