

JEREMY DICKINSON

Artforum
October 1998

LOS ANGELES

JEREMY DICKINSON ANGLES GALLERY

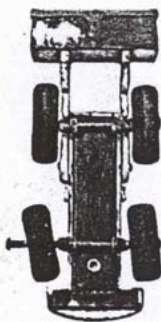
When Jeremy Dickinson's small, meticulous studies of English buses were exhibited a few years ago, they were shown along with route maps and tape recordings of the various sounds they produced. The mechanical aggression of the noisy, smelly, lumbering vehicles was all but erased by Dickinson's documentary approach. In his most recent work, the British artist continues to scrutinize modes of transportation, but with a twist: many of the cars, trucks, and buses in these small canvases are toys, and their massive containers are without any means of movement (they could, we assume, be carried by truck or boat). The containers have been rendered from photographs so carefully that their bulk and weight are conveyed even in miniature. Shipping-company logos (Ellerman, Genstar) break the monochrome blocks of red and blue. The simple rectangular forms and the literalism of the titles—*20 Foot High Cube* and *20 Foot High Double Stack* (all works

1998)—recall the primary structures of Minimalism; it's hard not to think of Richard Serra's steel cubes, or Gordon Matta-Clark's *Dumpster*, 1972.

As much as art-historical precedents, though, Dickinson's work is inspired by toys—a different set of “primary structures”—and he means for his images to call to mind “the things you see when you are four or five.” Every detail of the cars is lovingly copied: tire treads, body detailing, chipped paint. The vehicles are considered from all angles, with some paintings showing the underside of the chassis. From this perspective, the cars (modeled directly on the artist's Matchbox collection) resemble organic bodies, like pinned specimens of insects or butterflies. Named and classified by type—*MB1-75 (Tractor Shovel #2)*, for example—and hung in a row at eye level, the images became recognizable as a kind of taxonomy, a display of the genus Matchbox.

Some of Dickinson's compositions show the vehicles piled one on top of the other, as in *Junkyard Stack No. 5*. The stacks demonstrate basic proportional relationships: a Paris city bus is about two-thirds the length of its Chicago cousin; one yellow school bus is large enough to carry (precariously) three snack trucks; two storage containers are exactly the same size and thus stack perfectly. The artist's work was included in “Obsession,” the 1995 London show of work by male artists that explored the nature of preoccupations specific to the gender. One gets the sense that he could muse endlessly on vehicles—on the difference between a school bus and a Scenicruiser, say—and that he has only begun to do so; there are still jeeps, motorcycles, garbage trucks, and so on. The mix of wry Conceptualism and earnest obsessiveness in Dickinson's investigation makes us want to go along for the ride.

—Meghan Dailey



Jeremy Dickinson, *MB1-75 (Tractor Shovel #2)*,
1998, oil and acrylic on board, 8 x 6".