

Art: Preview

Sean Landers

WHITE CUBE

Sean Landers flagellates himself in public, both physically and mentally. This is not an edifying sight, and his four grandparents, whose small terracotta portraits are lined up to watch his antics, definitely seem to disapprove. So do I. Whingeing and whining is not acceptable (it's not British).

On video, Landers strips with languid narcissism, then lashes himself with a leather belt while looking to camera with a mixture of determination and defiance, pain and ecstasy. On the walls are two canvases on which he performs a verbal form of self-laceration. One canvas is covered in isolated observations: 'I'm trembling. I drank too much last night. I hate alcohol... I was insane for six months, but now I'm okay... Today I feel smarter than Duchamp. Don't worry it won't last long.'

It's when you get drawn into the second canvas – one long stream-of-consciousness rant – that reservations dissolve and you are won over. Landers' self-exposure begins to seem endearing rather than irritating and also brave; he is willing to expose his hang-ups and neuroses and, in the process, is often very funny. He starts (with terrible spelling): 'With each painting I do I seem to have less and less to say... Like Massachusetts fisherman I've over-harvested once fertile ground.' He rambles on, writes the Lord's prayer, then concludes:



'The more I think of Christianity the more I'd like to be Jewish.' He delves deeper: 'I'm not as liberal as I say I am, I might even be a closet Conservative... Honesty is a farce, from now on I'm going to lie my arse off... I'm a classic, snivelling two-faced Irish coward. I fear Hell too much ever to say what I want to... How is it that the older I get the dumber I get?' And so on, across the entire wall, ending with the absurd observation: 'Having no personal tragedy can be a formidable tragedy in its own right.' Another wall is covered in pages from a calendar on which are scrawled remarks like 'I'm trying to figure out what I'm doing', 'HELP' and 'Fuck the cock-sucking world'. I know just how he feels, we all do; which is what makes this mélange of raw emotion, courage and cowardice such compelling reading. Most people are narcissists; few declare it so openly. *Sarah Kent*