

Time Out

London

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Sean Landers

Greengrassi West End

Once you discover that Sean Landers' family originated in Ireland, his work makes even more sense. He could be one of those guys who bends your ear with blarney and, switching seamlessly from self-aggrandisement to self-deprecation, keeps you listening for hours. This show is hilarious, and infuriating. 'Plank Boy' – a crude painting of a figure made from wooden planks – is like a Magritte gone wrong. This maudlin image must be a self-portrait. Written in Landers' loopy script across the landscape behind are recollections of the artist's life. He can trace his lineage 'straight back to the warring monks and noble Celtic chieftans who valiantly battled the Vikings', he writes. 'I remember Irish Sundays in Bondsville Ma hearing story after story of relatives long dead whose lives were utterly miserable.' Gallows laughter kicks in but, anticipating your response, Landers adds: 'but this was somehow funny'. The ability to keep one step ahead of his audience is crucial. It

keeps you guessing; how large is the dose of irony in his finely tuned humour?

Two indifferent abstract paintings face one another, the name 'Sean' scrawled across one surface. The stream of consciousness rant with which he filled earlier canvases has migrated on to tape; with its mixture of sincerity and hype, it resembles religious cant. To the heroic swell of Holst's 'Planet Suite', Landers declares that 'no truly great artist was ever fully recognised in their lifetime. I expect no different, but I want you to know that I know that I am the greatest living artist on earth'. Wheedling flattery follows: 'I need you to encourage me so that I can go on creating masterpiece after masterpiece into the future.' Upstairs are two attempts at late-cubist Picassos – bad enough to be laughable, but good enough to foster the pretence of misguided ambition. As Landers witters on about a 'fruitful life when every day was spent in the pursuit of greatness', I recall an acquaintance who painted sub-Picassos and was consumed with rage at his lack of recognition. The nearer the knuckle, the better the joke and the sharper the pain. *Sarah Kent*