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Scott King
BORTOLAMI DAYAN

ANYWAY, I MUST DASH AS I'M GOING TO SET FIRE TO MY NEIGHBORS HEDGE NOW. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELVES, AND HOPEFULLY I'LL SEE YOU SOON. I LOVE YOU BOTH VERY MUCH. YOUR SON, SCOTT. X. London-based artist Scott King seems to have a thing about hedges. The above reference in *Dear Mum*, 2003, a small print reproducing the text of a less-than-reassuring letter home that rounded off "Information," his recent exhibition at Bortolami Dayan, isn't the first or the only one of its kind. He also agonizes about the significance of shrubbery in, for example, *Self Portrait as a Catholic Pie Chart (4 parts)*, 2002, elucidating his feelings of guilt for owning a house bounded by that stereotypical feature of suburban landscape design. King's work is informed by—steeped in, obsessed with, burdened by—the ethos and iconography of punk, and for a punk to descend into such comfortable normality might mark him as a traitor.

Yet King is nothing if not aware of the pop-cultural transgressions he has already committed. A former art director for British style magazine *i-D* and creative director for Sleazation, he has long been involved in bending the seditious visual strategies of gone-but-not-forgotten movements, Dada and Situationism in particular, to the economic demands of the youthmedia mainstream. In this respect, his debt to Jamie Reid, the designer who single-handedly invented the graphic language of punk in his record covers and posters for the Sex Pistols, is obvious. And while King revisits his radical models more directly (though humorously) in the sporadically published Wyndham Lewis-inspired journal *Crash!* (copublished with Matthew Worley), he remains sensitive to the divergent ways in which his approach is destined to be received as its context shifts: "As an art director and designer," he tells Rick Poynor in *Communicate: Independent British Graphic Design Since the Sixties* (2004), "I come up with solutions that are absolutely refined. They are reductive and they try to make a solution that is very clear. That does not seem to work very well in the art world."

Unfortunately, this admission, while admirably honest, didn't greatly aid King's cause here. "Information" (the title refers to the artist's use of charts, graphs, diagrams, and lists throughout the show, and nods to MoMA's 1970 survey of Conceptualism) was full of punchy and often mordantly amusing work, but its quick-hit glossiness tended to deflect sustained consideration. Its outward subject matter was the history of (primarily British) pop music from The Rolling Stones and The Who to Joy Division and The Smiths. In bright, posterlike prints, King distills the organized mayhem of concert crowds into stark diagrams redolent of Op art paintings and abstracts hectic touring schedules into squeaky-clean linear and color-coded maps. In an inspired titular inversion, a map of the countries in which Mark E. Smith and his group have performed becomes *The Empire of the Fall*, 2005, while in *Stalky*, 2006, the name of a (fictional?) headlining band undergoes constant revision across twelve photocopied show flyers, from STALKY AND THE PART-TIME NIHILISTS to STALKY AND THE CONNIVING DESERTER ARSEHOLE BASTARDS. Elsewhere, *Madonna*, 2003, and *Pink Cher*, 2002, transform their subjects into Hitler and Che (get it?) Guevara, respectively.

It's all witty enough, though ultimately most useful not for the purported "subversion" trumpeted in the press release—and presumably signaled by the cheeky if ultimately facile likes of *BR Flag*, 2002, a fusion of the British Rail logo with a Nazi standard—but as a study of what can go wrong when one's migration between art and design, punk and pop, criticality and complicity become a little too transparent. King is a highly efficient communicator (the fluorescent pink eponymous text of *Let's Talk About Me*, 2005, alone establishes that) but, as his comment to Poynor hints, the message that he sends most unequivocally is that of his own (artistic) project's ultimate expendability.



Image: Scott King, *Madonna*, 2003