

November 17, 2011



Installation view of *No Divorce Whore's Allowed*, N.D., Enamel on wood, 47 1/2 x 18 in.

Art in Review: 'Prophet Royal Robertson: No Proud Bastards, Project: Stewart Home' By Roberta Smith

Prophet Royal Robertson (1931-97) is not going gently into any outsider-art canon. As demonstrated by the first in-depth exhibition of his art in New York, the efforts of this Louisiana sign painter are too raw and unruly, his style too bristling and changeable. Looking at his work, you appreciate the sublime consistency of artists like Martin Ramirez or James Castle, but this in turn clarifies Robertson's singular and noisome wildness, the volatile fusion of image, language and unvarnished emotion that he achieved.

He believed in space aliens and was fluent in the Bible and furious with his former wife, Adell. ("No Divorce Whore's Allowed" announces one of the first signs in the exhibition.) Festooned with texts in tight, curling calligraphy, some drawings suggest pages from crazed illuminated manuscripts. Others isolate the complex geometric, implicitly metallic forms of spaceships, cars or weapons. In contrast he had a thing for sparkle and a penchant for sweetly colored futuristic architecture. In one of the best, more anomalous images, he uses shades of yellow and amber and patches of stippling to render a delicate vista of mountains whose thin, twisted peaks suggest narwhal tusks. There's definitely a fingernails-on-chalkboard quality to Robertson's sensibility that is part of its allure and perhaps a limitation. But as an introduction, this is a memorable show that whets the appetite for further exposure. It has been organized by the New York-based artists Scott Ogden and Erik Parker, who discovered Robertson's work in *Raw* magazine when they were art students and met him the year before he died.

In terms of resistance to easy absorption, Robertson's work is more than matched by White Columns' second show: the first American exhibition devoted to Stewart Home, the British oppositional artist, latter-day Situationist, writer, editor, filmmaker, punk-rock musician, anti-art prankster and all-around contrarian who has been a thorn in the side of the British art and literary establishments for nearly 30 years. The exhibition includes a video interview concerning Mr. Home's 1990-93 Art Strike, during which he purportedly abstained from cultural production, and copies of his fanzine *Smile* and his parodist pulp-fiction, including a sculpture made from stacks of his 2005 novel "Down and Out in Shoreditch and Hoxton." A brochure written by Mr. Home explains a lot, if not everything. For that, there is his lavishly detailed Wikipedia entry, which also appears to be his handiwork. In all, few cultural producers seem to have been as busily and consistently canon-averse as Mr. Home.