

Mark Anstee

Until Jan 12 2008 [Madder 139](#), 137/139 Whitecross St, EC1Y 8JL

Rating:

After performing in theatre companies for a number of years, Mark Anstee has established a visual art practice rooted in durational figurative drawing. Previous works have involved weeks or even months of mind-bending application to large drawings that improvisatorially pitch thousands of soldiers, gunslingers or crusaders together onto a single wall or sheet of paper. The reference to theatricality, then, is two-fold, both in Anstee's protracted presence in the gallery space and the stock characters that the eventual pieces portray. Anstee appears to be reducing the faceless hoards in moments of duress to human canon fodder, so that viewing the final drawing is rather like anthropomorphising yeast, ascribing human intent to the near-endlessly reproduced forms. To mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of William Blake, who is buried in nearby Bunhill Cemetery, however, Anstee has translated single drawings into a series of neons. The hoodie of media notoriety is wrought life-size in wiggling lines of green light, striking ambiguous transitional poses – perhaps dancing, fighting or performing some other shamanic teenage rite. Drenching with ghoulis phosphorescence, the cipher of feckless youth battling ennui and disenfranchisement, the drawings assume the status of ornamental motif, while the figures' isolation from a field of profusion lends them urgency. And yet the flat language of mercantile signage (somewhat overused in art of recent decades) decimates the seduction of their inky counterparts. The major perplexion, though, arises from the show's apparent reflection on Blake. Of course an artist should not be charged with the labour of reinterpretation or finding contemporary equivalence, but identifying any relevance to Blake here other than geographic proximity would be a process of shoehorning.

Sally O'Reilly , Fri Nov 23