



**MARTIN BOYCE**  
**Lotta Hammer Gallery London**  
**29 January - 6 March, 1999**

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Martin Boyce's *Red Disaster (in advance)* is a photographic piece. It shows us part of a room in which a chair has been wedged under a door knob. Classic scene from your thriller: a desperate bid to keep out the invader. Wedge the chair, OK, but is there a fire escape? Can he/she get out of the window? A companion piece is *Black Disaster (In Advance)* - again the chair is wedged. Boyce is picking away at contemporary anxiety in his work: the fear of intrusion, the fears of attack. The photographic pieces are deceptively "squeaky clean" and modish and this is set in a satisfying tension by the implication of menace.

In the same show, Boyce also exhibits a text: some sentimental lines about "God blessing this house" - the kind of thing Victorians did as samplers. It ends "And bless each door that opens wide, to stranger as to kin." The text is set against an arrangement of angled lines which suggests shattering glass, or perhaps a web - a motif seen in a recent wall piece of Boyce's.

*Now I've got real worry* is in two parts: there's a mask displayed on the wall, made from the top part of a leg splint. Charles Eames (whose chairs are used in the photographs) designed the elegant splint in 1943 for use by servicemen: it's made from thin plywood steamed into the necessary curving shapes to support and cradle the injured leg. Eames himself made these into "art objects" and displayed them in his own home. Boyce has sawn deliberately crude eye-holes. The other part is a length of angle bracket (L-bar) used in a shelf system designed by Eames: again, this has been a wee bit "distressed" by the artist... Some five feet in length and leaning against the wall, it inevitably "reads" (in an absurdist sense) as a spear. Boyce is one of a group of artists associated with the Modern Institute in Glasgow with shared interests in design, the environment, and in revisiting icons from earlier eras - particularly,

modernism. By showing a paired image in *Double Black Disaster (in advance)* the artist is hinting at the Warhol prints which in turn reproduced library photographs of an electric chair. The phrase "in advance" is a nod towards the Duchamp snow shovel piece. The word "Disaster" is a nod towards Goya, perhaps. The references go on piling up in work like this. Has one seen the films? Has one seen the artworks? Perhaps it is allowable to express some worry here: this work would mean a whole lot less to someone without the knowledge. In fact, one might say the work is primarily about the references, and this raises the question whether there is enough, aside from them, for us to feed on. Perhaps there's an excess of thought in advance of the making: a meticulousness which leaves me feeling a bit hemmed in. Boyce is probably representative of an important "component" in the present art scene: the implication is this is all one can do. Beckett said all there is left for us to do is to tell stories; now we just have a clutter of old certainties no one believes in any more. We can only sit around and rearrange the wreckage.

*Hugh Stoddart*