

RICHARD SLEE

Chay Allen, Richard Slee, Studio Voltaire, Frieze, June 2012



Richard Slee, Camp Futility, 2012

'I'm a lumberjack and I'm ok, I sleep all night and I work all day...' – though not so much these days. In Richard Slee's exhibition 'Camp Futility', at Studio Voltaire, we enter the abandoned workspace of a composite mythologized figure: tree-feller, prospector and craftsman. Inspired by Slee's recent residency at Alfred University in New York, the show investigates the symbolism associated with the popular perception of the pioneer spirit in America as a predominantly mythic construct. Integral to this is the notion of a masculinity parodied in various motifs throughout the gallery. *Kross Bow* (all works 2012) incorporates moustaches as handlebars (quite literally handlebar moustaches) at both sides of a crossed rope, creating a five-metre-long bow-tie. *Arrow*, meanwhile, features a brass phallic shaft with small ceramic moustaches for the fletching and arrowhead.

The numerous moustaches in the space, including 13 on one wall, present a parodic, circus-strongman-style notion of masculinity, and invite associations with late-19th-century American figures such as General Custer and Wyatt Earp. Similarly, the brightly coloured handles

of the cross-saws on workbenches in the centre of the gallery confuse both the saw's period and gender-specific associations. As if to clarify the gender-period stereotype that Slee attempts to expose, a cross-saw and moustache ensemble close to the benches, *Hanging Cross Saw*, makes this explicit.