

John Strutton's charged offerings can make the most strident political poster appear a bit thin on commitment. He employs modes of protest – the badge, campaign handout, placard and stage – to give form to a sputtering, hybridised stream of sketchbook doodles and zine-style commentary on topics as diverse as Specials lyrics and corn-dolly mythology. Autobiographical details, the nutter's rant and Wiki whispers all appear to play a part in this characteristically dense display of harsh, funny and oddly desirable art objects and artefacts at Domo Baal. It's a ludicrously inconclusive, fortuitously topical spectacle – bristling with pre-demo energy around the time of the G-20 summit in London this spring – which, over and above the inferences to class struggles and failed ideologies, most powerfully describes the tortuous process of mobilising heart and mind to express belief.

'Offerings' might sound a bit vague, but is an entirely suitable word to describe what Strutton makes, customises, writes and sings about, for there is a totemic quality to his perhaps defensively peekaboo arrangement of this stuff as art: a clusterfuck assembly of ideas punctuated by acts of homage and irreverence to the great, the evil and the overlooked. This particular outing of Strutton's developing collection of paintings, customised guitars and *Dad's Army* jumble comes with a day-of-reckoning-type theme. The exhibition's title, *Donderslag*, translates from the Dutch as 'thunderclap' and refers to a 1654 gunpowder explosion that destroyed most of Delft – at the time home to many of the Golden Age painters. The notion of a cull of cultural clutter might sit oddly with this one-man museum, but the sentiment of reception to change bleeds into

the surrounding urban landscape like alcopops over a dry student population.

Watercolours on stilts, propped in groups against the walls, dominate the main gallery – not unified but inextricably linked by the same graphic, painterly hand. It is often easier to recognise particular Strutton stylistics (Cold War typography, Blake album-cover figuration) than place the motley crew of real and fictional characters they describe: from Colonel Sanders to 'Cobby Bobbler the Potato Bomber'. Painted drumskins cover an entire wall like giant badges pledging allegiance to God knows what. It might be bat dentists, for all the urgent symbology suggests, but the group feels rather real and relevant. The wooden objects in the fireplace underneath are actually hat lasts nicked from the Kangol factory that unceremoniously dispensed with Strutton's father's services after 40 years' hard graft.

I wonder how the space next door will appear without the drum kit and instruments left over from the private-view performance of Strutton's band Arthur Brick – a bit like the token museological room always slotted into the posthumous artist-survey, perhaps. The success, however, of his infectious, decidedly masculine iconography lies in the palpable devotion to the magpie randomness of web browsing and channel hopping, or to the associative malady of a day's events. One is left with a strong sense of symptom over message – despite the shouty schoolboy laments and cheeky customisation of history's menu – as a result of not always being able to tune in to the vast array of channels on Strutton's pop-cultural dial. *Rebecca Geldard*

John Strutton *Donderslag*

Domo Baal, London
27 March – 9 May



Drumskins, 2008–, watercolour and acrylic on drumskin. Courtesy the artist and Domo Baal, London