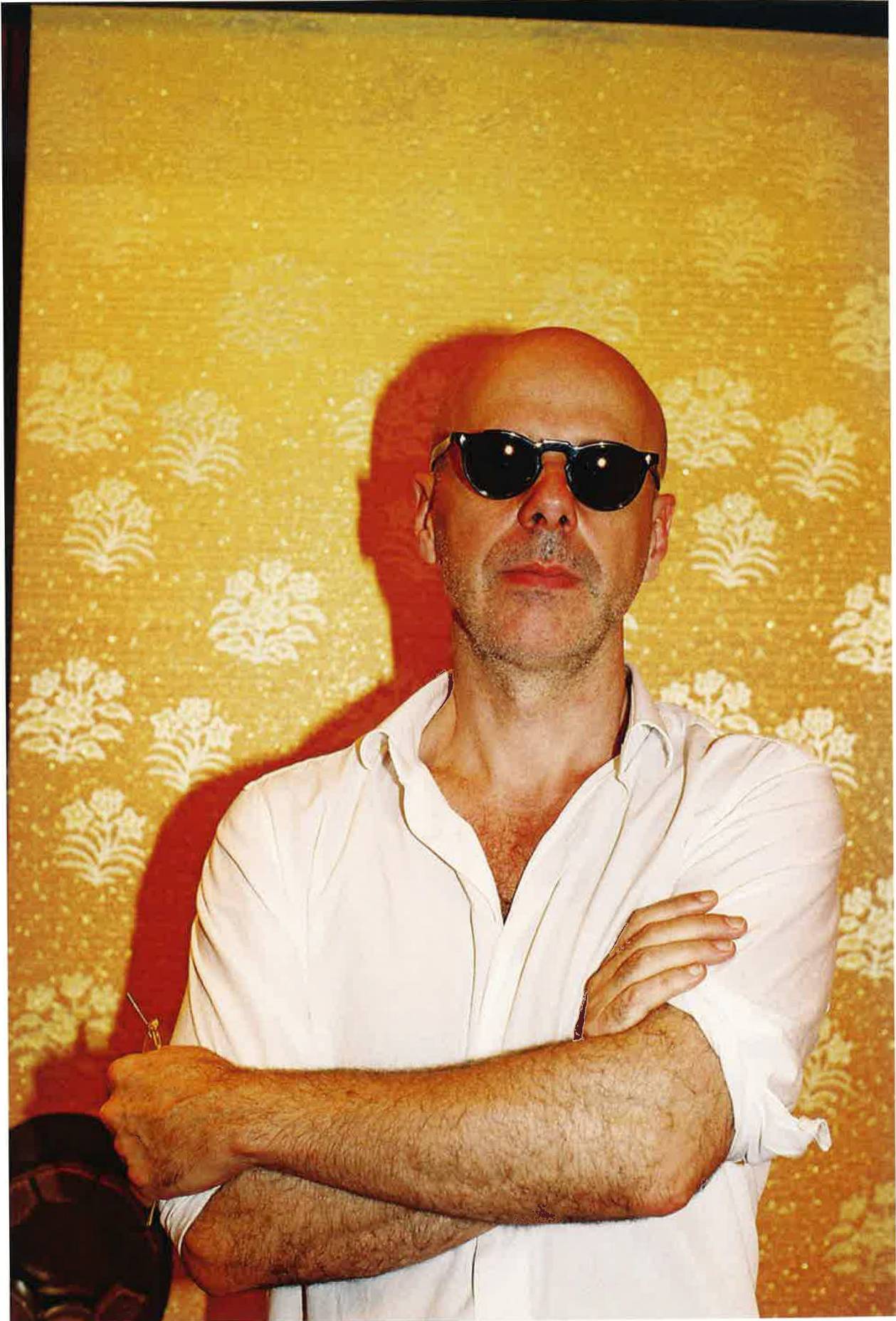


# ArtReview



Philippe Parreno



## Tony Lewis *Pall*

Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago 11 July – 29 August

There's nothing to — see! It's — ferocious —  
and terrible.

A series of monochromatic comics line the walls, featuring either completely darkened or erased frames. Their speech bubbles are sparsely peppered with words that were left untouched among passages of crossed-out text, reading like poems made by excision. Sentences amassed within the contained bands create a new narrative that rises out of the erasure: *How / mysterious — and — Brave*. While the sequences are not animated with illustrations, the relationship between the chosen text and the blankness of the image remains cinematic, as if each still were captured during a transition of a film reel: flash of white, fade to black. This opposition between light and dark is a trope within the work, though the division is never fully clean. The surfaces of the drawings are contaminated by smudges, as if the material that made the image were actively attempting to betray the paper to which it was affixed; underfoot, an expanse of graphite powder spreads across the entire floor of the space. In the centre of the gallery, a large crumpled skin of paper treated with the same powder anchors the room, personified and sullen, shrugged into being. Drawing is an interloper.

This is Tony Lewis's *Pall*, the first exhibition in Shane Campbell's newly minted South Loop space in Chicago. The demanding presence of drawing here challenges the speculative, propositional and theoretical traditions of graphite on paper. This challenge comes from two sides: first, as an environmental element, the work is undyingly formal in its response to the 280sqm of gallery space; and second, the physical installation echoes through the comics and works that have text as their primary component.

The specificity that Lewis brings to his chosen materials is part of what one might call an ontological approach to the subject of race. He uses drawing as a means to conflate the formal contrast between black and white with the concept of authority, and to confront the accepted voice — a white male voice — that speaks to American ideals of morality. This approach begins with the original sources of his texts. The comics in the main exhibition space are lifted from Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* (1985–95), which Watterson has guarded closely from the forces of merchandising and reproduction. In cancelling the images — essentially blacking them out — Lewis does such restrictions one better, all the while making the comics appear even more mischievous and sardonic than

the originals. In the wall drawing installed in the back of the space — the source of which is H. Jackson Brown *Life's Little Instruction Book* (1991, a #1 *New York Times* bestseller) — Lewis undercuts the idealistic decency of that text's intended message through the work's crude installation. Each letter is translated to the wall using nails and elastic bands that are contaminated by the same grey graphite powder that suffuses the space.

While drawing is an interloper, it is also a witness.

In the face of one of the wall drawing's quoted instructions, '879. Mind Your Own Business', we are forced to do the opposite. For Lewis, and the viewer by proxy, these words are our concern. Like Lewis's relationship to race in his work, drawing never adheres to the dictates of what it depicts, but instead mediates between a concept and its final form. The threat of graphite is the threat of ideas. The misconception of the medium, especially in relation to the temporary circumstances of Lewis's installation, is that it can be undone or resolved at a later date. *Pall* stands as an exception to the common rule of drawing: while graphite may always be erased, these works cannot be corrected.

Stephanie Cristello



*Surface*, 2015, pencil, graphite powder, correction fluid on paper and transparency, 28 × 22 cm. Photo: Robert Chase Heishman. Courtesy the artist and Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago