



the rural urbanite

By Caroline Phillips

My husband, BJ, suffers from what American psychiatrists term Rural Deficit Disorder – RDD – which makes him talk about pot-bellied pigs and jam-making. But I know the Rustic Idyll turns out to be mostly about couples entertaining themselves by swapping keys, or getting inadvertently sprayed with organophosphates.

So I accept with leaping (metropolitan) heart Mollie Dent-Brocklehurst and co-curator Elliot McDonald's invitation to a Summer Party at Sudeley Castle to celebrate *Reconstruction #2*, a cutting-edge exhibition organised with auction house Philips de Pury. Sadly 'art' and 'country' are found together as often as ice cream and anchovies, so I love the idea that Hoxton has decamped to the Cotswolds.

Sudeley is, as you know, the romantic castle where Liz Hurley married; and Mollie is its part owner. Suitably, BJ wants to travel there in his ATV, first cousin, he says, of the Chelsea tractor. It's a four-wheeled motor bicycle with large low ground pressure tyres, ideal for chasing sheep up hills. I suggest we leave it for another celebration. 'Like when we're leaving the divorce court,' I add sweetly.

On arrival, we're handed a Thousand Acre Wood-style map (complete with thumb prints and ink splodges) indicating the whereabouts of *No Rain* and 15 al fresco artworks: the piece by Conrad Shawcross is 'in the pond'; Adel Abdessemed's 'in the doorway'; and Keith

Tyson's 'on the bit above the rose garden.' The first, a fairground ride-style whizzing mechanical sculpture, is making the resident ducks act as if they're on acid at Thorpe Park; Abdessemed's is light fantastic, a massive must-have neon depiction of a brain; and Tyson's yellow hoop tunnel spied from the heady setting of the antique rose garden? Marvellously urban. Pure McDonald's.

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I go to the lavatory, where two women fall out of one cubicle. (I think I prefer the rural tradition of One Man, One Loo.) I wonder if one will offer me a line, but she doesn't look like the fishing type.

Back outside in the groovy contemporary sculpture park – set midst the exquisite knot garden, box hedging, topiary yews and Tudor ruins – BJ and I wander with hundreds of guests in Dover Street Market garb, white plastic catsuits or, suffering urban chilliness, Alice Temperley with three jumpers.

There's artist and taxidermist Polly Morgan in PVC trousers and baby blue Hunter wellies (but sans stuffed Labrador). Actress Katrina Boorman gamely sporting an entire flower-garden on her head. And socialites and

international luxury lifestyle brands, Ashley and Allegra Hicks. But although their artwork is present in the bushes, I can't find Tim Noble and Sue Webster, enfants terribles of contemporary art, whose self-portraits have been made from garbage and dead animals. Maybe they don't look like that in real life.

These are Stalwart Art Folk (SAF) who've just done the Biennale, Basle, Documenta and the London auctions but clearly can't get enough of each other. They walk in stilettos through disinfectant into the pheasantry, trot in gold wedges onto the mosaic floor of the private chapel and sit on pouffes in the Moroccan souk-style tent – praying they'll be picked to appear in *Boogie Woogie*, a forthcoming film of the book that's set in the art world and directed by Mollie's husband, Duncan Ward. 'With special artwork by Damien Hirst,' confides one SAF.

Then we eat an excellent dinner of hog roast, an entire field of lambs' shoulders and mountains of salads while listening to live music by the crooner Duke of Beaufort: 'Is Harry Worcester doing a *Joseph* audition?' asks my neighbour.

Sudeley was a 'safe house' for the Tate's works during the Blitz. Now its gardens are providing a fabulous backdrop for new works. The Serpentine party may be the summer's hottest. But, boy, this is the (rural) warm-up...

Exhibition at Sudeley Castle, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire until 31 October.

The Weekenders

by Digby
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