

Some local birds

Why not, I thought. Go local. Pat Brassington's had enough press already! So has ACCA. It just so happens that my friend Ben Sheppard has a show on round the corner from my house at Counihan Gallery in Brunswick. Excellent! I can walk there! And it just so happens that my friend Amy Jo is sitting the gallery when I walk in. Buoyed by the welcome, I am met with a thoroughly enchanting array of—and take this as you will—cocks and balls. This is where some local vernacular comes in—seriously mate! And they were grouse! And he used pen, mate—PEN!

Le coq is a fastidiously and beautifully executed collection of sculpture and drawings—iconic, playful portraits of roosters and cockerels. These portrayals are juxtaposed with spheres made of myriad strokes and coloured inks, steel twisted and painted with bright baked enamel like balls of messed-up string. There is the piqued and curious gaze of the rooster that's come into contact with the alien ball, reminiscent of the opening scene of *2001: A space odyssey*, where early man is met by the ominous black slabs. Not only in a compositional sense but also in energy and execution: the random versus the precise and deliberate, representation versus abstraction; the works embody a state of flux.

These proud and plumaged birds, always slightly on edge, with a jaunty expression, can be seen as metaphors for characters that populate our world. Heads held high with the gait of a barrister off to court, the pluck and adornment of a Gangsta Rapper or, locally, a self-consciously nonchalant young man in tight skinny jeans rolled up at the ankles, bright socks peaking out, going to buy bread at the Albert Street Safeway.

And then some.

Benjamin Sheppard, [*Le coq*](#), Counihan Gallery, Melbourne, 16 August - 16 September 2012.



Benjamin Sheppard,
'Where to next Pepin?'
(detail), 2012, ball point
pen on paper



Benjamin Sheppard,
'Tribal act', 2011, ball
point pen and black felt
on paper



Benjamin Sheppard,
'Not listening', 2011,
ball point pen and black
felt on paper



Benjamin Sheppard, 'Tabarin',
2011, ball point pen on paper



Benjamin Sheppard, 'Je
pense, donc je suis', 2012,
ball point pen on paper