



Be But Could If Is Not What by Jacob Wren



This text by JACOB WREN is published alongside [LORNA BAUER'S *What Is Not But Could Be If*](#) exhibition.

1.

There is a natural pleasure to smashing stuff. From a childhood rock through the window of the house that won't let you play on it's lawn, to the splintering guitar catharsis at the end of a sweaty concert, it is the gesture that enacts blind anger, blind rebellion, and that by enacting it connects it, for a moment, to a feeling of liberation. Later you will be forced by your parents to apologize to the man whose window you so rudely smashed. New guitars will have to be bought to replace the old ones. But for a moment you tasted freedom.

2.

I took the title of the show (*What Is Not But Could Be If*) and arranged the seven words in alphabetical order (*Be But Could If Is Not What*). Normally I avoid such language games but for some reason, in this instance, I was tempted. For a moment, I thought of it like the words had been smashed on the floor. That I had picked them up, put them back together. The sentence 'Be But Could If Is Not What' exists on the verge of grammatical sense. The 'if' in the middle, like a pivot point, suggests a mathematical formula such as ' $x = y$ if $p = t$ '. (With this analogy one might correctly guess I know practically nothing about math.) If you stare at the alphabetized sentence for a moment,

if you force it, it might break into two parts. A command: 'Be but could', and a question: 'Is not what?' And if you continue to force it, it might start to mean something like: what is the 'not what' that is stopping you from fully being what you could. What is the barrier, what gets in your way, what is the 'what' preventing humanity from fulfilling its promise? This genre of complex nonsense reminds me of some of the formulations of Heidegger, formulations that I also attempt to understand by staring at them, by attempting to surmise what they might mean through certain grammatical leaps of faith. For me, such operations connect back to the pleasure of smashing things, of seeing them in fragments, of wanting to put them back together. In the act of putting things back together one can re-imagine them, can be startled by unexpected juxtapositions. New meanings continuously emerge. Meanings that otherwise might have never existed. Meanings where one is not quite sure if there is anything there, other than one's sublime effort to 'force things.' This also might be one definition of poetry.

3.

A vase, wine glasses, bottles and water glasses. These are the things being smashed. There are clichés around such actions, here deftly avoided. Having a vase thrown at your head in the heat of a lovers quarrel. Smashing a wine glass to celebrate a Jewish wedding. Sketchy bars in which beer bottles are thrown at the musicians. There is also the embarrassment of knocking something over accidentally. Glass and ceramic are sturdy enough for everyday use but not for acts of random force. Vessels made of glass are more elegant than vessels made of metal or plastic. The reason must have something to do with their fragility.

Bio

Jacob Wren is a writer and maker of eccentric performances. His recent books include *Unrehearsed Beauty*, *Families Are Formed Through Copulation* and *Revenge Fantasies of the Politically Dispossessed*. He frequently writes about contemporary art.