

# SPASTIC FANTASTIC!

## Outcry at retard rock concert in the name of 'art'



The video, *File Under Sacred Music*, will be shown at the ICA on 13th June, the 25th anniversary of the original gig. The audience from the re-enactment will be providing live music on the night.

ON JUNE 13 1978 THE CRAMPS PLAYED A LEGENDARY GIG TO AN AUDIENCE OF MENTALLY ILL PATIENTS AT THE NAPA MENTAL INSTITUTE, CALIFORNIA. Little is known about their motives for gig, but the dodgy bootleg video of this awesome night is a must for all true fans. Some 25 years later at a very different institute, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, artists Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard

(who recreated Bowie's farewell to Ziggy Stardust at the same venue in 1998) set about restaging the event and the bootleg video for an artwork called *File Under Sacred Music* to see what light they could shed on the original while trying to create something new. A can of worms was duly opened. The pair put together a band featuring Al Pinto from The Parkinsons as Lux Interior, White Stripes collaborator Holly Golightly as Poison Ivy, Bruce Brand as Bryan Gregory and John Gibbs as Nick Knox. Then, scarcely flinching long enough to say 'controversy', they bussed in an audience of psychiatric patients to complete the line up, paying them £10 and as much beer and sandwiches as they could consume.

The event itself was one of the most electrifying the ICA has seen in years, with the stand-ins doing justice to the original Cramps by cooking up some raw, rude and righteous rock'n'roll in an atmosphere that was both intense and uncomfortable. As some of the audience — who, let's face it, you wouldn't sit to on a bus — engaged in lagered-up merry making, with one incident involving a chap throwing up on another fellow who was lying on the ground in a stupor. This was followed by a scuffle in Tenants Super slo-mo.

Some people walked out in disgust then and there, thus begging questions about decency and the exploitation of the mentally ill in the name of art. The artists, however, were quick to reject these claims. "I think the audience were truly complicit," said Pollard. "Many of them, who were musicians, poets and performance artists themselves, kind of took it upon themselves to create a role for them in it themselves".

Meanwhile, Paul Monks from mental health arts organisation Core Arts was dismissive of any "rent-a-loon" accusations, arguing that "ghettoising people, keeping them in their little holes, doesn't do anybody any good." As for the audience themselves, some were bored, some were indifferent, but most seemed to enjoy themselves. One patient called it a "good day out" while another pointed out that the afternoon was "better than bingo". And who can argue with that?

