

DAN SHIPSIDES - EVILSPORT



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EVILSPORT

Stephen Lawrence Gallery, Greenwich, London1st - 31st March

Offering his collection of vintage 'Mountain' magazines (1969 – 1992), Dan Shipsides' project asks the viewer to explore the "sport" of climbing through an encounter with aesthetics, philosophy, ethics and the maverick social positioning of many of its protagonists - in this instance the late Victorian prolific mountaineer and 'occultist' Aleister Crowley. Radical lifestyles and belief positions embodied by such infamous early mountaineers gave flesh to the quasi-spiritual, romantic and escapist tendencies resonant in the seductive images of the 20th century magazines. As climbing is being proposed for the 2020 Olympics, and as much of rock and mountain sport has succumbed to prescribed and commercial modes of physique, technique, equipment and brand placement, EvilSport expounds a friction to the wholesome Olympic ideal.

In contrast to the manly athletic and gymnastic aspirations of the late Victorian era Crowley used the verbs trickle and ooze to describe his climbing style. Nonetheless, he succeeded with a list of mountaineering achievements which is impressive for that period including;

The fastest ascent of 16,000ft at 1hour 23min in 1900. Ascents of the Mexican peaks: Colima, Nevado, Toluca, Iztaccihuatl and Popocatepetl.

In the Alp an ascent of the challenging northeast ridge of Mont Collon, the first guideless

traverse of the Monch and the first descent of the west face of the Triflhorn.

His topographical listing of climbing problems on a Lakeland boulder at Mosedale is one of the earliest recorded examples of bouldering as a pursuit in its own right.

His epic attempt on the then unclimbed Kanchenjunga by an untried route was unsuccessful but reached the highest point on the mountain yet and established the route by which the peak was later successfully climbed.

Crowley's radical approach to life and spirituality was then and still considered unsavory – a perception that he exploited - by self-proclaiming himself the 'Beast' and courting the tag as the 'most evil man in the world' - to gain notoriety in the conservative world of Victorian religion and morality. His 'unsavory' character barred him from the then conservative establishment world of British mountaineering, the British Alpine Club, and hence many of his accomplishments have been written out of the official history books.

His megalomaniac legacy to the world is one of edgy, ethically / religiously problematic outcast ritualistic spirituality and alternative belief but much of his spirit is perhaps echoed by others seeking alternatives to mainstream thought, behavior and the sense of what is possible.



**96 Mountain Hex**  
Dan Shipsides  
2012

