

**By Andy Field 2011**

I first saw Gemma and James from [Action Hero](#) at [I Am Still Your Worst Nightmare](#), a weekend-long live art spectacular at the Arnolfini in Bristol. The whole event was great in its openness; with a completely uncurated collection of work things swung from the brilliant to the kind of awfulness that takes you to a very sad place inside. Action Hero (along with Ed Rapley and Emma Bennett from These Horses) were probably the best thing about the whole weekend.

For their short piece they did a recreation of [Evel Knievel's 1969 Caesar's Palace jump](#) that left him in a coma for over three weeks. It was a simple and beautiful idea, playing lovingly with the difference in scale between the theirs and the original jump while retaining some really tangible trace of the original's sense of euphoria and fear. Here we all were staring at a guy on pedalling towards a ramp on a little red bicycle and yet, there was real pause, a real breath held, an authentic moment of danger. The really beautiful thing about the piece however was its loving attention to detail; it wasn't *just* a good idea. It was done so thoughtfully, borrowing text from a number of sources to create something that already at this early stage was already subtly questioning and undermining the collective excitement that it so effortlessly generated.

Anyway, it was a beautiful piece and I was super excited when we agreed to have them come do the next stage of development at Forest Fringe. In the meantime I also got the chance to see a version of possibly their most popular show *A Western*, which has toured across the country. It's a wonderful little show; a show that demonstrates that the act of playing (because they are always playing at being in a Western, covering themselves in Ketchup, riding on another little bike) can be as meaningful as doing anything *for real*. What struck me this time however was that both pieces were slightly in love with and slightly nervous of this kind of deeply Midwestern American mythology that seemed so familiar to me.

I grew up listening to my parents record collection, getting lost in the world of a collection of denim-wearing, guitar twanging lovesick bearded men roaming dusty open roads in big American cars and staring out at an ocean I'd never even seen. The Eagles and the Allman Brothers (and everything from Steven Spielberg to Perry Mason Investigates) were the nearest I came to a cultural heritage. Despite my resolutely, awkward, humdrum Britishness there's part of me that feels in some weird way American. But a kind of imagined, mythic American.

And this is another reason I love the Action Hero – that they seem too to have this strange pull. They wear their Englishness on their sleeves and yet there's a longing for freeway pancake houses and lonely towns called things like Splitwater Falls and the faded yellow colour of any American TV show from the 70s. It's strange and it's sad and it's familiar and I think they tap into something really meaningful for a whole generation of suburban English kids who's parents were big fans of Christopher Cross or who spent their childhood watching movies like *Capricorn One* and *Earthquake*, a beautiful, bizarre film that coincidentally features its own desperate daredevil hero.