

# apardon?

## Mark E Smith in conversation at the Institute of Contemporary Arts: non-communication fiasco-ah!

This is not an interview or an audience, it's a *happening*. Really?

Well it is according to Michael Bracewell, the novelist and *Late Show/Blitz* magazine pundit at large who will tonight be wrestling with one of the most difficult problems the late 20th century has to offer: Mark E Smith.

Whether the happening will consist of naked mud wrestlers extemporising poetry (the stuff that made the ICA famous), or simply an ale-charged Smithy flattening anyone who asks him about Brix, is unclear. It's intriguingly billed as "Mark E Smith talking about his experience as a self-taught artist", but such promise is blown right out of the water as soon as the two arrive on a

*History Today*-style podium. Bracewell proves to be a peak-quiffed *Without Walls* type in black peg trousers, and his glasses hang around his neck on one of those string things that Larry Grayson used to have. Smithy is wearing the self-same leather jacket he had on for *Top Of The Pops* and looks totally bemused at the whole shebang. Oh dear.

What follows veers between the hilarious and the excruciating. Smith grins sheepishly like he's never seen an audience before, smokes like a bastard and either blanks Bracewell's questions (cringe!) or bats them away with a completely unrelated answer (hooray!). The latter are much more fun and go something like this...

On The Fall's relevance to the resurgence of punk: "Nirvana? Yeah, middle class Americans with too much money, aren't they Michael? He goes out with an actress, doesn't he? Courtney Pine..."

On translating The Fall's peculiarly English aesthetic to overseas audiences: "The only place that doesn't take us is France. Which suits me. I've been arrested three times on internal flights in America, y'know. You're not allowed to smoke. They have SWAT teams and everything. You just wave your passport and go, Take me to the British Consul!"

And on musical influences in the Smith family: "Me Uncle Joe used to

play the saw. Beautiful sound..."


Bracewell flannels desperately, and visibly deflates with relief when Smithy suggests questions from the audience (sample query: "Do you like Sebadoh?"). But by then it's clear that we're not going to find out about Smithy's auteur theory, and he's not going to twat anybody either.

Thirty-seven minutes into the happening – one long Pinteresque pause, in fact – Mark stands up.

"Mind if I split?" he asks, and disappears into the night. There are three unopened bottles of Molson on the table, and the mighty Fall remain safe, sound and totally inexplicable.

ANDREW HARRISON

# no questions-ah!



**"Nirvana? Yeah, middle-class Americans with too much money, aren't they Michael? He goes out with an actress, doesn't he? Courtney Pine..."**

**"You courtin' then, Michael?"**