

Alex Farrar, Harry Meadley, Iona Smith

A LATENTO

3

Superscript (e.s.a & l.m.u)
and degree show

A LATENTO 3

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Editorial

Starting Point- Etymology Coterie

Derek Horton mentions that this volume will be the first made after its three contributors graduated from the same Art Degree, and also that it will be the first (and only) occasion of our discussing our position hitherto as ‘art students’. What has been cited by more than one party as our desire to operate professionally outside an institution and to engage with a contemporary art discourse had caused us to present ourselves to any willing audience as artists first, and students never. A word on a smattering of perceived arrogance here. The word *arrogant* arrives from an etymological route associated with stepping out of ones hierarchical domain (a man enters court to ask the king for his life), making oneself vulnerable to state a cause. It sits next to words like *pretension*; it prevents people from testing out ideas.

Institutions, in my experience, exist solely as something to be challenged, and should never, ever, encourage obedience. The only worthwhile alma mater is one that

Problematising

It is ironic that A Latento records and discusses artworks and exhibitions after the fact (in contrast to art catalogues which trade on the future merit of a collection of work), for which I am now writing an introduction, before it is bound, or in one piece, having seen only my own contribution.

A Latento is a demonstration of itself. In its earliest pronouncement it campaigned to raise awareness of itself, then it exhibited itself, lastly it was a reflection of itself incarnate in a gallery space. In this outing it is a book designed piecemeal, without discussion or debate. Each of us were responsible only for a specific area of the overall construction, on the page three sets of decisions meet for the first time.

Despite their declarations, A Latento has still to feature an introduction or explanation, preferring instead to stay in character throughout multiple guises. So to proceed, A Latento can be very easily

<^>><^<<<

[Excluding the times one of us did before]We made this journey three times and I made it once more. It takes three and a half minutes - I timed it. We made the reverse (return) journey only once and it was made twice without us. The return journey from the forth and final time I made the journey there, returned not to where we had come from, but to another place that was previously journeyed to by a group that had not journeyed to where I had just come from.

The first time was the same as the third - in the Leeds Met transit van containing all the works in the exhibition ^{superscript}. The second time the van was empty and the works were in the exhibition ^{superscript}. The forth time was in a taxi and the works were in the exhibition ^{superscript}. The only reverse journey we made was in the same van containing all the works in the exhibition ^{superscript}. In the reverse journeys made without us the works were in the exhibition ^{superscript}. Between the only return

encourages its own critique (and through that, critique of that critique, and so on). They should encourage individuality and ambition, and discourse without pedagogy. My debts are owed to people who have taught me to think. I would hope this stance is not confused with a similar and equally poisonous one, that treats universities as a business offering a product. One of these attitudes is about taking what is felt as owing, since the fee has been paid; the other is about attempting to engage with its accepted structure.

Each of us found the partitioned format of a degree show 'troublesome'. As a result, we sought the support of East Street Arts, Leeds, to house a self-curated exhibition to run parallel with, and support, the assessment of our degree show. It was titled ^{superscript}, and unlike our degree show did not ignore curatorial decisions that are part of a practice.

Meanwhile, we became aware at some point that the work we presented for our

described by the definition of its first issue, a performance.

*'Only a rehearsal doesn't have an audience'*¹

As a reflection of the atomisation of an art work in the 'information age', where the collective role of publications, journals, symposiums, websites and alternative mailing lists are acts of not only distribution, but equally part of an art practice. A Latento is an extension of our studio and exhibition practice, combining research, exhibition, and a way of presenting processes usually latent from a finished work.

This A Latento revolves around the climax of art education, conventionally topped out by the celebration of the achievement of individuals. Contained is evidence of the manoeuvres we took to produce a individual presentation of the work we each made over three years. We also took the liberty of recording the process of and inviting others to discuss its subsequent reception.

journey we made, and third journey there, the works were in the exhibition ^{superscript} but somewhere else - the place we originally made the first journey from.

We had to make the second and third journeys there, and two (of which we only made one) of the three reverse journeys because there was one journey that was not made (the return journey of which would have gone via the place that I had to journey too very last).

This journey would have been made in the Leeds Met mini bus, with all the works in the exhibition ^{superscript}, in the exhibition ^{superscript}. Those that would have been on the mini bus were those that exclusively got to attend the exhibition ^{superscript} between the only reverse journey we made and the third journey there. Though had they of made this journey-they would have just attended the exhibition ^{superscript} and it would have never needed to be anywhere else.

This journey, that was not made, was not

degree shows were all three invisible in some way – a floating box, a transparent bridge, a reclining 'ghost'.

¹. William Shakespeare, source unknown.

made because one person did not want to make it. This same person told the people (who I was not allowed to speak to) in the taxi in the forth and final time I made the journey there with, that they should not make the journey they did. The place I took them on the return journey, the person who refused to make the journey that was not made, had made the journey there.

[The journey there and back was made one final time by one of us, and on the return journey, one work was no longer in the exhibition ^{superscript}. That journey was not made by myself nor by the one of us who had made it previously before.]

Part One

SUPERScript (ESA & LMU)

ESA PATRICK Studios
St Mary's Lane
Leeds
LS9 7EN

* * * For Immediate Release * * *

superscript as part of UNITED
East Street Arts [ESA]
www.united-o.org.ukAlex Farrar
Harry Neadley
Iona SmithPV: Friday 22 May 6-8pm
Saturday 23 May - Friday 3 June
[12-6pm Monday - Saturday]

East Street Arts is proud to present ^{superscript}: a group show of Alex Farrar, Harry Neadley and Iona Smith. Working together as an artist consortium, each artist maintains their own autonomous practices, whilst corroborating as a supportive and critical body. Together, the consortium has organised exhibitions, taken residencies and produced a serial publication.

Their diverse artistic practices naturally found each other whilst studying on the Fine Art degree at Leeds Metropolitan University and in November 2007 they released the first volume of *A Latento*, a document divided into three equal sections of which they each hold control. 'Latento', an acronym of manifest, states out that which is manifest, but explains that which is latent. As such, it acts as an appendix elaborating on the back stories to their works - and in turn the artists themselves. A *Latento* vol.1 was launched at the opening of their regionally televised residency-cum-exhibition 'Too Forty Two' at 42 New Briggate. In October 2008 ESA hosted 'Samelbände' - what would have been a standard group exhibition was divided equally into three successive solo shows, bound together as a larger exhibition. Taking place the two weeks directly before their Degree Show, where their work will be dispersed among the labyrinth of cubicles, ^{superscript} presents for the first time Farrar, Neadley and Smith exhibiting solely alongside each other.

Alex Farrar will be giving an exclusive preview of a new suit handmade from Ermesegildo Zegna super 228 merino wool. Harry Neadley is debuting monochrome paintings of every possible image and his most Finnish work to date - a black box. Iona Smith's head is being paralleled with her local high viewpoint - Ruby Crag.

* * * * *

A *Latento* Vol. 2 Launch Event
as part of **HELL YES**, PSL [Project Space Leeds]
Friday 29 May 6-8pm
PSL
Whitethall Waterfront
2 Riverside Way
Leeds
LS1 4EN

A *Latento* Vol. 2 - Samelbände
ISBN: 1755-5787
Paperback, 208 pages
Edition of 100
£6.00

Developing from the exhibition 'Samelbände', A *Latento* Vol.2 - Samelbände covers the consortium's activities throughout 2008. Samelbände were popular because the Tutor praised as texts were widely released unbound, owners would have collections of texts and manuscripts by various authors bound together in large volumes, for posterity, cross-reference and to be more economically viable.

The first 30 visitors to the publication launch event will be given a free copy.

* * * * *

The minute ^{superscript} closes their Leeds Metropolitan University Fine Art Degree show opens.

PV: Friday 5 June 6-8pm
Continues daily until Thursday 11 June.
8 Block - Main Studios
Leeds Metropolitan University
Civic Quarter
Leeds
LS1 3BE

* * * * *

Friday 22 May ESA 6-8 / Friday 29 May PSL 6-8 / Friday 5 June LMU 6-8

East Street Arts
ESA Patrick Studios
St Mary's Lane
Leeds
LS9 7EH

www.esaweb.org.uk
www.united-o.org.uk

superscript as part of **UNITED**
East Street Arts

Saturday 23 May – Friday 5 June
[Monday–Saturday 12–6pm]

Alex Farrar
Harry Meadley
Iona Smith

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a group show of Alex Farrar, Harry Meadley and Iona Smith.

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* * * * *

Viganella, a village isolated in the mountainous border land between Italy and Switzerland, is situated at the bottom of a steep valley, one side of which cuts off all direct sunlight from November 9th until February 4th every year. In 2007, locals, lead by a newly appointed mayor Franco Midalli, campaigned for the installation of a giant mirror, positioned at the top of the valley slope and remote controlled to follow the course of the sun, reflecting light back down on to the town square. Last winter they successfully installed it and **Alex Farrar** spent a week researching the effects of what seemed to embody the Russian Constructivist towers and modernist icons to the future. Funded by a travel grant awarded to him by the Edna Lumb Prize, *Viganella 7th-14th November 2008* fulfils the single obligation to the Edna Lumb trustees, to provide documentation of the trip. Constructed using a pin hole camera, medium format film was exposed twice a day, providing an arbitrary daily measurement of the natural light and the surrounding community.

Using fabric purchased directly from the Ermenegildo Zegna mills in nearby Biella; a historic mill town that now supplies the worlds finest fabrics, Farrar continues the ongoing work 'Suit'. Making a suit by hand from a uniform pattern and wearing the product of his labour to attend every subsequent public appearance as an artist, Suit No. 1 was involved in the temporary theft of a boulder in broad daylight, appeared on local news and 'Big Brothers Little Brother' and attended two years worth of meetings and openings as Farrar looked to become a professional.

* * * * *

Harry Meadley wishes for no further information to be disclosed.

* * * * *

Why climb a mountain?
Look! A mountain there.
I don't climb a mountain.
Mountain climbs me.
Mountain is myself.
I climb on myself.
There is no mountain
nor myself.
Something
moves up and down in the air
--- Nanao Sakaki

If, as she suspects, every object is a microcosm, **Iona Smith's** head is paralleled with her local high viewpoint (Huby Crag). Using her environment's boundaries as a macrocosm of her own, she has historically made a point of collecting views (and physical shards) from her surrounding highpoints, and reasons that this can only be an attempt to extend the limits of her reach. Like pits and bridges frequently appearing in Smith's work, she points to hilltops as a symbol of transition, another 'end point' before departure. Arriving at these boundaries, where it's easy to forget where you come from if there's no question of your return, like the last stage of alchemy, ribedo, 'the reddening', everything is gold.

* * * * *

Related Events:

* * * * *

A Latento Vol. 2 Launch Event
HELL YES
Friday 29 May 6–8pm
PSL (Project Space Leeds)
Whitehall Waterfront
2 Riverside Way
Leeds
LS1 4EH

A Latento Vol. 2 – Sammelbände
ISSN: 1755-5787
Paperback, 208 pages
Edition of 100
£6.00

Hell Yes are proud to host the launch of
A Latento Vol. 2 – Sammelbände,
the latest publication from Alex Farrar,
Harry Meadley and Iona Smith. Developing
from the exhibition „Sammelbände“, the
book covers the consortium's activities
throughout 2008.
Hell Yes will be giving away free
copies to the first 30 visitors.
www.h-e-l-l-y-e-s.com

* * * * *

The minute *superscript* closes
their Fine Art **Degree Show** opens.

FV: Friday 5 June 6–8pm
Continues daily until Thursday 11 June.
H Block – Main Studios
Leeds Metropolitan University
Civic Quarter
Leeds
LS1 3HE

* * * * *

Works List

1:1
Harry Meadley, 2009
Chroma Key Green on canvas
150 x 150cm

Mountain Climbs Me
Iona Smith, 2009
Framed C-print, gold plaster crown
841 x 1189cm / 18 x 15 x 8cm

Suit no.2
Alex Farrar, 5th June 2009 -
Four metres of Ermenegildo Zegna super 220 merino wool,
on two bespoke tables
dimensions variable

Suit Pledge
Alex Farrar, February 2007 -
A4 document, signed by the artist
42cm x 33cm (framed)

φ:1
Harry Meadley, 2009
Chroma Key Green on canvas
200.632 x 124cm

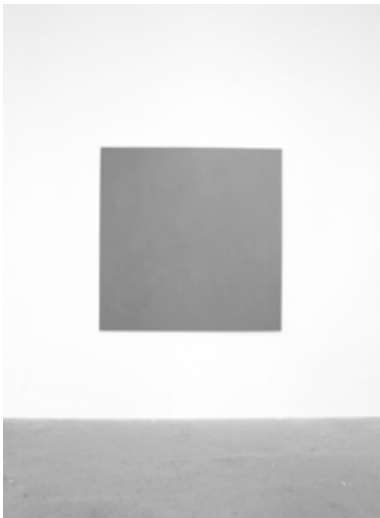
Viganella, 7th-14th November 2008
Alex Farrar, 2008
2 medium format films shot through a pin hole camera,
unique contact print
53cm x 63cm (framed)

Denote, connote; denote, connote:
Harry Meadley, 2009
Black enamel, mdf
15.9 x 20 x 15.5cm

A Payment - For the Ghoul, David and Apollo
Iona Smith, 2009
Plaster
6 x ø1.3cm

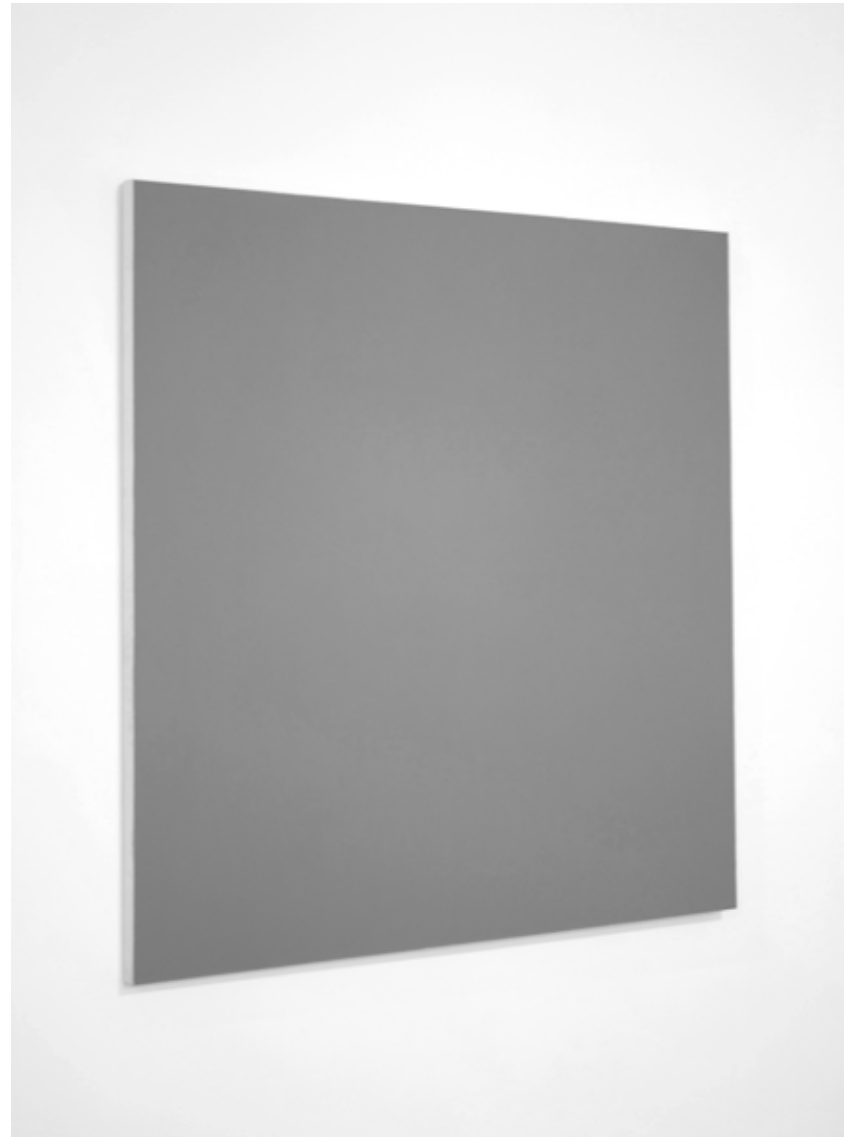


Installation



Harry Meadley , *1:1*

P 16



P 17



Iona Smith, *Mountain Climbs Me*

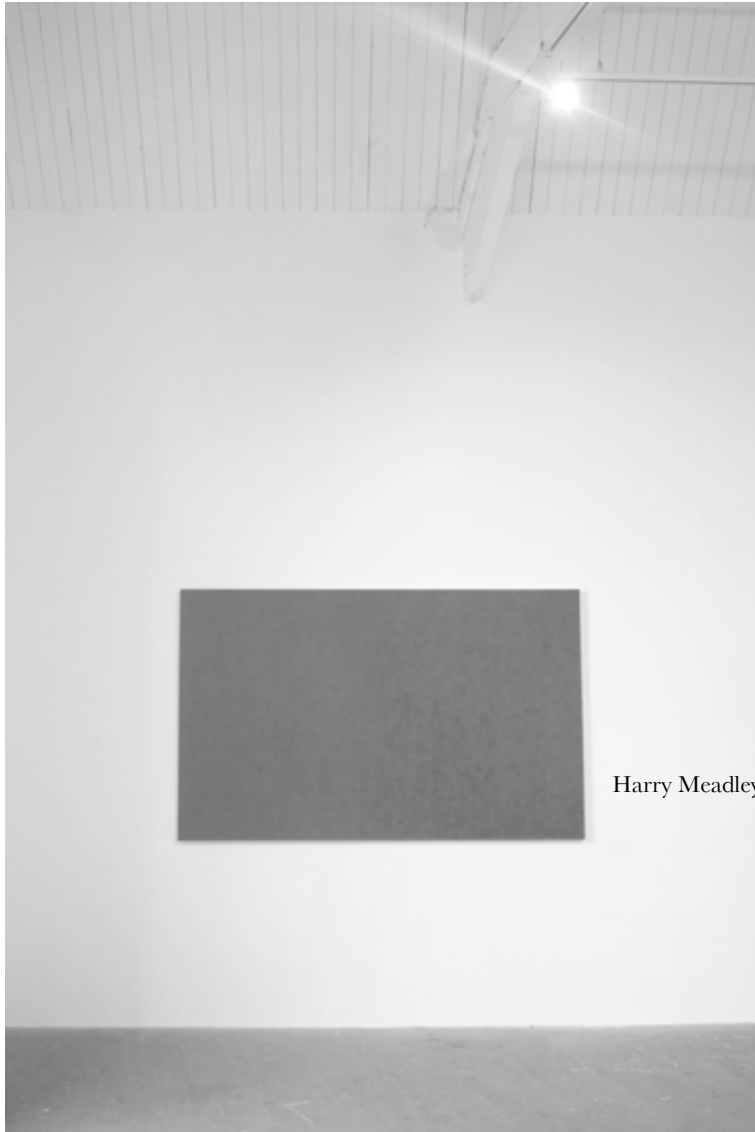




Alex Farrar, *Suit no.2*



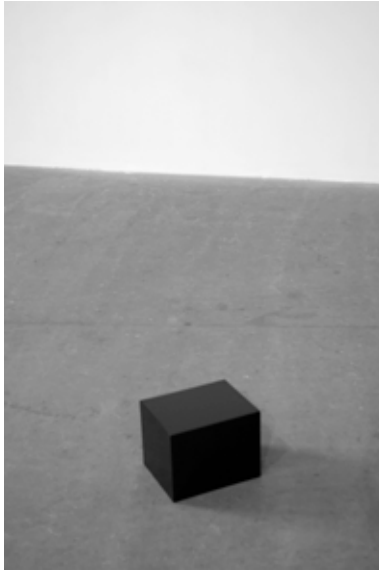
Suit Pledge, 2007 -



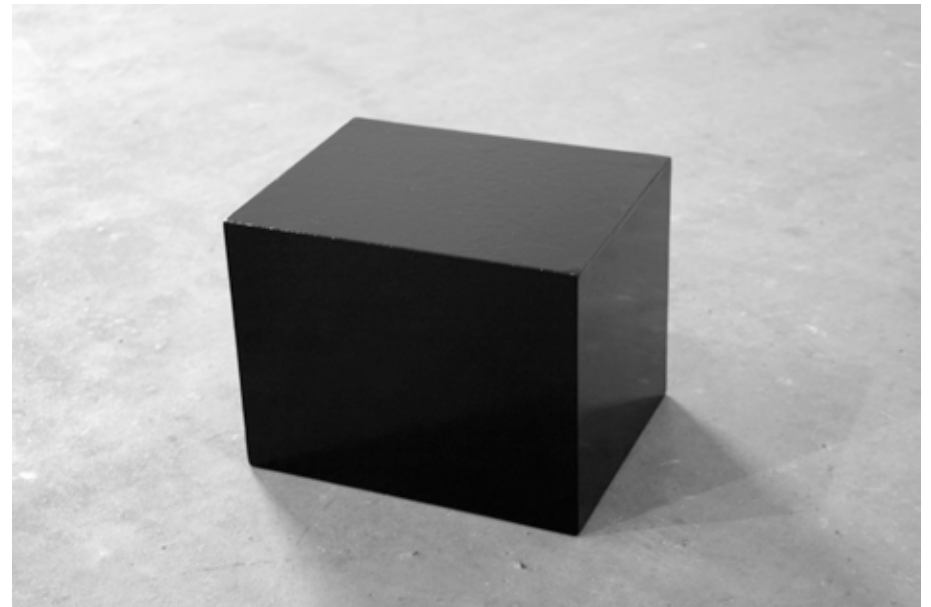
Harry Meadley, $\varphi:1$







Harry Meadley, *Denote, connote; denote, connote:*





When Harry Meadley asked me to write about my recollections of *superscript* – which I visited in June 2009 with Leeds Art Walk – he stated that “*all three of us gave quite a lot away about our works*”, referring to the introductory talk he gave with fellow artists Iona Smith and Alex Farrar. This notion of ‘giving too much away’ has bothered me a bit since. Harry seemed to say it almost like an admission or an apology, as if they wished they could take it back. But now they are asking me to write about their work, based upon their talk. So notwithstanding my lapses in memory or attention, I am instrumental in giving away their secrets to you.

Is it actually possible to give too much away? I suspect the idea that it is comes from feeling that telling people exactly what a work is or why it was made puts a kind of linear, explanatory logic on the work that pins down its meaning rather allowing people to make up their own minds. This is an issue pertinent to the work that Harry had on show. *Denote, connote; denote, connote*: is a black cuboid or “black box” made to the dimensions of Harry’s skull. He explained the term “black box device” as a system or object where we know the input and output but are largely unaware of what happens in between. We don’t need to have knowledge of its internal workings to use it. Computers, mobile phones etc would come in this category for most users, so would our brains. Actually one can think of every artwork as a black box, a transaction between artist and viewer where the transmission of meaning or affect is somewhat elusive. Might, then, an artist telling us why they made a work – revealing the ideas that went into it – neglect this elusive process and the explanation almost supersede the work itself, thus replacing a more nuanced and intangible object with a matter of fact stand in?

Giving too much away?

Harry’s other works *1:1* and *φ:1* appeared at first as monochrome canvases – paintings that reference painting, an anachronism transposed here from the 1950’s. Yet these canvases actually reference the digital age and imply the imposition of any possible image. Harry told us they were painted in chroma key green. Keying, using chroma key, is the process used with TV weather maps and film special effects. So the canvases are blank spaces, waiting for the digital insertion of an image. I can imagine them being curated into an exhibition about the role of painting in our digital world. But, in tandem with the black box, they invite reflection on the role of the viewer in the art process, providing a space where we can project what we want. The opposite to suggesting that an artist can tell us what a work is ‘about’ is the idea that the viewer is the author of its meaning. But of course, a viewer can never impose any image. The way we make sense will depend upon clues given in the work, any textual support, our prior knowledge and experience.

Our culture is highly visual but in terms of ideas and argument it tends to privilege verbal over visual modes of representation (seeing the visual often as entertainment; unreflective and uncritical). Art is important for its critical use of visual media and one of its strengths is its ability to mess up distinctions between objectivity/subjectivity, rationality/irrationality, logic/emotion etc. The artworks in *superscript* all traverse this boundary. They play with modes of substitution, transposition and (non-)equivalence – adopting methods that have intimations of logic, mathematical or scientific process yet pairing these with aspects that are more poetic or metaphorical.

Viganella, 7th-14th November 2008 is a series of photographs Alex took with a pin-

hole camera in Viganella, Italy. The town sits in a valley shaded from direct sunlight for nearly 4 months a year. This resulted in almost total darkness until a large mirror was installed in 2008 to reflect sunlight into the valley. Alex’s photos were taken post-mirror and the exhibition handout described them as “providing an arbitrary daily measurement of the natural light and the surrounding community.” This intent manifests a tension also present in the exhibition overall: the words ‘arbitrary’ and ‘measurement’ do not sit easily together. I recall in the last A Latento volume Alex included graphs and diagrams relating to the mirror, giving a nod towards the science and engineering involved. Yet the subtitles were in Italian; it had the ‘look’ of science without requiring you to understand the content. Similarly here, Alex uses the idea of measuring but the images capture only a moment of light telling you little about its intensity or quality. The choice to use a pin-hole camera seems appropriate (the light going into a hole like the light entering a darkened valley) but its logic is poetic, not reasoned. The photographs look overexposed or underexposed, Alex had little control over the outcome but as a series they are evocative making me consider the physical and emotional experience of inhabiting this changing landscape.

The photos have one objective function providing ‘proof’ of Alex’s artistic work. The single obligation he had to the Edna Lumb trustees (who funded the project) was to document his trip. An interest in the role of the artist and what is required to fulfil it links *Viganella...* with the other works he had in *superscript*. *Suit no.2* is a suit Alex made to wear whenever he was being an artist (exhibition launches, negotiation meetings etc) and *Suit Pledge* is a framed document in which he pledges to wear the suit at such functions. As intimated

Suit no.2 is a re-make, his second attempt. Though he professed to have improved his sewing skills, I enjoyed the discrepancy between the look of a smart, iconic suit and the wonky, badly sewn seams that revealed themselves on closer inspection. It is a work about partaking in a role and the pretence, bravado and potential failure of this; his hand sewing elicits associations of craftsmanship and of being a self-made man. It is further complicated by the fact that the fabric came from Biella (near Viganella), a town apparently known for its textile manufacturing. I'm not convinced that it is necessary that the suit be made from this fabric but perhaps it has a special authority in the world of men's tailoring. Similar to the decision to use a pin-hole camera it 'makes sense' to procure fabric for a suit when in a location famed for just that.

Iona's work *Mountain climbs me* refers to a hill not a valley but like Alex's *Viganella...* is to do with psychogeography or how our environment affects emotions and behaviour. A cast of the top of Iona's head sat on the floor below a photograph of the apex of Huby Cragg – her local high view point. The cragg had some graffiti at the top – names and love matches scratched into the rock –and also a gold pool (like the melted gold head) left there by Iona. The pool was like the graffiti, an individual inscribing themselves at a communal viewpoint, manifesting an urge similar to leaving a rock on a cairn or planting a flag on the moon. Iona explained that the gold was a reference to alchemy (and its attempts to turn common metals into gold). She likened the alchemist's quest to the human desire to seek out the furthest, highest and deepest points on earth and beyond. The potential for transformation in alchemy provided a metaphor for pushing personal physical boundaries and geographical boundaries. I would not have

made this link without prompting but knowing this intention is not essential. I saw it as a game of one up-manship or 'king of the castle:' if she stands on the mountain she is taller, the top of her head higher than the mountain's peak, able to look down with a different perspective on the familiar world around. But as the title suggests, not only do we climb mountains, they climb us too, by which I understand that living with a particular landscape influences us, becomes part of our identity. It inscribes itself in us too. Thinking about it now, alchemy provides a good metaphor also for the relationship between the objective and the emotional that is an underlying interest in this article. It mingles the rational and the fantastic, practicality and desire.

Iona's second work *A Payment – For the Ghoul, David and Apollo* was the last work spoken about in the art-walk talk and I can't really remember what she said about it. I know it is a life-size plaster copy of one of her boyfriend (and artist) David Steans' fingers. I also know that he has a tattoo on his arm of a hand missing a finger, so this is the missing finger. Trying to figure out its meaning, I wonder if it is index finger (pointing), middle finger (swearing) or the third middle finger whose name I don't know and I think it has no semiotic function until I realise that that's your ring finger. I e-mail Iona for help and she confirms it is a cast of the ring finger. This has intimations of marriage (replacing the finger so David is marriageable) but this is a bit sentimental and also there is the title, suggesting instead that the finger was given as a payment, a pound of flesh. Iona explains David's tattoo followed a conversation they had about palmistry and parts of the hand being dedicated to different celestial bodies/deities. Apollo – the patron of the arts – owns the ring finger. So perhaps David's tattoo suggests

a deficit of artistry or a desire to piss off the patron of the arts. Or has he given his flesh as a deal to secure his artistic talent? But what about the plaster cast? This is further dedicated to the Ghoul of African folklore who, according to stories, demands a strip of skin from finger to chin. Iona explains that the same story contains a raven that follows the then bleeding heroine, covering up the tracks of blood with dust. It is a work that, on its own, held little meaning for me but with some explanation makes me think about obligation, creativity and exchange. It represents a dialogue between two artists in a relationship. I start thinking about the balance of power/recognition in other famous artistic partnerships and wonder if *Payment...* is a reclamation by Iona of an idea that was co-authored.

Some people say that art shouldn't need explanation but (as an absolute statement) I disagree. It really depends on the nature of the work and, to some degree, the prior knowledge of the person looking at it. Lots of works have anchoring or suggestive titles, some benefit from extra information in exhibition hand outs or wall texts (giving context that one might not otherwise be familiar with). Even if a work does 'speak for itself' – and certainly I think an artwork won't be very successful if it gives nothing away on first look – then additional information can make the experience of looking richer. Rather than closing down meaning such information has the potential to generate a multiplicity of reference allowing each individual viewer to think beyond their personal experience.

“superscript”, the title of the exhibition, has an implicit reference to the idea of the footnote – that which is additional but explanatory or expansive. This too is how I think of the art walk talks. Lots of people

on the art walk (we have feedback forms to prove it) cite the talks given at each venue by participating artists or curators as the best bit of the walk. For some people this may manifest a general discomfort with interpreting the work themselves (will I have the 'correct' response?) but more often talks provide a quick route into the work on a short visit. People particularly like talks where artists and curators describe the process they went through, often talking about their indecision and pragmatic choices. Such discussions rarely close down the work but open up understanding. As long as what is said doesn't pretend that that's all there is or is the only interpretation, I don't think it is possible to reveal too much.

Amelia Crouch is an artist [HYPERLINK “http://www.ameliacrouch.com”](http://www.ameliacrouch.com)

Leeds Art walk takes place on the first Wednesday of every month: [HYPERLINK “http://www.leedsartwalk.wordpress.com”](http://www.leedsartwalk.wordpress.com)

Alex Farrar & Rory Macbeth

A I recall having very intense tutorials with you in my last year, so I'm not really worrying about what happens now, just going to let you do your thing rory// lets focus/ ^{superscript?}

R Haha! it is ...ok.... I guess the tutorial thing must have been a bit intense with me constantly asking you stuff, and not letting up... for me it was probably a lot easier!// anyhow ^{superscript?}...

You made me sweat, a lot// I think you had limitless enthusiasm from 'not being in the business too long'.

Sorry.... i guess this is revenge...a mix of technology and typing is making me sweat!

That was my plan// so ^{superscript},

I think being new to the teaching thing does encourage a kind of enthusiasm, but the stuff I was dealing with begged enthusiasm... I think first and foremost the show was a really professional thing... that surprised people// The twin show thing was a tricky one to pull off in at times quite discouraging circumstances. It was the resolute professionalism that made it work, and by this I mean that when things went wrong or got in the way, the three of you didn't complain, but found really meaningful ways around the problems.

Well I don't think we ever really felt victimised, or

at least not for too long, with help from you we had people on our side from the get go.// I don't think our degree show would have been the same without the politics and the games.

I think the whole degree show finality thing can be a problem for people who have an approach to work like you did. What I think was useful was that you managed to find a way of making things fit together inspite of the structures around you. It'll be interesting to see if you rely on these antagonistic structures for your work , or whether 'freedom' gives the work a new direction// how does making work feel now in your new situation...?

There is a bullish institutional promotion that is attached to degree shows and we didn't want it to be our only platform, however, wouldn't you agree that there always exists a contradiction, or conflict of interests between the 'autonomy of art' and the rest of the working world. Whether it's commercial or artist run galleries, everyone has an agenda. In that spirit, there is always a structure to antagonise.

Well I think it is and will always be an ongoing problem, but one that potentially kicks up interesting things... I guess it is using that mis-match, that gap, somehow can be a good way to generate work...

The Rietveld has a reputation and there exists an identifiable 'school style' which I feel contains a lot more traps than the Met¹.

It can also be a bad way, and get very self referential (I have to constantly check myself on this one)... but it is healthy to at least be aware of the mismatch and to an extent the kind of absurdity as well as the absolute rightness of what it means to make art (sorry I'm behind again!)// Well I guess the only important thing about that Rietveld reputation thing is to recognise it and see if it something that can be useful to the work, or that the work makes sense of in some way... I don't mean that it is essential that you network a lot... but that the work makes use of

the wierdness of that situation, without it only being about that system...// Anything that is trapping about it can be turned around to your advantage, as you have clearly shown you know in the way you handled the whole degree show thing.

Exactly, although I think part of the problem is the distance that exists between what I'm in and what I'm doing, which is why it's always nice to create your own structure or network, whether it's with an artspace or patrons, or 'consortium'.

Well it's good to surround yourself with a whole variety of those things, so that you don't rely too much on one and loose a sense of independence.

I remember you mentioning something about the difference between the way superscript worked at the met to how it did at ESA², you were surprised by how easily it fit?

...and other structures are useful, but setting up your own structures is essential...(sorry behind again)// I was surprised by how easily it fitted. I was thinking that the whole transfer of work would mean that we'd just see the bits of work, but what we actually saw was a show// I think that to able and be willing to undertake such a task is really important, whether it worked or not... it was the gesture that seemed as important ... it was a real bonus that it was a really cohesive show

It did come together (curatorially, in the space) very easily, I think the point we were stressing was that 'the exhibition' was a fundamental part of our practice which we wanted to have assessed, so it was important to install a show, rather than work// Could you elaborate on the faculties reaction to the show at the met?

That makes complete sense... it may have been 'easy' , but I think by that you mean right, and therefore just had to be done... most other students would have balked at the idea (well they wouldn't

have even thought of it).... in a sense I see the the met thing as a gesture and a show, and the ESA thing was a show.

Why do you think it was that some had such a hard time accomodating us?

Haha... the faculties reaction...well first and foremost I need to say that I am bound by a confidentiality thing around the whole assessment thing (rightly), but that leaves plenty to discuss!

Yes yes, there is also always chance to proof read Rory!

I think the college has developed a system that deals with degree shows, and with site specific work pretty efficiently, but for some reason the double whammy you presented took that system by surprise a bit.

I got the impression they didn't know what to do for quite a long time, and when we ended up taking control and bringing the show up to the met, they weren't really happy about that either.

Well, maybe, but it was one of a thousand things to deal with, and therefore perhaps got put on the 'problem' list rather than the 'exciting' list .

Ha ha there's an exciting list at the met?

I think that taking control is essential at all times, in all circumstances... you were doing this with the work that showed in the college.

You mean with En Plein Air?

Yes... well you all did with your individual and group attitude to what a degree show in the college meant... you had clearly discussed it at length, and worked out how it could work best for you all./

Continued on page 126

Rory Macbeth is an artist currently making and teaching art in Leeds. He founded the alternative platform for non-represented artists *Pilot*: His own work has been shown internationally, most recently at the Galerie Sara Guedj, Paris, Standpoint Gallery London and Nassauischer Kunstverein, Germany.

[1] Leeds Metropolitan University.

[2] East Street Arts, Patrick Studios, Leeds.

*

I was surprised when I saw Harry Meadley's first monochrome painting. Actually, I was more than surprised – I was concerned. Monochromes? In 2009? What was he playing at?

There must be more to it, I thought, as we sat staring at 1:1, an inscrutable 150 x 150cm square of flat saturated green, straight out of the tin. I inspected the workmanship, examining the edges, the quality of the stretcher, the tension of the canvas. I looked at the usual things one looks at when presented with a painting reduced to its barest essentials. I even looked *behind* it. No, I'm lying – I never looked behind it. But I wanted to. When someone does something out of character, you want to know what's behind it.

This is what was behind it: the paint was Chroma Key Green. Chroma Key Green is the colour used in TV and film to obtain a 'neutral' backdrop against which any image can be superimposed. The most common use of 'Greenscreen' is in weather forecasts. The forecaster stands in front of the blank wall, and the weather map is digitally projected onto everything that isn't green (i.e., everything but the forecaster). Before digital technology, Bluescreen was widely used. The image sensors in digital cameras are capable of screening out any colour, but they are most sensitive to green, which is why that colour makes the most effective 'mask'. This change from blue to green is fortunate for Harry – Yves Klein already having monopolised blue monochromes. We might even speculate that, without this change, Harry would not have begun making monochromes, that his adoption of an ostensibly obsolete form has been engendered entirely by developments in modern technology.

Harry also informed me that this single canvas would soon be joined by others, their proportions dictated by a system of aspect ratios established by the proportions of the first. This monochrome was 1:1; the next would be 2:1. Then we would have 1:2, and so on, every painting titled as its aspect ratio. These ratios could be specified by the artist or commissioned by others. The only rule was that no ratio should be repeated.

But back to Chroma Key Green. As we can see, Chroma Key Green functions as a 'host' for other images. To the initiated (cameramen, industry technicians, directors), the colour is an instant signifier of pictorial deferral: 'project onto me whatever you like'. And this is in fact what happens when these paintings are reproduced in print or online: the Chroma Key Green is screened out and replaced with arbitrary images (recent installation shots show the paintings in their altered and unaltered states). The monochromes thus have a dual condition: in actuality they are one thing, and in virtuality they are anything you want them to be (though it's unclear, at this stage, who this 'you' is, who assumes the responsibility of altering them). Clearly, this dual condition is where the meaning of the work resides. If, following Walter Benjamin, we accept that reproduction diminishes the aura of the artwork through mass-circulation, then the Chroma Key Green paintings accept this fate in advance, only existing as actual things to be effaced as virtual things.

* Ashton, Sean (2009) *Harry Meadley's Disappearing Monochromes*

In Benjamin's time, the diminution of the artwork's aura was restricted to the displacement of a material artefact into the representational realm and its mass-circulation as an image. Today, this diminution is compounded tenfold, not least by the advent of manipulative software and the meta-juxtaposition with other images represented by the web. Benjamin's 1936 claims that 'reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual' (he refers especially to the sanctifying ritual of exhibition), and that 'to an ever greater degree, the work of art produced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility', are of course hyper-relevant in the Digital Age, but we must add – uncontroversially – that the emancipation referred to here has transformed reproduction into a new ritual, not just in relation to artworks but to lived experience. The schema that Benjamin applied to the reproduced artwork now holds as a general psycho-social model. As 'digital natives' begin to outnumber the analogists (with their memories of film and chemicals, trips to 'the developers', the quaint toleration of the interval between taking a photo and seeing it), the belief that if a thing does not exist online then it doesn't exist at all is gaining real purchase. When I first began teaching, and told students to research certain artists, they expressed mild disappointment when they couldn't find them on the web. They now express annoyance; soon, they will express consternation. A friend recently told me that her flatmate came back from a club one morning at 7am, exhausted, but not too tired to post the photos of her evening on Facebook *before going to bed*. Forgive the hysteria of those italics, but it is the methodicalness of this that I find chilling, the diligence with which lived experience is quickly parsed through the USB, endorsed, substantiated, made credible, through its reproduction as an image. The reciprocity between actual and virtual that Benjamin wrote of has become internalised as a behavioural mechanism.

Benjamin continues, in the same passage from which the foregoing is quoted: 'From a photographic negative... one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual [i.e., the ritual of actual exhibition], it begins to be based on another practice – politics.'¹ I return, via that word *politics*, to my earlier parenthetical query: who gets to manipulate the Chroma Key Green paintings on their journey from an exhibition context to the reproductive context of print and web? Who presides over the monochrome's disappearance, its defection from the 'purely optical' doctrines of Clement Greenberg? What is the relationship between the thing that disappears and the thing that emerges in its stead, between the visual blankness of the original painting and the visual plenitude of the images pasted over it in its 'reproduction'? Is the content of these images arbitrary, or might it be assigned a specific political agency?

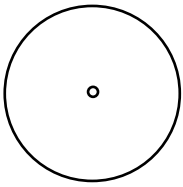
In her recent short essay 'Drawing the Blank: Notes, Quotes and Images', Monika Szewczyk writes that '[t]o be worth talking about, blanks must exist in the context of power. This is not necessarily to limit the notion of the blank to that of a "power vacuum"... but to introduce the blank as

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt; trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), p.218.

something with borders, within a context, not something that is “good” in and of itself.² Seen in a group show, the Chroma Key Green paintings appear as blanks inserted in a context. To what extent these contexts are acknowledged as ‘contexts of power’ may depend on the licence given to (or withheld from) individuals to participate in the alteration of the monochromes in their journey from actual to reproduced state. Does the artist reify this power structure by granting us permission to alter the work, and risk overdetermining its role in our interpretation of the monochromes, or does he allow it to remain a hypothetical aspect, leaving the political potential of their alteration to our imagination? But what sort of exhibiting context would encourage such participation? We may imagine, for the sake of argument, two options. The first might find the monochromes shown only in politically volatile contexts (the West Bank, Deutschebank...), with a consequent unleashing of debate when they are ‘reproduced’ online or in print form (it is easy to imagine the partisan slogans that would usurp their neutral surfaces); the second might see them doing the rounds in the usual museums and galleries, the Chroma Key Green presented as a blank signifier of the viewer’s prerogative to ‘project’ meaning onto the work (a symbol, perhaps, of Kant’s *sensus communis*). Is either option – political mobilisation or political abstinence – particularly attractive? Or does the artist have something less dichotomous in mind? This series of paintings is, after all, at an early stage, and there is nothing wrong with taking an empirical rather than determinist approach to the politics of the work’s negotiation of actual and virtual realms.



² Monika Szewczyk, ‘Drawing the Blank: Notes, Quotes and Images’, F. R. David, Spring 2009, p.53.



Axes Mundi, Genii Locorum, Etcetera

Conversation with Phil Legard

IS: Can you tell me more about the idea of a genius loci, am I saying that right?

PL: It's the Latin term for the spirit of the place, and relates to tutelary deities, where there would be various tribes, who would all have their local gods; When the Olympian pantheon arrived, they became aspects of Olympic gods, so there's hundreds of different Venuses and Aphrodites, They were essentially a chaotic mass of local gods who had bizarre customs associated with them.

Which would be really particular to an area you mean?

Yeah. Well local folklore I guess. Essentially it's just this idea that there are these local gods that have an influence over areas. I don't really interpret that literally but it's a good poetic construct.

Would you relate it to saying that certain places have a particular 'quality'?

Yes.

And how would those qualities be defined do you think? Is it something to do with geology? People?

Yeah, some sort of a unity of a place, I don't know. There's a little quote in *Psychogeographia Ruralis* – hang on I've got a copy –

“Form is shape perceived in its totality
after its unfolding in real time”

-the sum total of all our reactions will stimulate a feeling.

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For me the only way to grasp a place is to have it dwelt on afterwards, so taking field recording and photographs, like a witch might take a cutting of

someone's toenails, hair or something as a sort of talisman.

A talisman?

Yeah, or a way to re-engage... You know how some people think photography steals the soul and that, and in a way maybe it is taking the soul of a place, to re-engage with...but I think a lot of what I do is to use a place as a kind of doorway to...

To what?

To more subconscious exploration. Like, in *Abital*, they're encounters with two genii on the backdrop of Wharfedale and Ilkley Moor. How much of it was about the genius loci, and how much about psychometeorology? You know, psychogeography is measuring perceptions and reactions to place and psychometeorology is your reaction to weather.

And back and forth maybe? It must work both ways?

Yeah

That's what we're getting at?

mm-hm.

....

So what made you choose Almscliffe Crag [Huby Crag] to do your gold-leafing?

It just became 'the hill' I would go to. The gold-leafing...well, for starters, there's the thing about hills which for me is about getting a better view of your environment; I kind of have to do that where ever I live now, there's something about high things, it's the thing you're always looking at and can always see, so if you know what you can see when you're up it, somewhere at the back your mind will always be this extension of what you can see the rest of the time, perhaps it's just a safety thing. P 41

Every area has its own omphalos, and I also

think that's the central dwelling point of the genius loci. When I'm around that area, Almscliffe Crag is definitely one of those. Most people probably go straight past it, but once you re-conceptualise it as the heart of that land it means something totally different. And the thing about going to high places, high places are holy, hardly anyone would see an elevated view of a place, there is a pagan mystery in height. Of course high rise buildings and elevators changed that, then you've got a view of the city.

...

But I wanted to get to your piece on Almscliffe Crag.

Oh right, well I'm interested in boundaries, where one thing stops and another starts, apparently, and what happens when you cross those boundaries, and when they get blurred. That essay I sent you was sort of starting to go down those lines. An association with otherness and it being a dangerous thing, and at a point where the division of things break down, causing a kind of chaos which I suppose I would relate to a kind of transformation; and I suppose, I made this kind of jump between that and alchemy, which is where the gold came in. I don't think it was a wild jump. I was talking to this friend of mine, (whose understanding of this stuff comes from the point of view of his being a psychotherapist), who was referring to his mother-in-law as being in a state of Rubedo.

Oh right, is this kind of Jungian alchemical metaphors?

Yeah this is where I started to go. I was interested in alchemy having been treated sometimes literally, sometimes as a metaphor, sometimes both. So, through this, somehow, the idea of what happens when an individual, separate form starts to dissolve its boundaries and there some kind of transformation which could be likened to -

- Just going off on an interesting tangent in my own mind, the omphalos as a center in the astrological-chemical kind of schema the sun is the centre of the universe, so gold seems appropriate.

Have you seen on the top of Huby crag the symbol of the circle with the dot in the middle, which is also the symbol of an axis mundi, and the sun, is carved there? Neat co-incidence. The thing which I'm trying to get at : if an otherness is considered a kind of chaos thing, or a danger thing or the Nigredo or the shadow persona then approaching that and the incorporation of that would create something that is whole, like Individuation, which in my mind I equated to things becoming gold.

And where is this Other in the landscape?

Where is it? Well it's just what's beyond isn't it? Beyond your own home.

I'm interested then to see how things might meet at these boundaries.

I had been writing about various customs that take place on community boundaries between two groups, some of them about affirming their different territory, some about gift-giving to keep their relationship good, to prevent war, some of it is to instil an idea that what is beyond your hometown is dangerous, which is kind of a different thing, and interpret that as you like. What else, oh yeah, then there are people who think they actually don't exist in places beyond their territory.

Like?

Like aboriginal Australians not believing they are really alive beyond the boundaries of their clan's Dreaming.

Have you ever heard of Cotard syndrome? Where people believe they don't actually exist.

The opposite of solipsism, sort of..?.

I suppose so. My friend Andy studying Neuropsychology's obsessed with this idea, and of people losing their identity.

Oh there's something I should maybe refer to here, I was on an island on a lake in Ireland once,

it hadn't been inhabited for a couple of hundred years and was total wilderness. One of the things about sixteen of us ended up doing there was swapping shoes and ending up on different parts of this island, not coming across another person for hours at a time, after a while, when all you can see of yourself is a muddy scratched person and someone else's shoes, something interesting starts to happen...

What particularly appeals to you about the landscape where you come from?

I don't think it's a matter of appealing, or about liking a place, or it being beautiful, it just doesn't exist anywhere else. For me it's like doing all the hard work of learning to be in a place and nowhere else will have that. It's just home isn't it. My family's not from there. They all left the places they were from, I don't have a regional accent, I left my first house when I was ten.

You were saying about playing music as a form of active imagination when you're in a specific place-

Well I like to use music when I'm in these places as something to distract the motor functions, and then then mind can drift, rather than some solemn meditation.

Is the music inconsequential?

It's a by-product, it's not the ultimate aim itself. It comes from taking clippings from places, as a witch might take a sympathetic thing from a victim, or someone they would want to heal. Basically it's taking bits of field recordings and working on them later. That also ties in with the idea of dreaming and working on a place. You're constantly revisiting it.

Is the landscape also inconsequential?

Mm, no, although.... no, because the landscape often provides the backdrop for what might be triggered in your mind, which are the product of your imagination, but also your imagination interacting with that

landscape, and the genius in that way, so the landscape isn't inconsequential. The genius loci is something that you feel, it's a tangible thing but it's equally impossible to define. In the Baroque garden you'd have the garden laid out in very clear instruction to place things in accordance with the genius loci, to try and set it in a way that would complement the surrounding landscape.

Like Japanese gardens? Like Japanese architecture?

Well, I don't know about that. Also everything you said in the garden would be to complement to genius loci. There would also be a fashion for putting a statue there that's supposed to be the genius itself, so this indescribable thing gets kind of penned down, in, er, this marble statue.

I was just going to say in that film with Jenny Agutter, erm - Walkabout. there are these strong images of people trying to grow English rose gardens in the Australian outback, and my Dad (who was born in Tasmania) always tell me about the style of landscape painting that existed there for a long time which always tried to paint local landscape to resemble English ones.

The other thing I was thinking was of when things get too specifically defined...that 'culture dies as soon as you write it down'.....

...

You were saying you were doing some work at Cecil Sharp House recently?

I was volunteering there, archiving 'stuff' - I just wanted to see what they did there, it's one of those places you hear about.

...

I'm looking into these things because I'm interested in cultural identity and how it gets formed and I think ours is buggered and I'd really like to know how to deal with that, as a country.

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I think that to some extent it's from an elitism of the upper classes - the idea that we

laugh at our folk traditions, morris dancing's a joke, etc. Because people are so aspirational in a way aswell, the idea that these are things that idiots do.

Right, because aspiration suggests having to feel ashamed of what you come from.

I've got this really great book of collected English folklore...it's got to be on one of these bookshelves...

...Oh I can't find it, but this is David Jones, a 20th century poet, he wrote this poem called 'To the Tutelar of the Place' we were talking about tutelary spirits earlier, so local gods, essentially. I'm thinking about how to write a poem to a genius loci -

Oh very good.

It's as impossible as defining it, but I think his poem does it really well, it's 1960.

When I was on this island I mentioned, that was kind of what we were there to do really, was try and...well, it was kind of about learning eloquence, and looking at poetry and language as a way of...yeah.

What kind of retreat was this?

Er, I'll come to that. So this guy is trying to compose a poem to ...?

To his concept of a universal spirit, he's a Welsh poet

It's been translated?

Well he wrote it in English. It's interesting that it follows some of the Classical ideas about how to compose poetry to gods, by using epithets and sort of their doings, so this is very much about mothering and also about death and talking about various epithets that you can give to the genius of the place. He doesn't write iambic hexameter or anything, every line is a paragraph.

An epithet, like 'Grey-eyed Athena who wears the Aegis'?

Yeah, like, the 'black Aphrodite', or something and also these titles tell us what they do- the Psychopomp: the leader of the spirits, the leader of the mind, I suppose, which is one of the epithets of Hermes, who guides the dead to the underworld. So something like 'Empress of the Labyrinth', or 'Mediatrice of all the deposits'..

Charming.

...‘protector of all things knowing and unknowable’. Then I thought, this is how you could write it if you were going along with all these Classical ideas.

When you say Classical ideas, whose ideas?

Proclus wrote briefly about it -- when was Proclus, Kate? --He wrote about how to write poetry to the gods. Anyway this guy's really interesting, especially this poem 'In Parenthesis', the third part is called 'Starlight Order', and it's about his experiences in the trenches in the First World War, and Starlight Order's about him going into the trenches at nighttime, and how it's like a maze, like, er you know a labyrinth, so how you go into a maze and then it becomes the otherworld, er, Annwn, the Celtic underworld where people are kind of half asleep or half awake, are they living are they dead, and then just looking out over no man's land, as the otherworld. There's a hundred or so pages of extracts here, and I've not read the entire thing. There's this bit in the seventh chapter about 'the Five Unmistakeable Marks', which sounds like something from Celtic myth and legend, the Mabinogion or something, though it isn't, about these soldiers, and the Welsh one is boasting, making these boasts that occur in say the Mabinogion, bardic boasting, in this place where they're actually removed from their landscape, and the people became these atavisms, these ancient things welling up and finding expression, the archetypal forms, this bard coming out of this young private's mouth. Maybe you don't leave yourself behind when you leave your

landscape.

...

What do you think of talismans?

Not much

I ask because I've just been talking to my boyfriend about talismans in relation to this tattoo he's just got of a hand with a severed finger. He was saying that rather than it being a challenge to 'the fates' or something, it was more like an acknowledgement of the worst thing that could happen and holding it up and looking at it and that act as a talisman, in the same way that people would have skulls about the place.

Obviously you find talismans in any old New Age shop, they don't really mean anything. Agrippa took the writings of Plato and there were these kinds of frenzies, like madness -

Bacchinalian frenzy?

Yeah, that would be the kind of frenzy that would not be acceptable to write about, but there are other kinds of frenzy, like poetic rapture, love, prophecy aswell, they said that that came from Apollo, the ecstasy of love from Venus, poetry from Dionysus, but then Agrippa and so forth in the Renaissance, adapted these ideas into ideas about ecstasy and the way that a mind in these raptures can impress thoughts on objects and that's how talismans can work. There's also this idea that mental raptures can be translated into rhythms of poetry.

That's interesting to me because of this whole thing about things being separate and individual or not, and times of those frenzies being points where those boundaries go down, except I have associated that with Dionysus and Apollo with being separate.

Yeah, well all these folk excuses for piss ups ...

So obviously your art is quite conceptual?

I think it takes a lot of guts to do something that isn't written about easily or explained or justified, things like that aren't trusted... But I don't think my stuff is that conceptual, I mean gold leafing a hilltop, that's the sort of thing I'd do anyway.

I wondered what you felt about goldleafing the hilltop, would you theoretically gold leaf an entire hilltop? I mean what happens to the gold leaf? What would it do to the lichen colonies?

I don't think it would do it much good! But I like things that don't stick around for very long, I'm not a fan of permanence. Trying to make things permanent I mean! There are villages in Central America that burn their houses down every year so that they can build them again -- it's another one of those activities that renews communal bonds and identity, because making things that last for a long time make them dead, I suppose is the conclusion.

In this Neo-Platonic, er, hermetic tradition, this idea that man is a microcosm -

Oh I can't believe we didn't get onto this subject

- if you then delineate areas of landscapes, you know saying this area is the heart...

Not ignoring that there might be many of these at once... The village ceremony event I told you about, that was really heading in that direction...if a village has a heart, and this is the thing about Axis Mundis, centres of the universe, I was wanting to look at how central spaces in communities get used, which is why this model got buried in the village green.

I've gotten quite interested in cities, town planning, there's this one book called 'The City Shaped' that I'm reading, but in that geomancy book there's actually something really interesting about how Roman cities were sited: the augur wanders around until he sees a prophetic thing happen and puts

his stick in the ground, and that becomes the heart of the city, and the crossroads evolved from that. They have a name that relates to the heart, the heart of the city in that spot, the dwelling place of the genius loci. I'm quite interested in finding out where Leeds' heart is.

Shall we find it?

Phil Legard is a writer, musician and researcher based in West Yorkshire.

www.larkfall.co.uk

Vanishing Points: Escape and Transformation in the Work of Iona Smith

Paul Smith

A few years ago I overheard a conversation between a tutor and his student about a remedy to cure sleepless nights. He recommended that you lie on your back putting all of your muscles under tension and then, starting at your lower extremities, relax each body part with the command 'lose consciousness.' Toes lose consciousness, heels lose consciousness, ankles lose consciousness and then continue up through the body until you reach the final command: mind lose consciousness. Needless to say it has never worked for me but I love how both mechanical and yet mysterious the command becomes in its movement upwards erasing each part.

Iona Smith is well practiced in the art of vanishing. The pits, bridges and hilltops that appear in her work represent boundary points of departure and transition from which a person can be lost or changed. In her contribution to the exhibition ^{superscript} held at East Street Arts she presented two casts taken from the extremities of her body; one of her ring finger and one from the top of her head. These objects mark points from which she had performed two very different disappearing acts. The golden scalp of *Mountain Climbs Me* marked a point of transfiguration while the discarded finger of

A Payment - For the Ghoul, David and Apollo was a decoy to aid an escape.

In the press release Smith quotes the Japanese poet Nanao Sakaki from whom she derived the title *Mountain Climbs Me*. The closing lines of the poem evoke an annihilation of the boundaries between world and self:

There is no mountain
nor myself.
Something
moves up and down in the air.

In the piece Smith created an equivalence between her head as the upper extremity of the body and an image of Huby Crag, the highest physical point in her locality. Both peaks were capped in gold leaf to mark the final stage of an alchemical transformation to a state where "its easy to forget where you came from if there's no question of your return."¹ As a portrait of mankind in sublime nature *Mountain Climbs Me* differs from a conventional romantic depiction of a figure conquering or cowering. Even the form derived from a human head is without the complex of empathy required by classical romanticism. There is something unsettling in objectifying a head; making it other and equal to a point in the landscape and leaving a golden scalp as a trophy.

A Payment - For the Ghoul, David and Apollo adopted a different strategy for Smith's vanishing act. The eponymous creditors of the title refers to a creature in African folklore, the artist David Steans and the god Apollo. The Ghoul would apparently give fire in exchange for varying amounts of human skin. A small ember was priced at a strip from elbow to thumb and a large ember from finger to below the ear. The story tells that on the journey home, the girl who had made the bargain was followed by a raven who swept dust across her bloody tracks. David Steans and Apollo are connected by a tattoo on Steans' body of a hand missing its ring finger. This finger represents Apollo in palmistry who is the deity of the sun and patron of art, music, aesthetics, fame and wealth. In conversation over the tattoo Steans compared it to images of skulls and nooses that act as tokens of strength and talismans to ward off what they represent. Amongst this constellation of references lies Smith's white finger on the gallery floor. It is a decoy thrown to the beast and misfortune but also to the viewers attention to keep the artist unscathed. During the course of the exhibition the viewer could only guess at these relationships as no further information was given beyond the title. Somewhat like the raven from the story she wiped the trail clear behind her as she made her escape.

¹ ^{superscript} press release

~~SLOW - 5 MIN~~

OPPORTUNITY

The Edna Lumb Travel Prize gave me the ~~chance~~ to visit the remote Italian village, Viganella.

8M x 5M

I went to experience the recent installation of a giant mirror 500 metres above the village. (diagram) Programmed to follow the course of the sun, the mirror is positioned to re-direct light back onto Viganella which is otherwise without direct sunlight from November 11th until February 4th each year.

Initially, I was drawn to the mirror for its logic, which struck me as being particularly art-like. At the time that I applied for the travel prize I had just abandoned my own experiments using mirrors to light public spaces.

My original proposal, which was centred around a claim to the mirrors status as an artwork, developed into ^{RESEARCH INTO} ~~a study of~~ the role of public art, and the value of culture which under EU cultural policy has become irrevocably linked with tourism and it's ability to regenerate former industrial towns.

During my stay it became clear that the mirror reflected these fundamental goals, my presence in an agriturismo stone cabin proved the mirrors efficacy for attracting tourists and Viganella's welcoming preparation for such. Crucially, my experience of the mirror's power to resolve Viganella's

ergonomic predicament, for lighting and ameliorating the sub-zero temperature, well, they were subtle to say the least.

IS SUCCESS LAY IN IT'S POWER AS

Instead, the mirror ~~was a reality~~ a landmark for Viganella, which had successfully ^{DRAWN} ~~captured~~ international attention ^{FOR} ~~even~~ before it had ^{EVEN} ~~being~~ built.

The fact that it didn't perform it's designated function, ^{WAS INSTRUCTIVE TO THE} ~~wasn't~~ what ^{MOTIVATIONS} ~~remained~~ ^{BEHIND ITS} ~~was the symbolic quality of the mirror~~ ^{CONSTRUCTION} ~~is~~ an icon of a former mining town struggling to survive in a post-industrial west.

For my response to the trip, I decided to address the obligation I held to the Edna Lumb Prize trustees, to provide a recording or some evidence of my trip, which this presentation forms part of.

Due to the exotic and unique value of the place I visited, the anticipation of photographic evidence caused me to consider and critique the re-distribution of Viganella as an image and the responsibility I held for doing so.

The democratisation of photography through digital technology has exacerbated what John Urry calls the tourist gaze. In a contemporary re-manifestation of imperialism, when people travel to somewhere new they usually go in search of the authentic image of that culture, as in paris- the

Eiffel tower and kissing. The tourist industry then ~~absorbs~~ absorbs the expected images, manufacturing the 'authentic' experience, satisfying consumer anticipation, and bringing about the complete degradation of complex cultures into one or two easily reproducible images.

The re-distribution of Viganella as an image, which I was in some respect responsible for, would have the effect of haplessly promoting it as another tourist destination. Instead I sought to produce a photographic documentary that would tease rather than satisfy, and stand unpretentiously as a photograph and no more. For this purpose I used a pin hole camera as a reversion to photography's rudimentary mechanism- Exposing directly on to film, without any point of focus, using whatever natural light was available.

Over 8 days I used 2 films in total, constructing a visual diary that recorded my ^{EXPLORATION} ~~investigation~~ of Viganella. With the images I ~~had I tried two things~~. I ~~developed them individually, printing out only the 8 successfully exposed images. This method gave me results that were unexpectedly pretty, but because of the nature of the pinhole camera and the 13th century ramshackle surroundings, the images seemed historical rather than recent.~~

^{PRINT}
~~So then~~ I produced this * which is a contact ~~sheet~~, made by exposing the

^{OUT DIRECTLY}
entire roll of film laid on a sheet of glass over the top of photographic paper. This process presents a familiar early stage of photo printing, interrupting the editing out of unfavoured images, allowing the spectator to discover the complete contents of both films with their sequence preserved in true diary form. //

If you would like to see the contact print, it has been framed and is available to see in my studio... My total output from the trip, including a new suit made from super 220 merino wool that I sourced from the historic mill town Biella, directly in between Viganella and Milan, and a transcript of this presentation accompanying the contact sheet, will be exhibited at East Street Arts in Leeds directly preceding this years Degree Show.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank the Edna Lumb Travel Prize for their generous and faithful gift to me.

*I

The dimensions of Harry Meadley's *Denote, connote; denote, connote:* (2009), ostensibly a small black wooden box, are those of his head, or skull, cubed. Like his head, the box's interior is hidden. Our heads conceal our skulls as well as our brains, so, at a push, Denote... also boasts a layer of flesh - mdf - and one of hair - gloss black paint.

The work was shown in the group exhibition *superscript* (2009) alongside the efforts of Alex Farrar and Iona Smith. Presented without accompanying information or explanation, the work was described in the press release as 'the artist's most fiendish work to date'¹. Deprived of the usual pat declarations, the viewer is confronted with a puzzle, and offered precious little to solve it. Materially the box itself yields nothing. A small black wooden box sitting on the floor. It rests however, on a sort of curatorial ley line with Iona Smith's *Mountain Climbs Me* (2009), the placement of which provided this author with his first clue. A gold cast of someone's scalp sits similarly unadorned, about 12 feet across the room from *Denote...* That work turns out to consist of the aforementioned gold-painted plaster cast of Smith's scalp and a large framed photograph. The photograph depicts the top of Hubby Cragg, the artist's local high point. She gold-leafed its very tip, and *Mountain Climbs Me* pairs it with her own head. Though two very different works made by two very different artists, *Mountain Climbs Me* and *Denote...* obviously complement one another. Indeed, it's the information furnished by Smith's statement that most clearly points towards the subject of this obscure object: an artist's head.

Further routes are proffered via the work's title. A denotation, a connotation; another denotation, another connotation. Meadley has in the past twice used the titles of his works as clues to decode them - 'rewards for the curious'². The semi-colon in *Denote, connote; denote, connote:* implies two pairs of actions, to be carried out or observed in order. The use of verbs implies a command. Either we are expected to denote, connote; denote, connote, in order to solve the work, or its title describes the inscrutable process that produced it. Denote and connote are probably two of the most confused words in the English language. Frequently mistaken for one another, when placed side by side they emit a strange form of power. The process of denoting and connoting in turn circumscribes the limits of human perception: to describe and translate in sharp focus what is tangible; then to allude and conjure on a limitless canvas what is not.

II

In Peru some 4,000 years ago, a kind of radical splinter group of South American Indians were massacred by a conglomerate of their neighbouring tribes³.

The indigenous peoples of South America varied in their beliefs from tribe to tribe, but in the majority thought the world governed by a supreme deity, or two, one being good and the other malevolent, though their heavens and daily lives were populated by a plethora of lesser deities, like other, primitive, pantheistic civilizations. The philosophy of the offending tribe, the Sala-mauls, supposed a universe without gods. The Sala-maul Indians imagined that the world existed within a giant, functioning human head. When the world-head closed his eyes to sleep, our world fell into darkness. When the world-head drank water from a giant stream, our oceans and rivers flowed and swelled. This concept in itself might not seem that radical in comparison to other contemporary beliefs of the ancient world - witness the preponderance of giants and anthropomorphic geography in Norse creation myth, for example. The Sala-mauls, though, also believed that each one of our living, human heads contained a fully formed world of its own, and each of *that* world's denizens one of their own, ad infinitum. As a result of this belief the Sala-mauls dispensed with practices of worship, magic and ritual altogether. Whether it was the complex nature of their world-view or simply their unprecedented lifestyle choices that led to their slaughter, we will never know.

The head-cult of the ancient Celts venerated actual human heads. Those of their enemies, decapitated, or of their own dead, carefully preserved. The Sala-mauls worshipped nothing. Perhaps they thought it presumptuous to give one world-head precedence over another.

We have a tendency to anthropomorphize boxes. The yawning grave, a car, your home. *Mountain Climbs Me* and *Denote...* are both bereft of bodies. They also both represent, in more or less accurate form, the heads of their respective creators. These are venerable heads, not generic ones.

* Steans, David (2009) *Harry Meadley Trepanned*

¹ *Denote*

¹ Press release for the exhibition *superscript*, East Street Arts, Leeds, UK, May 2008

² Farrar, A., Meadley, H., Smith, I., 2009. A latento Vol.2 - „Sammelbände“ ISSN:1755-5785

II *connote*

³ Morborne, P. 1991. South American Indians: Beliefs and Practices. London: Alpine History.

III

Meadley believes *Denote...* to be the “best work [he’s] ever made”⁴. It is a work both exemplary and typical, though perhaps not so typical as one might think. It operates along similar lines to much of the artist’s output, admittedly. It differs in two important respects. Firstly, it is far more obtuse, or ‘fiendish’, and willfully so. The work is exhibited to the general public, free of charge, but is not presented as an object to be easily consumed, visually or otherwise. Though its meaning is not deliberately obscured, it is far from clear. *Denote...* is presented as something to be engaged with, to be worked at. It is not mystical, but it refuses to explain itself. According to Meadley, this approach has an adjunct function; it deters those who may not give the work due time and thought in the first place⁵. In deference to said approach, this text has deliberately avoided a thorough exposition of *Denote...* Upon figuring out what the box’s dimensions represent, you’re halfway there, I’m told⁶.

I once⁷ used the phrase ‘pregnant form’ to describe Meadley’s work. Quotidian objects and materials resonating with meaning via arrangements and manipulations both deft and obvious (obvious once made, of course); subject eating object eating object. 4387753 (2008) is an almost theatrical collusion of a lump of larch and a wood grenade, folding function, process, form and potentiality. *Denote...* squats at the end of this line of enquiry, sentinel. It is Meadley’s *non plus ultra*. Hence the necessity to denote and connote twice in the title. A brief summary of the artist’s previous output might run: denote, connote. Or even: connote, denote.

The second respect in which *Denote...* differs is in the manner that it deals with creativity and the figure, generic or otherwise, of the artist. Many of Meadley’s works incorporate the imprints of physical agency into their conceptual hierarchy; a fingerprint, a nail, a shoe. *Denote...* however also tackles the subject on a metaphysical level. Its measurements are literal and quantifiable - what that subject and this object contain are not. The mind that conceived the work is somehow simultaneously represented and concealed. It’s a work that made itself, a serpent’s mouth devouring its own tail.

III *denote*

⁴ In conversation with the artist, August 2009

⁵ A paraphrase: in conversation with the artist, November 2007

⁶ In conversation with the artist, August 2009

⁷ In conversation with the artist, December 2008

IV

In August of 1963, on American Eagle flight BAE-31A, somewhere between Chicago and Los Angeles, recently divorced estate agent Paul Olettee attempted to hijack the plane with a smuggled firearm. Holding a stewardess hostage to gain access to the cockpit and breaking her arm in the process, Mr Olettee proceeded to threaten and intimidate the staff, demanding that he be “given the black box”. Not understanding the purpose of said request, but eager to move the evidently unstable Olettee out of the cabin, the pilot and attendant had the plane’s black box recorder taken into the aisle for their captor.

Olettee’s curses and mumblings, rising in pitch and fever, soon revealed his intentions to the already hysterical passengers. “This is a suicide mission”, he cried, according to one eyewitness who maintained a firm enough grasp on her wits to later report the details of the incident⁸. He then began to nudge the black box recorder from side to side with his feet, eventually settling upon its position on the floor and holding it firm with his right foot. He addressed the rows of frightened and confused passengers flanking him right and left: “There’s nothing you can do now”. He took aim with his gun, and fired practically point blank at the box. The bullet ricocheted and lodged in his thigh. He collapsed in pain and was easily overpowered and restrained by passengers and staff.

Olettee was interviewed by the police upon the safe landing of BAE-31A at LAX. A manic depressive who had suffered a series of psychotic episodes, he had indeed intended to crash the plane; to kill himself and his fellow travelers. The bizarre nature of the hijacking however, was due not to psychosis but misunderstanding. Olettee had been labouring under the notion that black boxes housed computers. These computers, he thought, acted as the brains of the vehicle, controlling the flight path, speed, trajectory, fuel, everything. Olettee effectively tried to put a bullet in the airplane’s brain, hoping it might simply drop out of the sky.

The first work of Meadley’s I wrote about, three years ago, is now probably rotting, unloved, in another black box - the artist’s 2008 *Oubliette*. Another apparently unassuming terminal conceptual engine, *Oubliette* houses digital documentation of every work the artist ‘wishes to be forgotten’⁹. Like an airplane’s black box, information is inserted but not extracted. Also like an airplane’s black box, the object’s purpose and concomitant results are easily comprehended, while its inner workings are not.

Robert Morris’s 1961 *Box with the sound of its own making* is both a record and veneration of its makers creative and physical agency. Morris was apparently pleased that John Cage appreciated the theatricality of the work. *Denote...* is, as I have already stated, a box of its own making. The black box recorder, unfortunately for Paul Olettee, was and is a device with the sound not of its own making but of its own demise.

IV *connote*

⁸ Darley, P., 1963. Dumbo learns to fly. Los Angeles Gazer, 3 Sep. p.4.

⁹ Press release for the exhibition „Sammelbände“, East Street Arts, Leeds, UK, October 2008

A Payment- for the Ghoul, David and Apollo

The Havamal, the Scandinavian Edda -

(47) Noble and valiant men
Have the best life;
They have no fear atall
But a coward fears everything:
a miser always fears presents.

i

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, re-built in 1997 under the direction of American director, Sam Wanamaker, consulted a Central American shaman after a number of accidents and deaths took place during building work. The Globe was advised to create and make offerings of various replicas of the building; one in oak, left in the forests the building was made from, and one in gold, which lies, along with innumerable older libations, somewhere at the bottom of the Thames.

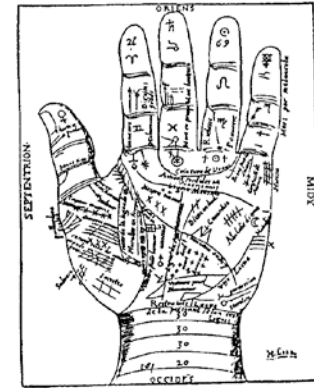
The term *Do ut des*: I give so that you may give, comes from the Vedic principle that sacrifice is a gift that compels a deity to make a return; it implies that gifts of all kinds are never free, but carry a compulsion to make a return of equal measure. In a similar way, offerings made before, or upon the occasion of notable events, are made to ward off harm, that is, to make payment for their good luck before it is unwillingly claimed. In Samoa, such gifts accompany the birth of a child, circumcision, sickness, a daughter's arrival at puberty, funeral rites, trade.¹ Elsewhere, a glass is trodden on or a plate smashed by a bride and groom, saying - "may this be broken and nothing else". ...

1. p.11, Mauss, M. *The Gift - form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, Routledge, London, 1954.



ii

“It’s like a ‘fuck you’ to being worried about things, like getting a tattoo of a noose round your neck, it’s about being fearless, or not caring, it’s not about being self-destructive, wanting to fail or die, it’s just saying I’m not scared to die...it’s about not being weak, or meek. That’s what skulls and nooses are about, in one respect it’s like ‘come on then’, and in another it’s a talisman, it’s like, I don’t want this to happen, it’s like a warding off of the fates, like an evil eye, like you can have this effigy, but not the real thing. ...It’s a bit abstract, it’s a notion, if I’d made an effigy of myself and ritually destroyed it, then that’s more straightforward, but this is more abstract because it’s one removed.”



iii

Apollo, deity of the sun, is claimed for the patron of art, music, aesthetics, fame and wealth. He is linked with ‘the individual’, order, the illusory, appearance, dreams.

By proxy he is the converse of the moon (and night), darkness, chaos, nigredo, the shadow persona. Palmistry dedicates the ring finger to him, and therefore reads a person’s relationship with those qualities by the physical qualities of that finger.

iv

*'Greeting father Ghoul' She said
 'If not your speaking had come before our meeting,' said the Ghoul,
 'by now the stones around would hear your young bones break and
 your flesh tear'
 'I come to ask for some fire', said she.
 And he replied, 'If the ember you want is a small one then you must
 give a strip of skin, from your elbow to your thumb, but for this
 large one here, then from your finger to below your ear.'
 The girl took a large ember and returned home, dripping blood upon
 the ground, and though she did not see it, was followed by a raven
 who swept dust over her tracks.*

Interview with Iona Smith Rhianon Silver

9 : 02am

Rhianon

hello¹

9 : 02am

Iona

bonjour!

9 : 03am

Rhianon

:)

so i thought we'd start with what i sent before?²

9 : 03am

Iona

Ok, i've got tea, and I'm ready to go

yep ok, i'll just copy and paste...³

9 : 04am

Iona

So I went straight to my flat after we'd finished talking the other day⁴ to re-look at *The Edible Woman* by Margaret Atwood⁵.

The part where Marian makes a cake in the image of herself and then relishes every mouthful happens in the last few pages of the book. The important detail I'd

1 This interview took place in Facebook Chat on 25 November 2009.

2 We had initially started this conversation via email, and here I am referring to the first email I had sent to Iona.

3 What follows is the email I sent to Iona, copied and pasted into Facebook Chat by Iona.

4 Iona and I met to discuss her work and my writing something for *A Latento* at The Clock Café, Leeds, on 18 November 2009.

5 *The Edible Woman*, Margaret Atwood, 1969, is the story of a young woman whose sane, structured, consumer-orientated world slips strangely out of focus.

forgotten when relaying the plot to you, was that prior to this symbolic act she had stopped eating altogether.

Throughout the course of the text a disgust at taking in food overwhelms her, and this anorexia parallels an inability to connect with any of the meaningful aspects of her life – her relationship, her job, her home. The end point of the book, the point at which she reclaims her Self is marked by this act of creating herself and consuming herself, significantly I feel, with pleasure and ease.

As I said at the time it's been well over a decade since I read this book but it came to mind very early on in our discussion of your work (although frustratingly I can't remember the exact point I made the connection – can you?) why do you think this is? and then I said⁶: I know it was brought up when we were talking about the bread hospital⁷, consuming something you exist within as a means of affirming your identity (that is, a collective identity specifically defined by a shared experience... we went into communion a bit)

and the difference between what the act of eating an effigy would mean if a different person had made it. I think for this woman there's something about being in control, but also about accepting every part of herself and taking it on.

That's the important thing for me anyway, there's a kind of surrender and acceptance of every aspect of herself, whether good or bad.

9:06am

Rhiannon

yes I think Atwood's concern is with the notion of self acceptance - explicitly within the context of all the things we encounter that counter that acceptance, and this makes me think about the first thing you said when we spoke about your work, that making was a lonely act.

I wonder is it a lonely act or an act to counter loneliness?

9:09am

Iona

Well, I'm not too happy that I described art making as a lonely act now, I think it's just something that is very alone...

in that sense, because it makes you be more 'yourself' i think it might be a good counter to loneliness yes. does that make sense? i think the thing for me about Atwood's woman eating this cake as a notion of self-acceptance suggests consuming - acknowl-

⁶ Here Iona refers to the email she sent in reply to mine, what follows is that email copied and pasted into Facebook Chat by Iona.

⁷ *Krankenhaus Brot*, Iona Smith, 2008, a piece in which Iona shared bread she had made in the image of the hospital building she co-habited with its patients (as part of an art academy she attended in the summer of 2008 just outside of Berlin).

edging - her whole self

9:12am

Rhiannon

I think it's significant that you used "lonely" even if it doesn't quite define what it is you mean.

9:13am

Iona

what do you think i mean?

9:14am

Rhiannon

One could argue that all artistic practice is, in part, the artist negotiating the space between self and outside of self, but I think in your case this is particularly true.

9:15am

Iona

oh, well, yeah!

I think that does come into but yeah for me it's

oops, hang on

9:16am

Rhiannon

Marian was lonely, not because she couldn't connect with the world "outside" of her but because she wasn't accepting of herself - her inner world.

Until she ate herself!

9:16am

Iona

i think that does come into creating anything, but for me yeah it's a central concern

9:18am

Rhiannon

But what I like about how you negotiate this self/outside of self-relationship is that you make groups of others...

9:18am

Iona

I think my idea of aloneness in creativity is about not having anything to hide behind groups of others?

Like the pyjama thing⁸ for instance?

⁸ *Electrons Nightwear*, Iona Smith, 2008, twenty matching sets of nightwear, based on the gallery aesthetic, were made by Iona for the participating artists to wear for the nocturnal duration of the exhibition *Electrons* at theartmarket, Leeds 19-28 November 2008

Rhiannon

Exactly

yes, i was thinking of the pyjama thing

I'm interested to know...

did you wear your pyjamas that week?

9:21am

Iona

Of course!

I have to say that

(In-fact I didn't have a pair, we made 20, one for each of the other participating artists and one for the gallery – mine were hanging up in the artmarket window all week)

9:21am

Iona

when you say groups of others though, it's not in relation to myself, within the group everyone is a self...

9:24am

Rhiannon

I think - if I understand what you're saying there correctly - that *is* what I was driving at. Because it's not like you make a group of yourself and others - binding you all together - you maintain a separateness and perhaps more significantly the individuals in the group remain separate - a sense which is almost intensified or at least pointed to through this act of your bringing them together -

9:25am

Rhiannon

in some activity or act of sharing.

9:25am

Iona

ok, yeah, that was the thing yeah, I've actually never really spoken in depth to any participants in the works that do that - the pyjamas, the village burial⁹, the bread
It would be interesting to know how it felt from that point of view
the problem is it's definitely an 'imposed' sharing
and your sharing may be being documented

9:27am

Rhiannon

Yes an imposed sharing, that's its poesy I think.

9:29am

Iona

because it forces attention onto it from the people involved?

or because it's an enforced activity?

9:30am

Rhiannon

Because it is your will that is being displayed and explored, not theirs.

and you say making exposes you - leaves nothing to hide behind - but i'm thinking perhaps that is not quite the case here?

9:32am

Rhiannon

There is something very tender about your simultaneously standing in front of and standing behind these groups.

9:33am

Iona

re: my will not theirs: yes i know, it feels quite uncomfortable to me

re: simultaneously standing in front of and behind, i'm glad you think that

9:34am

Rhiannon

Yes because I think it is an uncomfortable act - in that - what you're exploring is an area that is uncomfortable

9:36am

Rhiannon

Hold it there! Joe¹⁰ has returned from work, it turns out he isn't teaching today as he thought, and i'm on his computer...

9:36am

Iona

yes but the position i put myself in as a ringleader is never exactly intentional, i can't avoid it, but i never meant it to be central to how people reacted to it

9:36am

Rhiannon

I'll have to move downstairs to my laptop

Iona
ok

9:36am

Rhiannon
have you got everything so far?

9:36am

Iona
nearly...

9:41am

Rhiannon
i'm back

9:41am

Iona
ello

9:42am

Rhiannon
Ok where were we?

9:42am

Iona
this properly is not the easiest way of communicating is it? i thought it would be we were... yes but the position i put myself in as a ringleader is never exactly intentional, i can't avoid it, but i never meant it to be central to how people reacted to it i think that's why i stopped then making work in that kind of setup

9:43am

Rhiannon
no, its very hard to have an actual "conversation" but i think it will make for an interesting piece if we display it "as is"...

9:43am

Iona
do you have to be somewhere at ten?

9:44am

Rhiannon
no, i can chat for as long as we need...
can you?

P 70

9:44am

Iona
yeah!
that's great

9:45am

Rhiannon
i don't think it ever comes across as you exploring "leadership" there is an awkwardness to it that belies your true interest.

9:45am

Iona
i was coming at those pieces of work from an interest in how communal activities strengthen a group identity..
what do you think my true interest was?
but i had been looking at existing structures in other societies, and what i was doing was fabricating structures for groups i was in (or not)

9:47am

Rhiannon
I think that by pointing to others you point very clearly to yourself - ultimately. That by pointing away you point to.

9:48am

Iona
what i genuinely wanted to see was whether people felt there was a need for some sort of communal activity structure thing like that for their own...well-being i guess oh god i know there's no avoiding that is there

9:48am

Rhiannon
what pointing to ourselves?
:)

9:49am

Iona
yeah, well just revealing things like that about ourselves, even when we don't mean to another 'alone' thing

9:50am

Rhiannon
ha ha yeah - especially when we don't mean to.

9:50am

P 71

Rhiannon
yes, but it is this very dynamic that makes your work something other than social

9:52am

Iona

no it isn't, but do you mean the dynamic with the group and my personal intention?

9:52am

Rhiannon

Oh i mean the dynamic between your use of a group and yourself - if you see what i mean...

i cannot accept that your practice was - when you were working with groups - purely about an interest in a possible need for shared activity in communities...

9:53am

Iona

what do you think it was? sorry if i'm asking you to repeat yourself

9:54am

Rhiannon

Well i think that you are very interested in the need for some sort of communal activity structure and its connection to well-being...

9:54am

Iona

to be honest, that awkwardness was always secondary and interesting, but troublesome, and distracting

9:55am

Rhiannon

...but that those interests become the language through which you explore something less easily put into words
notions of self -
self rejection / disassociation?
self acceptance?

9:56am

Iona

yes i think these are explorations that get played out in group activity

9:58am

Rhiannon

it becomes a vehicle ultimately for your exploration - your work speaks most eloquently, to me, of *you* rather than of groups, but that is purely my reading.
A reflection of *my* interest?

10:00am

Iona

i can't deny that, but I always hoped that would be secondary. A reflection of your interest, haha! yes perhaps, i'm sure we all do the same
yes i suppose i can't deny that
how depressing
?

10:00am

Rhiannon

No!

Iona - it is what makes your work poetic and beautiful.
it is why your transition from using groups to your more recent studio-gallery practice is utterly seamless in my eyes

10:04am

Iona

Good, and i'm glad that that's the case, perhaps the latter is a bit less in denial that what i'm doing is personal

10:06am

Rhiannon

well to feel perfectly comfortable with that would be true acceptance of self and then where would you be? you wouldn't need to make the metaphorical she-cake and eat it anymore, would you?
once *i* like myself i'm going to start making jewellery
;)

10:07am

Iona

I remember having a conversation with someone a while ago that if artists really did their job properly they would do themselves out of a job

10:07am

Rhiannon

yes - we must always hold ourselves back from true resolution!

10:08am

Iona

ok i'll knit hats when you make jewellery

10:08am

Iona

no ok you're ~~right~~, this dissatisfaction..

Rhiannon

its a deal!
yes dissatisfaction
that's it in part
that is part of the energy of your practice

10:09am

Iona

no not my practice
everyone's to a degree

10:09am

Rhiannon

and it is distinctly a feminine dissatisfaction...

10:09am

Iona

go on you might have to elaborate
on the feminine bit

10:10am

Rhiannon

yes that is fair - everyone's practice
erm well you use the traditionally feminine to negotiate this
making
feeding
clothing
nurturing

10:13am

Iona

yes i know... i'm sure i've had the piss taken along the way, girl who likes to make
bread for people.
i'm hesitating from trying to give you the conceptual wang behind it because i don't
really see a point of denying feminine attributes of these kinds of activities

10:14am

Rhiannon

me neither

10:14am

Iona

i mean, you know further conceptual wang about bread, or nightwear, or whatnot

10:15am

Rhiannon

oh go on, there's probably not been enough conceptual wang in this conversation so
far...
but i promise i won't take it as an apology for the feminine

10:16am

Iona

but i also couldn't allow it to be primarily considered as about 'women's work'
oh i don't really want to now

10:16am

Rhiannon

no not women's work!

10:16am

Iona

no no i know, it's funny this pre-empting being called a feminist

10:17am

Rhiannon

a fate worse than death?

10:17am

Iona

ha!

10:17am

Rhiannon

:)

10:20am

Iona

i guess as far as i'm concerned art is just art... i don't know
hang on crap sentence
right what are we getting at now?

10:20am

Rhiannon

Ok lets talk about your more recent work
when we met up we didn't talk about the finger¹¹ at all
tell me about that...

Iona

alright, i've just been writing some bits about that.

so the title's 'a payment...'

'for the Ghoul, David and Apollo'

did you see any documentation of dave¹² being tattooed by will nous vous¹³ at morphic resonance¹⁴?

10:23am

Rhiannon

yes

10:24am

Iona

hang on! loo break! 2 mins!

10:27am

Iona

ok

10:28am

Rhiannon

:)

10:28am

Iona

ok, so the hand he had tattooed came after a drawing he did where the ring finger was missing

i'd asked him if it was about Apollo, the ring finger is dedicated to Apollo in palmistry apparently and him being the patron of the arts

10:30am

Rhiannon

and was it?

10:30am

Iona

Not intentionally no, but he liked the connection, hence the tattoo, My throwing a plaster cast of my ring finger was sort of a 'warding off' of what i perceived to be a challenge to this patron of art like a talisman, or an offering or a decoy

12 David Steans, Artist.

13 William Edmonds, member of the Nous Vous Collective (<http://nousvous.eu>) who set up a make shift tattoo studio during the recent *Morphic Resonance* residency at PSL.

14 *Morphic Resonance* was an experimental project at PSL (<http://www.projectsplaceeds.org.uk>), co-curated by Zoe Sawyer of theartmarket (<http://www.kunstfreund.co.uk>), which ran from 25 March – 27 June 2009.

The documentation Iona refers to here can be seen at <http://morphic-resonance.blogspot.com>

the Ghoul reference comes from an african folk tale, involving the central character asking a Ghoul for an ember to light a fire, who demands flesh in return the heroine has her bloody tracks (on leaving) covered by a raven who follows behind, stopping the ghoul from following I was thinking about decoy and distraction,

10:34am

Rhiannon

decoy and distraction from what?

10:34am

Iona

i'd been reading marcel mauss's book 'the gift'¹⁵ about exchange in archaic societies there are parts that go into ideas of exchange needing to be constantly in motion to maintain a kind of universal balance and that offerings and sacrifice was a kind of payment for things received before the balance was taken in some way

10:37am

Iona

So i suppose i was treating this plaster finger as some kind of decoy for dave's missing tattooed one

10:39am

Rhiannon

ah I see - I was starting to read it in the context of it being the time of your degree show

10:39am

Iona

how so?

10:41am

Rhiannon

a kind of offering to apollo

at this time of intense artistic endeavor

a protection from the ghoul who wants to take from you

a distraction from the focus on you

10:42am

Iona

ha, well, all accurate, but not for me this time

15 *The Gift* is a short book by the French Sociologist Marcel Mauss and is best known for being one of the earliest and most important studies of reciprocity and gift exchange. It was originally published in *L'Année Sociologique* in 1923-24.

10:43am

Rhiannon

not just another artist...

10:43am

Iona

yes, not picked at random

10:43am

Rhiannon

for the man you love

10:44am

Iona

yes, whose defunct art group translates as ‘misfortune’¹⁶

10:45am

Rhiannon

a preemptive act then?

10:45am

Iona

yeah

10:45am

Rhiannon

nice

10:46am

Iona

sort of. But then i spoke to dave further, and we were talking about our idea of talismans, and he was saying that getting an image like that tattooed hadn’t been a challenge, it had been meant as a warding off of that occurrence which is another interesting thought, that the acknowledgement of a worst case scenario can act as a defense against it sort of full circle back to acknowledging and accepting the ‘whole’ of yourself, all of it.

10:49am

Rhiannon

yes - it’s very neat - meant in its original meaning - and yes “full circle”, i’d started to type that myself - especially as it is an entirely internal problem made external.

10:49am

Iona

by external you mean having physical objects to represent these internal thoughts, etc

10:49am

Rhiannon

i mean - the fear is born from within - the act externalises it - creating resolution within

10:50am

Iona

oh yeah exactly

10:50am

Rhiannon

back to the edible women again

10:50am

Iona

All metaphors

and the physical acting it out does it better than just working it out intellectually i have always felt.

there’s something about experiencing something, for me, that has a lot more power and bypasses language, rationalisation, linear question and answer...

10:54am

Rhiannon

but also in acting it out we see an attempt to point away from the problem (fear - self created) quite literally in this case by “giving” an appeasement, but by this very act, attention is drawn to the problem - fear - self created.

10:55am

Iona

yeah, that too, it makes something visible and therefore vulnerable

10:56am

Rhiannon

yes - it becomes, for me, an expression of vulnerability through its very methodology - heightened by its choice of subject – a loved one.

i like it a lot

it contains many old voices

Iona

You've said (if you don't mind me moving on) that you really liked the mountain piece¹⁷, can i ask you why and/or what you made of it?

10:59am

Rhiannon

what struck me about it was how it spoke of relationship between inner and outer, or self and other.

10:59am

Iona

yep, can't deny it this time

11:00am

Rhiannon

It connected, I suppose with my own sense of loneliness/connectedness with the world. The dynamic between those things.

loneliness v connectedness

how you cannot speak of one without the other

know of one without the other

11:01am

Iona

yup that's true, and the stronger of either the stronger the re-enforcing balance is..

11:01am

Rhiannon

my pleasure in it came from that - it spoke to me eloquently of that experience, again very neat - the device you used.

11:01am

Iona

yeah someone else has described my work as neat

11:03am

Rhiannon

ah, it must be so then.

11:03am

Rhiannon

one neat can be disregarded, but two?

¹⁷ *Mountain Climbs Me*, Iona Smith, 2009, seen by myself at *superscript*, East Street Arts, Leeds, in June of this year (2009).

11:03am

Iona

mm, as a term it makes me feel quite satisfied, but also worry that neatness doesn't leave much.. space

could you tell me maybe what that device is?

11:07am

Rhiannon

yes - you clearly expressed self, through the crown of your head, and significantly head because of our association with the "I" of ourselves residing there (a belief which arguably creates much of our loneliness, but lets not get too side-tracked in that right now). Then that self was represented on a natural form, an "outside" form - then a relationship between these two was created in the gallery space and also an informing that you had carried out these acts - that you made a plaster-cast of the top of your head and you painted a representation of this Self on a mountain top

11:09am

Iona

oh i see, so definitely a thing about loneliness you read?

11:09am

Iona

yes, that's the case, although there's also something going on about the point where the self gets lost

11:10am

Rhiannon

no it connected to *my* sense of loneliness - but only because it spoke of more than that because it spoke of connectedness too

11:11am

Iona

the things you just mentioned?

and connectedness..

from the perspective of not having the one without the other

?

11:12am

Rhiannon

yes, but more than that - the piece evidences an act

11:12am

Iona

right

Rhiannon

which is powerful

11:12am

Iona

yup

11:12am

Rhiannon

and moving

11:13am

Iona

thanks!

11:14am

Rhiannon

and speaks far more forcibly of our negotiation of these problems - daily problems - because they are experienced as acts too.

11:14am

Iona

right. good

11:14am

Rhiannon

good.

11:16am

Rhiannon

that is what i mean when i point to the seamless transition from your “group” work to your more recent “traditional” sculpture - *acting out* that is at the heart of all you do

11:17am

Iona

yes, i’m really glad you see it that way, it’s the case, but i think i’d worried about the apparent difference in the work’s form, i’m glad you don’t see them as different or in conflict

11:18am

Rhiannon

no, not at all.

do you think that might be a “neat” place to end?

P 82

11:18am

Iona

I was just going to say, i wondered if it was

11:19am

Rhiannon

well then it must be.

11:19am

Iona

I’ve no idea how this will work out in terms of a bit of writing, i’ll collect it all together and see how it reads

11:19am

Rhiannon

would you send it to me?

11:19am

Iona

i mean, you know if it’s coherent to anyone except us

11:19am

Rhiannon

i’d like to edit if that’s ok?

11:19am

Iona

yes of course

oh-ho, okay then

11:20am

Rhiannon

also i was thinking of adding footnotes in places to provide background/elaboration

11:20am

Iona

Thanks again Rhiannon. Yeah big fan of footnotes. You could add any other bits you like.

god i wish i interviewed better

oh well

11:21am

Rhiannon

P 83

it might be nice to present it very much as a chat - and make it more understandable by adding footnotes.

very genuine

11:21am

Iona

i would be happy however, if it's alright with you i'll leave that to your decision

'earnest' eugh

!

ha

11:22am

Rhiannon

no not earnest!

yuk

genuine

11:22am

Iona

phew

11:22am

Rhiannon

can i play with the layout?

11:22am

Iona

natch!

11:23am

Rhiannon

i mean what will harry¹⁸ do with it design-wise when he gets it?

11:23am

Iona

oh i'll need to send him the finished design. It's only page numbers and that that'll get added

11:24am

Rhiannon

ok well i might ask joe¹⁹ to help me with it - is that ok? - i just think cos of the form of "chat" good layout will make all the difference

when are you working tomorrow?

11:24am

Iona

yes that's fine with me

tomorrow i'm working..er..

11:24am

Rhiannon

when can i send it to you for approval?

11:25am

Iona

8.30-4

11:25am

Rhiannon

before it's signed off as it were

11:25am

Iona

whenever you like,

11:26am

Rhiannon

it won't be today then i'm out tomorrow from 4.30 so we won't get time to make changes if you hate it...

11:27am

Iona

oh i see, well then i don't get to make changes, i quite like that you have total control over this one, trust

however if you can give me any idea of the length that would help a lot

11:27am

Rhiannon

ok then, trust it is

length wise it will not differ much from what it is now

11:28am

Iona

yup

11:28am

Rhiannon

i don't envisage gutting much out or adding much

You are not online.

11:28am

You are online.

11:28am

Iona

righto

11:28am

Rhiannon

do i need to work to certain page dimensions?

11:29am

Iona

Our pages are portrait, 138mm x 216mm, with a 10mm inner border.

don't feel you have to do the layout unless you really want to

11:30am

Rhiannon

oh i want to

11:30am

Iona

ok then, well that's good for me

11:31am

Rhiannon

ok then i'll email it to you but by then i guess i'll have emailed it to harry too...

11:33am

Iona

ok then...in fact, that's probably a good idea, since i'll be at work (i'll check if harry will be) if it needs any tweaks with the page setup...or something...he might be able to check that.

11:33am

Rhiannon

right best go - going to studio to talk with emmy²⁰ about my work - i have absolutely no idea what that is about!

11:33am

Iona

ha! onwards..

11:33am

Rhiannon

ever onwards

:)

11:33am

Iona

alright, hope it all goes alright

11:33am

Rhiannon

love x

11:33am

Iona

oh dear

losing the plot

and to you! x

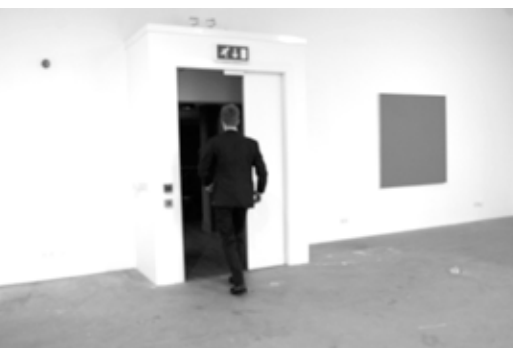
have a good day, keep me posted and speak to you later sometime

x



DRESSING IN SUIT NO.2 2009- PRESENT

*pictured at the closing of ^{Superscript}, immediately before the opening of the Degree Show



SUPERScript IS A GROUP EXHIBITION THAT INCLUDES THE WORK OF ALEX FARRAR, HARRY MEADLEY AND IONA SMITH. THE SHOW IS PART OF A SEASON OF EXHIBITIONS, 'UNITED', WHICH HIGHLIGHT THE PREVALENCE OF COLLABORATIVE GROUPS IN LEEDS.

TOGETHER, FARRAR, MEADLEY AND SMITH HAVE BEEN COLLABORATING ON EXHIBITIONS, PUBLICATIONS, RESIDENCIES AND PERFORMANCES WHILST RETAINING AUTONOMOUS PRACTICES.

COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCES ASIDE, SUPERScript IS THE FIRST TIME THE ARTISTS HAVE SHOWN THEIR WORK AT THE SAME TIME, IN THE SAME PLACE.

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HITHERTO THE 'GROUP' PRESENT THEMSELVES FORMALLY AS A CONSORTIUM.

DIFFERENTIATED FROM A 'GROUP', IT TRANSPARENTLY DEFINES THE ARTISTS' INTENTIONS TO CORROBORATE FOR MUTUAL SUPPORT, MUCH LIKE A CORPORATE ALLIANCE.

AS 'UNITED' COINCIDED WITH THE CLIMAX OF OUR DEGREE, IT SEEMED APT TO DRAW OUT AND EXAMINE THE TIES AND DIALOGUES WHICH ARE MANIFEST PHYSICALLY IN OUR OUTPUT.

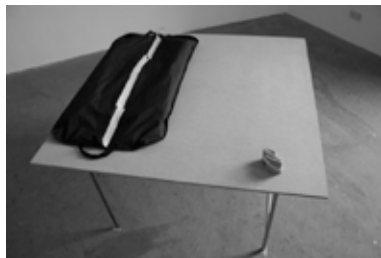
P 93

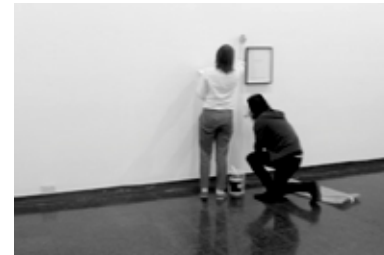
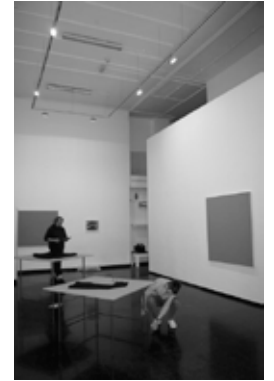
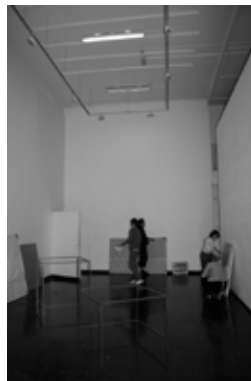
SUPERScript WAS PROGRAMMED TO RUN FOR THE TWO WEEKS OF ASSESSMENT, CLOSING THE MINUTE THE DEGREE SHOW OPENS.

THE WORK SHOWN IN THE LEEDS MET GALLERY, TO WHOM WE ARE INDEBTED FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF OUR PERSONAL ASSESSMENT, IS NOT THE SUPERScript EXHIBITION.

FOR THAT, PLEASE REFER TO THE RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION ATTACHED.

INSTEAD, THIS ADDITIONAL SPACE, HAS BEEN MADE AVAILABLE FOR THE PURPOSE OF EXPERIENCING THE INDIVIDUAL WORKS FIRST HAND, TO AIDE AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT.





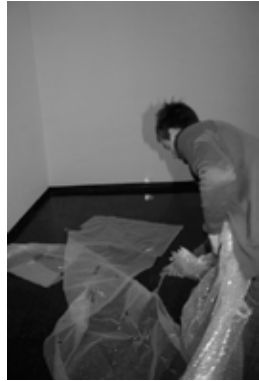
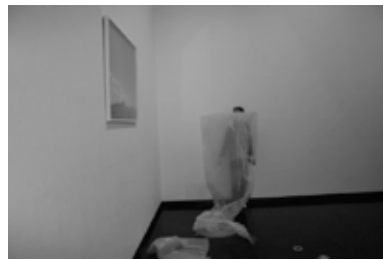
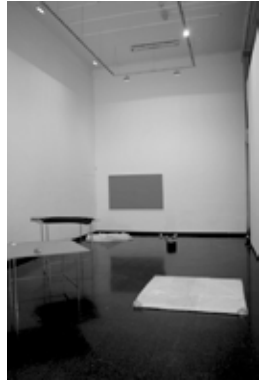


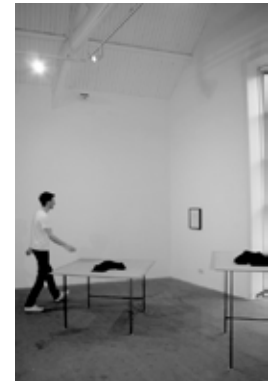
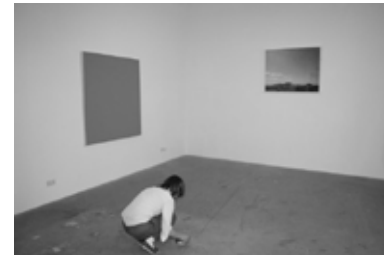
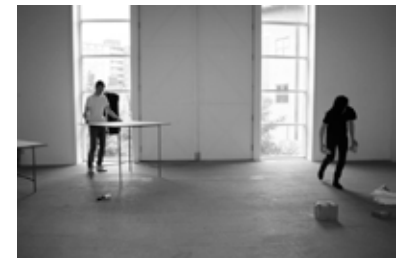
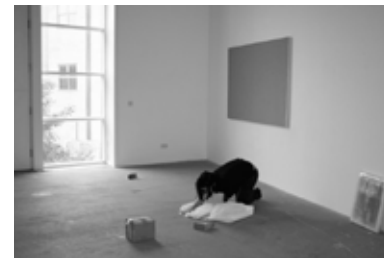


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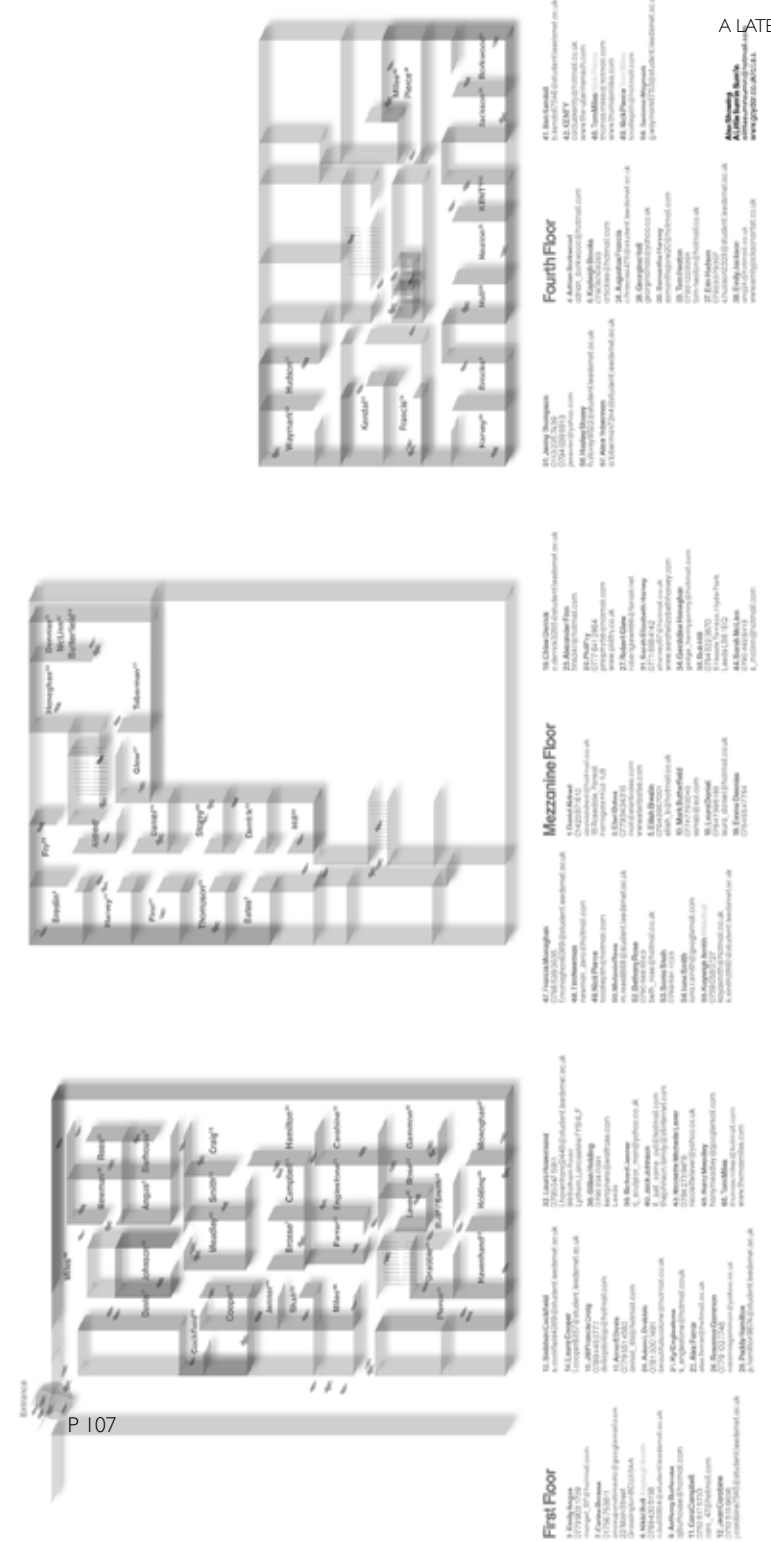


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DEGREE SHOW



ALEX FARRAR

Alex Farrar

En Plein Air

2009

Tissue paper construction, helium, mirror plinth
50 x 34 x 26 cm, 60 x 54 x 19 cm

5020-Y20R_CX & 5010-Y_CX

2008

Emulsion paint, digitally colour matched to the artists hair and eye colour
Dimensions variable

Suit (#1)

2007 - 2008

Suit made and worn by Alex Farrar at all art events for 2 years,
whilst he was on the Leeds Metropolitan University Fine Art BA course
120 x 90 cm [x2]



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EN PLEIN AIR

* view of the accredited installation space from the entrance

P 112

EN PLEIN AIR

* view of the accredited installation space facing the entrance

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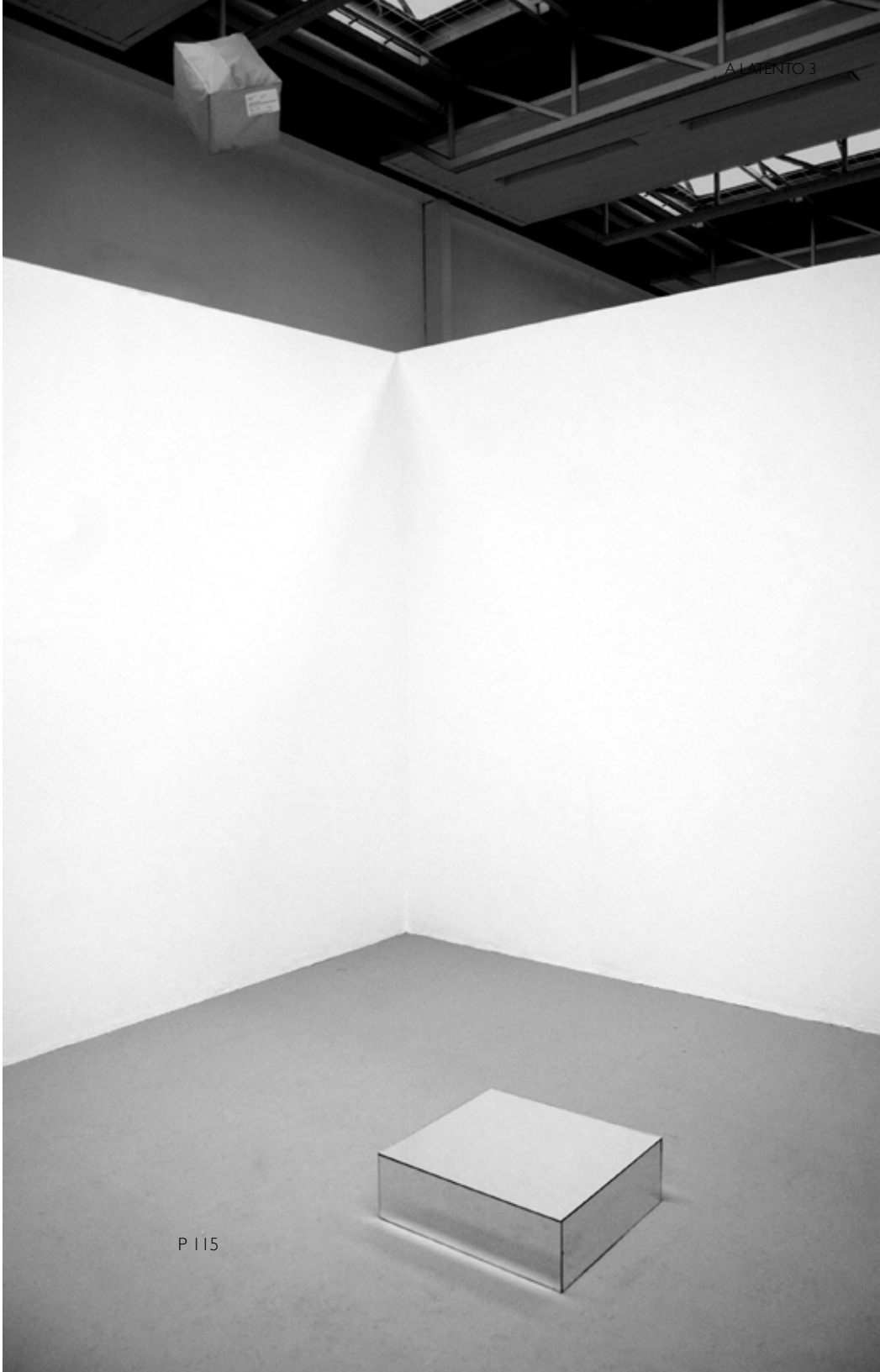


EN PLEIN AIR

*

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DEGREE SHOW

EN PLEIN AIR
*

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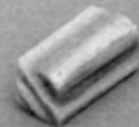


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EN PLEIN AIR

*detail of the balsa weights which have being removed from the box and dropped to the floor



P 122

P 123

EN PLEIN AIR

*detail of the balsa weights which have being removed from the box and dropped to the floor



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EN PLEIN AIR
*

Alex Farrar & Rory Macbeth *Continued from page 35*

R En Plein Air had plenty of structure and control... the fact that it did what it wanted was part of that control and structure, and made it such an engaging piece.

A I recall having a discussion with you when there was some obvious 'visual plagiarism' going on, and you suggested that within a collective there always exists a kind of shared language, do you think there existed one between Iona, Harry and myself?

I think the work in the degree show was pretty slight in terms of physical presence (for all of you), and you seemed to have made a conscious decision to use these pieces rather than the slightly physically fuller work you featured in esa. This could easily come across as contrary and stage-managed, considering the environment, but was actually really nicely pitched to avoid any potential rebellious posturing, and it gave your work the space to breathe, which I think is hard and rare in degree show situations./ I know you were really wrestling with just how invisible your own work should be in this sense, and you were considering some solutions that might be more easily seen as 'making an effort' in some traditional degree show way (the deconstruction of the walls to make shelving units, and the inclusion of other work in your 'official' degree show booth) . I was really glad when after much experimenting, you went for the most minimal option. It gave the En Plein Air piece a real opportunity to work properly.

I do have a lot of love for the box, but it was extremely demanding, and I would think twice about showing it again- although don't you think it work in an art fair nicely?

Yes I think it would! I think it had a really good counterbalance in the formality of the framed suit thing, though how many people may have made a connection I'm not sure/ how do you think people

would react to the piece out there?

Do you mean in amsterdam or in the rietveld?

Well, both... or more widely even... it was shown in such restricted circumstances here/ Do you think it will become something more expansive or less so?

I liked the way it worked at the Met, because it wasn't attached to a name, it was literally above the degree show/ So, well, I think the context would have to be right and an art fair is probably the closest thing to a degree show, depending on the architecture.

Yep the context is important with it, which is why an art fair would be good i think. It is a bit like a degree show, but the implications and audience would be very different.

How do you see it working in another context? roger (I'm introducing 'voice procedure phraseology', I think they could work well here in signalling the end of the a thread) (roger)/ how do you mean?/ (roger)

The thing I like about the art fair idea is that art is packaged to get there and to be bought and taken away... this would start to make some kind of sense/ nonsense of that for a start, roger.

Of course, it is the unattainable!/roger

It is, and by being in that situation, it can really usefully make sense of that situation in a critical and poetic way that anything on a stand would have problems doing/ roger

... sorry, I'm just looking for something I'd read recently.

What about?

I can't find it but it was an interview with a psychologist who was proposing that they (psychologists) now agree that thoughts are triggered

by feelings, which is obvious I know, but it bares quite nicely on a lot of things I've been thinking about/ roger// by which I mean how someone experiences art, roger

It does... and yes it does sound a bit obvious, but I guess they're talking about proof which is quite funny. but I think art is one space where the idea that thoughts are triggered by feelings has been tacitly accepted for a long time, and perhaps has more credence in movements like romanticism, but might be good to apply to minimalism and conceptuality.

Exactly, it muddies up the idea that an intellectual dialogue exists solely on an abstract, intellectual level, whereas what now seems obvious is that emotions are actually a vehicle or trigger, oo for the sake of closure, I've found the quote...

I'm not surprised you've been thinking about this, as it makes a lot of sense of how you might want to situate your work/ I found this great quote the other day, and I was wondering how this might fit into it... 'Describing her husband's relationship to art, Chelsea dealer Marianne Boesky recalls, "He had never been in a contemporary art gallery until we met. But as soon as he started understanding the numbers and seeing the margins, he became serious about art."'

'To have a thought, it is necessary to begin from an emotion. Through this transformation in the mind, a strong emotion is turned into a symbol. Symbols are the building blocks of thought. Symbols are placed together, a thought is formed and thinking begins.'³// does she mean the accounts?!/ Music always works through your emotions, a physical transformation'

Yep! It made me laugh, and is clearly a common truth, but in makes a wierd kind of sense with what you're saying ...is the symbol in this case simply \$, or is it more complicated than that?

Humour in the same way/ I think it's more

complicated, although she is being a little vague- it's to do with this 'mentalization' malarky

I guess everything can be said to work through emotions, which is why I dragged that art=money quote up... I suppose music tends to do it a little more obviously on the whole.

'There is a recently defined law governing the transformation of strong, uncontrollable emotion into symbols, or thought. When people are able to perform these transformations, they feel better, they can free themselves.'⁴// It's about quantifying the 'religious' ecstatic reading of art/ so you see something you can't understand and it unnerves you. You know the stendhal syndrome? When someone becomes 'helplessly overwhelmed by the beauty of art' and can't speak or walk, they usually collapse.

I like the idea of a law governing this! And yes I have heard of stendhal...possibly from you!/ is this what you want to achieve with your work?

Yes I would like people to be momentarily paralysed.

I think any good bit of work does this (though possibly without the melodrama)...was it Doesteyfsky who had a bit of the Stendhal in front of Holbein's dead christ?

I think it's really important to create a physical reaction to a work, as something more crucial and I don't know, base than just illustrating an idea.

But is a physical reaction the same as an emotional one? Or are they just generally connected?

I think they are connected, it's biology and chemistry right?

It might be biology and chemistry... it certainly sounds like it, and I'd be very tempted to say that I knew, but I don't! I think the proof thing can be dodgy ground for artists to work on... they fair better, or at

[3] Quoted in 'Metropolis M' no.4 2008, in an interview with 'the famous Florentine psychiatrist Graziella Magherini'.

[4] Ibid.

least more constructively on the less definite.

There's a nice definition of Science I came across recently which also serves as an antonym to art- 'The scientific process is one of doubting something until it can be proven to be true.'

And art?

Art is founded on belief isn't it.

I believe so// sorry that was a bit trite... but maybe ... yes.

As you said yesterday - 'the absolute rightness of what it means to make art'.

Yes.. but in a very personalised way, rather than an absolute...in the sense that it is right for you and you have to make it, irrespective of proof, sensibleness, logic etc// and I'm tempted to say that the proof is in the pudding, but we're doing the main course... it sounds pretty stupid but is sort of how it feels to me...sorry for seeming trite again.

I'm really getting in to this idea of fiction, suspension of disbelief, theatre, it's too early to talk about but somehow it all relates/ I'm reading up on social construction theory also, still early days but it's changed how I think about a lot of things which I've done.

In what way ... what kinds of things have you been reading...

For example how the suit, box, and boulder are all non-specific items, which in the past I've described as props that trigger a performance or signify a performance, which I understand better now as portending to actual props that are inbedded in our social construction of reality/ the suit being a marker of professionalism- people know what a suit looks like, to the point that they don't really exist as sartorial items, but as markers or symbols/ boulders,

trees, bollards mark the roads and paths in way which alters are emotional and behavioural relation to a city// apologies if I'm sketching a rough picture, I'm still at that stage, but I like the way theatrical props are made and positioned to make a scene or act or time period appear more real/ roger

Well, yes, I guess you could see them as both... as props that trigger and as actual props... there is something very awkward about your suits that makes them actual things as well as a whole series of markers for stuff.. the not-quite-rightness of them does this in a very subtle and unnerving way.

They blur a certain kind of expected reality and present a more unstable and confrontational act.

But I think it's worth considering that props are also constructed to make the situation/scene less real (sometimes deliberately) and this is what helps make them interesting things that function in a very odd way.

How do you mean? (this is my stock, please elaborate gambit)

Well, it's maybe the mismatch between the intention and what you get. There are really engaging props in cheap films that shatter the illusion of what they are meant to be supporting, and then there are those 'suspension-of-disbelief' sort of vocabulary that you get in traditional theatre (the backdrop fools no-one, but functions perfectly well by complicity with the audience/ I think the wrongness of your suits has a bit of each of those categories to it.

I see, yes this is where the construction of my props work to push our semantic understanding of this objects.// BS johnsons bloody brilliant at doing this/ have you read the ...Christie Mahlry⁵ book?// on every other page there is a deconstruction of the character within the novel- some times literally in a dialogue between the author and the protagonist.

[5] 'Christie Mahlry's Double Entry', B. S. Johnson

Years ago... I really want to again.

It makes you care more about the character.

Do you think this is something that written fiction is particularly adept at doing?

I have no idea why, but you fear for him, you want the novel, the illusion to continue, which in the end it doesn't, Johnson just kills him off. // I don't know, Smith thinks it's about a collective experience, I think it's linked again, with our perception of reality and our ability to empathise.

I guess you as a reader are more directly placed in the action... the emotion we were talking about earlier is less about the suspending of disbelief, but about the actual situation of reading

You have to believe in emotions (through the knowledge of their consequences) - in jealousy, in hate.

I think she's right as well... it is certainly one of the ingredients at any rate.

Ok, ok, we are both right.

I'm not sure you have any choice but to believe in emotion.. perhaps it is beyond belief.

This could go on and on rory,

It will (well it always has)



Alex Farrar & Charlotte Morgan

Hi charlotte,

What about that interview... the next a latento publication is under way; covering the period around our degree show, in which we (Harry, Iona and myself) were busy with a few shows, and I wanted to suggest that, as you were withheld at the time and didn't see any in the flesh (hopefully you'll have avoided any documentation as well), that we could have some sort of correspondence in which I will describe in as much detail as possible the specifics of the works and contexts that I showed in. In the resulting to and fro we will be responsible for the translation of the work into the publication, and whilst the difficulty of writing about art (and live work in particular) will be made obvious, I hope that something interesting will emerge- rather than producing a Q and A with carefully thought through answers (and questions) their might be a more purging, fluid, exploratory and honest exchange of ideas. (which I can edit later)

Alex

Charlotte A Morgan is an artist and writer based in Sheffield, United Kingdom. Through an interdisciplinary and often collaborative practice which extends into archival and curatorial processes, live events, discussion and critical writing, Morgan's work occupies a position between event, object and documentation. Her recent projects include MarketPlace, a site specific project as part of

Hi Alex

I like this idea - talking about work I haven't seen (and I haven't seen documentation either, though I've spoken to people who saw the degree show so this is another layer to the translation). The spontaneity of this works well, and I'm pretty good at rambling, stumbling fluidity when it comes to conversation! So do you hope this will tease out recurring concerns or methodologies etc or have less of a definite outcome? I guess we can just see what happens I won't plan anything. I like that in writing about art you have to to an extent communicate the work to the reader, which in this case I can't do, you have to communicate it to me and then my role is a bit fuzzy and our roles might end up interchanging. A sort of indefinite exchange/irrigation. Nice. When are you thinking? Over email or in person?

Charlotte

re:place Derbyshire, Ta(I)king Place, a series of discussions around the intersections of art and architecture and a published text in RITE, a collection of 18 original texts by UK based art writers developed through Critical Communities, an Open Dialogues and New Work Network collaborative project. <http://charlottteannemorgan.blogspot.com>

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A The site is always the starting point, I consider what would be the most effective use of the space, in what way can I make the context of an exhibition or otherwise (duration, audience, physical space) work for me, then I introduce an element which triggers something, that may have multiple effects but essentially is created to challenge your projected experience of the site.

C A response rather than an enquiry, something new, an altered situation. I'm being speculative, tell me about the objects. Are they objects?

It depends on the conditions, they could be anything. Until recently I referred to the objects as props, but after considering the language I use to describe the work, the term 'prop' is perhaps more significant. For example, I used to use the word props to suggest a simple object which helps to create a wider performance/ 'prop' as in a theatrical device which give scenery, actors or a performance space a specific period, place or character.- making it more 'real'.

Are your works trying to create a real situation, to trick the audience? Not in a malicious sense, mischevous maybe. Create a kind of uncertainty as to how real or serious the situation is that the props act within. Or are the boundaries of a performance laid out so the audience are aware of the artifice if you see what I mean?

The boundaries might be a little blurred, but the objects are very transparent, lumpy re-constructions of real objects- objects which I consider props, part of our social and physical landscape. Contracts and suits are socially constructed signifiers of meaning, which, like money, validate, they are symbolic objects for an exchange./

So the props are part of/instantiate a performance, shift what would be expected to happen in a certain situation, in an overt way? Tell me if I'm getting it

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wrong. Can you describe an example, like the suit. I read a sentence about it on the ESA mailout, and I'd seen the one you had made before.

The suit (I'm now on the third), I make entirely by hand, without any prior sewing experience, it is shown as I wear it to any situation in which I am presenting myself as an artist, which is usually to exhibition openings or meetings. As before, it is a re-construction, of a symbol of professionalism and success.

So you're performing something, or pointing to something, emphasising it.

Because of the method that it was made, the meaning of a suit is completely undermined/ The suit is replaced when it becomes necessary, with each version (they're all produced from the same pattern) the illusion becomes stronger until the work is rendered invisible from any other suit, only then does the work finish.///I think the performance is what is being made transparent/ In Leeds, the crowds at openings are generally made up of professionals, with very few students, so I could mingle and appear to blend in.

What effect do you think/want the suit to have on perceptions of you as an artist?

Well I'm aware of my own desire to appear professional, but also I am interested in role playing and costumes, in this sense it's a consideration into the facade of success, what it means, and it's effects.

Do you mean the illusion is undermined because the suit (usually afforded by having a bit of money to spend) is obviously hand crafted (badly as tailoring goes, or is it very finely made?) or because you're open about having sweated over it yourself which goes against the idea of fine tailoring being made for the professional by someone else, well, a tailor/ when your craftsmanship becomes invisible and no-one notices you' made it. Will you alert them to this

as a piece when you're wearing it or wear it as an ongoing work that doesn't have attention drawn to it when it's on.

The illusion is undermined because up close, it is very apparent how it is constructed, it hangs awkwardly, there are inconsistencies and irregularities (because I made it)/ I think the work will be finished then, I won't continue to wear my own suits/ We've been talking a lot about the 'being an artist', but the suit can be applied to any profession.

So it's the act of creating this persona and the attempt at creating an illusion whilst simultaneously being open about the artifice that makes the work.

It is a precarious act, which I'm conscious of having to perform. You have to be professional, as basically your own enterprise, and yet I believe art is made in the absence of more urgent human needs. As excess, it doesn't have to exist, but it does as an officially sanctioned 'void'.

Artists are definately their own marketing and finance team, until they get to a position where someone does it for them/

You create your own job.

It's a massive industry in a way, just involving personal creative agendas.

The work which I had in the degree show, was in the Fine Art hangar, have you been there?

No I haven't.

I think it was originally built for a swimming pool, it's a huge hangar-like space, with only one floor that has views to a tin roof./ For the degree show, the basic studio structure remains, with ten ft high walls dividing compartments into on average 5m sq spaces/ There is one artist per space, as in a fair.

Sounds like an interesting space, with a typical degree show set up. Semi-curated but very seperate.

In my proposal I requested a central space, with only one entrance, and the work was 'En Plein Air'.

Was it an installation or did it involve an element of performance with props as we talked about before?

My space contained a installation which supported a prop/ The only thing you saw as you entered the room (and from the entrance, if you were passing) was a pedestal, which was constructed from mirrors, and positioned in the centre of the space/ the dimensions of the pedestal referenced the kind usually used by museums for tall statues, probably of large weight, it looked a bit like a launch pad.// The mirrored surface reflected the surrounding space, actually inverting the walls and the floor, so it's 'walls' reflected the grey floor and the top, the white walls // Next to the entrance, obvious only on the way out was a helium canister, like the ones hired by professionals. Usually there was also a pile of tiny pieces of balsa wood, somewhere within the space.

Sometimes it wasn't there?

Sometimes, depending on the time of day, also, you might have recognised the balsa weights from somewhere else in the degree show, again, depending on the time of day/ The weights were scattered, in what seems like a arbitrary course.

Was it arbitrary?

Yes and no/ the 'prop' in the piece, was a box, made from 'fudge' colour tissue paper, and reinforced with a frame made of drinking straws.

The box was placed on the plinth

Depending on where you saw the box, it would have the appearance of an average, ordinary brown cardboard box, identified with a white label, with

the lid sealed with parcel tape. Every day, before the show opened, a white bin liner, filled with helium, and fixed with tape to have as much of a box-like-form as possible, was sealed in the tissue paper construction, causing the weight of the box to equal minus 8 grams/ causing it to float out of my space/ if it had been left with the total negative weight, it would have just hit the ceiling and stayed there for around 3 hours before hitting the ground again. So it was weighted with the balsa pieces, which were precision cut to measure 1.52 cm and weigh a hundredth of a gram/ the weights were added until the construction weighed exactly 0.00g, when it would neither float to the ceiling or fall to the floor, it would rise gradually until reaching an equilibrium, usually 15-20 feet up, and then would inevitably drift, traversing the entire hangar/ the conditions of it's course were initially dictated by the alternating strips of radiators and windows, but air pressure also had a huge effect, as did the people in the room, and close to the box, which would disturb it and cause it to move in the opposite direction.

I'd really like to have seen this. Did you calculate this specifically for the space, is it something you would have adjusted for any space you were given?

Beuase of the inherent qualities of helium, roughly every 15 minutes, enough gas would escape for the weight of the box to increase, causing it to fall, then an invigilator responsible for the work would remove 2-3 weights and it would raise to the optimum height.

Mathematically. the box in the hanger rising to 15+ feet suggests the boards dividing each students work was considered.

Ah, I see, to be honest, it was trial and error, then again, each day it behaved differently. But my intentions were for it to leave my space and to be completely unrestrained.

Can you explain a bit about how you wanted the work to depend/respond to the space and the shifting audiences?

I wanted the work to be discreet enough so that there was the possibility that you could 'find it' rather than have it announce itself, and I knew I had to be careful to avoid the usual connotations associated with helium and floating things- celebration and hippies/ the size of the box was modest, and the image of a cardboard box, the colour and structural qualities of this, caused it to blend in with the industrial achitecture.

Hippies?!

The 'floating' I was interested in, was the opposite of 'flying', non heroic, clumsy, directionless, disruptive, etc// (japanese lanterns and wishing balloon things).

I like the illusion of the box. Also the idea of uncertainty in the audiences encounter.

The course of the box, interfered with the audiences regularised viewing of work// it's worth clarifying that the box also rose and fell/ you could walk around the corner and it would be there, and because of it's minute pace it would appear transfixed, for a second in mid-air, before you could perceive it's gradual course.

In a situation devised to draw attention to sudents work as a kind of display, degree shows often bring about interesting discussion around curating and around the place of works which create a transient encounter, 'hide' as you say, depend on audiences or occur outside of the degreee show space, as ultimately they serve the assessing and grading of students work. /There's also an element of eeriness, enchantment if I can say that!

I had to arrange a demonstration and personally set the work up for the tutors assesment, and again for it to be externally moderated. Which was incredibly stressful as I was never sure how exactly it was going to perform, I think it got stuck in a rafter during the tutors demo, but for the externals, they ended up following it around, becoming hypnotised,

like watching an animal move around, it had an internal logic./ I think muddying up the regularity of a degree show, and the presentational set up which comes with it, was what excited me about the works potential, I knew some people would miss it, or not link it with the installation space, but for the people that found it, it was always different, depending on where it was, what it was near, what it was doing, whether it was trapped, there's a personal discovery which can be satisfying.

Interesting degree shows often address their context and play with it, lots of mini white cube's all linked together is a strange norm, necessary in some ways but not closed to critique.

It's a difficult thing to approach though, as it is such a large target, with a history for critique. And I'm not sure that the box was a critique, it was restless...

Did the work come from initial thinking about the degree show, the exhibition space, previous experiments or works or external influences?

I had the idea about a month before the show. There was a number of other works and ideas I was preparing which were fairly conventional, surveys of activities, stuff on tables and walls kind of thing, and I just getting more and more frustrated. The box was going to be a party piece, for myself, and I realised that the piece would work best leaving an empty space

Party piece?!

The 'empty space' would have been perceived as an 'empty space' so I had the installation of an 'empty space' or, 'a space which had been made empty'// Can't I say party piece? // I was a nervous that the work be read as a 'fuck off' kind of thing./ Thankfully it wasn't.

I don't think it would have been read like that, ultimately it was a very considered piece and wasn't

a rejection of the exhibition opportunity just a different way of approaching it. The space wasn't empty even when the box wasn't there, it sounds as if it invited questions and a sense of something happening, a loss, an uncertainty/ venice talk?! you can say party piece, I wasn't sure if you meant you didn't plan to exhibit it at all.

No, I just meant that it could have been, like a lot of artwork is accused of in Venice, a showy, quick, piece./ Let me just clarify that at that stage, I was dealing with very rough prototypes, which I was refining until the last minute.

It seems far from a fast showy piece. Do you feel that you got it right in time and you could work on it further in a new context?

I feel quite content with it, it was high maintenance and required me to be there at least twice a day to re-fill it (that was if I could find someone I trusted to monitor it throughout the day and release weights when necessary), I also had to make a supply of two boxes for each day of the exhibition, which took about a day, each, to make and were destroyed after every float. So, I would, and I have, thought twice about showing it again. I'd be interested in trying it in an art fair context though

But art fairs and dealers don't just trade in objects so its' ephemeral quality wouldn't stop the commercial agenda. Perhaps it'd be the sort of work that could be done more easily with a technical team and paid gallery staff.

That would be nice, a large museum with high ceilings would be a good host too.

Ha.



SUIT NO.1 2007-2008

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*shown in frames by the official Leeds Met memorabilia framer,
the suit is hung opposite starbucks in the Civic Quarter building

HARRY MEADLEY

Harry Meadley

1:58

Leeds Metropolitan University
Fine Art Degree Show
05/06/2009 - 11/06/2009



Harry Meadley

With an A, but not in that way

2009

Neon

52 x 20cm

Reclining Ghost

2009

Bench on loan from the Henry Moore Institute

152.1 x 50 x 43.2cm

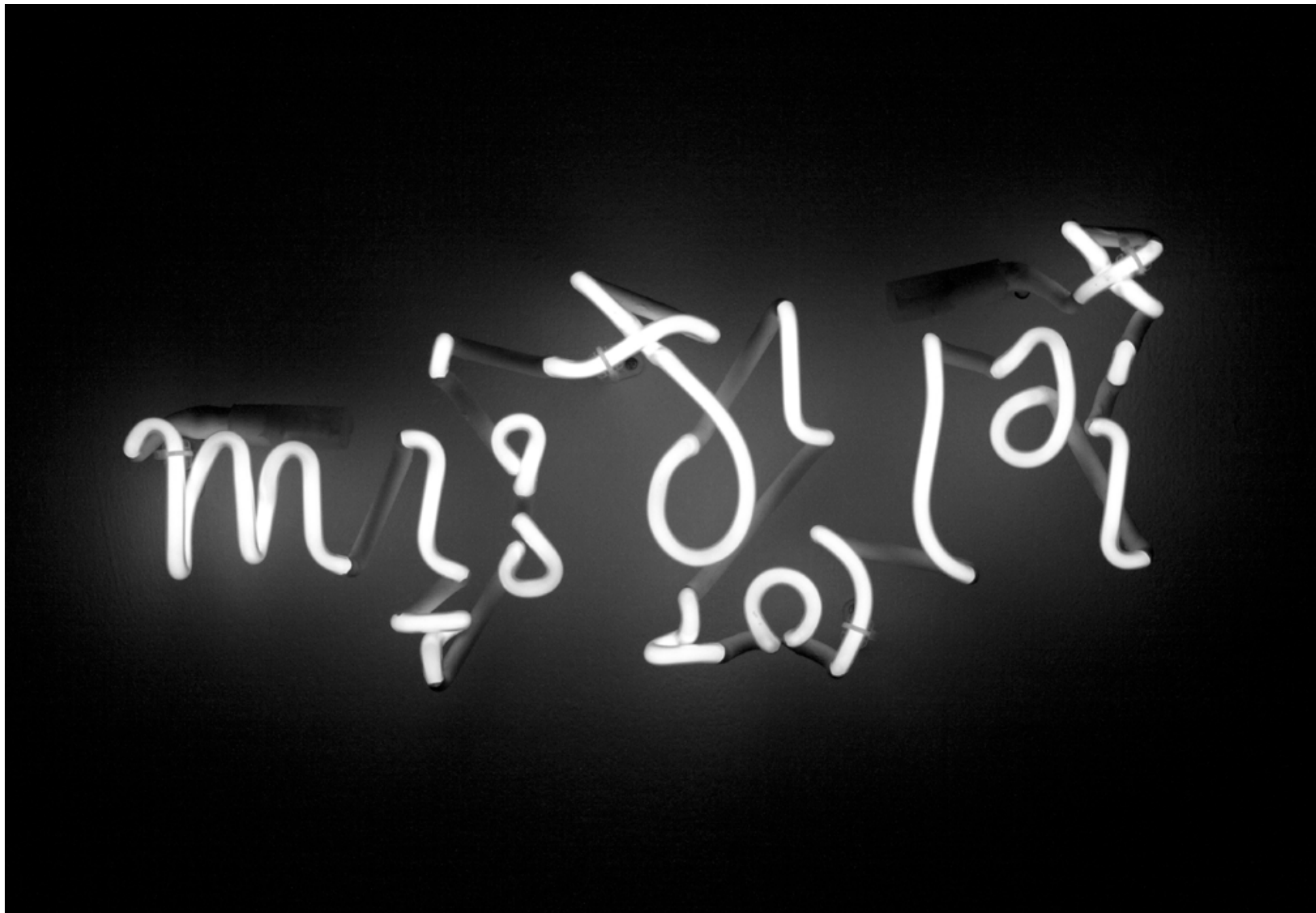
***Alex Farrar, Xenofon Kavvadias,
Phillip Fry, Anthony Burhouse,
Kayleigh Brooks, Gillian Holding,
Rosie Gammon, Theodore Reeves-
Evison, David Steans, R B Grange,
Simon Ringe, Alison Brien,
Pete Ellis, Jo Ray, Michael Burkitt,
Ahn Mi-Ok, Xymphora, Harriet
Parry, Charles Sheldon, Patrick
Sherwood-Hamilton, Iona Smith,
A Little Sum'in Sum'in, Christopher
Woodward, Rachel Carter, Mark
Tovell, Rob Glew, Nick Pierce,
Daniel Hird, Catherine Wilkie,
Alex Chocholko, Tom Miles, John
Slemensek, Simeon Barclay,
Hardeep Pandhal, Paul Smith,
Michael Pollard, Tom Walker, Nina
Wakeford, Clare Asquith, Zeno Velia
and Josephine Flynn***

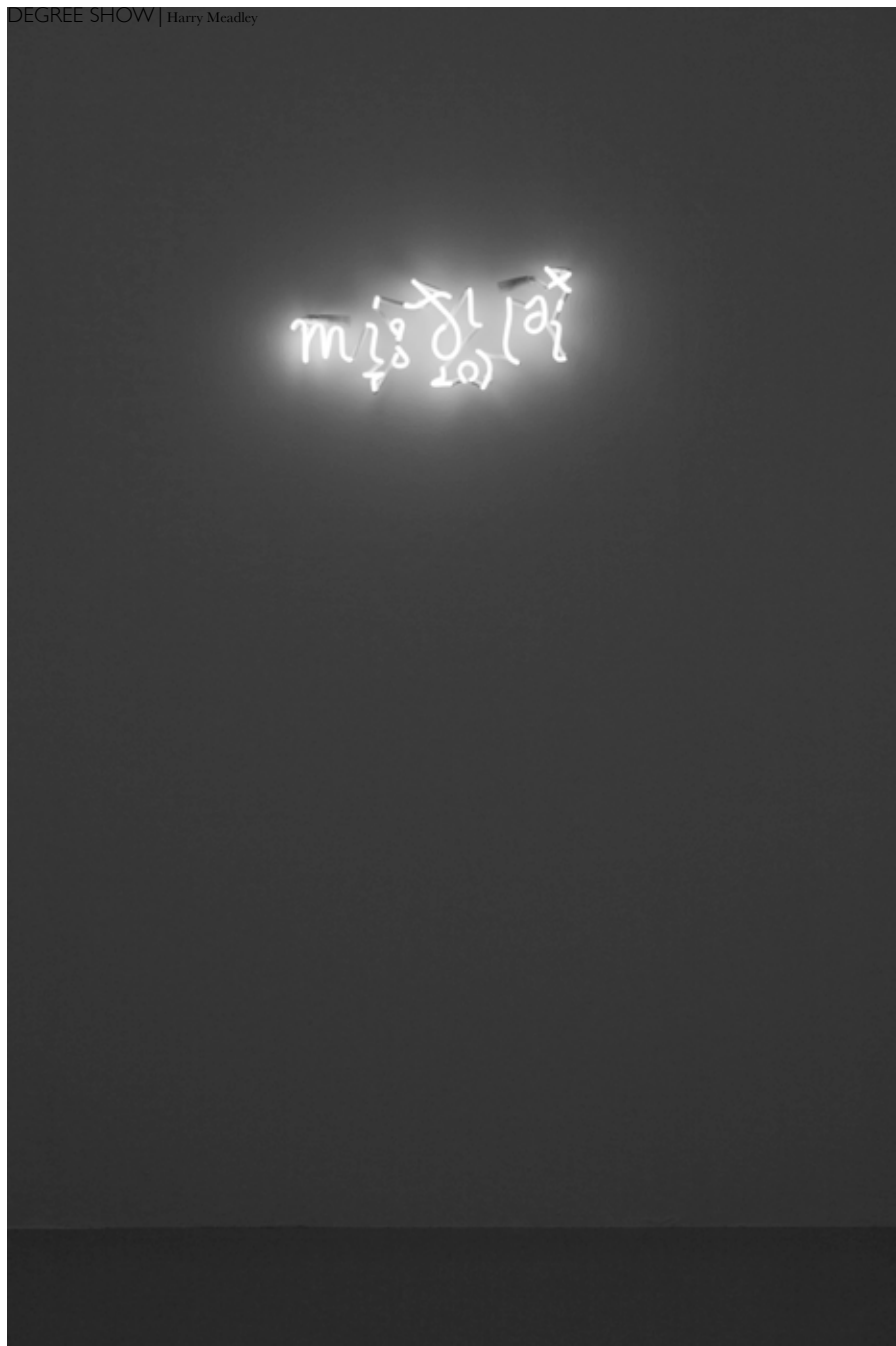
2007 - 2008

Engraved padlock

3.25 x 5 x 1.5cm



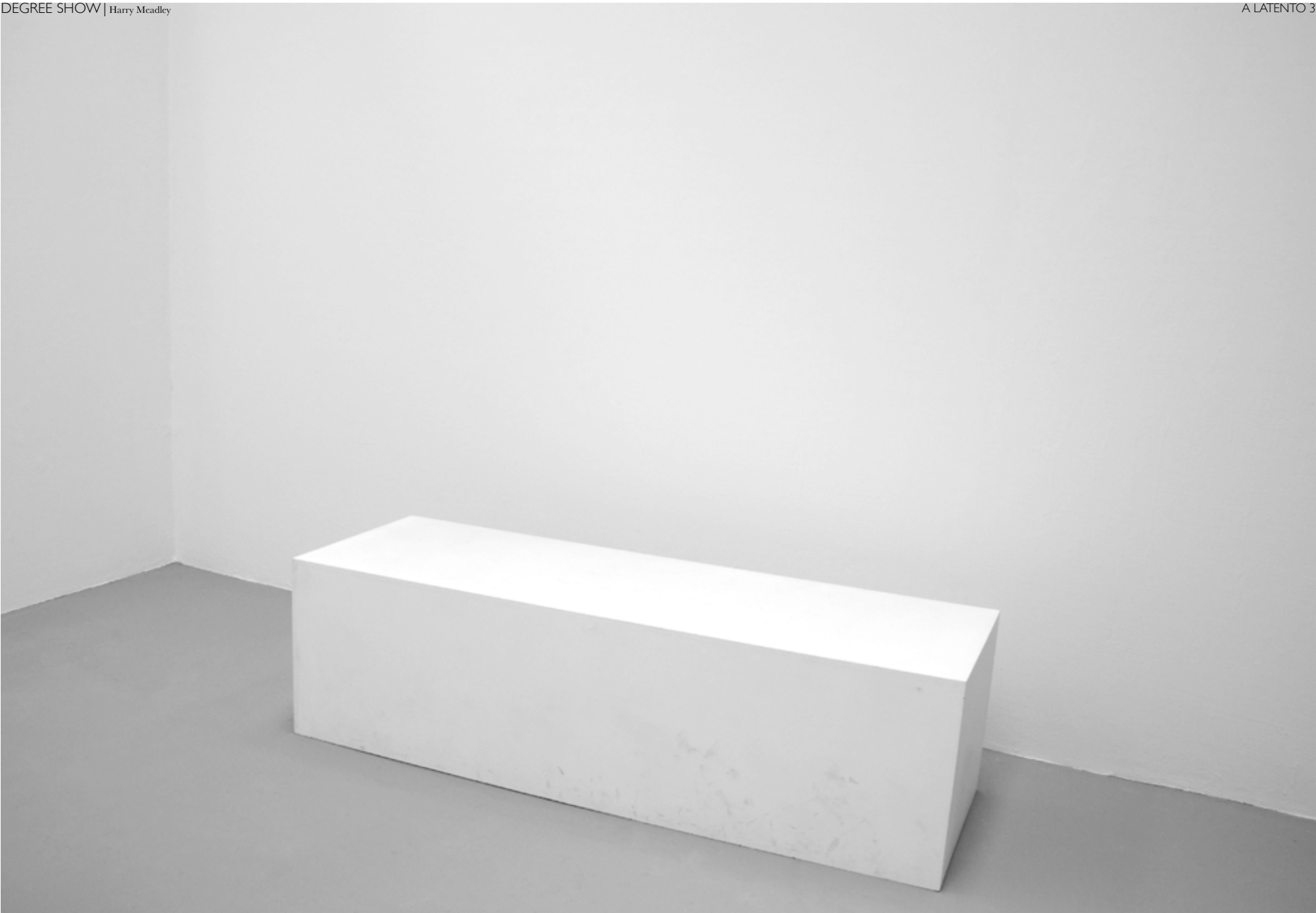




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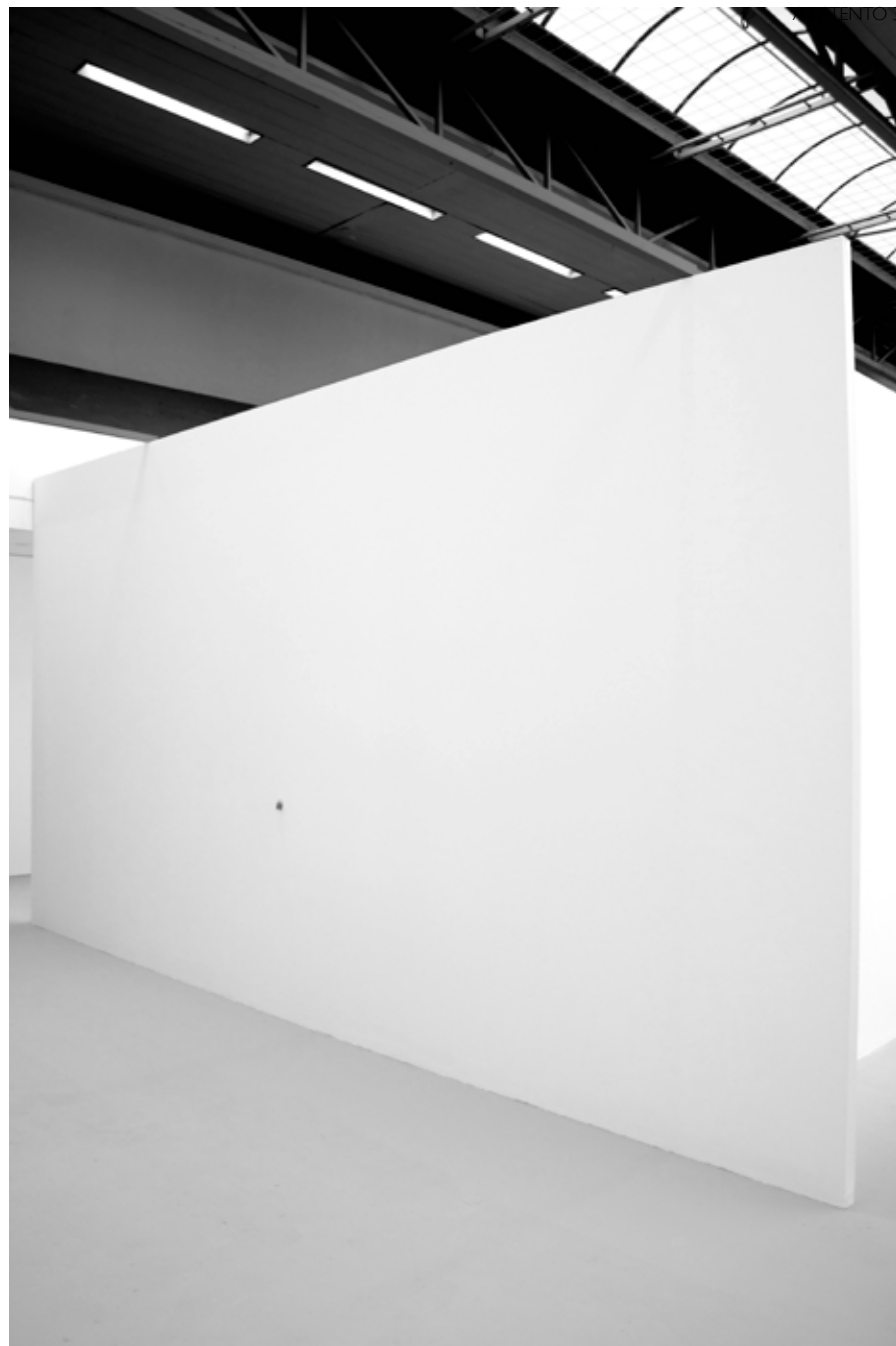


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HARRY MEADLEY
PERSONAL STATEMENT
29/11/2009

To inform a student's final assessment it is often a requirement for them to write an artist statement to accompany their works. Unlike all previous formative assessments in which you are asked to write a *personal statement* - written in the first person, you must shift to the third for your summative assessment and provide a cohesive explanation of your practice. Appearing to be written by someone else, such as the press releases of most artists starting out, it is a text that must still illustrate the student's decision-making and self-awareness to justify being given marks. A somewhat paradoxical situation to find yourself in, the statement you end up producing, which you are told should be the text you use for proposals and submissions after graduating, rarely stands a chance of ever being used again. And mine certainly has not.

Given the scenario of this volume of A Latento we created for ourselves, it seems only fitting, that as students who tried our hardest not to appear as students, and that now we are no longer students, and are acknowledging our previous roles as art students, I now have the urge to return to writing a personal statement. The main reason for doing this, is to provide information on the works I included in my degree show, that could only otherwise be relayed by finding someone to interview me and telling them what questions to ask, or writing down every point I want made and have someone re-write it as their own text. As we are only just beginning to ask people to write about our practices, that kindly they are willing to do, it would be a rather inconsiderate thing to request. And as I have now moved from the dynamic of educational assessments, to just general critique, my personal statement can be whatever I so wish it to be, without (much) worry. Maybe I just felt like I had one last personal statement in me that had to be written? I may even use 12pt Arial as the font as dictated by the personal statement guidelines, that as far as I can recall, I never actually followed [I will write it at 12pt Arial on A4 – the proper guidelines – and scale it down, as 12pt is too big for my liking – but against regulation, this statement will have to exceed the one page limit]. As this *is* personal, I can also be far more informal and justifiably use the taboo word 'I'. It is taking a lot of courage to write this – so I have intentionally left it to until very close to the print deadline to write it. The pressure has a way of drawing things out. I should also state, that as I am forcing myself to be quite open about the works, I will inevitably not make some things clear, get facts wrong, make mistakes, and somehow, though hopefully not, offend people. I've given myself very little time to correct anything that will need correcting. So I will apologise for this now. My ability at writing will affect my work – this has always been my main concern with writing about it, and why I scarcely have.

Before the works themselves comes getting the Degree Show space I wanted. This meant taking a bit of a risk. As all students on the course know, one

individual tutor is entirely in charge of deciding which students get to show in which spaces. The overall space used encompasses the studios of all three years set over three separate floors: the massive, triple-height ceiling third year studios, the squashed first year studios hidden on a mezzanine floor, only accessible through a series of three standard size doors and the converted office spaces of the second year studios on the forth floor. Competition is high, as visitors only ever find the third year studios, and the spaces themselves are very photogenic (unlike the others). I had in mind one space in particular, as I required a rectangular space that's entrance was only on one of the shorter sides, the longest sides were of equal length and the other shorter side was within reach of a power source. There were only two spaces that would have worked – one in the third year studios and the entirely separate 'Fine Art Gallery' space. The space I wanted, which was for many reasons the most ideal but did not have a power source close by, also happened to be the space used by David Steans for his degree show two years earlier, for which myself, Alex and Iona were his degree show helpers in what became his work *Labour 'n' Gang* (2007). This was probably the first thing the three of us did together, and part-formed our future corroboration. This re-using of his space felt very fitting, given the uncannily similar animosity we received on the course. But that history is reserved to the look we gave each other on the Degree Show opening night.

As you have to propose which three spaces you should have, in order of preference, you are asked to provide the requirements of your work and the positives and negatives of each of the three spaces you are asking for. The tutor always in charge of choosing (who just happened to be the same one who would subsequently force the actions documented in this book to take place due to his refusal to travel three and a half minutes to assess our additional external exhibition (though he is not solely to blame)) I felt would certainly not give me my first choice, which I gave as the Fine Art Gallery space – applied for by many students. I guessed that he would read this choice as me wishing to segregate myself from the rest of the course, occupying, what is believed to be the 'best' individual space, which I knew he would not allow me to show in. Then for my second choice, I chose a space which had a power source, though physically wasn't that great for my work, but as a positive I put that it was in the main through-fair of the third year studios, again this would mean my work being among the most prominent. So as my third and apparently least preferred space, I had the space I wanted with a carefully proportioned list of positives and negatives that I hoped would subconsciously make the said Tutor feel as if by them giving me this space, they would not be giving me my preferred space, but I would not be obviously hindered by being given this one as a back-up. On top of this, I made it very clear I had put a serious amount of effort into my proposal (which evidently I did) that I guessed many students would not. It even included a beautifully photoshopped mock-up of my works in my first choice space. Given the effort I put in, even this particular tutor would find it cruel to not give me at least one of my chosen spaces.

I'll never know whether my tactics had any real effect on the tutor's decision, but I was given my third choice.

Once confirmed, I also realised that one the external sides of my space was in the large corridor that lead through the third year studios, and that this corridor was parallel with the main H Block corridor where the lockers in which I had run MXXXII (the locker gallery) for two years were. More precisely, just as the row of lockers was divided into two sections by the entrance to the Fine Art department, my wall was one section of a potential larger wall divided by an entrance into more studios. And even more so, my wall was the larger section to the left of divide, which was also the side where MXXXII had been located. This parallel was too good to pass up, so I secured that external wall as part of my exhibiting space.

The work shown, the symbolic engraved padlock that secured the acrylic door of locker 1032, was hung at the exact height (107cm) it occupied when attached to the locker and was horizontally placed proportionally on the wall in the location it was placed on the original set of lockers. This happened to be just off the middle of the wall, as I selected locker 1032 due to its central location. The padlock was titled with the names of all forty one artists / artist groups that had exhibited over the gallery's two year tenure excluding myself, whom obviously is the artist of the work and only ever exhibited the gallery itself as a work (*Vernissage* (2007), *Midissage* (2007), *Finissage* (2008)) rather than showing work in it. I arrived at this title during the questions that followed my third year talk 'I to L' solely about the work MXXXII where I was asked by a fellow student, who in fact exhibited in MXXXII, why I kept referring to "we" when talking about the gallery when, they felt, I meant "I". My response to this was "...I would say that it's a collaborative piece, with my name at the top and with everybody else that has been involved with it just beneath". Given that a few of the names listed in the title could also be seen in the surrounding degree show spaces, it displayed a connection between certain students on the course. Not to mention the tutors who had exhibited. Padlocks are symbolic after all.

However, just as the locker gallery itself rarely gave away it's gallerist to the passing public it prayed on, this works author would only be given away by the audience reading the rub down transfer works list present inside my degree show space. That originally I imagine would have been clearer due to the corridor in which the work was shown being empty, with my space just round the other side. Until another student was forced to exhibit their works on the wall opposite. Though this confusion, surprisingly, had a good feeling to it, given the student in question was the very same one who I shared my locker with at the very start of the course, and who was also the person I first told, on the very first day of the course, that I intended to run a gallery from it. Admittedly MXXXII was not run from our locker – I chose another one (I usually don't admit this).

The decision to show this relic, that was a new work (dated 2007-2008 – the two

years the gallery ran for), was a final unmasking of myself as the locker gallery MXXXII's originator. But only to those who had previously known of its existence - a secret history within H Block.

This work was the only work I listed for sale. Priced at £1032.00 from which 50% would be kept by myself - the artist / gallerist - and the other 50% would be divided by fifty as artist fees per show (£10.32 (£10.00 plus postage)) for all fifty shows (three of which would come back to me). A price far higher than I knew anyone would pay, but a price I felt it was worth.

The next benefit from being given that space was that another of the three external walls was also in a corridor, the much smaller one previously mentioned. This was the back of the feature wall at the far-end of my space on which I was to hang a neon work, which allowed for the wires and transformer to be concealed on the other side of the wall. It was a nice compensation for the difficulty of actually getting a power cable to reach the transformer - solved by three very long extension cables and lots of blown fuses. In fact, connecting the transformer up was the biggest issue, as no one was qualified enough to confirm whether it would be safe or not, as the course no longer paid for an electrician to help with installation. So the eventual, and usual, methods of *try it and see if it works* and *cover it with a box* were used one rather strange and very early morning (so no one else was around) by myself and *that* tutor who was unusually glad to be helping me. It was after all his responsibility to help provide my space with electricity when he had given me one without.

I had had a growing worry about the neon work, as I had not actually tested it to see if it worked with the transformer since I had collected it from the place that produced it months before. It had been mounted to the wall with all the wires in place for over a week before the moment it was unofficially turned on. Which the very first time it didn't. Not a very nice moment. Upon realising we had not put a fuse in the plug, the second attempt was successful. The tutor had even been the one to press the switch, as he had warmly told me to go round and be the first to witness it come on. Followed by some very positive comments from him; it was a very strange morning.

The work itself, as I mentioned, was made months in advance, and conceived even more so. I can not exactly remember when he told me, but Pete Ellis, a tutor on the course, who had been my personal tutor in the first year, told me about a particular moment at the beginning of a documentary made about Ed Ruscha he always thought was wonderful (made I believe for the BBC in the seventies, though I could be, and probably am, wrong). The opening scene is a shot of him wearing a Stetson hat, stood in the desert, in his wonderfully thick American accent saying, "*My name is Ed Roo-shay. With an A*" whilst pointing directly, sort of gun like, at the viewer. This is how I remember it, from him telling me of how he remembered it, and I've never been able to track the programme down. This impression by Pete stuck in my mind, maybe even stronger than the

original in his. I think this had also been the first time I learnt Ruscha was pronounced roo-shay, which it very rarely is. I felt very sympathetic towards Ed Ruscha, as I also suffer, but to a much lesser extreme of my surname being frequently mispronounced. To which, over my lifetime I had become accustomed to, and of which I very rarely correct – usually out of politeness.

'Meadley' is very common sounding (even when pronounced correctly), but is in fact, a very rare surname. So rare it is not even common enough to be considered a 'rare' surname on the official list of British Surnames. And so rare that as far as any records show, I am the only 'Harry Meadley' alive on the planet [partly helped by actually being called 'Harry' which many Harrys are not]. So 'Meadley' is often understandably confused for the substantially more common 'Medley'.

At the start of the third year I came across the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA for short). That according to Wikipedia, the source where I first discovered it – IPA *'is a system of phonetic notation based primarily on the Latin alphabet, devised by the International Phonetic Association as a standardized representation of the sounds of spoken language'*. I found the extent of which IPA goes into detail alluring. A system of typography so complicated and accurate it can represent someone's exact voice. It was not a long process of working through the permutations of possibilities of using this form in an artwork that I arrived at deciding to have myself pronouncing my own surname translated into IPA. As the way someone pronounces their own surname, should be (I believe anyway), the most *correct* way their name should be pronounced.

Then we have the issue of accent, and pronouncing names, particularly surnames, in their native accent. A common trait within Art, maybe due to the vast number of different names from around the world it combines, and to the people discussing those artists wanting to show they know how to pronounce their names *properly*. I should not need to give any examples, as you will know what I mean. This accent change usually only accounts for artists from non-English speaking origins, which partly makes sense. But I quite liked to imagine someone with a thick, lets say, Italian accent saying a British artist's name with a British accent. Or even someone speaking in RP saying a Scottish artist's name in a Scottish accent. So maybe my name should also be said in a mild Yorkshire accent? It helps that it is the *International* Phonetic Alphabet.

The very first person I contacted about transcribing myself saying my own surname into IPA was Dr Barry Heselwood – a phonetics expert and professor at the University of Leeds. Who coincidentally, I found, also has a strong interest in language-based Conceptual Art, was more than happy to do the transcription for me. He was even able to do the transcription in the more detailed 'narrow' International Phonetic Alphabet that accounts for my accent and actual voice. Oddly the transcription has in it a *voiced dental non-sibilant fricative*, a consonantal sound not found in most languages and not really found in English.

This may explain why pronouncing my surname correctly is somewhat unnatural (though you wouldn't notice it).

The decision to render the work in neon had actually been made before I had even found IPA, as I began looking for such complex typographical systems in order to produce a neon work in such a system. I wanted to treat using neon as a material object, or rather the glass that the neon is trapped inside. There is obviously a material limit to the detail you can achieve in a neon work and I wanted to make a work that was just at the point of breaking (because if it did break, it would be a glass work rather than a neon work) but this alone was not enough. Neon works mostly deal in text and language and very clear statements. I like to make very unclear statements – but statements nonetheless, so a specialist typographically based language system had to be found as well as a person with the skill (and love of a challenge) to make it. The final neon work (which took a few attempts to make) from a single 3m length of glass tube, and is gloriously fragile. Partly to allow for the thing to be made, and partly to illustrate the handwritten nature of the work the final design is an enlargement of the handwritten transcription by Dr Barry Heselwood. He provided this for me, as correctly presenting IPA in most text editors is, in most cases, highly inaccurate.

Just in the way Ed Ruscha said *"with an A"* it is the misunderstanding, or just the missing of, of the A in 'Meadley' that causes the problem. As such, I could also say, "My name is Harry Meadley, with an A" but the A I refer to is a differently pronounced A, so it is not in the same way as in Ruscha. His A is the A sound in the word 'way' whereas in my name it is not. The works title 'With an A, but that in that way' acts also as a phonetic example that explains what it does not sound like. The clues – the Ruscha reference, the phonetic example, the 'm', 'i', 'd', 'i', 'i' visible amongst the unfamiliar characters of the neon itself that itself is an artistic signifier of text and language [the work was also designed to the scale of, and hung at the height of - my nose (superscript), mouth (midline) and throat (subscript) though this detail is unknowable] - illustrate the problem whilst also providing the answer/solution in the most accurate way. So accurate it would take years of learning phonetics to be able to understand [saying that, when I first showed the transcription to my marvelously punctilious personal tutor Sean Ashton he gave it his best shot trying to work out what each symbol meant, though he did have the advantage of already knowing how I pronounce my own surname (I am very glad he is not assessing this statement)]. After all, I still don't correct people when they mispronounce my name – and I don't expect this work to do it instead. It is in the dialogue around the work that the answer is relayed rather than found.

There is the inescapable connotation of 'my name in lights' but as most people would not realise it was my name, I think it was okay. Another student [in the list of names of the padlock work] did do their name in lights however – but their first name, and really big, cut-out light box style (and also in white light – I used white as using colour colours the work itself and any works around it) and they were

female - so it was a very different work. But as two works in a degree show they were interesting to compare.

I like how people mistook it for a mathematical equation; I wonder what the answer would be? This even included a tutor who had assessed it that (should have) read my supporting materials in which explained that it was in International Phonetic Alphabet. Someone thought it was a squiggle(!) and a few people did not even notice the neon was there, even though they had managed to notice the other work shown in my degree space - a bench from the Henry Moore Institute.

Before I tell you how I got the bench, I should point out how the bench got from there to my space. As previously mentioned, third-year students are given degree show helpers. This usually includes one first-year and one second-year. You are told when you are a helper, to make you help, that the third-year you help evaluates you, and depending on this, it will determine how many helpers you get when you become the third-year. But unsurprisingly everyone always get two helpers [unless you have a very good reason for more], no such evaluation forms exist, most first and second-years don't actually help and then whinge when their helpers don't help them in the third-year. Luckily the two helpers I got were good ones and very helpful ones at that. I sort of felt bad that I didn't have that much that they could help me with. Asides from painting the walls and floor the only thing I used them for was carrying the bench up from the HMI to the Leeds Met studios [that when it came to carrying the bench back (with David Steans nonetheless), I realised was quite a serious effort]. The outcome of having them carry the bench to my degree show space was the placement of the bench itself within the space. I left the bench exactly where they left it. I had planned to place the bench in the exact centre of the space [hence why I needed a perfectly rectangular space] but upon witnessing them subconsciously, between themselves, place the bench down - I realised the object had chosen its own location; a location more perfect than I could ideate. It just *felt* right.

In a way, I sort of feel the bench chose me. I first noticed the bench at half two on the 19th February 2009. I know this because that is the date and time from the photograph I took of it - which is usually something I condemn. Never take photographs in galleries unless you have permission. Somehow I justified it to myself because I wasn't photographing the work - I was just photographing the bench; this is a vital distinction.

I had been collecting images from the Internet of the many benches in art galleries and art museums across the World; I find their varying designs, roles and status fascinating. I had begun thinking around developing a work involving the displaying of a bench from a gallery or museum. Then when attending the *Asta Gröting Sculpture: 1987-2008* exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, which is important, not necessarily that it was her work (though it had probably helped my mind set), that it was a sculpture show. Benches are very rarely put near sculpture. If you're a gallery you put a bench in the middle of a room lined with

paintings or set back in a blacked out room with a video work in, or if you want to appear to be *public friendly*. You don't sit in front of sculpture you walk around it. But it was the bench itself that had the greatest appeal to me - it was made in exactly the same way a plinth would be. Essentially it was a plinth; and this separates it from all other gallery benches. It camouflages itself and confuses the audience. This dubious form becomes unfriendly - empty of an artwork and empty of sitters. Not quite a bench and not quite a plinth - so I saw it as a sculpture. A sculpture produced by a sculpture institute.

Most children born in or around Leeds of my generation, and after, will first experience Art through the reclining figure basking in front of the Leeds City Art Gallery that will more than likely be the one single artwork they see the most of during their life. Moore's reclining figure is Art as you know it, the first, and incredibly deep-set, point of reference. Affirmed, not by a plinth, but by a ten-foot sandstone wall, a lone female figure looking down at you guarding Art itself, so self-confidently exposing, or rather, imposing herself. Then if you grow up and, for whatever reason, decide to take an artistic path, you may likely end up studying on the Foundation course at Leeds College of Art & Design in the original Jacob Kramer building on Vernon Street - the same place Henry Moore went (and they don't let you forget it). Though very few Leeds Foundation students will ever study or even discuss Moore, maybe through desensitisation from over-familiarity or just from not being to begin to relate to it. Art has changed (as it should) quite a lot since Henry Moore. For me Moore is somewhat of a great grandfather figure. He died before I was born; I never knew him or understood him, yet I feel an attachment to him. But that attachment probably comes less from his works and more from what he left behind for us - the Henry Moore Foundation. Something I am personally very thankful for.

It was not hard when stood looking at this plinth-like-bench, I had momentarily become infatuated with, to realise that if it were to be used as a plinth, it would be the perfect size for a life-size reclining figure. I tried to imagine what figure would lie on it, but unlike Moore, that is not something my brain can do; something I am very envious of. I knew there could be a figure there, but to me it was invisible. But maybe if the figure was not on the plinth, then maybe it was inside it? A coffin [it had already been carried through the streets as such]. Or maybe the bench itself was the figure? As much as it blurred between plinth and bench, it could just as much be blurred with a minimal form (maybe because it is). This bench was an artwork without knowing it. So I set about trying to get it.

Like their choice of benches the HMI is sort of a mystery, in the sense that, unlike municipal galleries such as the Leeds City Art Gallery it connects to (note their very bench like wooden benches), or ticketed Art Museums (big fancy benches), that make their role for the greater public very clear, the HMI's role is sort of vague. The public are obviously welcome, but they have to approach what is essentially a giant dark-grey granite fortress, enter a long and incredibly difficult-to-walk-up corridor of steps to then be presented with very intelligent and

challenging exhibitions of works. There is an austerity uncommon with big galleries. All of which make it such a great place. I wish I knew more behind the design of its façade. It is literally the studded curtain wall of a castle. There is a room you can just see that faces out from behind the studs; I bet that is a really good room to look out from.

I learnt that there were four benches and that they had been made for a previous exhibition of video works *The Object Quality of the Problem: Palestine/Israel* [I must have noticed them before but in a context in which they made sense]. And the next exhibition at the time - *The New Monumentality*, a video show, which was going to contain the benches, was to open days before the degree show. I only wanted the one (but I really wanted *that* one) so I asked to borrow one or pay for a replacement one to be made. I needed the true bench, with its genuine marks. There is an honesty to the work which is important, for me, anyway. It would be unconvincing if I said that long meetings were held, the work was scrupulously discussed and it was eventually approved as a worthy Henry Moore referencing work (which it probably wouldn't have been). An art student's work in a degree show is pretty inconsequential. I was lent it more as a personal favour, which really meant a lot. That without which, the work would not have been realised.

I had wanted to acquisition the bench, but was only really in the position to borrow it. There is a distinction between the work being 'acquisitioned from' and 'on loan from' but logistically it had to be loaned. When I ended up returning it I marked the inside of it with my initials in hope that in future I may get chance to keep it – and to stop it getting mixed with the other three. But then it dawned on me that my initials are also H.M; which probably doesn't help. But the distinction of loaning the work, lends itself more to the place it is on loan to, rather than had it of been acquisitioned, that would have connected it directly to me. This transportation from one institute to another is integral to the work, when the institution it is being loaned to has an astounding secret.

Before I had even begun at Leeds Met whilst still a Foundation student at Leeds College of Art & Design my girlfriend Rachel worked as a temp in the Leeds Met Alumni Office. As part of this job she had access to the usually restricted-access Alumni archive in which she discovered the records of Henry Moore. Something the wider-University itself may not actually know. Or does but doesn't acknowledge? It was a very confusing discovery. Leeds Metropolitan University, originally the Leeds Polytechnic, was formed in 1970 from the amalgamation of several 'Leeds College of's including part of (as it split) the original Leeds College of Art. In this divide the Polytechnic must have taken the archive. So the BA Fine Art course at Leeds Met seems to be a direct descendant of the original Fine Art course at the original Leeds College of Art. Though this is never mentioned. I say original Leeds College of Art, as from 1970-2009 it was the Leeds College of Art & Design but as of the summer of 2009, the summer of my degree show, it reverted to its original name as the Leeds College of Art. The Leeds Met Fine Art

Degree Show 2009 was also the final time the degree show would be held in H Block – the courses custom-built home since the Polytechnic began in 1970 before the course moved to the new building *Broadcasting Place* – further distancing itself from its lost ties with the original Leeds College of Art. Also, as I would soon be leaving Leeds Met, I felt comfortable enough bringing this little-known piece of information out and in making a work that references and connects itself to Henry Moore, I couldn't help but consider it as part of the work.

'Reclining Ghost' the title I gave the work, can really only mean one of two things: the ghost of Henry Moore himself, or the ghostly figure of a lost work (or one he never made). As I said earlier, I'm not capable of imagining new forms in the way he did, nor is anyone else. The fact the ghost is 'reclining', though a fast and effective signpost, is intended to be telling. Plus, the bench is the right size to recline on, but not the right size to lie on [or in, that's the coffin idea out the window].

However, this is digressing from the bench's originally intended purpose – to be sat on; and it's new location – a degree show. Degree Shows are horrible things. They have a finality that doesn't really exist in other forms of exhibitions (or at least I've not come across it); it has an over-whelming self-generated pressure by both the tutors and students alike. Naturally causing the frictions that have slowly built up between students and students, students and tutors, but most of all, tutors and tutors – to surface/resurface. Curatorially they are a nightmare; in so much as there is no curation. Some degree shows attempt to curate themselves; yet they end up even worse. Probably the main un-spoken fear amongst many students is that fateful visit by their parents (maybe more-so on provincial Fine Art Degrees). And this family-heavy audience is attending an exhibition of fifty or so students but only trying to find their particular one. Similar to art fairs (which are probably the closest things to degree shows – but much better) there is a certain feeling of herding. Numerous cubicles all interconnected by a series of complicated corridors the congested audience has to trudge through. A bench becomes a highly desirable object. Preying on an audience of which the majority are not there to pay attention. As soon as the bench is sat on, it becomes a plinth. It draws out either those not realising it is a work; or those that realise it *is* a work but want to make a point about sitting on it – to expose themselves. Which as I vaguely hypothesised, no one did during the private view. The bench, by becoming a work, transcended being sat on – in front of other people anyway. Apparently a fellow student spent the majority of their half-day invigilation shift sat on it reading, having not realised it was a work. Though why they felt they just had to guard my space, I really don't know. A few different people I showed round sat on it, though when they did, they were not making a point, but sat on it very consciously. Not self-consciously; but like they were testing it. Or feeling it.

My feelings towards people sitting on the bench really vary. I see the obvious provocation that can be read from the gesture or declaring a bench an artwork, and that artworks, unless invited, should not be touched. The cruel-side of the

work draws out the exhibitionists who wish to put themselves on show; I like that side. But the bench is already marked from a previous audience who sat on it when it was just a bench. There is nothing really *wrong* with someone sitting on it again – it wouldn't damage the work. I've sat on it loads. That's why I like the ghost – this uncomfortable presence residing over the bench. Haunting those that sit on it. I don't believe in ghosts, nor do I imagine that someone who actually does would believe in the ghost I made up. But I believe in the force artworks have not to be touched by those not permitted. Sitting on what had become *my bench* in an amplifying degree show space was a very different affair to sitting on the other two identical ones inside the Henry Moore Institute's echoey main gallery space on show at the very same time. I would like to think this goes part the way to explaining how one from a set of identical objects becomes a unique work of Art while the others do not. Though when another fellow-student (also one of the names on the padlock work's title) decides they want a bench in their space for people to sit on whilst listening to headphones, and measures up my bench's dimensions - things get very complicated. Luckily, they went for a cushioned top on their bench – very friendly. But with the additional factor of the headphones, no one would sit on the bench and *not* listen to them. Doing *that* would be even ruder.

So we have the three works, and then the three of us – Myself, Alex and Iona. It would be a mistake not to mention our shared roles in each other's degree show works. Iona's degree show space being next to mine (on the other side of the last remaining wall I have, until now, not mentioned) reached by the corridor that passes the reverse side of the neon's wall; Alex's space being only two spaces away from mine and three from Iona's, with his box frequently finding itself in ours. One space with a translucent bridge; one with a mirrored plinth and an escaping box; one with an empty plinth [/bench] and an undecipherable white neon. We also all had rub-down dry-transfer works lists / titles in the exact same fonts and format [though it was still enforced we had to put up the quickly cut out foam board name tags provided for every student by the course in – or near, in our case – our spaces]. Maybe we had anticipated our degree show works being shown solely alongside each other in this next volume of A Latento? Away from the rest of the degree show we wanted to segregate our selves from; or that had wanted to segregate us from it. There was a very significant work by a fellow student that I *could* mention; but I won't. All the works shown by Iona, Alex and myself together in the degree show could quite have easily been swapped with all those in ^{superscript}, but they weren't. It is not my place to talk on behalf of all of us and our collective decisions as we can only be assessed individually. That may have been the problem: you are only allowed to submit alone, or together. As a consortium we are both.

Technically the works I showed in ^{superscript} were also assessed, so technically this statement should really also cover them. But one of those works would become conceptually flawed if I ever explained it [but I *would* be able to write about the technician (officially a *learning support officer*) who tried to con money out of me,

that when failed, told incredible lies just so he didn't have to do the one technical service he is employed to do, at more length]. The three works shown in the degree show are very *personal works*; this may be where the original urge to write this in person came from.

As I should be critical of my works in my personal statement I should know that providing this very personal statement creates a contradiction to the work. My works are not intended to be explained. Rather, they are to be solved. So explaining these works such as I have, it could be argued, will degrade them. But I would argue back that just understanding what the work *is*, is just the beginning of the work. I just make it take longer, and with more effort, to get there. By the reading of this text, you are making the effort and I felt to acknowledge your efforts by revealing some sides of the works you could not have discovered without me. This is after all meant to be *personal*. I would also hope you presume there are still many details I left out.

If we return to the context of this text: assessment. Here lies the problem (that possibly helps exemplify the larger one) – in order to be assessed your assessors must understand what it is they are assessing. Even if they work out that the work wants them to work at working it out, how do they know I'm not just crying wolf? It would be very easy and of very little merit to make things that appear to have clues, that are a mystery, that seem to allude to something – that do not have an answer. *That* is far crueler. That is why students must write statements, and assessors must assess the students' explanations. In those explanations they need to acknowledge all the questions the works may raise, and then answer them. If the work does not want to be explained, or it is integral to the work that it is not explained, then it will be treated as any other work that *has no* explanation. And that will ultimately receive a low grade unless a belief in the student has already been established to trust in their work. But that trust, and that expectation, is only gained from the depth of previous explanations. Maybe why I feel I have to explain myself to you? And maybe why it has taken a text the length of a dissertation, rather than a single page, to do it? I think that when that belief has been avowed is when you become an artist. As, as much as I tried to make myself not comment about Art directly, Art is nothing more than belief and trust. The nature of 'going through the system' of art school and getting a degree acts as quick affirmation. When you graduate you are no longer an art student, but there is no certainty you will be an artist. That only comes from personal resolve. A resolution, that if you happen have whilst still an art student, says *I am not an art student – I am an artist*. And that, of course, is the role of the system. Even if sometimes, parts of it are not too happy about it.

IONA SMITH

DEGREE SHOW

Bridge (separatio)

Clear Resin

53 x 18 x 20cm

06.2009, Leeds Metropolitan University



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Iona Smith/ Fine Art level one/ personal statement 30/4/2007.

Solipsism, Rational Irrationality (or why Nietzsche thought Socrates deserved hemlock), Spectacle and the untapped well of performance (another unquestionable medium? the slowness of theatre and everything else to catch up with art)- the problem with performance referring to performance; life as performance, life as art, Situationist International, Übermensch), collaboration with other professionals (the lonely artist or the tool of society, and why I've been dealing out extensions of my work to other craftsmen- does Sol Lewitt and conceptual art's free association come into this?, art historicism a diversion for awareness of history (Kosuth)- we have no genuine identification with historical events (we choose to identify with them- (art and language) - the cat sat on the mat- reconstruction/recreation, artist's obligation/prerequisite to create- contextualisation of one's work in present climate (to avoid referential work that is made to be understood by a handful of self-congratulatory academics....)

This year's body of work has been informed by contradictory interests of working with solipsism as my standpoint and a resolve to explore inter-personal relationships through willing and unwitting collaboration with other professionals and members of the public.

An on-going work involving a four-piece band operating as my own personal live soundtrack can, I suppose, be taken as fulfilling both criteria. Other collaborations have included a commissioned drawing by an illustrator and a poem by a storyteller. This process has unexpectedly uncovered the problem that although in principle I embrace this employment of other skilled bodies, I did in fact have very strong ideas about how I would like the commissioned work to be, and found it difficult to establish a balance between complete control and absolute creative freedom of the other party.

A performance using about thirty members of the public to wave at strangers on a departing train evolved from another egocentrism in which I was initially intended to be the sole recipient of the waving. The problem here would be that the audience would be...me (instead of imposing the position of art audience/participant on the whole train.). Well, maybe that's fine, after all I can't pretend that my own satisfaction plays no part in my making art. Why not just make lots of work that requires having people give me presents, writing odes to me, being nice to me, etc.? Indeed, this may be a particularly good (if offensively schematic) means of communicating my next point: that the abhorrent prevailing self-importance of the artist and ready-acceptation of established art practices remove the practitioner from being a member of society in which one could work instead as an integrated component. This doesn't necessitate a deprivation from art of either spectacle or outright revolutionary aspirations (it would be interesting trying to make an integrated component out of a revolutionary), I merely stress the importance for art and the artist to be an impetus for collective social change, and not allowing for distraction by becoming embroiled in self-referential elitism.

Particularly worthy of note here are the 'Essays on the blurring of art and life' by Allan Kaprow and Situationist International's impetus to *supersede* art, to overturn "the notion of art as a separate, specialized activity and transform it so that it becomes part of the fabric of everyday life."

Harold Rosenberg (or was it Kosuth?) described the blunder art has made in somehow allowing an (institution-selected) study of art history to take the place of

it was Kosuth quoting Rosenberg

history proper. I stand by a desire to do away with art that refers to art, unless it is to uncover its serious misconstruction in an attempt to better understand the present climate.

I am keen to implement my view of the whole world as an artist's playground ("under the gallery floor- the playground" -Tino Sehgal referring to 'This Success/This Failure' 2007, come on Tino, step up your game.), and see no reason why an interest in theatre design shouldn't be included to an end of creating a theatre (in the sense of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk) without walls, box office or distinguishable participant/audience boundary. My next foreseeable plans are digging orchestra pits in lonely hillsides and gathering a band of official mourners for hire 'at appropriate times'.

FINE ART**Formative Assessment 2****Level: 1**

Student: ...Iona Smith.....

Unit/Module ref.:

Personal tutor: ...Kevin O'Brien

Assessment criteria:

Does the work presented demonstrate an ability to use a variety of tools and basic techniques for the preparation and construction of an individual practice?

Has the student begun to demonstrate an independent approach to generating, developing, articulating and realising ideas through their own studio practice?

Does the work presented demonstrate the importance of self-presentation and some professional skills?

A	A-	B	B-	C	C-	D	D-	E	E-
						X			
						X			

Supporting Material: / Yes	Personal Statement: YES	Indicative Grade: D
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How to Improve:

You began to engage with the course last term and have the confidence to pursue what you want to make. But you are just not seeing it through with the rigour necessary to make this kind of work. You seem to either talk yourself out of seeing things through or you run out of steam when obstacles are encountered. Nothing happens in or with the work and it lapses into whimsy.

To make this work you need to step up to the mark and tough it out. You need to test it, interrogate it, adjust it and adapt it to circumstance. You also need to make greater efforts to record it and work out what significance recording plays in your overall practice and what form it should take.

Personal Tutor: ...Kevin O'Brien.....

Other Staff: ...Pip Dickens..... Date: ...27/02/07.....

I
 Proclivities towards ambitious large-scale performances, such as *Portable Orchestra Pit*, *Kite Bullfight* and *Plant Your Village!* are remedied by short-term projects and supporting work (eg. *Valentine's Day Massacre*) that are able to elaborate and give more integrity to the long-term projects and show the beginnings of a more refined visual language. The nature of this developmental stage shows that work over the last two years is varied in style, though all tries to get at similar themes. These may be broadly categorised as tragedy, community, ritual and courtship, and draw from folk-lore, sociology, zoology and whimsical conjecture.

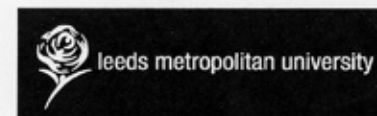
II
 I reject art that is 'solvable', that can be explained in a few sentences, is not more than the sum of its parts, and which is consequently not art.
"It is obviously difficult to define oneself after a post-modern period where we all became extremely self-conscious and aware about the consequences of our actions. This is why conclusions should be suspended but the tension should remain. There is a complexity that should be recognised and that should produce a fragile object."

- Pierre Huyghe

III
 While some ongoing projects, like the twinning of objects and geographical landmarks and some uses of the Orchestra Pit are undoubtedly public intervention, I am more inclined to move away from this kind of suspiciously apologetic gesture in favour of performances that put an audience in a position of endorsement, or at least witness-bearing, without their having to be the ringleaders. In particular, I am interested in the possibility of transgressions being imbibed through experience of performance. This is again related to ideas of Otherness and ritual, and also collective Katharsis of Greek theatre.

Reading List

McCormick, J. *Bullfighting- Art, Technique & Spanish Society*, 2000, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey.
 Cohen, A. P. *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, 1985, Tavistock Publications Ltd, London.
 Mauss, M. *The Gift*, 2006, Routledge, Oxon.
 Drummond, B. 45, 2001, Abacus, London.
 Morgan, P. & H. *The Book of Kites*, 1992, Dorling Kinnersley Ltd, London.



The Leeds School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design

BA (Hons) FINE ART

FORMATIVE FEEDBACK

Student: Iona Smith

Tutor: Simon Ringe

Unit ref.: Studio Practice 2.2

Date: 13th March 2008

Assessment Criteria:

- Does the work presented evidence a self-directed programme of study rooted in research and critical reflection aligned to an open and explorative approach towards practice?
- Does the work presented and your engagement with the course demonstrate a developing, applied and appropriate critical language?

Strengths & Weaknesses:

Again you have delivered a series of proposals that are not strategically presented as art but as background, clues and developments of proposals. Unfortunately we can't really mark proposals as they work to offer something but what they offer can't be tested and as such only exist in their possible potential. Proposals are indicators of very little. One can promise to make wonderful work especially if the work promised is never to be tested against the claim.

These are points we've discussed numerous times and I believe you have to deliver against some of them now. When you have worked previously within the relative comfort of the university you can and have been brave but now that things are operating in the wider world there is reluctance. That isn't unusual in fact it's a perfectly natural reaction. Everyone has to deal with the fear of failure, the sooner you tackle it the better.

You don't present evidence of works achieved either. Do you produce evidence for yourself? Neglecting to do so within the confines of an educative framework seriously undermines your position. My explaining to a third party, assessing partner, what it is you have done isn't good enough. It certainly wouldn't be to external moderators because how can anyone outside of the course put faith in the supposed history of a student's work and their achievements if it only exists as hearsay. You have to recognise that you are operating within an educative setting and in so being are subject to the expectations that give proof of your endeavours, practice and artwork. Artworks as objects are admittedly easier to document but documenting events shouldn't be more problematic it just takes planning. Be mindful of what constitutes your practice and give it due credit by witnessing it through documentation.

I don't doubt your integrity but you have to now bite the bullet and move away from proposals and conjecture to test ideas and works out by realising them. In that way you will negotiate them in a pro-active way to revise and improve them.

Your research is always rich and your increasing knowledge of social constructs and power relationships are and will be a great resource. Would you perhaps be interested in presented your findings as museology as opposed to working to make actual artworks as events.

Indicative Grade: C-

Indicative Grade Bands

75 – 100	A	70 – 74	A-
65 – 69	B	60 – 64	B -
55 – 59	C	50 – 54	C-
45 – 49	D	40 – 44	D -
35 – 39	E	0 – 35	E -



leeds metropolitan university

The Leeds School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design

BA (Hons) FINE ART

FORMATIVE FEEDBACK

Student: Tona SmithTutor: Pete EllisUnit/Module ref.: Studio Practice 3.1Date: 23/11/08

Assessment Criteria:

- Demonstrate through practical work a self-directed independent practice and research led study, with a consistency and competency in the realisation and selection of appropriate media.
- Demonstrate through the personal statement an astute evaluation and critical analysis of their own work.

Strengths & Weaknesses:

Tona is achieving degrees of excellence that have to be encouraged. Her statement is intelligent, cogent and very good and can be improved by being extended to include more critical evaluation of what is being achieved. It needs more!! More contextualisation, more detail in why things are done in the way they are done, more expansion on terminology used e.g. "archetypal", more expansion on the meaning of visual conclusion. This sounds v. critical, it's not. And although the presentation was somewhat low key and rushed, staff were mindful that all the pieces referred to P.T.O.

Indicative Grade:

A-

Indicative Grade Bands

70 - 100	A
60 - 69	B
50 - 59	C
40 - 49	D
30 - 39	E

were not studio bound but were out in the contentious arena of the public domain. That all the work produced has/is being used sits specifically, or themed to particular events. Staff were also aware that Tona fundamentally seeks out every available opportunity to make a visual intervention as ambitiously and professionally as she can. She is a very hard working student who is continually setting levels of excellence in her engraving productions and striving to live up to them. This is acknowledged in the position she has achieved at assessment.

Very definitely improvements in performance and attention to detail can be made, but the quality of the performance has to be set first and Tona has skilfully demonstrated that she does this.

I thought her last assessment and the work she had to show was terrific and she should seek out more tutorial advice and speak about her aspirations to more staff.

Our next one-to-one tutorial will be on Tuesday, 9/12/08 at 12-00pm.



leeds metropolitan university

The Leeds School of Contemporary Art and Graphic Design

BA (Hons) FINE ART

FORMATIVE FEEDBACK

Student: Gona Smith

Tutor: Peter Ellis

Unit/Module ref.: **Studio Practice 3.2**

Date: 8/3/09

Assessment Criteria:

- Does your studio work evidence a refining independent art practice embedded in your independent research, ideas and sensibilities?
- Does your studio work and personal statement reflect the critical evaluation of your own work and that of others?

Strengths & Weaknesses:

Gona has spent recent time in reviewing and critically evaluating what she has achieved and the direction she now wants to go in. It is fair to say that Gona is deeply intelligent & mature and has achieved degrees of excellence in the content, location and presentation & recording of her work, all of which has been made for venues outside of the studio to real audiences. She often in site specific venues here and abroad she takes her opportunities as she finds them and her ideas have great adaptability and are flexible to suit purpose & venue.

Indicative Grade:

Indicative Grade Bands

70 - 100

A

60 - 69

B

50 - 59

C

40 - 49

D

30 - 39

E

She researches excellently, materially and theoretically and often works collaboratively. I look forward to her next piece! Gona should explain her ideas to other staff to get general critical advice and feedback.

Unmitigated

Derek Horton

Coda

Mitigate: - to cause to become less harsh or hostile;
 - to alleviate or make less painful;
 - to reduce the blame or responsibility for.

Unmitigated: - not diminished in severity (e.g. 'unmitigated by any hope of relief');
 - out-and-out; downright (e.g. 'an unmitigated disaster').

Art school

It is a convention of academic and critical writing that the self is excluded from the text. Writing is done in the third person, formal language is preferred to that of everyday speech and the pretence of distanced objectivity pervades. Such formality is avoided here, not least because my subjectivity is central to the case I want to make: I am writing about people I know, about experiences that I have been a part of, and from an unashamedly partisan position on art education in relation to what I believe in, work for and want to advocate. I refer both specifically and generically to the circumstances of the artists for and about whom I am writing, Harry Meadley, Iona Smith and Alex Farrar. Avoiding the parochial and the anecdotal, I nonetheless want to allude to their particular experience in a specific set of circumstances. I generalise from it because that experience is symptomatic, emblematic even, of a much wider experience of the malaise of contemporary art education. Throughout I will frequently use the somewhat anachronistic term 'art school'. I use it because it signifies an approach to learning and teaching in the creative arts that still means something not only to the people who study and work in such places, but also retains a currency in the wider culture. In reality there is no such thing any longer in Britain though, because the few independent art schools that remain have been thoroughly absorbed into the highly regulated superstructure of British higher education and the vast majority, including the one that Farrar, Meadley and Smith attended, are now departments, schools or faculties within universities, primarily the unwieldy mega-bureaucracies of the so-called 'new' universities derived from former polytechnics.

The rebel

Conventional ideas of 'education' when set against avant-garde ideas of 'art-education' (which are now of course the norm since the avant-garde has long since congealed into an orthodoxy) are fundamentally at odds. In most disciplines you go to school or university to learn a set of skills that are readily identifiable, subject to a consensus regarding their usefulness, and within which the knowledge gained is measurable. In contradistinction, you go to art school with a pre-formed idea, well established in popular culture, of the artist as bohemian rebel and of art as some kind of oppositional activity. And when you get there, crucially, unlike in most other disciplines, no one is going to teach you how to do it. The expectation is that you will 'experiment', using your 'creativity', and the outcomes of this will be subject to a critique that all too often will veer wildly between rejection of your naivety and clumsiness to praise for

conforming to a norm that is not yours, usually accompanied by suggestions as to what and whom you should ‘look at’.

Art teaching at its most charlatan but all too commonplace involves the so-called teacher advising you, in effect, that what you have made is reminiscent of the work of A, B or C, so you should go away and look at them, or that (perhaps even worse) what your teachers perceive, often wrongly, to be the ideas behind your work have been theorised or philosophised about by X, Y or Z, so you should go away and read them. Faced with students working with photography, for example, lecturers will - like Pavlovian dogs - recommend reading Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, most failing to put that essay in the context of its origin (a German Jew writing seventy years ago in the face of the Nazis' aestheticisation of politics), even fewer knowing that the accurate translation of the title is the much more nuanced *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility*, and none at all recognising that it might be entirely irrelevant to the students' real concerns. Understandable moves twenty years ago to question or avoid the reinforcement of a traditional canon of Western art history have left the hapless art student now wading through a deluge of post-structuralism and cultural theory that has become the new canon in what Nicholson Baker has called “*the twisted dead scholarship of theory*”.¹ Only in art schools, where careers aboard the ‘critical studies’ gravy train depend on it, does anyone still think this stuff is necessary for most aspiring artists to grapple with. One can only hope for more art students and teachers who might adopt the slogan of the Californian art and architecture collective Ant Farm, formed in the late-sixties: ‘*Short On Theory, Long On Joy*’.

Manacled by freedom

Given that no one is going to tell you what to do, or indeed teach you how to do anything, but instead give you the intimidating freedom to do anything you want – just as long as it looks like what your teachers think is art, students are encouraged, required even, to see themselves as artists rather than art students by virtue of a constant demand to see their task as being to make art. You are placed in the empty white box of a studio space and left to your own devices to fill it with ‘art’ – if there is nothing on the walls, then *ipso facto* as far as your tutors are concerned you are not doing any ‘work’. You look at whatever models of art you might have recourse to and then when you have made something in your little white box you are subjected to a form of so-called teaching that consists of little more than your tutors’ (un)critical judgement as to whether it actually is art, and if so whether or not, according to their predilections and prejudices, it is ‘good’ art. This is freedom as a prison cell.

Faced with this conundrum, Meadley, Smith and Farrar have followed a path set by many other creative, intelligent and critical art students before them: determined to be taken seriously they have found a need, whilst art students, to pretend that they are not – to front up to the world as artists, adopting a quasi-professional approach to their activities and locating them as much as possible outside of the art school/art student domain.

Back in the art school this strategy faces you with your next Catch 22: if you achieve some undeniable success in your ‘outside’ activities you will earn some more or less grudging praise, but also some resentment on the part of those who see you as a jumped up egotist who should ‘know their place’ as an art student. Telling someone they’re pretentious is a way of warning them not to get above their station, maintaining the status quo by censoring them. But pretending can be a productive method for working things out – pretending to be something you’re not (but might be on the way to being) as a means of defense, escape or experimentation.² As Brian Eno reflected on his early career: “*I decided to turn the word*”

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‘pretentious’ into a compliment. The common assumption is that there are ‘real’ people and there are others who are pretending to be something they’re not. There is also an assumption that there’s something morally wrong with pretending. My assumptions about culture as a place where you can take psychological risks without incurring physical penalties makes me think that pretending is the most important thing we do. It’s the way we make our thought experiments, how we find out what it would be like to be otherwise.”³

Unfortunately not all art school tutors have Eno’s imagination or sensitivity. Their response to students trying to figure out the world around them, trying to take some agency within their future in it, can sometimes - perhaps generated by their own bitterness - be an acid of criticism that is far too corrosive of their students’ energy and spirit.

So they don’t teach you how to do anything, they present you with no curriculum to study, the only thing you are told to do, at least by implication, is to ‘make art’ – and then there is a high price to pay for doing what you are told. In this sense the system is actually dependent on people who don’t do as they are told, providing cannon fodder for the self-appointed teacher-critics to shoot down in flames; and dependent also on those who try earnestly and fail, enabling their teacher-mentors to massage their own egos by, as they see it, helping their students to succeed by emulating them. The possessive description, ‘my’ students, is all too often heard from such would-be svengalis.

Without a cause

This and the confrontational nature of most of your teaching (‘healthy debate and informed critique’ your tutors will call it) will, if you are an intelligent and determined student, leave you in an oppositional position from which it will be an easy step to identify a need to make oppositional work. But this is ultimately limiting and constrictive because when your activity is located around critiquing the institution you are in it is all too easy to disregard the extent to which the institution itself makes this possible, so you are dependent on the feeding hand that you are biting – even if the hand contains only paltry scraps rather than a hearty meal. So when after kicking against the pricks, to use a biblical analogy, for three years, you suddenly find yourself with no pricks to kick against, you are left in a vacuum where the only questions are, as they always are for any artist: why would you do this?.. what really matters about this work?.. what have you really got to say?.. who are you trying to say it to?.. And anyway, the currency of apparently transgressive innovation is debased when pronounced criticality and its supposed frisson of risk are so readily integrated into an expanded economy of attention and consumption.

Having made their previous books in this series to professionalise themselves by curating themselves as artists without reference to their status as art students, it is to the credit of Meadley, Smith and Farrar that now they are using this publication to interrogate their former status as art students. Now they are no longer students but independently functioning professionals in the harsh environment of a highly commodified and capitalised art world, they finally have an opportunity to make sense of their art school’s frequently manifest inability to work out its own dilemma when confronted by art students who actually do what they are told.

The bonfire of the qualities

Art schools and universities still provide safe haven and well-paid tenure for too many self-declared but hopeless artists who would be taken seriously nowhere else. There are too many acerbic critics with too little to offer to make room for a little generosity. This is not to say that

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there are not many genuine and committed artist-teachers who do their best for students, unstintingly offering intellectual and practical support of the highest order. All art schools have some of these people, and some have a majority. But they are up against it. Higher education is now unremittingly commodified in response to a society that values acquiring more than inquiring, which in turn results in an instrumentalism in education that sees it as a means to an economic end, something to be pursued for where it gets you rather than what it gives you. Government targets of 50% of school leavers going on to higher education, regardless of its suitability for them and wilfully blind to the lack of informed choice many of them will have in where they end up, have only added fuel to this fire.

In this climate, marketing strategies and rhetorical PR conceal pedagogical inadequacy, funding streams determine investment in research and the survival of whole subject areas, and every kind of resource is subject to ever more stringent financial constraint. This is a world in which universities are unashamedly businesses, competing with each other for students as customers in a market economy. Most art courses have expanded to accommodate a rising number of students and are now thoroughly invested in keeping these numbers high in an attempt to remain viable. Inevitably this has reduced the amount of one-to-one dialogue between tutors and students at exactly the time it is ever more necessary because so many more students are arriving with little real understanding of why they are there or what they really want to do.

There was never a golden age to hark back to, but it is fair to suggest that thirty years ago almost everyone who went to an art school did so because they thought it was the kind of inventive and unconventional place in which they might have the space to find out about and be themselves, and where they might be given both the free rein and the skills to express and articulate themselves creatively. Such students still go to art school but now they find themselves in a highly regulated university structure that cannot really provide such a space, and surrounded by peers who are at university for no better reason than that they have been led to believe that university is the place to go, regardless of which one or what you do there just as long as you come out with a degree at the end. This is a tough place for intelligent, energetic and passionate teachers to try to maintain the values of an art school approach that doesn't fit and isn't valued.

An historical aside

The older generation of art school teachers, generally the decision-makers, those in the positions of most influence and remuneration (or incidentally in other cases those who have managed to find a relatively undisturbed niche in which to hide away from any responsibility, taking the money and not running) are doubly responsible for their collusion in the current state of affairs. They are part of a generation (I'm one too), born in the increasingly prosperous fifties and early-sixties, liberally educated in the sixties and early-seventies, attending university or art school with the security of a full maintenance grant and then able to drift into relatively easily obtainable academic jobs. They were the beneficiaries of the all too brief period of British history when relative economic prosperity coincided with a politics, however flawed, of social justice and optimism – a period ended all too violently by the arrival of Thatcher in 1979 whose market-driven revolution has only been reinforced by the neo-Thatcherites of 'New' Labour who succeeded her. The debt-burdened, anxiety-ridden and under-educated generation of students in the bureaucratic and costly processing plants currently masquerading as universities in this country deserve but all too often don't get the respect or understanding they deserve from the generation who had it so much better than them.

More alive, more fun

The space that a worthwhile art school would offer is a space of dialogue, a place for people to generate, share and debate ideas. The things that provoke those ideas and the things that might be made in response to them are fundamental, but the site of their creation and manufacture is as likely to be outside the walls of the art school as within, and arguably will be of more social value as 'art' if it is. *"I'm less interested in what art is than in what isn't art yet. What really interests me is how you move stuff into the area of art that isn't there"*, says the influential American artist and educator John Baldessari. He'd be sympathetic to the environmental artist Fritz Haeg who says: *"When I visit art students to discuss their work I am often guided to a studio full of stuff. I try to demarcate the border between art and 'not art' in the room. Once they have identified what we should be looking at and talking about, my eye is inevitably drawn to the 'not art' side of the room, which often seems more alive, more fun."*⁴

Baldessari has suggested that art education might as well take place *"sitting on a log"* as in a studio or anywhere else because *"it's a people-oriented activity"*.⁵ By all the accounts of those who have been taught by Baldessari, he has always treated students like peers and not a lower form of intelligence, and he sees his primary role as to provide them with generous and non-hierarchical conversation. He has never worried about how an idea will fit into a given historical moment or social situation. As he has said, *"If it doesn't fit it's probably worth pursuing"*. He just makes things and believes in them, and encourages students to do the same. Not enough art school teachers share Baldessari's recognition that teaching is (or should be) a creative act, and as such can be just as much a part of an art practice as anything else. Such an open, generous and sociable attitude envisages an approach to art education located in contemporary society itself, in how and what we communicate, and in what happens to us in the process of that communication, highlighting the relationship between the production, transmission and reception of art, and emphasising the artist's role as a communicator, collaborator and facilitator as much as a maker. The issue is not what is made or how, but one of what might be at stake in its making and showing, what use or debate it might trigger. What we need more of, as Hilary Koob-Sassen asserts, is *"a culture of proposal rather than a state of conviction."*⁶ What is problematic in too much current art education is precisely the lack of problematics that art schools generate.

Just make stuff

Whether the increasingly stultifying climate of British higher education is ever going to be a place where problematics around cultural production can be generated in an atmosphere of generosity, experimentation and energetic production is an open question. As is the extent to which students will continue to be willing to pay to engage with anything that falls so short of this ideal as most of what they currently get does. The £30,000 debt model of art education is untenable for most and will soon become so for the rest when they realise how little they're getting for their money. The education young artists are paying so much for is too often mired in irrelevance, pushing them into critical redundancy on the one hand and professional mediocrity on the other. The rank and cynical opportunism of the increasingly commercialised university sector is generating an overflow of BA, MA and even PhD-bearing would-be artists who have been alienated by a false war between blind romanticism and blind professionalisation, alienated from the real and better potential that art could give them. Bob and Roberta Smith's advice is, *"if you're interested in being an artist don't go to art school, just make stuff and sell it"*,⁷ and Sophie Calle often reminds people that she was never an art student, claiming that *"the first time I entered a contemporary art museum was to show in it"*.⁸ But for those who lack the confident barrow-boy front of Bob and Roberta or the privileged connections of Calle, this might be less

than helpful. A space for learning, development and experiment is still what many aspiring young artists need, so there is a gap that needs to be filled, but perhaps the time has come to look beyond the confines of academia for alternatives.

Art schools have succumbed to over-determined and controlled academic structures but outside of the university environment any small group with a good idea can still benefit from the fact that the art world is in many ways one of the least regulated occupational spheres on the planet. As a consequence it remains unusually susceptible, on a local level at least, to being altered and improved by the actions of a few good people. There are many young people, inside and outside the art school system, who have the spirit, energy and determination of artists like Smith, Farrar and Meadley, and there are many older, more experienced or established artists who share their optimism and commitment to a creative culture. They need spaces beyond the reach of the dead hand of bureaucracy to maintain the values and opportunities that a genuine art education would still espouse, and I believe such spaces, both actual and metaphorical, are still there to be imagined and found.

The idea of the thing if not the thing itself

One aspect of a possible model might be the unaccredited, free art school that the young New York artists' collective known as the Bruce High Quality Foundation have recently set up in a downtown Manhattan space.⁹ They guard their anonymity fiercely but the Bruces' are a band of artists, some of whom became friends while undergraduates at Cooper Union in the late-nineties, when Hans Haacke was still teaching there. They have made a site-specific film, *Isle of the Dead* that charts the death and zombie-dominated resurrection of the art world, and in *Public Sculpture Tackle*, a continuing work begun in 2007 and documented in video, one of the Bruces hurls himself against, clambers up or hangs from various pieces of public sculpture around Manhattan, outfitted in quasi-Matthew Barney football gear. In July 2008 four of the Bruces' gave a lecture-performance called *Explaining Pictures to a Dead Bull* at the Harris Lieberman Gallery. The title paid homage to Joseph Beuys's famous performance, *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* whilst addressing a post-boom, dead-bull art universe. It mapped out the links between contemporary art, the market and the art school system that churns out MFA's who are burdened by debt but largely naïve about the workings of the art world. It ended with the question: "How can we imagine a sustainable alternative to professionalized art education?"

The Bruce High Quality Foundation University is one such imagining. As they say, "we aren't granting degrees or certificates, we aren't claiming to prepare anyone to become another piece of human capital. That's simply not a lens on life that needs any more looking through." The university's first course is currently meeting weekly, and is titled BYOU (Bring Your Own University). Whoever shows up will have a hand in the formation of the University, which is being made up as it goes along, in line with its motto, 'Professional Problems - Amateur Solutions'. Whether BHQFU can become 'the thing itself' remains to be seen, but even as 'the idea of the thing' it strikes a blow where one is seriously needed, against the big business of art schools.

In this and other examples of modest, started-from-scratch ventures that lead to ambitious pro-activity, lies an inspiration for those who are frustrated by the constraints and inadequacies of our current art school system but remain open to new possibilities for creating alternatives. There is no reason to believe that, with artists of Meadley, Smith and Farrar's generation creatively improvising positive responses to the frustrations of their own art school experience and energetically investigating new ideas and colonizing new ground, such alternatives cannot be willed into existence.

¹ Nicholson Baker, *The Anthologist*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2009, p.152

² I am indebted for these insights into pretentiousness to Dan Fox's article, *Class Act*, in *Frieze*, issue 126, October 2009, pp.202-207

³ Brian Eno, *A Year with Swollen Appendices: Brian Eno's Diary*, London: Faber & Faber, 1996, p.381

⁴ Fritz Haeg, *Border Control*, in *Frieze*, issue 126, October 2009, pp.176-179

⁵ See John Baldessari's contribution to the Tate symposium 'Rethinking Arts Education for the Twenty-First Century', 16 July 2005, partially documented as a podcast at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/symposia/rethinkingartseducationforthetwentyfirstcentury3327.htm> See also: Derek Horton, (*Sitting On a Log*) *Imagining the SuperCity Art School*, in *Corridor8*, Issue 1, July 2009, pp.58-60

⁶ Hilary Koob-Sassen, *The Errorist Manifesto*, presented at the Serpentine Gallery, London, 18 October 2008, see <http://theerrorists.com/fii/manifesto.html>

⁷ Bob and Roberta Smith, in his text on Rev Jesse Howard in *The Museum of Everything*, London, 2009

⁸ Sophie Calle told this story most recently during an interview with Iwona Blazwick at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 15 October 2009

⁹ Current news on BHQFU can be found on the Bruce High Quality Foundation's website, <http://bhqfu.org/Site/home.html>

Colophon

A LATENTO 3
ISSN: 1755-5787

A/W 2009
Leeds/Amsterdam

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on canvas
121.92 x 243.84cm
[not an exact
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THANKS

Huw Andrews
Sean Ashton
Bash
Merel van den Berg
Rachel Carter
Matthew Crawley
Amelia Crouch
Sally Dixon
Will Edmonds
Pete Ellis
Alex Farrar
Julie and Gerald Farrar
Stephen Feeke
Joe Gilmore
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