SHEFFIELD CONTEMPORARY ART FORUM

Art Sheffield 08 Yes No Other Options*

16 February – 30 March
Citywide Contemporary Art Event
www.artsheffield.org

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Yes, No & Other Options
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Art Sheffield 08: Yes, No & Other Options is a citywide contemporary art exhibition involving work by 38 artists in 8 venues including Bloc, End Gallery, Millennium Galleries, S1 Artspace, Site Gallery, Yorkshire ArtSpace, Sylvester Space, the Winter Garden and the public realm.

Taking as its foundation a specially commissioned essay by art critic Jan Verwoert, this citywide exhibition addresses the fact that in a post-industrial condition, one particularly pertinent to Sheffield, we have entered into a service culture where we no longer just work, we perform in a perpetual mode of 'I Can'. (Even advertising tells us that 'Life gets more exciting when you say yes').

Verwoert asks, 'What would it mean to put up resistance against a social order in which high performance and performance-related evaluation has become a growing demand, if not a norm? What would it mean to resist the need to perform?' He suggests that certain means of resisting are in themselves creative – that as well as embracing exuberant performativity, art has also used the 'I Can't', by creating moments where the flow of action is interrupted, established meanings are suspended & alternative ways to act become imaginable. He suggests that as well as yes & no, there may be other options.

The citywide programme was collaboratively selected and curated by Jan Verwoert and Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum and includes a high proportion of specially commissioned new work and a mix of emergent and established artists, and of Sheffield based, nationally and internationally based artists.

All venues are free to enter – see back page for information on venues, opening times and linked events.

www.artsheffield.org

Texts on the works by Jan Verwoert and the artists.

Right
Hilary Lloyd 'Sarah' (2005). Image courtesy the artist.

Far Right
Silke Otto-Knapp 'Dress' (2007), watercolour and gouache on canvas. Image courtesy the artist and Greengrassi Gallery.



Hilary Lloyd
Site Gallery

In her video and slide installations, Hilary Lloyd shows people casually displaying themselves, or places that look as if they could be a stage for an act or event of a yet unspecified nature. Combining strong attention to detail with a stance of relaxed detachment, Lloyd carefully studies the intricacies of people's body language as well as the specific pace at which time passes in particular locations. In doing so, she creates a heightened awareness of the ways in which, on a most basic level, social life is structured through the routines that we perform everyday, at work, in the city and among ourselves.

Primarily, however, Lloyd looks at people and places that interrupt these vernacular choreographies. Such interruptions may occur because the physical presence of a particular person – or maybe just the slightest particularity about their body language or gestures – is so distinctive that he or she transforms the space around them into a stage and commands the flow of time through the pace of their actions (as around some people life is always fast, around others it slows down). Likewise she shows how structured routines fall apart in specific places because time there stands still, like it does when you take a break, gaze at something and let your thoughts wander off.

There is a subtle politics of resistance implied in these interruptions. By highlighting certain exuberant gestures Lloyd points to a defiance of the standardisation of body language in social routines. Likewise, she shows that the spaces where the pressure to perform falls away may in fact be right there in the everyday, so that the regimented patterns of social performance, in the end, are always porous.

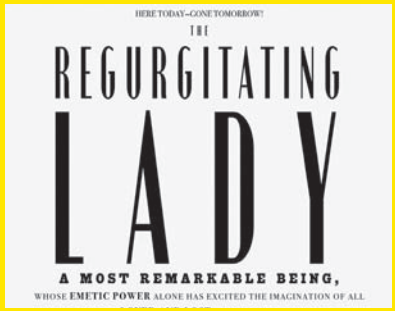


Silke Otto-Knapp
Site Gallery

Could we collectively perform differently? In her recent paintings Silke Otto-Knapp points towards this possibility. The works are based on her ongoing study of the ways in which modern ballet has translated patterns of social life into dance. Otto-Knapp appropriates moments from this history and transforms them into pictures that focus the attention on the formalised body language through which dance reflects the relation of the individual to the collective.

Many of Otto-Knapp's works are painted in monochromatic silver tones, others in luminescent water-colours. Through this painterly form abstraction enters the picture. Isolated from the plot of the ballet, the gestures are no longer designed to tell a story. It is precisely this moment of abstraction (from narrative) that brings out the intrinsic exuberance of the body language of dance.

The depiction of dance, then, is a cipher for a communality that is not organised around an ulterior end, a task or function it has to perform. People here perform coming together and falling apart in ways that are solely determined by the communication of their bodies. What the paintings make you see, then, is a utopian state of exuberance.



Janice Kerbel (new work)
'Remarkable' & 'Ball Game' Live performance
Saturday 16 February 2.30pm
Site Gallery

When we do things, we like to plot and make plans, not realising that the world of action and the world of plans may be separate universes. In her work, Janice Kerbel explores the rifts and concurrences between these two spheres: drawing up plans, diagrams or blueprints for potential actions, events or entire cities is her main medium. That an element of fiction is at play in the work is tangible. Yet, at the same time, Kerbel's plans are so meticulously researched that they instantly strike you as completely feasible and sound. In the past she has developed a foolproof scheme for robbing a local bank, diagrams for creating self-sustaining micro-ecosystems on your roof terrace or blueprints for love letters for each season of the year.

In Art Sheffield 08, Kerbel will present 'Remarkable' (2007), a series of posters that promote the appearance of spectacular female performers in a vaudeville fashion. Each performer is a unique character with remarkable skills. There are, among others, Iggy Fatuse, the Human Firefly; Faintgirl; The Regurgitating Lady and The Shyest Person Alive.

In addition there will be a spoken word performance of 'Ball Game (Inning 1)' in which an actor will read a live play-by-account of an ideal baseball game, scripted by Kerbel. Working with the rules, history and logic of the game, and the eccentric yet analytic language used to describe it, Janice Kerbel constructs a perfectly playable yet unseen innings of the game.

In both works Kerbel creates an eerie feeling of open potential that transcends actuality by evoking the power that the mere idea of the deed and the doer exerts on the imagination.



Jirí Kovanda
Photographs of Performances
Site Gallery

Jirí Kovanda's performances are concise reflections on the potentials of personal agency: what can you do when, as an individual, you may not be able to do much but still you face a social order that has to be changed?

Developing his practice from the mid-1970s under political conditions imposed on Czechoslovakia after the quelling of the Prague Spring, Kovanda's works take the form of small interventions into everday life that insert an element of uncertainty into its order. Such incursions included simple gestures like gazing fixedly into the eyes of people encountered on an escalator or bumping into people on a Prague pavement, as attempts to make contact, or, conversely, to break it by suddenly, without comment, running away from a group of friends assembled in a public place. These acts are documented by a simple photo and descriptive text.

The undiminished fascination of Kovanda's actions lies in the way they allow you to see how an individual builts up a basic vocabulary of gestures for social interaction from scratch, when his nonconformist position would otherwise have condemned him to inaction under the politicial conditions of the time. On this most existential level Kovanda then raises a question, that in its political and ethical implications, is more contemporary then ever: how – according to whose terms – do you want to engage with the social?

Left
Jirí Kovanda 'Actions Prague (Waiting For Someone To Call Me)' (1976), black and white photograph. Image courtesy the artist and Kontakt Collection.

Far Left
Janice Kerbel 'Remarkable: The Regurgitating Lady' (2007). Image courtesy the artist.

Right
Kirsten Pieroth 'Dead Ant' (2005). Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Right
Kan Xuan 'A Pound' (2008). Image courtesy of the artist.



Kirsten Pieroth (new work)
Site Gallery

In her art, Kirsten Pieroth enacts symbolic gestures that question the very nature of what it means to perform an act or produce an artefact. Crucially, these gestures follow a completely stringent logic which, however, leads to a result that defeats all expectations of what could or should be achieved through purposeful actions.

Pieroth has in the past, for instance, plotted the perfect murder. She killed an ant with a detective novel, a crime that was bound to pass unseen, if you failed to see that the victim was hidden on the murder weapon, as the poor thing was stuck to the back of the novel, displayed in the gallery. On another occasion, Pieroth took the invitation to 'collaborate' with a local entrepreneur for an exhibition literally (in the criminal sense). Together they stole the minute hand from a clocktower in broad daylight and recorded the time it took (27 minutes).

In a series of works dedicated to Thomas Edison, Pieroth dissected the myth of the unbridled productivity of a creative genius. Edison is celebrated for turning his gift for inventing things into an industry by running his business like a factory. Pieroth turned this iconic figure around by building a replica of the restbench on which Edison had his catnaps. She also sought to get the patent rights for an excuse Edison invented to avoid attending a formal dinner. A hero of productivity is thereby turned into a renegade patron saint of procrastination and reticence.

Against the backdrop of a contemporary working culture in which the pressure to perform is always on and creativity is measured in terms of economically viable productivity, Pieroth's work proposes a critical alternative that promotes the inexhaustible potential of particular gratuitous acts.



Kan Xuan (new work)
Recent videos
Yorkshire ArtSpace
Persistence Works

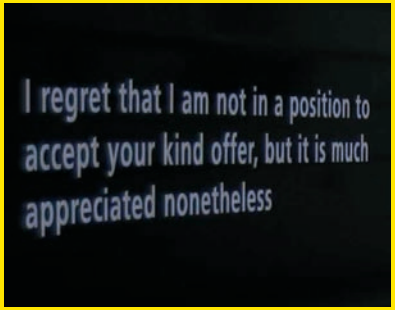
One of the key categories that we today use to describe meaningful acts and experiences is the event. But what constitutes an event? And how does it make meaning?

Kan Xuan raises these questions in her work, precisely by shifting all conventional parameters for what we perceive as an event and what we see in it. In her videos she enacts small gestures that take you into a microcosm of performance where anything goes but everything matters – in ways that have yet to be established.

She films, for instance, the breaking of eggs and the slow oozing out of their inner liquid – or the ceremony of going through her rubbish bin and carefully addressing each item by its proper name – or spiders crawling across human skin investigating all folds and crevices. Object (2003) in turn is a black and white video that shows small items (coffee, hair, apple…) dropping into water, accompanied by a voice describing the (invisible) colors of each object.

Under the scrutinizing gaze of Kan Xuan's camera, hierarchies of importance are inverted. Notions of the monumental, spectacular and heroic collapse, as you are made to experience the smallest acts and occurrences as fully fleshed out events.





Left
Esther Stocker 'I Cannot in all Conscience Do What You Request' (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Left
George Longly 'tertiary matter' (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.

George Henry Longly (new work) 'tertiary matter'
Bloc

In his work George Henry Longly inquires into the rules, habitual ways of looking and norms of behaviour that are enforced by our education and shape our experience. He traces the rigid logic of such standards back to the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone's song Here's to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the peculiar form of its composition: centred around a single theme and verse, it builds up to a crescendo through insistent repetition.

The song then epitomises how a rigid repetitive structure can produce an intense experience of emotional drama. Longly uses this logic of form as a model for dramatising objects in space. Lights borrowed from Sheffield Theatres are installed in a way that transforms the gallery into a stage, the atmosphere being charged with a strong sense of anticipation for a yet unknown event by the spotlights that illuminate the space with their scrutinizing gaze. Also part of the installation are prints of natural and cultural wonders, rendered in rich monochromatic colours and blown up to expose their dot printing structure. A political subject, theatrical props and pictures of the sublime are thereby made to share one stage. What choreography they will perform, however, is left provocatively open.

Esther Stocker Untitled paintings & 'I Cannot in all Conscience Do What You Request'
Posters on Bloc billboard & fly posters around the city

In 'I Cannot in All Conscience Do What You Request', Stocker translates her sceptical stance from painting (see Millennium Galleries) into the medium of social etiquette. The work consists of a series of posters, stating phrases of polite declining. Featuring a different phrase for each of the six weeks of the exhibition, the posters are displayed on fly poster sites around the city. Together, all six statements appear on a billboard outside Bloc on Eyre Lane.

As the gesture of polite declining carves out a space in between open refusal and willing acceptance, it opens up a world of options beyond the restrictive binary alternative of yes and no that otherwise governs our actions. By unworking such rigid structures in painting and language, Stocker then formulates what might be called a reticent politics of purposeful vagueness. In the face of the social pressure to perform, this stance may constitute a forceful form of opposition.

Host Artists' Group 'Host 8: Observatory'
Bloc

The audio bulletins from artists, also part of the installation at The Millennium Galleries, are replayed in the courtyard at Bloc, via a tannoy system, returning this narrative on artistic production to the site of that production – the artists' studios.

Right
Eveline Van Den Berg 'Colliding Sides of Unwillingness' (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Right
Deimantas Narkevičius 'Revisiting Solaris' (2007), 35 mm film transferred on HD video. 18 minutes inclusive. Image courtesy of the artist and Jan Mot, Brussels.





Eveline Van Den Berg 'Colliding Sides of Unwillingness'
Bloc

In her installations and photographic work, Eveline Van Den Berg creates evocative situations using everyday materials, from simple hardware to the odd bits and pieces that people either keep and collect or discard as waste. Often, text enters into her work in the form of short notes or quotes that, like the objects, have an ambiguous character. Seemingly casual remarks or fragments of inner monologue turn out to be sharp comments on moods and emotional states as well as reflections on the conditions of artistic practice.

The photograph 'Colliding Sides of Unwillingness' shows a square patch of industrial grey carpet flooring with a wide circle neatly cut out off its centre, merely leaving a frame of carpet behind at the edges. The carpet patch lies on the floor in a space that looks more like a workspace or studio than a domestic environment.

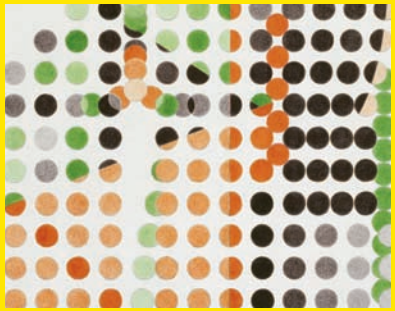
The spatial arrangement of this peculiar object for the camera points towards a certain ambiguous feeling and state of mind, a state of exhaustion that is equally also a state of potentiality, something is used up, yet in its emptiness and wastedness it equally also awaits a new interpretation. It may be the situation of awaiting inspiration in the studio, yet, in a wider sense, the state you are in, when precisely in the moment in which you feel most exhausted, worse for wear, coming apart at the seams, you find yourself being exceptionally open and ready for any event, idea or encounter that may come your way.

Deimantas Narkevičius 'Revisiting Solaris'
S1 Artspace

Modernity is not over. Maybe it never began. Still, we live among the ruins of its architecture, political systems, dreams and terminologies. Through these exhausted forms and their inexhaustible echoes, the legacies of modernity now shape our present.

In his films, Deimantas Narcevičius amplifies the echoes in modernity's ruins. Contrasting documentary footage from places that speak of the recent Soviet past of his home country, Lithuania, with the words that people used and use to assert their beliefs and place in history, he creates complex montages in which the memories inscribed into the images rub up against history. Narcevičius thereby gives you a strong sense of social reality in a state of historical transition when, upon the arrival of an unclear future, monuments crumble, words lose their meaning but memories linger.

'Revisiting Solaris' (2007) was shot on site in a former Soviet television station. Here Narkevičius filmed the Lithuanian actor Donatas Banionis, who played the protagonist in Tarkovsky's iconic 1972 film adaption of Stanislaw Lem's novel 'Solaris'. Extracts from the novel appear in subtitles to vintage black and white images of lonely snow-covered forests and cliffs on the Krim. In its faded glory, the station echoes the promise of the technological sublime that the Soviet imaginary was built around. Baninonis then appears as the vessel of a memory that is not disclosed in words but through his looks and postures, the language of his aged body. Through Lem's words we finally experience the dream of a future world which, before it ever became real, was already filled with the melancholia that the idyllic landscapes of a lost past today evoke. In this way we re-experience modernity, beyond its exhaustion, as time is suspended in the tense of future past.



Tomma Abts
‘Untitled #1 – #7’
S1 Artspace

Parallel to her abstract paintings, last year’s Turner prize winner Tomma Abts has been continuously developing a series of drawings. In this series of drawings (‘Untitled #1 – #7’) Abts unworks the logic of geometrical structures; through small yet decisive displacements she destabilises the form of seemingly rigid shapes and patterns; as she makes them drift apart, she also allows them to reconfigure themselves in unpredictable constellations. By performatively unworking structures in the process of working on them, Abts reveals their hidden latencies and thereby deconstructs their organisation from the inside out.

Unmaking the logic of systematic structures in these drawings therefore is an act, a practice or performance that, in a much wider sense, speaks about how to deal with the structures that determine the way we think, make decisions and experience space and time. Today we live with a dominance of cybernetic structures of thought, decision making and experience (the choice always only being one between 1 and 0, yes and no). When we choose, we choose from menus of options predefined by programmes.

By unworking the systematic logic of this rationality in works – that indeed look at times like cybernetic systems gone out of sync – Abts demonstrates what it means to mess with the programme. Her drawings therefore propose different structures for thought and agency as well as other rhythms to sequence time and organise space – structures that allow for uncharted possibilities to emerge.



Nicole Wermers
‘Double Sandtable’
S1 Artspace

In her collages and sculptures Nicole Wermers isolates the sources of visual allure in the surfaces of modern design, architecture and commodity culture. Dissociated from their primary context of use and consumption, these visual stimuli are presented as sources of sheer fascination and purpose-free desire. As their original function, however, is still tangible as a more or less latent presence, the dislocation of desire is experienced all the more consciously.

The Sculpture ‘Double Sandtable’ exemplifies this vividly. It consists of two interconnected tables with tray like tops filled with fine beach sand; a hybrid between a piece of modular office furniture, a giant ashtray and an autonomous sculpture. Littered with cigarette butts, the patches of sand still look like a stretch of beach cut out from the landscape, contained in a geometric frame and elevated to table height for practical use.

On the one hand, the table ashtray could surely be seen to mock the aesthetics of modern formalist sculptures (a lot of which would indeed make good ashtrays) as well as the pretence of modernist design to provide elegant forms that only followed function (as if they ever did). On the other hand, however, Wermers’ work goes beyond mockery, since she fully embraces the fascination of modern functionalist design even and especially in its warped and exhausted vernacular manifestations.

In much the same way in which smoking celebrates the gesture of elegantly wasting your money, time and health, Wermers rejoices in wasting the assets of functionalism. Because it is precisely at the point of their exhaustion, when their meaning and use is again up for grabs, that these modernist concepts begin to radiate with a strange sense of new potential.

Left
Nicole Wermers ‘Double Sandtable’ Image courtesy of the artist and APT.

Far Left
Tomma Abts ‘Untitled #1’ (2007), pencil & coloured pencil on paper. Image courtesy of the artist and Greengrassi Gallery.

Right
Gite Villesen ‘I Capture You. You Capture Me’ (2005). Image courtesy of the artist and APT.

Far Right
Kerstin Kartscher, ‘Private War’ (2005), photo by Matthias Kolb. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Giti Nourbakhsch.



Gitte Villesen
‘I Capture You.You Capture Me’
Sylvester Space

In her documentary videos, Gitte Villesen goes against the grain of social generalisations by negotiating the terms of her (and our) relation to the individual she portrays with great care. Her works consequently show an exchange over the way in which someone enters into the process of being portrayed.

In ‘I Capture You, You Capture Me’, Villesen documents conversations with an old friend, Helene Hermann. As the two speak about shared memories and everyday things, they casually build the backdrop for a shadowplay (shown at the end of the video). In the conversation it transpires that, just when her career was taking off, Hermann had to give up her work as a theatre set designer because of an onset of manic depression. She still feels awkward about mentioning the subject, she says, as this usually prompts responses of empathy that mostly only inadvertently confirm her social status as an outsider.

It is precisely this outcome that Villesen prevents, by creating a situation in the conversation where the issue can be raised without being overly dramatised. As the two work on the shadowplay set, the very parameters of what it means to work and to be capable of performing are in fact shifted: as both, obviously, are working together to make a set and film a documentary, yet at their own pace and on their own terms. While she addresses what may today be one of the biggest taboos among creative professionals – the incapacity to perform – Villesen thereby makes it clear that we do have the power to define the parameters of this performance and defy the outside pressure to perform.



Kerstin Kartscher
‘Private War’
Sylvester Space

In her drawings and installations Kerstin Kartscher sketches out imaginary worlds with an atmosphere that shifts between the utopian and apocalyptic. Like still images from an unwritten turn-of-the-century novel, these scenarios evoke the quest of nameless heroines through allusion and innuendo. In the drawings words sometimes appear in the sky over troubled waters, spelling out words that hint at desires, dreams or fears but never reveal a story.

Kartscher’s installation ‘Private War’ comprises a canvas tent that houses a bed, a washbasin, bulbous bottles. The canvas at the back of the tent is filled with drawings depicting the facades of modernist tower blocks. Evoking the scenario of a hospital or sanatorium, the installation dwells on the conflicting emotions connected with such space: a sanctuary and shelter, it is also a confined space that isolates the body in pain. In modernity, it is here that life begins and ends.

In Thomas Mann’s novel ‘Magic Mountain’, the sanatorium is portrayed as space where time flows at a different pace while its wealthy patients may spend months gazing at the mountains to cure their overwrought nerves and recover from the exhaustion induced by modern life. It is such a transitory space of exhaustion and convalescence that Kartscher conjures up; a space where the time of work is interrupted, there is nothing to be done and no job to be performed. Even so, it is a place of ‘becoming’ where the self confronts itself in the experience of pain, rest, boredom and a re-awakening of the senses in the moment of convalescence.

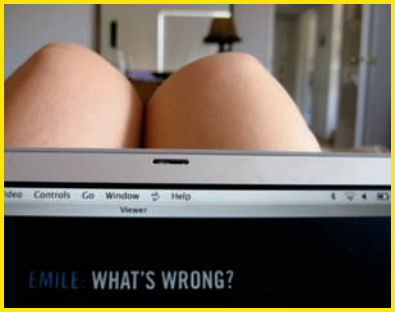


Katy Woods (new work) ‘Sailing Dinghy Hawk 20 Passing Lookout on Passage from Gull Rock Towards Falmouth, Gull Rock is Starting to Disappear in the Mist’
Sylvester Space

In her video Katy Woods works with footage that she took from active and empty coastal lookouts positioned along the Cornish coastline. These places have an evocative history: coastal lookouts became almost obsolete in the 1980s when maritime technology became so advanced that HM Coastguard deemed it unnecessary to have a person watching the ocean. Following a fatal tragedy at sea in 1994, however, the National Coastwatch Institution was established, to reinstate many of the disused coastal lookouts around the country.

A contemplative study of a largely unnoticed and invisible organisation, the film explores ideas of stasis, of constancy and permanence, of time passing and time slowing down. In long takes and carefully composed images, Woods conveys a strong impression of the environment in which the watchkeepers are doing their work. As their task is to avoid disaster, their job is one of anticipation. They are unnoticed and work silently, logging each vessel, craft and person as they pass through their stretch of the coast. Their notes are a permanent record of time passing and passed, of activities undertaken and completed. At those, however, that were never revitalised, time passes and events occur unwatched and un-noted.

Woods’ video is an investigation into the work of the coastwatchers. To perform this work means to inhabit a state of latency, awaiting events that may never arrive. By creating a cinematic experience of a place that is out of sync with the pace of urban life, Woods conveys a strong sense of how time and space could be experienced differently, as a site of uncharted possibilities where anything – or nothing – could happen while you wait.



Frances Stark ‘‘Structures That Fit My Opening’ and Other Parts Considered to the Whole’
Sylvester Space

In the piece ‘‘Structures That Fit My Opening’ and Other Parts Considered to the Whole’. Stark deliberately chooses one of the most awkwardly conventionalised media for public address, the power-point presentation, to voice her reflections on the politics of her art practice. As the sentences continue from slide to slide, sometimes interrupted by images of works or photos of domestic situations, you curiously follow the unravelling of Stark’s thoughts that go through sudden twists and reversals. Stark clearly stakes her position, yet in doing so she constantly shifts between categories, moving from feminist concerns to motives of desire, fear and inspiration. As the categories interlace and open up in the process, Stark gives you a very strong sense that all these aspects are different dimensions of one practice and one life.

At the same time, however, this practice and life is home to many voices. In this, as in many of her works, Stark proceeds by time and again incorporating ideas, quotes and excerpts from other people’s work. This gesture of appropriation, as much as it echoes an act of stealing, also communicates a sense of appreciation. The personal space opened up in her work is in fact a public space. In it, the powerful position of the author is displaced by a form of conviviality with the ghosts of other artists, writers, friends or lovers.

Ryszard Wasko
Sylvester Space

Richard Wasko uses film as a tool for an investigation of the conditions of personal agency and experience. Measured or unmeasured time, architecturally defined space or the space of the body in motion, language as meaningful communication or simply sounds and signs – these are the basic categories that Wasko probes and dismantles in his film experiments. See also under Millennium Galleries.

Left
Frances Stark ‘‘Structures That Fit My Opening’ and Other Parts Considered to the Whole’. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Daniel Buchholz.

Far Left
Katy Woods ‘Sailing Dinghy Hawk 20 Passing Lookout on Passage from Gull Rock Towards Falmouth, Gull Rock is Starting to Disappear in the Mist’ (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.

Right
Ines Schaber ‘Picture Mining’ (2006), installation shot, Kunstwerke Berlin 2006. Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Right
Xu Tan ‘Concert Hall of Zheng Daoxing’ (2005). Image courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.



Ines Schaber ‘Picture Mining’
End Gallery

Pictures do not simply represent this or that; they work in the most literal sense of the word: images are a means of production, they generate communication, power and capital. In the global economy of the information age images are therefore performers in their own right.

In her work Ines Schaber explores the material conditions of this global performance of pictures. ‘Picture Mining’ took its point of departure in Schaber reconstructing the history and current whereabouts of a series of iconic photographs of Pennsylvania workers taken by Lewis Hine, a pioneer of social documentary photography, for the National Child Labor Committee in the 1910s. The copyright for several images from this series, it turned out, are today sold by Bill Gates’ firm Corbis, which offers over 70 million images for sale online, and stores the negatives and prints in a former limestone mine, also in Pennsylvania.

Schaber travelled to the site of the mine and documented the journey in photographs and a video essay that evoke the eerie nature of the place. Home to one the world’s largest image archives, the mine is utterly inconspicuous, an overgrown mound of earth blending into the mining country landscape. The sight of the invisible archive is hardly reconcilable with the thought of the immense power of the images that it stores. It is this tension that Schaber amplifies by staging her relatively cool documentary imagery around a platform in a theatrical mise-en-scène in which the gallery lights darken and light up according to a choreography defined by the (breaks inbetween) the screening times of the video essay. The performers in this choreography are the images themselves. Their performance reveals an uncanny sense of the latency evoked by inconspicuous images from an invisibe archive.



Xu Tan ‘Concert Hall of Zheng Daoxing’
End Gallery

In his video ‘Concert Hall of Zheng Daoxing’, Xu Tan presents the documentation of a concert performance of Mr Zheng Daoxing, of Yangjiang County, China, which he organised. Accompanying himself on a self-built electric guitar, Mr Zheng sings songs about his life, mixing his own tunes with revolutionary songs and traditional Chinese motifs. The story of his life is a convoluted tale about work: he has been a farmer, soldier, and truck driver. During the Chinese economic reforms of the 1980s, he established his own transportation company which went bankrupt during the 1997 economic crisis, whereupon he became a singer, touring the country at the age of 60.

It has often been observed that under the ‘flexible’ and precarious working conditions imposed by current forms of turbo-capitalism, professional careers have become disjointed. Since the life-long employment that used to provide the connecting thread in people’s biography is no longer the norm, the stories of their lives come to sound like an arbitrary collage of fragments.

The story of Mr Zheng’s life on the one hand seems to be precisely such a fragmented biography. On the other hand, however, it is through his very particular performance that he strings the fragments together again in his songs. Taking matters into his own hands, Mr Zheng creates a revolutionary form of new folklore, merging the tunes of the past with the improvised songs of the present into a hybrid form that, even and especially in its most bizarre moments, seems perfectly suited for telling the story of contemporary working biographies. In presenting Mr Zheng as an example, Xu Tan seems to suggest that it is from his songwriting that we could learn how to, now and in the future, tell the story of our lives.



Mladen Stilinović
‘The Artist at Work’
End Gallery

‘Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time – total amnesia. It is also indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is sheer stupidity, a time of pain, futile concentration. Those virtues of laziness are important factors in art. Knowing about laziness is not enough, it must be practised and perfected. Artists in the West are not lazy and therefore not artists but rather producers of something…Their involvement with matters of no importance, such as production, promotion, gallery system, museum system, competition system (who is first), their preoccupation with objects, all that drives them away from laziness, from art.’

The Praise of Laziness, Mladen Stilinovic
http://www.guelman.ru/xz/english/XX22/X2207.HTM



Ruth Legg
‘Centre Fold’
Millennium Galleries
(Foyer Plasma Screens)

In the video piece ‘Centre Fold’ Ruth Legg probes and unravels the power of images to perform. A series of newspaper images are shown in extreme close-up, zoomed in to near abstraction, as a mechanical scan moves across image after image in a slow vertical or horizontal motion for a duration of over 20 minutes.

Like in an endless cinematic tracking shot, the scan directs the gaze across the image; quite literally you ‘look’ the image ‘up and down’. The monotonous pace at which the scan moves in fact creates a certain form of suspense: since you can never see the image in its entirety, you are left in a constant state of expectation. Adding the details together, a recognizable picture may momentarily appear in front of your mind’s eye, yet only to fall apart again as the scan moves on and the image on the screen disintegrates again into a series of indefinable, changing, abstractions.

As media images the job of newspaper photographs is to convey meaning, but when removed from their original context and dissolved into abstraction, they are no longer pressed into performing this service. Their power is still tangible, but only in a state of open potential. Consequently, the images begin to perform in their own right. Without a story or script to coerce them into delivering a message they still work, but the work they do now follows no prescribed function. It only elicits a gaze that travels on endlessly.

Left
Ruth Legg ‘Centre Fold’
Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Left
Mladen Stilinovic
‘The Artist at Work’(1978).
Image courtesy of the artist.

Right
Wolfgang Tillmans
‘Morrissey, Studio’ (2003),
c-type print, dimensions
variable. Image courtesy
of the artist and Maureen
Paley, London

Far Right
Július Koller ‘Universal
Physical Culture Operation
(Defence) 2 (U.F.O)’ (1970)
black & white photograph.
Image courtesy of
Kontakt Collection and
Galerie Martin Janda.



Wolfgang Tillmans
‘Morrissey, Studio’
Millennium Galleries

How do you live your life when you choose to live differently? In his photographs artist Wolfgang Tillmans shows moments from this life; singular instances of awareness in the middle of the everyday, often euphoric, at times gloomy, never heroic, but always revealing a love for details that make all the difference.

Although he works with most basic means, with no artifical light (other than a simple flash gun) and with whatever develops out of a given situation, Tillmans’ images have an iconic quality. They in fact reflect on what it means for a photo or person to become an icon in the media. As they circulate widely through different media, Tillmans’ photos still always also remain part of his expanding personal universe of images. As pictures, they perform both in a public and personal sphere. Thereby they also speak about how it feels to live your life in public.

In 2003 Tillmans shot a portrait of Morrissey for the American magazine Index while the singer was in the studio recording his album ‘You are the Quarry’ (2004). As the patron saint of a counterculture dedicated to romantic revolt, Morrissey is an iconic public performer come of age. In a pop culture capitalising on the promise of youth, getting older is not part of the plan. Both in his music and in the remodelling of his public persona, Morrissey challenges these conventions as he negotiates his own terms of how to age in public. Tillmans portrays him doing so, as, reclining on the studio floor, Morrissey casts a sceptical glance to the side, somewhat exhausted maybe or just getting ready to perform or, most likely, performing a moment of sceptical reflection as a conscious means of interrupting the pressure to perform.



Július Koller
Selected Photographs
and Printed Materials
Millennium Galleries

The context in which the late Július Koller began to develop his work in the late 1960s in Bratislava was marked both by the hopes of the thaw period in Czechoslovakia and by the violent quelling of the Prague spring in 1968. Against this violence Koller’s art is a firm gesture of objection.

The erratic poetic wit of his work implies an uncompromising insistence on the utopian potential of free thought and communication between people in the face of an authoritarian social order. Sustaining his practice with most minimal means, Koller realised his works in the form of simple diagrams on postcards and as symbolic gestures performed in public and private places, at times just for the camera. Koller called these gestures ‘anti-happenings’ and this term fits. Often they just consisted of a question mark or endless wave graffitied onto a street with whipped cream, or in a table tennis match staged in a gallery as a model of direct social exchange – or in the act of redrawing the lines on a tennis court, designated as minimal yet fundamental form of agency by being titled ‘Time / Space Definition of the Psycho-physical Activity of Matter’ (1968).

Central to his work is a play on the acronym UFO, which in diagram drawings came to stand for, e.g. Univerzálna Futurologická Organizácia (Universal Futurological Organization, 1972–3), Univerzálny Filozoficky Ornament (Universal Philosophical Ornament, 1978) or Underground Fantastic Organization (1975). The infinite variations on the cipher UFO resemble an ongoing exuberant incantation of the utopian principle.

Defining his own terms for what it means to perform, Koller shows the imagination to be a force that can transcend the realities of the dominant social order through a defiant, utopian optimism.



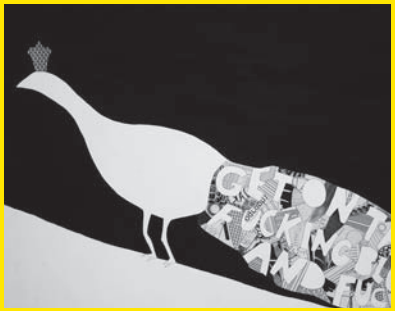
Dexter Sinister (new work)
‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’
Millennium Galleries

Dexter Sinister is a workshop and publishers based in New York City, run by Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt. The workshop seeks to counter the contemporary assembly line realities of large-scale publishing. This involves avoiding waste by working on-demand, utilising local cheap machinery, considering alternative distribution strategies, and collapsing distinctions of editing, design, production and distribution into one activity.

In view of the connections between this philosophy and Jan Verwoert’s sceptical exploration (in his essay for Art Sheffield 08) of the culture of high performance and mindless overproduction, it seemed natural to collaborate. Commissioned for Art Sheffield 08, the pamphlet ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’ was produced on site at the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Geneva, Switzerland during a two week period. Dexter Sinister used the opportunity to assemble the group of writers contributing to the forthcoming issue 15 of Dot Dot Dot magazine (ed. by Stuart Bailey) to work and discuss together, cheek by jowl with the Dutch printers’ collective Knust who were printing the magazine and pamphlet on stencil printing machines in the same gallery / workspace.

Largely written on site, the final version of the essay is both included in Dot Dot Dot and published as a pamphlet, as part of Art Sheffield 08. By renegotiating the conditions of production in terms of this collaboration, Dexter Sinister created a different ecology of production and distribution – as well as a community of writers, publishers, designers, editors and printers assembled for a brief moment under one roof.

The publication will be displayed in the Millennium Galleries and available to purchase from gallery bookshops.



Frances Stark
Millennium Galleries

Mixing and merging text and image, writing and visual art, Frances Stark carves out a space through her work where the personal becomes public and politicised, yet where the terms and codes of how meaning is made are continuously twisted and renegotiated.

Her painting ‘Reflection for Readying’ shows the outlines of a peacock in a perky pose, but its tail feathers are not yet unfolded. The feather texture is composed of a collage of different small cut-outs with graphic icons or typewriter letters. Among them, a Henry Miller quote is spelled out in hand-drawn capital letters: ‘Get on the fucking block and fuck’. The words read equally like a firm admonition (Do it!), a declaration of will (Yes, I will do it!) and a supportive cheer (Come on, you can do it!). As you can also tell by its pose, this bird both wants and needs to get up and go.

With a sharp sense of self-irony, Stark here touches on one of the most painful conundrums at the heart of creative production: the motivation for the urge to perform. Is it your own will or other people’s demands that make you ‘get on the block’? To work out the difference between what you expect of yourself and what others want from you may in fact be one of the hardest puzzles for any creative worker to solve.

The peacock apparently has not resolved the issue yet, either. About to go out and perform, it still holds back for a moment, out of indecision maybe, or stage fright or because it actually enjoys the intense moment of suspended time shortly before the curtain goes up.

Left
Frances Stark ‘Reflection for Readying’ (2005), gesso, casein, collage on canvas board. Image courtesy of the artist and Mr George Lindermann

Far Left
Dexter Sinister ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’. Image courtesy of Dexter Sinister and Will Holder.

Right
Still from video ‘Passage’ by Nasrin Tabatabai (2005), Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Right
Tsui Kuang-Yu, stills from ‘The Shortcut to the Systematic Life: Superficial Life’, 2005. Image courtesy of the artist.



Nasrin Tabatabai
‘Passage’
Millennium Galleries

During the one-year process of filming the documentary video ‘Passage’ (2005) Nasrin Tabatabai repeatedly visited a middle-aged immigrant woman in the foyer of a shopping mall in Rotterdam where, every day, she hands out free newspapers and speaks to passers-by. In the course of their conversations it transpires that the woman may not have a residence permit, but that, because of serious family problems, she cannot return to Iran either. This impasse, however, does not stop her from acting. Through speaking to passers-by in the foyer she establishes herself as a public persona and people share stories of their daily chores with her.

While you would assume that the precarious situation she is in would destine her to be in need of care, she reverses the situation by caring for others. Her performance continuously alternates between exhaustion and exuberance. In moments when she takes a cigarette break her exhaustion is tangible. Yet, when she is talking to people, there is a certain understated exuberance in her actions: she performs without any mandate and upon no request but with an unassailable legitimacy created through the fact that she cares.

Tabatabai here portrays an experience that many asylum seekers have: after the troublesome passage into the foreign country, you find that, although you may still be full of energy and hope, you have effectively exhausted all your options for further action. There is nothing you can do but wait while your request for asylum is examined by the authorities. Caught in this situation, the protagonist of Tabatabai’s video turns the tables: defying the imposed state of exhaustion and isolation, she goes out into the public to make the non-space of a supermarket foyer her space of agency and social exchange.



Tsui Kuang-Yu
‘The Shortcut to the Systematic Life: Superficial Life’
Millennium Galleries

In his performance videos, Taiwan-based artist Kuang-Yu Tsui enacts slapstick actions in urban environments that parody the laws of contemporary city life. Waving, for instance, a chequered flag at passing cars at traffic lights or hitting golf balls at office buildings, Kuang-Yu Tsui’s wordlessly caricatures a competitive culture of high performance and high aspiration. At the same time, his performances celebrate an exuberant absurd humour.

In ‘The Shortcut to the Systematic Life: Superficial Life’, Kuang-Yu Tsui performs an intricate ceremony. Rushing through the city, always on the move, he constantly pulls out new outfits from his backpack that allow him to blend in with the social surroundings of the place that he has just arrived in. With a deadpan expression on his face, he instantly transforms his identity in order to adapt to the situation. In seconds, he smoothly moves through all fields of life, performing different jobs, engaging in leisure activities and even religious practices, without stopping for one instant.

Kuang-Yu Tsui portrays an urban existance in which no aspect of life seems to be free from the pressure to perform and the demand to be mobile and flexible. Yet, by over-fulfilling all standards of adaptation, he equally also mocks those demands through the exuberant acts of overshooting all marks.



Andrew Cooke ‘Performance Under Working Conditions’ and ‘A Guide to Maintaining Dignity in the Workplace’
Millennium Galleries

In our current so-called ‘service society’ the conditions under which services are provided differ drastically, from the tasks performed by skilled professionals like media designers, IT technicians to the monotonous work at call centres, to serving or cleaning in hotels or restaurant kitchens. Still, effectively we perform the same job: we provide services.

In his work Andrew Cooke examines the working conditions of menial labour and the effect performing such services has on the person doing so. Status, respect, dignity and aspiration are what the menial worker struggles to maintain but is equally also denied on a daily basis. Facing this situation, Cooke proposes different strategies. In the video ‘Performance Under Working Conditions’ he can be seen, moving his head across a hotel room carpet as if he was hoovering. ‘A Guide to Maintaining Dignity in the Workplace’ is a handbook for employees Cooke compiled. It offers practical advice on how to elude the will of your employers, and carve out autonomous zones for yourself as an employee during the working day by disengaging from the pressure to perform in subtle ways.

Turning your head into a hoover is a strategy of pushing over-identification with work to the point of defiance. The subtle ways of emotionally and practically disengaging from the routines of everyday work, conversely, constitute a form of reticence that, in the long run, may actually be more effective than theatrical forms of open resistance, because it is untraceable and therefore unstoppable. In a more general context, Cooke’s works raise the question of what gestures of resistance mean and look like in a service society, where in different ways, we all perform to serve.



Left
Tim Etchells ‘Wait Here’. Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Left
Andrew Cooke, still from ‘Performance Under Working Conditions’ (2006). Image courtesy of the artist.

Tim Etchells (new work) ‘Wait Here’, ‘Please Come Back’ & ‘Let’s Pretend’
Millennium Galleries

Every day we do things with words; performing ‘speech acts’ such as greetings or apologies, picking fights or ordering drinks. On this simple level, words alone become a kind of performance – changing the world and the situation we find ourselves in.

In his newly commissioned works for Art Sheffield 08, Tim Etchells plays with this performative dimension of language in a series of neon signs that spell out enigmatic, comical and slightly perplexing phrases.

Each of Etchells’ new works – speech acts of sorts – creates an awkward moment of intimacy in a public setting, invoking a situation of danger, regret or urgency, the source of which, however, remains mysterious. Decidedly resistant to any clear definition of the context of these utterances, the signs draw the viewer into an absurd situation or non-functional interaction – an ambiguous space in which the viewer is implicated, but imprecisely, as a lover perhaps, or as an accomplice, or as a friend. The pressure for the viewer to perform in response to these texts is on, but the logic and the rules of the performance have not been clearly determined.

Right
Tim Etchells and Vlatka Horvat ‘Insults and Praises Video’ (2003), produced during a residency at IASPIS Stockholm. Image courtesy of the artists.

Far Right
Host Artists’ Group (HAG). Image courtesy of the artists.



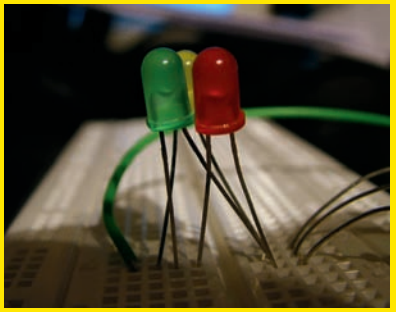
Tim Etchells & Vlatka Horvat ‘Insults & Praises’ & ‘Promises & Threats’ (new work)
Millennium Galleries

Love owes a lot to theatre: if you want to work out what your emotions are towards someone you love, the best way to find out is to make a scene. Often it seems that feelings must be enacted to become real, but what is real when everyone knows that we’re all playing roles?

In the two video works, ‘Insults & Praises’ and ‘Threats & Promises’, Tim Etchells and Vlatka Horvat explore the theatrical rituals connected to emotions and judgements, playfully cataloguing the possibilities of both complimentary and critical statements that define us in relationships and social situations.

In ‘Insults & Praises’, a man and a woman face the camera and take turns insulting and praising each over the course of an hour, drawing on an exhaustive list of abuses and derogatory terms on the one side, and compliments and declarations of affection on the other. In the new work ‘Threats & Promises’, a follow-up of sorts to ‘Insults & Praises’, the same two people console, lure, shame, intimidate or tease each other with proposals about future things they might do from bringing flowers to behaving badly, from playing safe to smashing up the town.

In both of these works, it’s clear that all the statements are just that – phrases, positions and possibilities for a multitude of contexts which may or may not apply to these two people in particular. However, the energy generated by their performance, testing the system as they egg each other on, is so strong at times that the tipping point of play becoming real never seems too far away. In these works Etchells and Horvat expose how, in the performative exchanges that shape our relationships, real and staged drama are irresolvably intertwined.



Host Artists’ Group (new work) ‘Host 8: Observatory’
Millennium Galleries

Host Artists Group’s project focuses on the process, location and politics of artistic production. Their piece is an installation of models and sound broadcasts which reflect on the activities of 21 invited artists.

The ‘Host 8: Observatory’ comprises 21 semi-transparent perspex models, made to scaled down plans of each represented artist’s workspace. Each model contains a light, the intensity of which will be set to a level that corresponds to the artist’s own perception of their current productivity. If the artist is running at full power, then so will the light; if in a period of latency, then the light will be dimmed. In addition, the participating artists compose bulletins on the state of their current activities that will be automatically relayed and played back intermittently in the space.

The project provokes questions concerning the visibility and evaluation of artistic productivity. The trouble with artistic labour has always been that, while the inner and outer pressure to perform and be creative is always on, standards for assessing this creativity are impossible to determine. How do you measure the degree of dedication, the quality of ideas or the intensity of inspired moments that define the creative process?

While, for good reasons, artistic labour then resists objective evaluation, its conditions are not entirely subjective either – because they are shared. A lot of people make art, work under comparable precarious conditions and face similar pressures. It is precisely this ambivalence between the personal and the collective perception of artistic labour that the ‘Host 8: Observatory’ highlights (literally, and with tongue firmly in cheek) and politicises.

Host Artists’ Group are Matt Butt, Michael Day and Neil Webb.



Paul Rooney (new work)
‘Words & Silence’
Millennium Galleries

In his text, sound and video works, Paul Rooney presents autobiographical testimonies of semi-fictional characters. In written, sung or spoken monologues these characters speak about their life and work using a language that may be personal or formal or literary. These different forms of storytelling create an intimate way to address broader issues concerning the history of a place or the political stakes in a particular work situation.

In the sound piece ‘Words & Silence’ you listen to the voice of a fictional call centre worker. Her story is related to the listener in the form of a message left on an anonymous answer phone. The telephone system in many ‘cold calling’ call centres is programmed to automatically dial the next number as soon as one call is ended, so that the worker has to launch straight into the next call. The chance to take a break arises only if a call goes to an answer machine. The worker can then hold that call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine.

In the silence of such a moment, the worker in Rooney’s work begins to speak and tell her story. Defying the pressure to perform in the expected way, she carries out a different kind of performance, a performance of confabulation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily controlled resource. Rooney’s protagonist squanders this resource, winning back an intimate relationship between the human voice and silence in the process.



Michal Budny
‘Flight’
Millennium Galleries

In his sculptures Polish artist Michal Budny takes a critique of architecture to a level of abstraction where the established meanings of architectural forms are eroded and their shapes come to evoke a feeling of sheer potential. Folded from paper or cardboard, his sculptures sometimes have the dimensions of architectural models and at other times fill the entire gallery.

Budny shows how abstraction can become a method to free your mind by severing the link between what you see and what you believe you know. In emptying out and, if you will, exhausting the seemingly familiar forms of our built environment, Budny’s works give you an idea of what architectural space could potentially be otherwise.

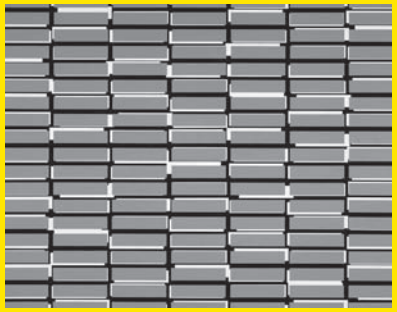
As the buildings we live and work in quite literally structure the way we go through life by determining the paths and passage we take, architecture always imparts a social choreography on our daily lives. In opening up the formal language of architecture, Budny therefore also challenges this choreography. His works make you wonder: If the spaces we inhabit lost their conventional meaning and became soft and open, how would we perform in them? Would we not perform differently? How?

Left
Michal Budny ‘Flight’ (2004). Image courtesy of the artist and Johnen & Schöttle.

Far Left
Paul Rooney, research still from ‘Park Online’, Wirral (2001). Image courtesy of the artist.

Right
Esther Stocker ‘Untitled’ (2007), acrylic on cotton. Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Right
Ryszard Wasko ‘Zaprzeczenie (Negation)’ (1973). Image courtesy of the artist.

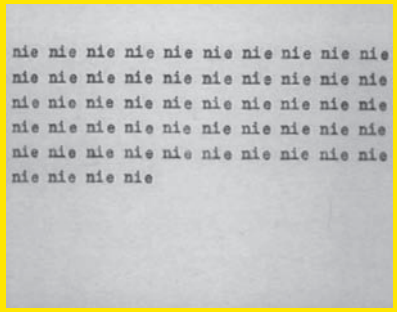


Esther Stocker
‘Untitled’
Millennium Galleries

Abstraction is not just a style of painting, it is an attitude towards the world. In this sense, Esther Stocker formulates a stance of subtle resistance or reticence through her work.

In her abstract paintings, Stocker, unravels the internal logic of seemingly rational structures, using no colours but only shades of grey, white and black. She proceeds by projecting several grid structures on top of one another. As the overlays generate visual interferences, a delay occurs in your perception and the grids begin to waver in front of your eyes. As you then experience the latencies at the heart of any structure, alternative ways of seeing – and thinking about structures – become tangible. By exposing the inherent ambiguities of seemingly regular patterns, Stocker effectively undermines the confidence in the rationality of structures on which a conventional belief in order is built.

In ‘I Cannot in All Conscience Do What You Request’, Stocker translates this sceptical stance from painting into the medium of social etiquette. The work consists of a series of posters, stating phrases of polite declining. Featuring a different phrase for each of the six weeks of the exhibition, the posters are displayed on fly poster sites around the city. Together, all six statements appear on a billboard outside Bloc on Eyre Lane. As the gesture of polite declining carves out a space in between open refusal and willing acceptance, it opens up a world of options beyond the restrictive binary alternative of yes and no that otherwise governs our actions. By unworking such rigid structures in painting and language, Stocker then formulates what might be called a reticent politics of purposeful vagueness. A stance that, in the face of the social pressure to perform, may constitute a most forceful form of opposition.

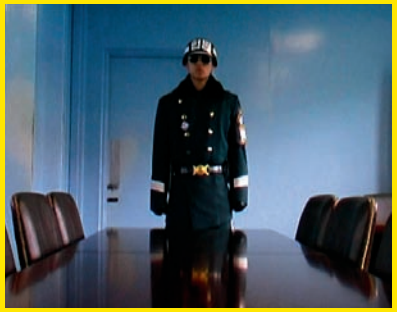


Ryszard Wasko
‘Zaprzeczenie (Negation)’
Millennium Galleries

In 1970 Ryszard Wasko was a founding member of the Polish artist group ‘Workshop of the Film Form’ that existed in Lodz until 1977. In their works the members of the group sought to cut through the ideological rhetoric that had at that time permeated everyday communication in the country by creating a film language that was as provocative and direct as possible.

Wasko’s film ‘Zaprzeczenie (Negation)’ is a strong example of this. The film alternately shows a black screen and a white page. When the page is seen for the first time, the word ‘nie’ (no) appears in typing on it. Next is a split second of black screen. Then the page is shown again, this time the word ‘nie’ appears twice. This continues, until the page is filled with the word ‘nie.’ Then the process is reversed, and with each subsequent shot one word disappears, until the sheet is again blank. Each time the writing (dis)appears, a voice monotonously intones the word ‘nie’ while the alternation of white page and black screen produces a nervous flicker.

The (dis)appearance of the word ‘nie’, punctuated by the flicker of the cuts, has the force of a slap in the face. You feel the rhythm of the strikes: nie nie nie nie. Through abstraction the film is reduced to an audiovisual signal that directly enters your nervous system. Paradoxically, the insistent repetition of the act of saying no exhausts its meaning and boosts its sensual intensity. Between exhaustion and intensity the act of negation then appears as a powerful gesture with a potential that lies less in its content and more in the form (or formula) of its performance.



Katie Davies (new work)
‘38th Parallel’
Millennium Galleries

Filmed at the Demilitarised Zone on the border between North and South Korea, the work ‘38th Parallel’ seeks to portray the particular reality of this contested site. It is a reality marked by an eerie sense of latency. Constantly alert, constantly inert, North and South face each other in a stalemate situation sealed by a cease-fire agreement 55 years ago.

Ever since then the heavy military presence on both sides of the Demilitarised Zone persists, turning the Zone into a symbol for the irresolvable conflict between two political systems that splits the country and haunts its citizens. George Bush described it in dramatic words as “The line dividing freedom and oppression and the one of the most dangerous places on earth”. In actuality, however, the Demilitarised Zone is a no-man’s land where nothing happens, because it is there to prevent things from happening. The Zone exists in a constant state of suspense. It is a geopolitical void.

In her video, Davies operates in this void. She shows how political reality manifests itself here in the ways how space is structured and time is regimented in this militarised environment. Facing each other across the turnpike, for instance, border guards on both sides execute the silent ceremonies of authority prescribed by their military protocol. It’s a choreography of empty gestures enacted on the stage of a deserted strip of land and bleak interrogation rooms. Davies then shows the local epicentre of a conflict of global proportions to be a non-place where power manifests itself in ghostly acts of decorum performed in suspended time.



Sean Snyder
‘Analepsis’
Millennium Galleries

Throughout modernity, architecture, like information, has become a global currency. Copies and clones of buildings appear in cities all over the world. Like commercial imagery and product brands they form the dialect of the modern planet.

In his work Sean Snyder taps into this global currency, drawing on sources that range fromnews agencies like dpa or Reuters to American soldiers’ image exchange websites, from commercial satellite imagery of cityscapes to his own photos and videos from modern non-places like army compounds and metropolitan outskirts. Snyder channels this material into works that make you see what the world looks like today. The facades of the cities and surfaces of media images blend and form a world picture that looks pixellated, raw and connected, always updated but still eerily familiar and enigmatic.

For ‘Analepsis’, Snyder recorded hours of news footage from satellite television and isolated the short passages at the start of news items that show panoramic views of the city in which the reported event took place. He then arranged them according to the camera movement: panning across or zooming into cityscapes the camera scans the globe like a sentinel on a watchtower in the centre of the world. Wherever the camera turns, something seems about to happen. But nothing does. So, in the moment of an exhaustive overview, the gaze of the camera exhausts itself as it travels on endlessly. In this state of exhaustion, the power of the media image, the fantasy of absolute world-wide visibility, is most tangible, yet in the form of an empty potential and a most eerie sense of premonition. Some time soon something will happen somewhere. And one of the zillion camera-eyes will relate it right back, via satellite, to the nerve centre of the globe: your tv screen.

Left
Sean Snyder ‘Analepsis’ (2003-2004), video stills. Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Left
Katie Davies, still from ‘38th parallel’ (2007). Image courtesy of the artist.

Right
Phil Collins ‘they shoot horses’ (2004), synchronised two–screen colour video installation with sound, duration: 2 x 420 min. Image courtesy the artist and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

Far Right
Annika Eriksson ‘Maximum Happiness’ (2008). Image courtesy of the artist.



Phil Collins
‘they shoot horses’
Millennium Galleries

The art of Phil Collins investigates the nuances of social relations in various locations and global communities. Collins sometimes employs elements of popular culture, low–budget television or reportage–style documentary to address problems of representation within different media, and the complex relationship between the producer, the participant and the viewer.

For ‘they shoot horses’ Collins organised a disco dance marathon in Ramallah with young Palestinians. He filmed two separate groups dancing over the course of a working day, without breaks, to the soundtrack of pop hits from the past four decades. The resulting work is presented as a real time installation, interrupted only by intermittent technical problems, occasional power failures and calls to prayer from a nearby mosque.

Dance marathons were a popular form of entertainment in the United States during the Great Depression. The historical irony of this craze for self–exhaustion during times of hardship was portrayed in the 1935 novel by Horace McCoy (adapted to film by Sydney Pollack in 1969) from which Collins took the title for his work.

Restaging such a marathon in Ramallah, a Palestinian city under Israeli occupation, and the place of daily discrimination and violence, would at first seem to invoke an even stronger sense of irony. However, as we experience the elation, stoicism and, finally, exhaustion of the dancers, it becomes clear that while Collins points to the tragedy of living in the midst of a violent conflict, he also celebrates the spirit of resilience, and a defiant insistence on having a life and enjoying it.

The performance of exhilaration, endurance and eventual collapse, then, comes to epitomise both a daily practice of survival under oppressive living conditions and a stance of resistance in the face of a seemingly interminable political crisis.



Annika Eriksson (new work)
‘Maximum Happiness’
Millennium Galleries

In her work Annika Eriksson creates situations in which people are invited to perform an activity that represents their work or special interests. She, for instance, worked with the Copenhagen and Stockholm postman orchestra in 1996 whom she asked to play the song Sour Times by Portishead. The videos of their performances resemble a group portrait in motion. Eriksson created similarly dynamic, time-based portraits of people at their workplace, asking, for example, the entire staff of the 2002 Sao Paolo Biennial, to introduce themselves to the camera, one after another, and then join the slowly growing line-up of workers.

By purposefully, without comment, reducing the framework for a group portrait to its most basic form, Eriksson’s works raise the question of how communities today constitute their identity. If through work, then what does this work represent? A sense of class or professional pride? If not that, what else?

For Art Sheffield 08 Eriksson will have the facade of the Park Hill housing estate illuminated by floodlights for one night. Towering over the city like a majestic castle, the estate is a landmark building, yet what it stands for is ambiguous. In a visible state of decay, about to be redeveloped into contemporary apartments, it still testifies to the unparalled social vision of the 1960s that futurist architecture should be accessible to everyone. Is this utopia exhausted? In the title Eriksson cites the architects of Park Hill who wrote that, although they did their best to fulfil the residents’ wishes “it is clearly impossible to secure the maximum happiness of everybody”. Yet they hoped “that Park Hill is a satisfactory ‘machine for living in’.” In the night of its illumination this modern machine will perform once more, maybe to display its exhaustion, maybe to revivify the promise it once embodied.



Neil Webb (new work)
‘Adrift’
The Winter Garden

In his sound works Neil Webb unframes time and creates places for thinking. Against the backdrop of a contemporary event culture that steadily increases the daily dose of media stimulation, Webb seeks to create moments of interruption that allow you to recalibrate your senses.

For his sound installation in the Winter Garden he works with diverse recordings: the ambient sound of people within the building is mixed with sounds of the building’s inner workings and external sound sources from nature. The recordings are further de-familiarised by being played back through water rather than air in the post-production process. The mix is then presented through ‘surface exciting speakers’ which activate glass surfaces within the building’s architecture as speakers. As the glass building literally becomes the sounding board for the water-modulated sounds, pockets of the environment will be transformed into something more akin to an aquarium.

By altering the basic framework for the experience of the place, the piece attempts to create an alternative choreography for the way people may move through this environment, slowing down their pace and potentially opening up pockets of empty time for different thoughts and sensations.



Roman Ondák (new work)
‘Failed Fall’
The Winter Garden
16 – 24 February

Roman Ondák’s works often take the form of small symbolic acts that interrupt the regimented patterns of everyday life by opening up spaces in which time flows at a different pace and social exchange is experienced under different conditions.

For ‘SK Parking’ (2001), for instance, Ondák used the exhibition budget provided by the Vienna gallery Secession to rent several Slovakian Skoda cars from friends in his home town Bratislava. Together they drove across the border, and parked the cars behind the exhibition space in the heart of Vienna. There the cars remained, unused, for the duration of the show, as an anti-monument publicly commemorating the interruption of time.

For Art Sheffield 08 Ondák will again realise an anti-monument for interrupted time – the piece ‘Failed Fall’, in the Winter Garden in the town centre. The temperate glass house contains evergreen exotic plants that are not subject to the seasonal cycle. Inspired by this moment of temporal suspension, Ondák decided to both underscore and invert the logic of the garden: for one winter week in February, the interior pavements of the Winter Garden will be filled with dry autumn leaves from average city trees.

Inconspicuously then, autumn invades the space of perpetual summer, as if its remnants had just been blown in through the door. Yet, as the title affirms, it is a ‘Failed Fall’. The last one happened long ago. This one is an echo of the seasonal cycle exhausting itself. Time is out of joint and the place becomes surreal. As an anti-monument for interrupted time, ‘Failed Fall’ surely seems melancholy at heart, yet it equally also testifies to the liberating possibility of radically unravelling the structures that otherwise govern our expectations of how things should work. If even fall can fail, why should we be forced to always succeed?

Left
Roman Ondák ‘Failed Fall’ (2007–08), proposal for installation. Image courtesy of the artist.

Far Left
Neil Webb ‘Adrift’. Image courtesy of the artist.

SCAF would like to thank…
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Kerlin Gallery
Deirdre Pashley
& Winter Garden staff
Toby Oliver at Sheffield City Council
Ivor Lawrence at Sheffield Hallam University
Caroline Lister at the University of Sheffield

Venues

Admission to all venues is free and opening times vary – please check the list below.

Bloc
71 Eyre Lane S1 4RB
Telephone 0114 272 3155
Open Wednesday to Sunday 12noon – 6pm
www.blocprojects.co.uk

End Gallery
Sheffield Hallam University,
Psalter Lane S11 8UZ
Telephone 0114 225 2607
Open Wednesday to Friday 11am – 6pm,
Saturday 11am – 5pm, Sunday 1pm – 6 pm
(*Closed Friday 21, Saturday 22 & Sunday 23 March 08)

Millennium Galleries
Arundel Gate S1 2PP
Telephone 0114 278 2600
Open Monday to Saturday 10am – 5pm,
Sunday 11am – 5pm
www.sheffieldgalleries.org.uk

Yorkshire ArtSpace Persistence Works
21 Brown Street S1 2BS
Telephone 0114 276 1769
Open Monday to Friday 10am – 5pm,
except Thursday 10.45am – 5pm,
Saturdays 11am – 4pm
www.artspace.org.uk

S1 Artspace
Units 4A-6B, Trafalgar Court,
Milton Street S1 4JU
Telephone 0114 249 3386
Open Wednesday to Sunday
12noon – 6pm
www.s1artspace.org

Site Gallery
1 Brown Street S1 2BS
Telephone 0114 281 2077
Open Wednesday to Saturday
(plus Sunday 17th & 24th February)
11am – 5.30pm
www.sitegallery.org

Sylvester Space
4 Sylvester Street S1 4RN
Telephone (via SCAF) 0114 281 2013
Open 12noon – 6pm
www.sylvesterspace.com

Winter Garden
Surrey Street, Sheffield S1
Open 8am – 6pm
(Please note: Roman Ondák’s project is only viewable 16 – 24 February)

This information is available in large print. Contact SCAF
Telephone 0114 281 2013
Emai contact@artsheffield.org
Website www.artshefield.org

Events

Saturday Tours
2pm from Millennium Galleries
Free one-hour tours led by Sheffield based artists, offering a personal insight into the ideas behind the work and this citywide event.

Thursday lunchtime Tours
An Introduction to the Exhibition
1pm at Millennium Galleries
Free 20-minute lunchtime tours, offering a brief introduction to the works at Millennium Galleries. Meet in the exhibition space (run 28 Feb - 10 April).

Co-curator’s Talk: Jan Verwoert
Wednesday 20th February 1pm
Millennium Galleries
Free informal gallery talk giving an introduction to the citywide exhibition as a whole in relation to individual works at the Millennium Galleries.

Symposium

Thursday 28th February
Session 1, 3pm – 5pm
Can we rediscover latent potentials in the exhausted conflicts and promises of modernism? Programmed & chaired by Jan Verwoert. Speakers: Nikolaus Hirsch, Deimantas Narkevičius.

5.45 pm
Screening of Deimantas Narkevičius’ work ‘Energy Lithuania’ in Showroom Cinema.
Free to symposium attenders and also open to the public.

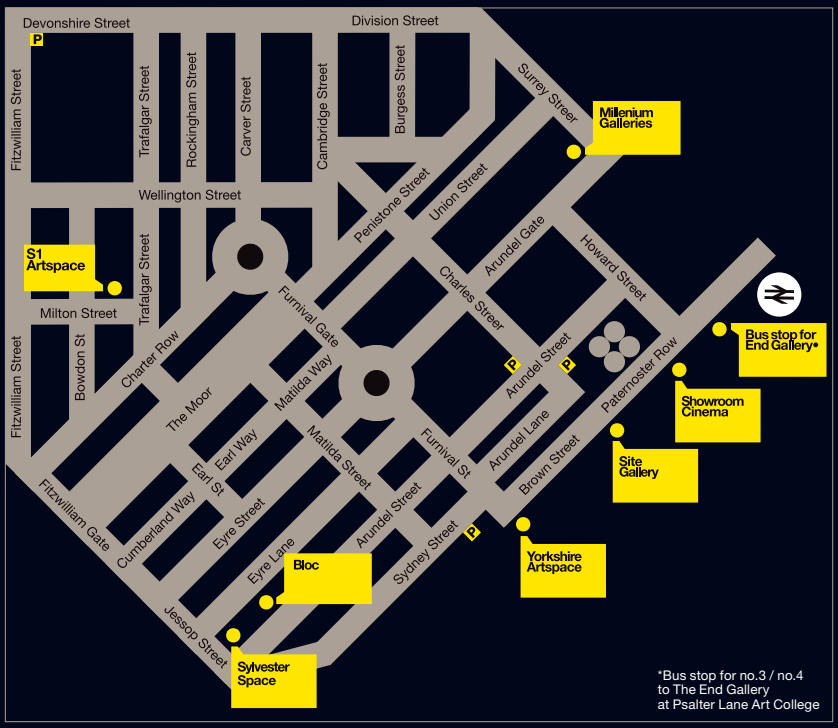
Friday 29th February
Session 2, 10am – 12noon
Revolution & Exhaustion
Babak Afrassiabi & Irit Rogoff
Programmed & chaired by Jan Verwoert.

Session 3, 1pm – 5.00pm
On the Circulation of Artistic Labour: Performing the local and distributing the International and vice versa. Programmed by Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum and chaired by Becky Shaw.

Speakers include: Jennifer Johns, Annika Eriksson. Break Out sessions speakers: Nasrin Tabatabai and Babak Afrassiabi, Stephen Beddoe & Russell Martin (ArtQuest), Jeanine Griffin (SCAF) and Katy Woods, Cylena Simonds, Iniva, London

For details please visit the Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum website – www.artsheffield.org
For booking please contact the Showroom Cinema on 0114 275 7727

Tickets
APD providers / organisations £45
Individuals £25
Students £10.00 (incl Friday lunch)



Visiting Art Sheffield 08 – see www.artsheffield.org for travel / accommodation info.
Admission to all venues is free.

Art Sheffield 08 is organised by Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum, a not-for-profit company working to further the presence and awareness of contemporary art in Sheffield through joint programming, audience development and profile raising activities.
The directors of the company are Sheila McGregor (chair), Jeanine Griffin, Richard Bartle (Bloc Studios), Caroline Krzesinska (Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust), Lesley Sanderson (artist & Sheffield Hallam University representative), Carol Maund (Site Gallery), Louise Hutchinson (S1 Artspace), Mir Jansen (Yorkshire ArtSpace Society) and Steve Dutton (artist & lecturer).

SCAF Director & Artistic Programme Manager: Jeanine Griffin
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