

Evolution Isn't Over Yet

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The result of a co-operation the Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, *Evolution Isn't Over Yet* presents new work from twelve emerging artists and/or artistic groups based in Scotland. The exhibition takes its theme from both local and global concerns loosely connected with the idea of 'evolution'. Its title comes from the script of Mike Leigh's powerful 1993 film *Naked*, which probes at the dark underbelly of human psyche and culture. Much of the art deals with contemporary society - the moment we are at today - how we got here, and what is to follow. In *Evolution Isn't Over Yet* all of our senses are engaged: sight, smell and sound. The artistic approaches adopted are diverse and a rich variety of media and practices are employed, including painting, video, installation and sculpture. Here, big time theory collides with pop culture. What comes out in the mix is vivid, immediate, and gleefully subversive of the expected - in art, and in the assumptions we live by. The strong line of humour which runs through much of the work is frequently barbed; and the cultural paradigms represented through a variety of means - explicit, ironic, anecdotal, absurdist and elegiac - offer us moments for reflection and thought.

Evolution Isn't Over Yet does not present itself as a survey show or as an overview of current artistic practice in Scotland. It brings together the work of twelve significant emerging artists/groups and demonstrates the wealth and diversity of art practice in Scotland today. With the new Scottish Parliament shortly to open, on the cusp of a new millennium, the exhibition hopes to encourage us to reflect with humour, enthusiasm and intelligence along exactly these lines: evolution isn't over - yet.

JOHN BEAGLES & GRAHAM RAMSAY

John Beagles and Graham Ramsay as a collaborative duo have strenuously attempted to create a large body of work capable of reflecting the absurd, grotesque and humorous character of British culture. Employing a variety of forms and approaches, ranging through

photography, video, sculpture, drawing, printed and audio texts, their collaborative practice has sought to articulate their direct, physical experience of contemporary urban life. Shifting in tone from the colloquial, anecdotal, to the fantastic, tragic and comic, they have developed a practice which fuses art, life and music.

Statement: The environments we manufacture aim to articulate our experience of contemporary urban life. Shifts in tone, subject or medium are central to our practice, and in an attempt to fuse an overheated imagination with a limited budget, our intention has been to operate like Cecil B de Mille on skid row.

In our videos the viewer is greeted by a whole host of deviant characters. Frequently absurd, daft and tragic both in their actions and inertia, this grotesque assortment (Gary the Misunderstood Toddler, the doltish Beagles Ramsay doppelgangers and Derek and Ron Blades) act as guides on a cut price tour of some of our nation's less salubrious hot spots.

DAVID BELLINGHAM

David Bellingham's work has as one of its main preoccupations a fascination with measurement. In installations, wall drawings and multiple objects he uses the recurring motifs of rulers, the lengths between places, the confinement or definition of spaces. He shows us only the suggestion of what has been left behind; an indication of what might happen, of seeing beyond the surface. The distances between what is and what might be.

MARGARET BARRON

Margaret Barron's small scale figurative paintings subvert our sense of perception. They occur as panoramas of our immediate surroundings, yet in the most unexpected places. The view from a street corner will be painted at eye level on a lamp-post, on site. By nature of their size many of these paintings could be judged unobtrusive, and could be easily overlooked, but this is their intended effect. They tell us as much about our own intervention and interaction with place.

Statement: The work in this exhibition has its basis in a set of pairs of snapshots taken on the coach journey between Glasgow and Edinburgh - each pair of photos being an attempt to capture a particular point of the journey at the time of outward and the return travel. The results of this process reveal the gap between the promise of tinted picture-windows and the actuality of the half-missed photo, the blur, the object in the way. The paintings then, are based on the fallibility of actual experience rather than the conventions of landscape painting. Inspired by traditional tourist amusements such as peepholes, viewing-telescopes and cycloramas, I have contrived a looking-device with which to view the paintings. For the tourist, devices such as these offer a miniaturised, controlled version of experience - a view seen at second-hand and from a distance. My own device is included to offer a similar form of experience a second chance to frame that perfect vista. The work as a whole is an engagement with, and a reaction to, the traditions, conventions and mythologies that go along with landscape tourism and with landscape painting in particular.

CLARA URSITTI

Clara Ursitti is a visual artist who works with smell to create her images. Through scientific experiments, Ursitti can capture aspects of personality and identity. A recent work was based on a pheromone dating agency where people were matched with one another according to their own particular 'perfume'. Portraits of people and places using scent

analysis blurs the lines between scientific experiment and art.

Statement: As an artist, I am intrigued by how scents can trigger vivid visual memories. There is no language for smell, and so we talk about them as being good or bad, creating a crude dichotomy. I'm interested in exploring this dichotomy and what makes us decide which is good or bad. Everyone possesses a unique scent signature that is both genetically and culturally determined. In most Western cultures, one's natural body scent is something we try to mask, and only share with those we are intimate with. Would you recognise the scent of a lover? Of a family member or friend?

JOANNE TATHAM & TOM O'SULLIVAN

Tatham and O'Sullivan's working practice is a role play. They engage with sets of ideas and attitudes to produce constructions which come from within the subject matter they are examining. They are not on the outside passing comment. Instead they mean to deny both themselves and the viewer a position of easy irony. Their worlds of symbols of cultures are represented by a decidedly amateur aesthetic but are executed in a professional manner.

Inner becomes Outer & Outer becomes Other, or: You've gotta get into it to get out of it, comprised of two large sculptural representations of heads and a wall painted grid plays with instantly recognisable, but nevertheless problematic motifs and signs. Retro in look, it deals with a large number of issues, not least what we expect out of a work of art. The heads are massive signs, cliched representations familiar to everyone, through which the chessboard grid can be seen. At certain angles this gives the profile of the heads a temporary illusion of solidity; at others this disappears. At another level this might also refer to the statement that 'nothing becomes legible unless it is submitted to the architectural grid' - a comment on our mode of perception and the (so-called) rational order by which the world is organised by signs and representations.

CHAD MCCAIL

Chad McCail's signature style is clean, detached, intricate draughtsmanship. Yet what his drawings depict are the hidden memories of everyday life. In the cleanliness of their exterior they almost suggest a vacuity, but this is an emptiness to be occupied by childhood memories or hidden histories. The existence of traumatic experiences brought to the surface in this way serve as symbolic reminders of shared pasts, of the child's sublimation of violence or discovery, of the necessity for and misunderstandings brought about by adult role-play.

Statement: *People Stop Using Things* is a series of images and words which offers a proposal about how we might change the way we live and organise ourselves in a way that would bring us closer to one another, the other forms that live around us and our sources of nourishment. The texts are simple and direct and the series marks the steps toward self-governing, non-authoritarian communities. While I felt the viewers were likely to bring a lot of cynicism to bear on the work, I hope that they may spend it freely and be left with space to take some refreshment.

1st April/1999 marks the 350th anniversary of the Digger occupation of St. George's Hill, near Weybridge, Surrey [Publication including an essay available at Front Desk]

DUNCAN CAMPBELL

Duncan Campbell's transformations of everyday ephemera - like posters, photographs or betting slips - are done in such a way that is not intended to memorialise or

monumentalise. Instead he uses techniques which at first sight might seem unexpected, unsettling even. Previous work includes objects which are knitted or meticulously sewn. These are, by their nature, almost as fragile as the 'originals' from which they were copied. By changing the context and the presentation, they carry quietly complex and contradictory signs of gender histories, hidden messages of transformation.

Statement: Much of my recent work has involved taking found or readymade objects and producing a facsimile version of that object on another material. Although the selection of these objects began as being quite a random process what has emerged is an emphasis on objects of a temporal and throwaway nature posters, hand-written notes, found graffiti, etc. I am interested in the history of largely inconsequential events that these objects refer. The work that I made for Evolution continues in this vein. 'Modern Times' is a video piece which was made of appropriations of text and images from lifestyle magazines over a three month period from January to March 1999. The video offers a partial history of the century reflected through the prism of celebrity production and commodified historical events.

PAUL CARTER

Much of Paul Carter's recent work attempts to investigate the relationship between art and spirituality. Simultaneously it begins to trace the assimilation of spirituality into contemporary culture. Carter's attempts to communicate with God, or to create post apocalyptic survival shelters, have within them a certain pathos. His search retains an agnostic attitude, not just towards religion, but to the whole idea of cultural artifacts as vessels for spiritual meaning; he cannot fully believe in it, but he can't stop trying to find it.

The work refers to the ubiquitous garden shed, and to the British culture of amateurism. Carter is intrigued by the mystery of the motivations, individuality and belief systems implicit in this aspect of the common culture. The Tandy disco lights and speakers mounted on the shed are an attempt to communicate (perhaps) with whatever may be out there. There is an air of quiet desperation about the project.

JAN ICE McNAB

There is a hidden community of displaced people who are allergic to 20th Century life. They seek isolation in mobile homes far from the contamination's of 'civilised' society. It is these homes - ramshackle caravans, pre-fabricated accommodations - without any influence of the outside world, which form the subjects of Janice McNab's paintings. From making contacts through the internet to actually meeting up with some of these individuals, McNab's works express the peculiar dislocation of the times and places in which we live.

Statement: We are all happily terrorised by the selection of domestic 'lifestyle choices' we are up against every day. An endless stream of products with promises of comfort, safety and love. this endless stream of product, including art, seems to be what it's all about. Anxiety about it is just another unfortunate byproduct that we try to ignore.

Endless production is making some people very sick. These paintings come from photos I took of the homes of people for whom 'things' have become a big problem. They have Environmental illness, also known as an allergy to the Twentieth Century. This is when over-exposure to some 'everyday' chemical overcomes a person's nervous system and leaves their body permanently chemically injured and so hypersensitised to the man-made

chemicals in food, clothing, housing, other people, everything. Unable to tolerate most workplaces or any modern home, people lose almost all control over their lifestyles. It's an idea most of us would rather send back to the manufacturer and the existence of the condition is angrily rejected a psychosomatic by much of mainstream society, a view backed up by the pharmaceutical (chemical) research industry. The paintings are silent images from where the 'everyday' has fallen apart. We all deal with lurking fears every day in how we live our lives and these come from the same place as the toxic chemicals which control the environmentally ill.

SHAUNA MCMULLAN

Recently returned from the British School at Rome, Shauna McMullan takes maps of cities and the topography of metropolitan centres as raw material for manipulation and alteration. By cutting up, hollowing out and rearranging found maps and plans, McMullan reverses the inherently graphic and abstract nature of map-making and cartography. Underlying her 'renovated cartography' is a philosophy of experiment and play which conjures the bizarre and magical aspects of modernity. New emotional maps are produced in which the opaque becomes transparent and representation remade into reality

For this installation of 3-D drawings, Shauna McMullan asked 12 different people to make aggressive gesture-drawings which function as emotional maps. The empty spaces of these drawings were then removed. The resulting installation gives the illusion of depth and substance, while the fragile nature of the works contrast with their aggressive origin.

ZOE WALKER

"I am interested in the way in which consumer culture capitalises on mass ideals or fantasies by producing goods which might placate our desires in an instantaneous but temporary way. The inevitable disappointment of the fake or material object is inherent in my work." Zoe Walker's work exists as flights of fantasy. Far more than a daydream, she creates home made escape devices which help her negotiate the tediousness of everyday life: scenarios which are both symbolic and poetic.

Statement: My work is concerned with escapism, specifically the psychological bolt hole that is provided by an imaginary place. I am interested in places that are both real and fictional at the same time. I work within the gap between the commercial presentation and packaging of a place and the 'reality' of the particular location. In order to negotiate this space I make objects which act as home crafted escape devices. These objects are used as props in videos or photographs which often emulate the kinds of images that are provided for us through advertising or films. The images that subconsciously become part of our own imagining. Nesting is a work done during a 6 month residency at Prema Arts Centre in the Cotswolds. The landscape of the Cotswolds provided the perfect back drop to a video piece which explores the unique position of the rural idyll. Nesting is a swollen parody of the country home, constructed from gold PVC stitched together and inflated, it is beautiful but unstable; a futile caricature of an English cottage trapped in its earthbound state.

HENRY VIII's WIVES

Henry VIII's Wives are a group of young artists based in Glasgow and Scandinavia who have agreed to work collectively under this pseudonym. Their work examines social institutions and issues, and at the same time attempts to subvert them. As a group, as well

as individuals, they deal with aspects of endurance: questioning personal fears or phobias, as well as confronting the reasonable boundaries of performance in their examination of spaces and products, and the control exerted by multi-national companies.

List of works (to right at top of stair): 7 Photos of elderly people recreating famous/iconic 20th century moments; 2 Video pieces, one of the Glasgow Blind Buskers, the other showing the group carrying out pointless tricks and games; snake paintings on gallery walls.

Statement: Rachel Dagnall, Bob Grieve, Sirko Knupfer, Simon Polli, Per Sander and Lucy Skaer make up the collaborative group Henry VIII's Wives. We are an international group founded in 1997, our first project taking place in Transmission Gallery in January 1998. Since then we have regularly regrouped for various shows in Scotland and most recently in Norway. The group meets about three weeks before a show and makes new work for each gallery space. We work in whatever materials are appropriate to each idea, and make work which is playful but has underlying themes which are not so light. In making our work we act as audience as well as artist and share the responsibility for what we produce, This often allows us to go further than we would as individuals.

Evolution Isn't Over Yet was initiated by Graeme Murray, Director of The Fruitmarket Gallery and Sarah Munro, Director of the Collective Gallery.

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