

semantics, with law-enforcement agencies worldwide being reduced to one long, meaningless catchphrase.

Equally jovial is Martin John Callanan's Letters 2004-2006: Confirmation that you still exist; I respect your authority. Callanan writes formal letters to political or religious institutions bearing bizarrely simple messages. These are exhibited alongside the responses, which are mostly predictable signifiers of the writer's robotic slavery to the whims of bureaucracy. However, among these measured replies one can find the occasional sincere message of thanks, a grateful note that, for example, the president of Afghanistan is touched by the simple message from Callanan; 'I respect your authority'.

Arnaud Desjardin's The Everyday Press/Business As Usual is a fully operational publishing office, where publications can be printed, guillotined and bound. The publication Business As Usual is available throughout the week, but visit on Fridays and you can witness them being made live, in the space.

After a bean-bag session thumbing through Emma Holmes's 'zine Schizm (which is surrounded by Robert Orchardson's sculptures, produced in reference to the set design for a 1955 production of King Lear), I pass Leigh Clarke's Heads of State, 2012, looking briefly at each grotesque reverse-cast of protest masks, bearing the distorted effigies of Robert Mugabe, Vladimir Putin and the whole gang.

In the upper galleries there is firstly a selection of video works. Having recently cringed my way through Lucienne Cole's brilliantly orchestrated pub quiz and DJ set at the opening of 'In The Presence of Multiple Possibilities' at French Riviera, I was pleased to spend several minutes with her wistfully nostalgic English-country-garden music video As Tears Go By, 2011. Sarah Dobai's 16mm film Nettlecombe, 2007, disrupts the English country garden in its own way, animating landscape vistas with the cinematic apparatus of lighting and wind machines.

A strong favourite has to be Sol Archer's video palace in the left, 2011. Video footage of hummingbirds is accompanied by a constantly deviating computerised voice which, while attempting to narrate, digresses at every turn – simultaneously the most evasive and engaging way of approaching the internet as a subject for exhibition.

The last room in the exhibition appears to approach the London art scene from a more dystopian, devolutionary perspective. Channer's pieces furnish the exhibition space in the sparse way primitive garments might adorn the human body, both decorative and reflective. Both Channer and Caroline Achaintre seem to approach art from a craftist perspective, however there is something heavily politicised about the choice Achaintre makes to explore abstraction through a practice so grounded in traditional craft. Conversely, Paul Westcombe's intricately decorated, disturbingly beautiful paper coffee cups approach a heavily political issue with, perhaps involuntary, environmental implications, while doing so in a manner unusually figurative for our times. The drawings, while dark and surreal, are anything but abstract. They are explicit to the point of discomfort.

It is in this last room that a lack of textual stimulus becomes apparent, but while this stringency with word count may necessitate the vagueness that instigates such dull, sweeping sentences as 'Peter Abraham's photographs of carefully arranged everyday objects associated with cleaning and lighting question the value of things and work', this is not generally to the show's detriment. The textbased works and the overtly political imagery presented in the first room of the show provide a grounding for the viewer, provoking an embedded understanding of the works throughout. Although this may fade by the third gallery space, the scale and beauty of the paintings by Mark Harris and Carney are less in need of commentary, and the furnishings of Channer and Voss's giant wallpaper installation are equally self-supporting. This exhibition could be said to represent a certain anti-intellectualism among the artists of London. However, this is not the case. Instead it seems the anti-intellectualism comes from within the institutions, which must do what they can during hard times to get visitors through the doors. London artists are, in fact, becoming increasingly adept at working independently of curators, critics and theorists, and in the ethos of self-publishing and the self-taught attitude brought about by the internet, these works generate their own commentary, and their own criticality. ■

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London Round-up Cartel, ASC Gallery, George and Jørgen, Jonathan Viner Gallery

'When preparing a disappearance and identity change, it is best to consider who might be looking for you and the means they are likely to employ trying to find you.' Wise words, lifted from Doug Richmond's manual *How to Disappear*, reprinted in Bik Van der Pol's publication *The Disappearance Piece*, 1998-, as part of the group show *Last Day* at Cartel curated by Paul O'Neill. Richmond's advice also comes as a handy insight, not so much into O'Neill's show itself but into his curatorial approach. Positing the phrase 'curatorial constellation', O'Neill has attempted in his work to disperse the definition of the work of the curator among a range of activities in and outside the gallery space. When it comes to actually making an exhibition, then, O'Neill seeks to dissolve the curator as directing auteur and instead promote the group show itself as a medium. The show at Cartel ostensibly has a 'theme', its starting point a found painting with the words 'Last Day' which becomes more of a gravitational centre around which a range of responses and approaches by 13 artists can cluster and then slowly drift away from. This is best exemplified in Mark Hutchinson's *On The Last Day*, 2012, a list of 26 statements hand painted in blood red on the outside of Cartel's black container. They riff on the ways you could conceive what 'last day' might mean, from 'Different endings are always conceivable' to the slightly more pessimistic 'Melancholia, the large blue planet, relentlessly pursues Earth through space until it engulfs the Earth, obliterating it'. Luckily some of the works get away from this literal response to the brief, and where the exhibition starts to get interesting is the communication and tangling between the works themselves. Håkon Holm-Olsen's small triptych of black-and-white collages unassumingly feels like the real gravitational centre of the show; in *Logic*, 2012, kids play with shapes on the desks in front of them while wooden blocks float in the air above, like a snapshot from a Steiner school for telekinetics. These shapes undergo a dream-transformation to Rhona Byrne's oversized tangle of thin black balloons *It's All Up in the Air*, 2011, hovering over a calm seascape in one photo, and which also hung as a sculpture over the gallery on the opening night.

The mysterious abilities of these children seem to manifest themselves again Ronan McCrea's black-and-white video *Autodictat*, 2010, in which a solemn young girl plays a solo game of tag, darting around and climbing the innocuous public sculptures among the brutalist architecture of University College Dublin. Here we find the suggestion of an odd optimism, the young refashioning what to us might seem like an ominous, doomed future. Here it is the works and not the curator which provide meanings. But, as Richmond asks us to consider, if O'Neill is attempting to reposition the identity of the

SEP 12 | ART MONTHLY | 359

Page 35

| Reviews | Exhibitions |

curator, is anybody going to notice the change? 'Last Day' does provide glimpses of the self-forming group show O'Neill describes, but it is hard not to see the role he has imagined as not so much about the absence of curatorial judgement but rather one in which he has exercised his judgement at an earlier stage. What is also interesting to see is that the end result of O'Neill's arch stance isn't that much different to a handful of other group shows running concurrently around London.

The gathering of 22 artists at ASC Gallery made it clear from the title of the show that they wanted to dissolve the efforts of not just the curator but also the audience: *There Is Not and Never Has Been Anything To Understand!* Posed as a Communiqué from David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan's fictitious group *PlastiqueFantastique*, the press release is phrased in mock-disbelief at the group's baffling behaviour, claiming they were 'interested in making an exhibition through layering or accretion, a process more akin to the production of a noise or crystalline object than curation'. The result is a dense matrix of sculptures, diagrams, glitter and angular oration that feels like a surrealist conspiracy theory and occult capitalist critique. 'Do you think the volcano serenades? That the ocean is playing a rhythm just for you?' asks the incredulous alien narrator of Benedict Drew's video *Lecture on Everything*, 2012. Looking like some sort of toxic mutant cousin of Zig and Zag, the black foam puppet emits buzzes and blips that are subtitled as a condescending talking-to about humanity's attitude to noise. In the next room, the droning automated voice of Dean Kenning's *Value – A Visualisation*, 2012, describes a factory of zombie workers who secrete a 'congealed human labour' goo from their bodies. Burrows and O'Sullivan's cryptic diagrams line the walls, circles bouncing off owls, dogs, rats and crystals, making an unsifted, unsettling rant that is like the combined dream-babbling of Karl Marx, Aleister Crowley, Aldous Huxley and Doctor Who.

Among the seven artists in *Capital* at George and Jørgen there was no such chatter, being a more thought-through collection of work – to the point of being stiffly overconsidered. Assembled by artists Fergus Heron and Martin Newth, photographic and video works traced London's hierarchies of visibility. But as in Heron's shots of empty shopping malls, or Emma Charles's *After the Bell*, 2009, where we see City office cleaners doing their jobs at night from mostly a vantage point outside the buildings' glass facades, they only lightly trace the surfaces. Thorsten Knaub's cute double projection *London/London*, 2010, shows super 8 footage taken by the

artist's father on a family holiday to the city in 1974, complete with panning shots of the iconic sights and those awkward, bored moments when the family is captured on film. Knaub replicates the footage shot for shot remarkably accurately, but what is more remarkable is how little things have changed. The groups of tourists are the same but the presence of CCTV cameras and the absence of the family and the artist himself highlight the capital's increasingly intimidating impersonality. What felt like the main backbone for the show was Karen Knorr's 'Gentlemen' series, 1981-83, a set of black-and-white photographs of London's illustrious private clubs, their members posing ostentatiously among extravagant studies and parlours, while quotes from Parliament and news of the day subtitle the images – several of the lines obliquely referencing the Falklands War that was happening at the time. In *You May Meet its Members*, a trim, suited man poses in front of a vaulted window, the words underneath gently gibing at what you assume is the club's description of itself, its members 'branded with the Stamp of the Breed'.

Deliquesce at Jonathan Viner, curated by Emma Astner and Laura McLean-Ferris, was more concise and well-directed – not just because it was only five artists but also simply because of the order of the works. In Emily Wardill's short black-and-white film *The Pips*, 2011, we see a sole gymnast training in a studio, twirling the long ribbon found in the Olympic Rhythmic Gymnastics discipline. The camera follows her dotingly as she gracefully moves around the room, twisting her body into unlikely arrangements, the ribbon a flowing extension of her body. Then the image warps slightly, folding in on itself, and a spare foot appears and drops to the floor. The dancer continues unperturbed as a leg, a hand and another leg bob to the floor, and she finishes her routine resting poised among the discarded appendages. This startling moment is the last thing you see in the show, but returning back upstairs to the rest of the exhibition it manages to transform what felt like a gathering of heavy puns and unfinished posturing into a more tangible and lyrical affair. The posters of euro and pound coins draped over trapezes in Nina Beier's *The Demonstrators (Drowning Coins)*, 2011, inherit some of the gymnast's poise, while the dark forest photograph printed on aluminium and folded into a rough flag-like X in Oscar Tuazon's *Untitled (Photograph)*, 2012, suddenly demands that you acknowledge the body that bent it into that state. What Astner and McLean-Ferris allow for in 'Deliquesce' are spaces for contradiction, change and multiplicity, a feat much more notable in a smaller group show. But it also highlights the fact that the shifts O'Neill attempts to articulate – that group shows be multiplicitous and self-managing – are common and spring from the necessary facts of placing multiple artists and works alongside each other. Despite attempts to redefine or diffuse their identity, it seems that in the making of group exhibitions the curator remains an ambiguous, shadowy figure who must stand back but at the same time be willing sometimes to emerge and be identified. ■

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Rhona Byrne *It's all up in the air* 2011 Karen Knorr *You May Meet its Members* from the series 'Gentlemen' 1981-83

SEP 12 | ART MONTHLY | 359

| 35 |

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