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Shonky @ Dundee Contemporary Arts

Artist John Walter seeks to organise his own work around a group show of contemporary and established artists, and positions their work as united under the "aesthetics of awkwardness"

★★★★

Review by Aphra Pilkington | 19 Apr 2018



Shonky by Jonathan Bassett

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Under no more modest a premise than defining a new genre in which to situate his own art practice, John Walter has rallied various international contemporary artists to partake in his 'shonky' world: an audacious quasi-defunct funhouse of art, installed in the galleries of Dundee Contemporary Arts.

Shonky: The Aesthetics of Awkwardness, which is this year's Hayward Curatorial Touring exhibition, draws a skittish line around the precarious, the freaky and the boisterous to demarcate Walter's style and those who fall into it. Delighting in the gaudy, Walters connects [Niki de Saint Phalle](#)'s statuettes and immense prints of Friedensreich Hundertwasser's architectural façades to the dislocated on-screen environments of Jacolby Satterwhite and the collective, [Plastique Fantastique](#). The show is extroverted, tongue-in-cheek and densely colourful, serving a dose of hedonism whose ensuing wave of nausea is expressly relished, if not required.

Particularly hard to resist are the cheeky provocations made by Tim Spooner's droid puppets with their twitching beaks and tentpole limbs – yet their evidently programmed flirtations expose the exchange as a seductive ploy. If there is sincerity left wanting, it is provided for by the sensitivity of Andrew Logan's idolatry busts; Divine in Heaven is one of multiple affectionate homages to queer icons, fusing mosaic and photography.

Walter positions the works in *Shonky* as deviant from and challenging to stylistic conventions of contemporary art through their craft-based processes and intentionally defective goals. However, when faced with this sense of cutting edge curatorialism, an argument lingers whether this style had not already been long recognised and traded as an aesthetic of currency and validity. [Aphra Pilkington]

Until 27 May, Dundee Contemporary Arts, free
dca.org.uk/whats-on/event/Shonky

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Margaret Tait @ Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow

A number of Margaret Tait's films are on show in Gallery of Modern Art, giving an overview of the Orcadian filmmaker's practice and legacy

★★★★

Review by Adam Benmakhlouf | 08 Feb 2019



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Margaret Tait, Portrait of Ga, 1952 by Courtesy of the Margaret Tait estate and LUX

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The suite of films by Margaret Tait currently showing in the Gallery of Modern Art (to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the filmmaker's birth) demonstrates the subtlety of her idiosyncratic, thoughtfully-paced and atmospheric works. Also showing are works by the winners of the [Margaret Tait Award](#), which began in 2010.

As a film poet, Tait worked across poetry, art and filmmaking, and the films themselves are tightly punctuated. During a quick run-off that nears the end of *Place of Work* (1976), cuts feel like commas in a list, going between leaves moving on the ground, the dog, the cat. Rhymes are made between the person walking on the street and the bee crawling between failed flights, trapped behind a window.

The gaze of Tait's films goes between garden greenery and the wind passing through the leaves; the grey houses of Orkney, and the shadowy inside of her own house there; passers-by, animals and insects. Then there is footage of old Edinburgh, cranes and construction. At points, there's field recording, then pop music or a warbling pibroch.

'Ultimately there's only movement, nothing else' says a line of Tait's poetry split over the two pages of the book left open amongst the archival materials. The camera scans along, sometimes following a moving animal, or slides over a view to record the papers or buildings there. Fixed shots come like a photograph: the plants on a Roman windowsill.

Throughout the works there's an analytic eye that resists the expectation of a comforting homeliness as Tait films her bedroom or living room. No easy prettiness either in the garden. Each shot points at an object, or lists a grouping of things, charging the select imageries with communicative intention and a composed intrigue.

[Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow](#), until 5 May, free

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