

fabric digitally printed with photographs of smoke and dotted with flat, four-fingered, elongated plastic hands, used by shops to keep gloves unwrinkled. All this, we're told, evokes 'reaching for that something you can't quite put your finger on'; not even the fingers are fingers.

So this is, at least in part, reflexive. It relates to the psychic repercussions of using a pool of source material that is vast and extremely flat, and the latent dissatisfactions of using it at all. Everything here slips across borders, cross-pollinates, accumulating wry irony here and there as modernist design purity mixes with art, smoke looks like abstraction but isn't, bodies are alluded to but not here, the bed becomes a substitute plinth for an absent sculpture, the past drifts into the present etc. In a second series, 'Opticlocks', 2014, the Glasgow-based artist laser-cuts the shapes, in perspex, of eight 'artist's clocks' as made by Vitra in their long-running collaborative series, then covers them with vinyl photographic images of (mostly) fur. Time is lost here, blatantly – clocks now just outlines – and things that once spoke of forward motion, or were demarcated, are now made simultaneous and blurry. It is probably too easy to blame (or thank) the internet, but apparently the most popular subject matter for amateur photographers putting their imagery online is, yes, smoke.

In a little yellow flipbook that accompanies **World Music**, an eight-artist show curated by Steve Bishop and Richard Sides at Carlos/Ishikawa, speedy drawings show a figure holding an iPad-type tablet, first touching the touchscreen, then ripping a finger into it, finally punching through it. In a flare of blood, the hand goes in up to the wrist. We are, I assume, in that realm where digitality puts the body in anxious question and artists critique that process somehow: the first work in the show, Stuart Middleton's *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome*, 2014, is a well-sculpted disembodied hand – one starts to wonder whether this is the archetypal post-internet motif – dangling above a bag of cloudy resinous goo and ending, at the wrist, in metal wires. And where does that aforesaid syndrome usually come from if not from zealous over-clicking?

So we're off – into abject modern bodies and servings of what will, one day soon, look like 21st-century kitsch attempts at analogue-digital counterpoint, sometimes with a side order of dour prognostication about real-world antagonism: see Renaud Jerez's figures reduced to martial, embattled organisms, to circulatory piping sprayed with camouflage patterning wearing Air Jordans or laid on a bier reading 'Front National'. Or Richard Parry's minimal canvas featuring a rough black rectangle sized and shaped like a smartphone. Or Vittorio Brodmann's painting of a loping guy plugged into his headphones while another one, flying on the Starbucks beside him, battles angrily with his laptop. Or Louisa Gagliardi's suave remakes of modernist figuration in a digital cut-and-paste style. 'World Music' is full of mediums asking what they're supposed to do now, and bodies taking a last chance to feel themselves before the inevitable cyborgian next stage. It's melancholy, but at least it makes for useful subject matter.

This moment has delivered, besides flashy aesthetics, a new lease on the sociological, as witness **Helen Benigson** at Tenderpixel. *Late Night Supermarket Shopping Live* is, at first, a carbon-datable slab of newness revolving around today's economy of the body: neon-bright manipulated and collaged video footage of women dancing, seemingly narcissistically, on the beach; intercut breasts; bits of football footage; a man observing a woman dancing in what seems like an audition; and a smartphone app for tracking your periods: 'flowers will open during your fertile window'. On one monitor, flat on the floor, are little models of gratifyingly low-calorie sushi. At this scale, they are nearer to no-calorie.

So the critical, primarily gender-specific context is body image, body anxiety, the complicated compensations of food, consumption in general and the need to sell oneself: a thematic continued and rerouted downstairs via shelved cans of Diet Coke and chopsticks, and a lengthy video shot in

Los Angeles that centres on 'contouring' – a phenomenon at least partly about using hotel pools for free. As we cut between a tour of celebrity homes and an over-sharing interview with a young man, poolside, who variously laments and exemplifies the vacuity of LA life, you start to think that Benigson, who is English, in her late 20s and also a rapper, is partly exploring non-content. Clearly she has topics – subjugation, vanity, superficiality – but her art feels riskiest when, as in the LA film, it bores the viewer, and makes us feel nauseous for staying to watch. In a different though parallel way to Auerbach, Benigson actively courts our dislike, and the payoffs are greater than with artists who merely, and smartly, mirror the critical verities of the time. ■

MARTIN HERBERT is a writer based in Tunbridge Wells and Berlin.

Snow Crash

Banner Repeater London 2 May to 29 June

opti-ME*

Auto Italia South East London 27 April to 25 May

The end, as always, is nigh. There is a murky spy-versus-spy world of data liberationists and anti-terror absolutists sprouting around us, and a neo-Cold War on the horizon, so surely the days when the drones finally decide to take over is just a fortnight away. As Justin Jaeckle points out in 'opti-ME*' at Auto Italia South East, Dolly Parton once wisely sang: 'We've been living in the last days ever since the first day, since the dawn of man.' But what's happening at Auto Italia and simultaneously at Banner Repeater's group exhibition 'Snow Crash' is two shows attempting to find the productive possibilities while we anticipate the supposed digital apocalypse, in what Jaeckle termed the '#memewhile'. Maybe, these shows suggest, instead of just being passively and unwillingly co-opted into the incipient networked world, we should be actively co-opting ourselves. Maybe, they suggest, we should be looking for the dawn of something else, a being that can take the cyborg ideology and just vamp with it.

The six-artist show at Banner Repeater is a morphing collection of works-in-progress, crammed into the small room whose four walls slowly dissipate as you get lost in the mental corners each work provides. The exhibition takes its name from Neal Stephenson's 1992 sci-fi novel, a sort of ironic cyberninja adventure story set within a future where everyone plugs into an immersive version of the internet called the Metaverse. Stephenson's book is an apt touchstone; it helped popularise the term 'avatar' as well as inspire more than a few programmers to imagine software like Google Earth. But Stephenson's dated idealisations are also pointed; the titular Snow Crash is a virus that can infect people in both the Metaverse and the physical world, and in the story he proposes a form of programming as ur-language that can control the physical world, and the hacker as the essential liberatory role in society.

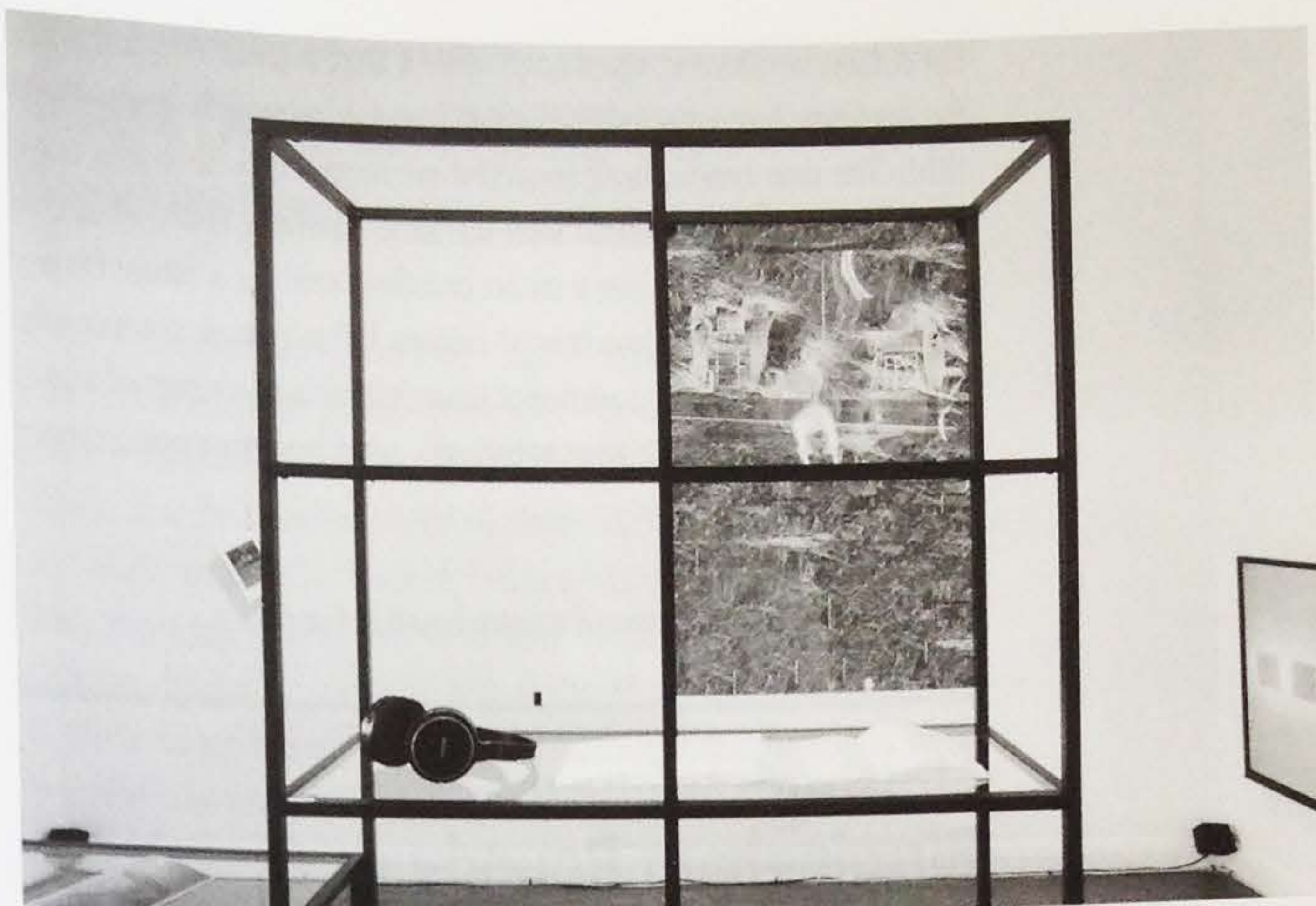
The 'Snow Crash' in front of us at the moment is similarly obsessed with language, but rather than using it as a means of liberation it is used to map a set of predetermined relationships to technology. Several of these are overtly apprehensive, from Tyler Coburn's pamphlet *Robots Building Robots*, 2013/14, a hyper-conscious travelogue essay musing on 'lights out' factory production, to Ami Clarke's 'live app in development' *Impossible structures: 'the eye that remains of me that was I'*, where a floating mouth whispers a nine-minute monologue, catching phrases like 'algorithms as actual objects, subsecond ultrafast extreme events' – Samuel Beckett's *Not*

1977, recast for a kitsch rehearsal of digital confusion rhetoric. A set of clipboards nailed to the wall displays Erica Scourti's research into the book she's making during the show: an autobiography, of sorts, written by a ghost writer who has been given only what information exists about her online. Hiring a data miner, social profiler and privacy researcher to supply the research for this 'Google confessional', the project is an embrace of Big Brother that attempts to turn the fiction of online presence on its head and data culling into critical introspection. But looking at her results and how actively she uses networking platforms (she is given a 'Google history social people' rating of 94: 'One of the highest results we have ever seen!'), it is hardly surprising that there is a lot out there that can be used. It is more data narcissism as self-portrait, and circularly self-fulfilling.

'Reflections cybersquaring, trying to hold onto the screen, and you hold on to time' is the nonsensical advice for a potentially more productive cyborg relationship. Anna Barham's spoken-word piece *Penetrating Squid*, 2014, is a short text passed through a range of voice recognition software, casting technology as more of a welcome guest and a happy interference. It seems, though, paranoia wins the day in 'Snow Crash', as you are constantly reminded to be wary of where this dance with the digital might take you. A small yoga mat and a pillow sit in front of Jesse Darling's untitled video, a new-age guided meditation video gone horribly wrong. A drone of sine tones fills the room as you follow the moving squares of colour on the screen, the text narration of the video asking you to imagine a force moving through your arms, 'breaking every bone in turn. Your hands are a soft useless pap. Relax.'

The slightly off new-age sheen also reverberates around the large empty sets at 'opti-ME*'. At one event during the show, actor turned philosopher of plagiarism Shia LaBeouf, now almost an institution in Postmodernism in himself, led a 'Meditation of Narcissists' session live via Skype: dressed in a tracksuit matching the oranges and greens in the display units in the show, he simply skipped for an hour. With the subtitle 'visions and strategies for tomorrow, today', Auto Italia invited Jaeckle, writer and artist Ingo Niermann and modelling agency/artist project Special Service to create a series of workshops throughout the duration of the show, with the space itself designed as a 'trade fair for identity capital'. Bright colours in oblong shapes adorn the walls and floors. Special Service, which claims to collectively 'renegotiate their agency in the field of fashion', has so far held an open call for new models. Niermann will hold a workshop on his concept of 'drill', advocating for humans to adopt more machine-like directives (a call echoed in Coburn's pamphlet, citing Philip K Dick's 1955 story 'Autofac'). A video with a *Star Wars*-style scrolling text introduces Jaeckle's '#memetime' project, proposing a future where live-streaming events have become the norm and rampant exhibitionism our main commodity. He didn't have to look far for substantiation, getting LaBeouf on board and streaming into the space the Diva, one of South Korea's leading 'mok bang' celebrities, who make a living broadcasting themselves eating live online.

'opti-ME*' is a conscious staging of 'intensified self-commodification', as Special Service calls it, and from the display images in Auto Italia the models certainly achieve this: familiar vacant-eyed faces stare at us in soft focus. Delving into the future is no easy business, but the rehearsal of the



installation view of 'Snow Crash'

Special Service
open call / spring 14
2014

modelling role and the roll-calling of LaBeouf seems to imagine a future defined solely by a fame economy, the new subjectivities they envision as simply magnifications of our current individualism. That surface dwelling seems not much of an update on the shallow celebrity-dropping of, say, Sam Taylor-Wood, Francesco Vezzoli or, um, James Franco. LaBeouf is also an easy target; in the age of unicorns farting double rainbow memes, we could also recognise that anyone could, or should, be skipping that rope, and that the memetime's attention economy can also be diffuse, anonymous and accumulative.

This new cyborg being, it seems, is more than a little self-obsessed; between 'Snow Crash' and 'opti-ME*' there is hours' worth of run-on texts and durational performances, with the sense of an adolescent constantly wondering out loud: 'I wonder what I'll be when I grow up?' Both acknowledge, in their events and adaptations through their openings, that it is a changing set of entities in process. Yuri Pattison's video *colocation, time displacement*, 2014, in 'Snow Crash' places footage from the Pionen data centre, a high-security former civil defence centre in Sweden that has been used by WikiLeaks and Pirate Bay, alongside texts from archival webchats by a figure who posted as 'TimeTravel_o'.

John Hansard Gallery

www.hansardgallery.org.uk

A John Hansard Gallery exhibition, curated by Elizaveta Butakova Kilgariff with Professor Sarah Wilson, Courtauld Institute of Art.



ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Paper Museums

MOSCOW CONCEPTUALISM IN TRANSIT

27 MAY-19 JULY 2014

He comes, he claimed, from 2036, after a 2015 nuclear war, and when the Air Force has perfected time travel, arriving in our time to get an old IBM. The data centre, itself modelled on 1970s sci-fi films like *Silent Running*, doesn't quite mesh with the time traveller's chats, which, as some theories go, were just a smart branding seed for a future Disney movie. Although these two layered fictions fail to mingle productively, Pattison's pairing raises a pertinent issue: technology consists of and is formed by the fictions we want to believe – what type of vamping cyborg do you want to be? ■

CHRIS FITE-WASSILAK is a writer and curator based in London.

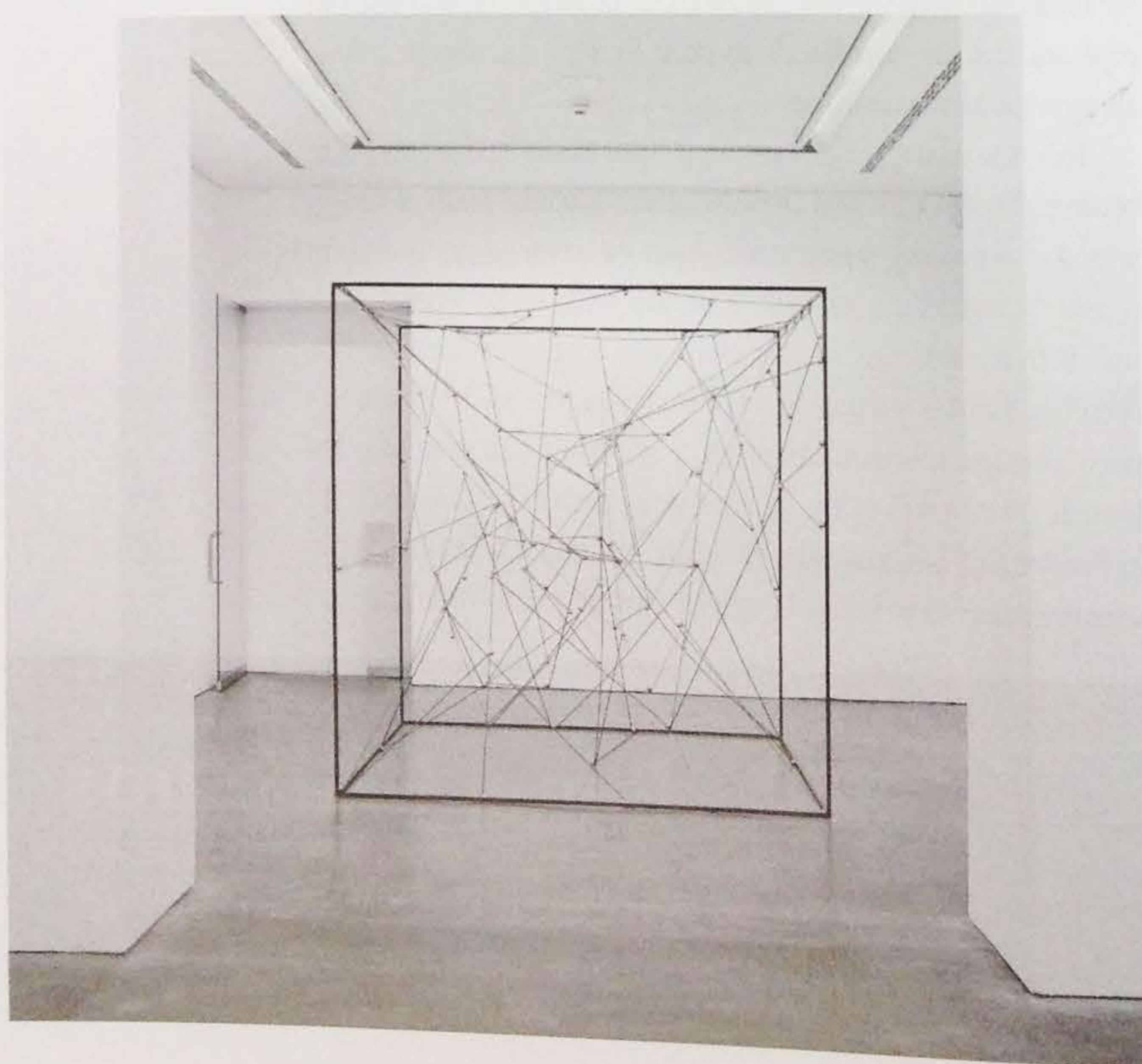
Nottingham and Birmingham Round-up

TG • Ikon • Nottingham Contemporary • Grand Union

Maia Conran
Trace 2014
video

Michel François
Parts 2009

In a packed talk at Birmingham's town hall in March, Jonathan Meades reiterated his Birmingham thesis. In Meades's world the Midlands are south of the 'Irony Curtain', and their people are characterised by a self-deprecating humour in which they conspire to be the butts



of their own jokes. 'Irony is a code. It may disguise parochial pride but it doesn't lessen it.' Perhaps it was this code that Stewart Lee, a midlander himself, was using in his recent fondly scathing portrayal of Birmingham: 'A Brummie will tell you: "Birmingham has more miles of canal than Venice"; to which a Venetian will counter: "yes, but it's quality, not quantity."'

Although we have moved beyond the Midlands being what Meades terms 'an ignored void at the heart of the country', living here sometimes feels like being part of a secret club. When Bill Drummond (Reviews p20) wrote of his 'crush' for Birmingham in the city's newspaper, I felt excited. It shouldn't be surprising but it is gratifying that Tom Godfrey, previously one of four directors of Moot (2005-10), should return to the Midlands, readopting Nottingham as the context for his activity.

Godfrey's new space, TG, is sited in the caretaker's house in the Victorian school building occupied by artist-led studios Primary (which has also recently launched a new programme, starting with a major commission by Jonathan Baldock). TG opened with **Peace & Love**, a group show of work by Jason Benson, Ed Fella, Samuel Jeffery, Harald Klingelhöller and Jon Knight. Combining an unusual grouping of intergenerational practitioners (with Fella in his 80s and Benson and Jeffery in their 20s), this show functions like the exposition in a classical fugue, themes from which will be developed throughout the programme.

Klingelhöller's *Streets After The Rain*, 2012, is an oversized aluminium chain strung between three points on two walls. Godfrey mimics this piece in his formulation of 'Peace & Love'. He plots each work in a new chain: Fella and Jeffery's works both utilise slippages in their materiality (Jeffery uses moulded PVC and insulation tape to make a matt, unknowable form, while Fella uses pastel on plastic bag as the material for his delicate drawings); Jeffery and Klingelhöller employ a cartoon-like post-minimalism; Klingelhöller, Fella and Knight share a graphic sensibility. Like the graphic rhythm of the metal chain's repeated components, the show is made up of a series of motifs. Each work expresses one link in a string of repeated processes or gestures.

Michel François' solo show, 'Pieces of Evidence' at Ikon in Birmingham is his first major public exhibition in the UK. It begins in the square outside Ikon, with a freestanding cast concrete barrier, sections of which have been removed and placed within the gallery. Much of the work speaks of borders and boundaries and the concealment that might result from an attempt to cross them. François delights in the aleatory; many of his works take their form from a moment of performative action. This show is densely installed but each piece is self-contained and discrete. Its sculptural work is tightly bound. Despite their fragile DNA (gold leaf or tensely united magnets and metal), none of his sculptures truly endanger themselves. They hold me at bay; they are detached. This leads to a sense of re-enactment, a feeling of witnessing the formally packaged version of an artist's action, not the action itself or its messy afterbirth. More than the sculpture, François' videos achieve an air of intrigue, an illusory lightness. A sense of action and human presence makes them compelling. *Pieces of Evidence*, 2013, pictures magician-like hands exploring everyday artefacts, uncovering internal compartments and hidden contraband. The video revels in the inventiveness of smuggling. It exposes the mystery possible in known objects. In another projected video, *Inchworm*, 1993, an inchworm crosses the surface of an atlas, moving freely across the map's borders. The creature's jerky movements look unnatural, choreographed, raising a question about the tension between chance, intention and control. François' work benefits from a sense of rarity, of specialness; at times in 'Pieces of Evidence' it needs more breathing space.