

ART

Monthly

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Prem Sahib

Interviewed by Paul Carey-Kent

Sickness and Solidarity

Sarah E James

Sleep

Marcus Verhagen

Sung Tieu

Profile by Adam Hines-Green



or the paintings to the films (or the filmed workers to those outside the window). They set in train a game of hide-and-seek in which represented reality is always just out of reach, or defaulted to another vehicle.

Lloyd has rigged up an exhibition-as-workshop, which tests how expansive this game might be. This is an art of the provisional from an artist who has sought to tie off all loose ends. Where holes are drilled into a wall, admitting a batch of cables, the debris is left where it fell, offering a synaesthetic link to the videoed drilling. There is a staged sense of making it up as one goes along, when we are clearly past the notion that art might be a vehicle of primary experience rather than a statement of its own various degrees of secondariness. The attempt to escape art by dedicating it to a world that flickers beyond its grasp only produces another kind of fiction, a 'truth' with inverted commas around it, as if the installation were a contraption designed to prove that there is no proof to be had.

Since the early 1990s, Lloyd has taken a series of probing steps out of a post-Warholian paradigm, in which the signified is always confined to the sign. She deploys an array of lenses - here adding painting to the arsenal - all showing that they are least inadequate when they most explicitly avow their relativism, the uncertainty of their record and by implication of the world it records. The thick-set workman is as much an unassimilable exotic as a figure from the annals of camp, and so already within the frame of postmodern filmmaking. The autobiographical aspect of some of her earliest work has evolved into a question of whether, and if so how, art can be 'true to life', only to show that life can only be what lies tantalisingly beyond the facade she erects, a perception, given this exhibition's hothouse atmosphere, not incompatible with the facade being all there is.

Mark Prince is an artist and writer based in Berlin.



Jill Posener, *Blood Group, Soho Dirt*, 1984

Hot Moment

Auto Italia, London, 12 January to 14 March

Passers-by cannot but be stopped in their tracks by the scale of the black-and-white poster, *Dalston, London*, 1981, straddling Auto Italia's front-facing external wall. One of Jill Posener's photographs of graffiti-vandalised billboards, it features the witty riposte - JOIN LESBIANS UNITED - to an advertisement for beds reading 'We can improve your nightlife'. It is an apt introduction to 'Hot Moment', an exhibition

of photoworks and other paraphernalia from three artists' archives, Posener, Ingrid Pollard and Tessa Boffin, all of whom worked in photography in 1980s and 1990s London.

In contrast to the billboard, the diminutive scale of the minimal displays of small black-and-white photographs sporadically arranged on cool grey painted walls is striking, the first minute 'image' being a photocopy of a call-out for submissions for what became the important anthology edited by Boffin and Jean Fraser *Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs*, 1991. A 'poor image', the call-out is nonetheless significant in further setting the context for 'Hot Moment' and work by other lesbian artist/photographers at the time. Framing the criteria for submissions as 'non-documentary representations', it intimates the importance of theatrical staging and performativity to explorations of lesbian, or dyke, sexuality in the 1980s and 1990s, emphasis on the latter term highlighting the urgent declaration of lesbianism as a radical act of sexual identity rather than an oftentimes benign passing. Claiming the streets in public displays of hyperbolic and parodic intimacy is writ large in Posener's series 'Dirty Girls Guide to London', 1987, in which the city's tourist sites form the backdrop to lesbian couples in various modes of erotic embrace.

On the one hand, Pollard's 5x3" R-type prints appear to be documentary images of spontaneous street performances by black drag kings and their femmes outside the queue barrier of the Fridge nightclub in Brixton in 1990. But this would be to overlook the deliberate flamboyance involved in self-organised displays of gender-bending by the black lesbian and transsexual performers for a readymade, if not unanimously supportive, audience. The images capture vulnerability and assertion. These performances contrast with the safe space of Club Sauda, a cabaret organised by and for black women by open call-outs. A select number of Pollard's snapshots of singers and performers are displayed, including *Deborah/Skin*, c1991, a close-up of Skin - later in Skunk Anansie - microphone to mouth, the slight double exposure of the image alluding to Pollard's characterisation of the 'hot moment' as one 'where the detail of a gesture or the caress of light on a shoulder were part of the alchemy that captured my attention'. These photographs are markers of transitory experiences that cannot be pictured as such, only felt.

More straightforwardly documentary is the colour video, documented by Yvonne Sanders-Hamilton and edited by Pollard and Alexis Kyle Mitchell, representing a typical night at Club Sauda, the range of acts including dance, reflective poetry reading and more theatrical vignettes. Its celebratory ethos is complemented by a second TV monitor showing *Audre Lorde in conversation*, 1985, directed by Late Start Film and Video Collective, of which Pollard was a member. At 27 minutes, it is a captivating record of a meeting between Lorde and feminist women of colour in the UK - Jackie Kay and Pratibha Parmar amongst others - in which they frankly discuss the differences between black African-American experience, women of colour in the US and black women in the UK. Lorde's advocacy of the necessity of discussion in small groups to learn how to use difference creatively rather than 'ignore, kill or imitate it' resonates with the move towards safe spaces today, but rather than censorship, Lorde's call to arms is about talking through differences to prevent the incapacitating 'detonation' that inevitably occurs

in larger groups of women of different backgrounds. Separatism was strategic, having to do with re-education and renewal of the spirit.

Different iterations of Pollard's photographs of African-American female icons, such as Alice Walker and Maya Angelou, appear respectively as a poster and in the pages of *Spare Rib*, a key feminist magazine of the era, as part of an interview with Angelou by Maud Sulter. The exhibition's minimal staging makes this traffic between different forms of print media at the time very apparent. For example, Posener's black-and-white silver gelatin prints documenting the TUC march against the anti-abortion Corrie Bill in 1979 also circulated in the mainstream press, artist photographers working across journalism and other forms of publishing, as well as in fringe theatre and art activism. Assembling what are often seen as antagonisms in lesbian queer histories between activism and eroticism, the back gallery shows Posener's documentary photographs of the Lesbian Strength March in London in 1984 and the reproductive rights march in 1979 alongside Boffin's more allegorical and staged *Angelic Rebels: Lesbians and Safer Sex*, 1989/2020, a series of four digital sliver prints each featuring an Albrecht Dürer-inspired angel of melancholia dejectedly trying to educate herself about safe sex practices in the context of a lack of information, other than the Conservative government's advertising campaign for preventive measures, in the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. A cling-film wrapped dyke appears and, in a perverse take on Pygmalion, educates the 'angel' in lesbian safe sex erotics. Boffin's *The King's Trial* (aka *Querelle*), 1993, an unfinished work – Boffin died in 1992 – features

three facsimile proofs of a crossdressing lesbian accompanied by tick boxes that humorously attest to her 'masculine' desire for other women. This series refers obliquely to an infamous trial in which an 18-year-old dyke was prosecuted for impersonating a boy. While beyond the scope of this review, similar cases in recent times signal a changed landscape in which issues of consent and internet grooming predominate, but this is not the exhibition's narrative. Subtly curated by feminist collective Radclyffe Hall, which in this outing is represented by Laura Guy and Mason Leaver-Yap, 'Hot Moment' displays images somewhat as footnotes, supplemented by discursive panels, that point to a myriad network of under-represented queer lesbian histories and connections.

Maria Walsh is a writer and a co-editor of the anthology *Twenty Years of MAKE Magazine: Back to the Future of Women's Art*.

Nobuko Tsuchiya: 30 Ways to Go to the Moon

Mostyn, Llandudno, 9 November to 1 March

There's something afoot at Mostyn gallery; specifically, a dozen esoteric objects and assemblages arranged about the space, on floor and walls alike. This is Japanese artist Nobuko Tsuchiya's '30 Ways to Go to the Moon', a gathering of arcane-looking works (though all made in 2019). Apparently, ahead of their installation, the artist sat in the Llandudno gallery's airy space



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