

Summary of Artists' Talks at The High Low Show, 25 May 2017

Tom Lovelace: Lens Flare - Reflections on Looking Up

Tom began with a definition: *Lens flare refers to a phenomenon wherein light is scattered in a lens system, producing an undesirable effect on the image.* Flare is particularly caused by very bright light sources, such as when the lens is pointed at the sun. Being in this show, said Tom, had drawn his attention to the upward-looking and celestial aspect of much of his work. Ladders, stacks and staircases have been prevalent; and *Stargazing*, 2015, recreates a dud night sky out of glitter, black felt and cheap party lights. The work in 'The High Low Show' continues this theme: *The Last Sun from Spoleto* presents a canvas where the patination has literally been created by the rays of the sun beating down from above. *Jim*, which combines object and image, presents the wonders of a sun dog, recently photographed above the Yorkshire Hills. The image is illuminated and nestled within an air vent, the intention being to create an encounter and clash of materials which are caught between the functions of machinery and the everyday, and the act of being transfixed in transcendence, in what lies above.

Bronwen Buckeridge: Do You See What I Hear?

Joining a group armed with bat detectors some years ago, Bronwen was fascinated by how the bats' clicks could be heard yet the bats could not be seen. There was a confusion between looking and hearing, and that sent her back to the original experiments of Lazzaro Spallanzani in 1790: noticing that bats didn't – as owls do – bump into objects when flying round a wholly darkened room, he set out to isolate each sense in turn. He covered the bats' eyes, then plugged their noses, then oiled their bodies as they flew round a room with bells dangling down. The deprivations had no effect, but Spallanzani found that with their ears stuffed the bats could not fly. He deduced that they 'saw with their ears', but left his findings unpublished as they were 'against the laws of creation'. Not until the 1930's was echolocation fully understood, yet the sight-sound confusion remains from a non-scientific perspective: when we're on the ground listening to bats, we're actually the observed first and observer second, as the clicks may be a result of the bats 'watching' us.

Kate MccGwire: Natural Born Dualism

Kate was born on the Norfolk Broads, and grew up with a sharp awareness of the violence behind the bucolic vision of nature: most of the ducklings she saw would be taken by pike, foxes or crows. Her own recent bat sighting was indicative: she had thought it odd to see one hanging from a post in broad daylight, and wondered if it was dead, only to see it move. Getting closer, she saw that the movement was caused by the maggots which filled its stomach. As a boat woman (Kate has a Dutch barge on the Thames) she often sees fishermen fishing with maggots, and wanted to capture that aspect of the cycle of life in her art. Putting maggots on paper with graphite, she can alter the lighting to influence their movement, as they seek out as much dark as possible. In the show, that made her 'maggot drawings', associated with death and decay, right for downstairs; while her feather works found their place above (it was important, Kate mentioned, that she collects feathers only from moulting, through a network of racing pigeon enthusiasts: no birds are killed for her art).

Julie Verhoeven: HIGH FASHION Low Humour

Julie was unable to attend, leaving Paul to read her words in an imaginary hyper-colourful wig and outlandish dress. She had encompassed the whole vibe, in a tongue in cheek play on 'artists' embarrassing cringe monologues', and gone down 'the Burroughs / Bowie route, with cut and paste pop songs'. Julie's text claimed that 'Words don't come easy to me' before getting on to such as:

There are some things you can't cover up with lipstick and powder
and I just want to hear girls talk...

Clean shirt, new shoes
Silk suit, black tie
I don't need a reason why

Art for art's sake
But it's not very clear
It's loud and it's tasteless.

Why does it hurt when I pee?
Why does it hurt when I pee?
I got it from the toilet seat .It jumped right up
and grabbed my meat

Art for art's sake
Push it.
Push it real good
And it's getting more and more absurd.
It's sad, it's a sad, sad situation.

I'm not at the bottom, I'm not at the top.
So this is the stair where I always stop.

Boom boom!

Sara Haq: Up and Down

Sara explained that her works' generic title, 'Quantum of Solace', wryly referred to a period of homelessness: she had been fighting the system 'James Bond style', but finding some respite in London's parks, which have the advantage of being free and providing elemental connections with nature and animals. She noticed how often what might have been up is often down (feathers on the ground, clouds reflected in water, fallen trees), reminding us how we are bound to go through some shit as humans, and yet finding those reminders in a context of uplifting natural beauty. Happily, she has been allocated housing since the show opened, and had felt the place right when she found the previous tenant had pinned a quote by Black Elk to the wall, which muses on how 'everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle', citing sky, earth, wind, birds' nest and the moon. Just so, 'when a vision comes from the thunder beings of the West, it comes with terror like a thunder storm; but when the storm of vision has passed, the world is greener and happier'.

Sarah Roberts: What to Look for in an Installation

Standing in front of her installation, Sarah advised us to 'look for nothing', as for her the key was how the work took her own intensely felt experiences of place, but then remade and rethought them to the point at which you start to look simply at what it is, rather than looking for what lies behind it. Her High Low work is a pool and spa which have become trapped in a casino in Reno, and Sarah shared the 'love note to herself from Reno' which was one of the means – photographs, sketches, text – through which she captured those feelings for herself before that process of recombination began. For example:

*Poolside, A fat man belched out his belly before a breast stroke,
cutting through the water like a wet panna cotta on the glide.
Low rollers off the clock were smoothed over sun loungers like pallid custard skins.
Later, she sipped a cocktail called a last word that tastes of the swill at the dentist
with her mouth full of teeth, an overhanging plastic turtle gave her a sense of the beady eye.*