

# Reviews

## Katja Davar

★★★★★

### The Drawing Room East End

Given the relative subtlety Katja Davar displays elsewhere, the opening work in her UK solo debut makes its point with surprising brusqueness. The London-born, Cologne-based artist's looped, minute-long drawing animation depicts a scrolling landscape in which half-demolished housing complexes and modernist follies perch perilously on ice floes in a polar sea. Billowing in front of all this is a flag; with its compound design made up of various road markings it could be the



'Pearls and the rising rain'

standard of the motorists' lobby.

Having established her context and future-tense viewpoint, Davar then thankfully moves onto more subtly dystopian stuff. A second brief drawing animation pictures translucent jellyfish dilating and contracting around a submarine landscape in which one glimpses silhouetted industrial constructions. Like her flag, the mobile marine life in this sunken, post-apocalyptic world is gorgeously and believably rendered. In this harmonising of the old and new – draughtsmanship and computer animation – there is also a sense of fatalistic acquiescence to man-made disaster. The Earth is simply dominated by other species – we blew it – and that's that.

Meanwhile, the best of a suite of drawings sends more jellyfish fluttering through dark swirling waters. While all are attached mysteriously to a spiky organism in the lower corner, which one might expect to see under a microscope, one of them has been left as a blank silhouette. Mutation, collapse and uncertainty, then, are exemplified less in subject matter than in slower and secondary aspects of facture. Considering Davar's ecological anxieties, what could be more fitting than for much of her art's life to lurk below the waterline?

Martin Herbert

## Private view

### Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard



Collaborative duo Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's work explores re-enactment and the live experience within popular culture, particularly through music

and art. Past projects include a move-for-move restaging of David Bowie's farewell performance as Ziggy Stardust and a reworking of a 1973 video by performance artist Vito Acconci. Their exhibition at Jerwood includes a new work, based on a 1974 video by Bruce Nauman, in which the artist constructed and walked along a narrow corridor with a hip-swinging walk that mimicked the *contrapposto* pose often seen in figures in classical art.

#### How are you modifying the human performance?

The piece is a kind of sister project to the Acconci video. For Acconci we worked with rap musician Plan B because the way the camera was used and the directness of the performance in Acconci's original work suggested an urban music video. For 'Walk With Nauman' (Reperformance corridor) we're collaborating with a professional female dancer who has worked on a lot of music videos and she's going to improvise a dance down the corridor. She won't be copying Nauman's walk exactly but again there will be references because R&B dance throws similar poses and shapes.

#### Why the interest in re-enactments?

We first started working with ideas of re-enactment when we made 'The World Won't Listen' in 1996 using a Smiths tribute band. It was about the idea of taking a ready-made performance into a gallery. Coming out of Goldsmiths College in 1995 we'd seen a lot of big, quiet empty work and felt a sense of frustration that our artwork and the work around us just wasn't making enough of a connection on an emotional level. We really wanted to make live work and create a live experience.

#### What is it about the live experience that you try to recreate?

It's not about nostalgia or unpicking something to understand the past. Our interest is more on a psychological level; not what happens but what happens in your head and your feelings. We've never seen Bowie play live but we were really emotional at the Bowie event. What we've realised is that there's something about presenting the familiar that frees up space for participation much more than if you're going through a completely new experience.

#### What future projects are you working on?

We're building a Silent Sound machine which will allow us to subliminally embed spoken word into instrumental music. The technology exists and apparently it works.

Interview: Helen Sutherland

For details see *Jerwood in Elsewhere*.

## Tamsin Morse



'Resurrection'

★★★★★

### One in the Other East End

Tamsin Morse uses small brushes to cover large canvases, creating mountains and valleys line by dotted line, so that her landscapes appear veined, as if they were composed of petrified wood. Thanks to the pale, rather sickly glazes she then applies, the air seems thick and unbearable – as on a distant planet, or a post-apocalyptic earth. Rashes of pointillist foliage, however, suggest that life endures and, if you look closely, signs of human activity begin to surface. On a slope in 'Animal Trap', a fire burns while, apparently scored into a rock face, is the outline of what might be a beast; deity or dinner, perhaps, to Paleolithic folk.

Things soon become more complicated. Like strays from a computer game, fir trees appear uniformly triangular. Perching on a plateau with a series of crucifixes lined up along a summit is a walled garden.

These, then, are paintings about belief – as told through the slow, accumulatory way in which the work is produced and the proliferation of details old and new, real and imagined. Omens of divine punishment nestle alongside more optimistic imagery, revealing the breadth of the artist's intellect. Overall, though, Morse errs towards visual equilibrium; if she injected something of the drama of, say, a painting by Caspar David Friedrich or John Martin, she'd be on to a real winner.

Martin Coomer

## Jonas Mekas

★★★★★

### Sketch West End

If it happened in the New York art world during the 1960s and '70s, chances are that Jonas Mekas was there with his Bolex camera filming the action. In 1966 he captured the first gig by the Velvet Underground. In 1970, he was there while John and Yoko bared their behinds. In fact, he seems to have tailed the couple

for most of the period. During this mini retrospective, we see John holding a knife, Yoko posing in a garden, the couple on stage. Warhol, too, was shadowed regularly. Here's Andy at the Union Square market, at the seaside, filming boys wrestling on a lawn.

But Mekas was more than a chronicler of the art world elite. Any mention of him is usually suffixed with 'the godfather of American avant-garde cinema' and in short films such as 'Cassisi' (1966) – high-speed footage of the sea funnelling in and out of a Mediterranean harbour – we see evidence of his concentrated approach to the everyday. Comedy and bittersweet charm often surface, particularly in the 2003 short in which the 81-year-old dances around his studio to Bruce Springsteen's 'Lonesome Day' and the deadpan 'Film for Maya', which features his cats grooming each other.

Sketch's way of showing videos simultaneously as a frieze is never conducive to concentrated viewing but in this instance the configuration – a kind of do-si-do of sound and vision in which each film is eventually partnered by its sound-track – elicits odd juxtapositions that Mekas would probably approve of. Work that might otherwise be filed under 'nostalgia' is choreographed into life.

Martin Coomer



Still from 'Happy Birthday to John' (1966)