

ICA Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2014

Gallery Tour: Goldsmiths MFA Curating Students

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The following text has been written to accompany the gallery tour *We're All Very Disappointed* of the exhibition *Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2014*. The tour was led by Goldsmiths MFA Curating students Tamar Hemmes, Christian Lübbert, Erik Martinson and Jessica Ziskind.

We're All Very Disappointed - Introduction

Disappointment is somewhat of a red thread for most of us; with every moment of transition we have expectations, but things don't always turn out as hoped. With submissions being open to current students and recent graduates, the artists whose works are exhibited in New Contemporaries are leaving the insular academic institution behind to deal with the uncertainties of the art world. With a consistent stream of artists emerging from art schools and an unstable economy in the wake of the 2008 recession, the stakes remain quite high. What can be made of this anxiety, of being on the verge, of disappointment?

Gregory Sholette's *Dark Matter* adapts the concept from astrophysics and applies it to the art-world context. Dark matter in astronomy refers to the invisible non-mass that makes up most of the universe, surrounding the relatively small planets, stars, and galaxies. It is the negative to their positive, providing the filler for the gaps between, which in turn supports the celestial entities. It's an apt metaphor for the art-world, given that the market supports only so many artists to be valued economically, socially, and historically. There are many others, who toil away unrecognized by this system, invisible but necessary to buttress its existence. This context manifests anxiety and perhaps dread for those graduating from art school, they stand on the precipice between the insularity of the academy and the dark amorphous mass that waits to claim the statistic majority, while very few are 'discovered'. However, as Sholette states, a potential exists in refusing to legitimate the system, or to demand visibility in different ways. There is a freedom of movement within the margins, a place for those with initiative: artists, curators, and organizations alike, to develop meaningful practices on their own terms, while simultaneously embodying a critique of the system of validation at work in the art market and art world at large.¹

1 Sholette, Gregory 2011: *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, London & New York: Pluto Press.

We see the function of a tour through New Contemporaries as a potential to apply our own curatorial framework. We will borrow our title from Alice Hartley and call this endeavour *We're All Very Disappointed*. The pathway we form, the 8 artists we speak about, will be our methodology. Disappointment will be the connecting thread.

We are Jess, Tamar, Christian, and Erik. We all started on the MFA Curating course at Goldsmiths this September. It's important to note that we acknowledge our shared place regarding the tension between the academy, the art market, and dark matter. We are ever mindful of our own precarity.

Alice Hartley, *We're All Very Disappointed*, 2013

Alice Hartley's *We're All Very Disappointed* is the emblem, the starting point. It occupies the in-between space at the ICA: the impasse. It's the juncture between upstairs and down, between academia and career in the context of New Contemporaries. The sprawling screen print covers its wall, adapting to the fixtures, showing its seams around the door, willing to be cut for the sake of a window. In this way the work is imposing yet malleable, loud yet quiet. Passing through its covered door to the theatre produces unease; merely walking by the effect is potentially subtle. The frenetic hashes of paint, flattened in the re-presentation as screen print, are punctuated by red, forming an x or cross-out. This gesture does not negate the titular text however, which is over top, dominating, edge-to-edge. *We're All Very Disappointed* is not a manifesto; rather it's an overheard sentiment. As the artist states, it is a fragment, re-contextualized. The statement lurks and finds itself applied variously. It conjures expectations unmet, moments of introspection and speculation, a turning point. There is power in disappointment. It is fertile ground.

Marco Godoy, *Claiming the Echo*, 2012

Marco Godoy intends to use this exhibition as a platform for actions and activities that connect to specific social and political events in both the past and present. His work *Claiming the Echo* explores the aftermath of the financial crisis in Spain that lasted from 2008 to 2014. The effects of this recession are still painfully noticeable, also for recent university graduates who have invested time and money into obtaining degrees, only to be faced with unemployment. Questioning the way in which authority is legitimized, this work is a commentary on the failures of a government and the subsequent disappointment of a nation. Beginning with images of an empty theater, the video shows a choir entering the space and taking their places in rows, holding sheets of music. In beautiful harmony, they sing protest slogans that can

usually be heard at demonstrations in Spain, combining the significance of their words with the controlled sound of their voices. Slowly moving past the faces of members of the choir, the camera captures different facial expressions, from serious and angry, to cheerful. The choir sings the following slogans in Spanish:

They do not represent us no.

Social peace is going to end.

They do not represent us no.

No, we are not afraid.

They call it democracy but it is not

These are our weapons.

The existing slogans were adapted into a musical piece for *Claiming the Echo*, using scores by the 17th Century English composer Henry Purcell as a reference. The choir is called Solfónica, and is an assembly-based choir that sings only at demonstrations in Madrid. This 'protest choir' formed itself as a proposal for activism and politics, to invalidate the existing stereotypes associated with social protest. Through music rather than chanting, the sound waves and vibration reach even those who do not want to hear. The songs that were composed for *Claiming the Echo* are now used by Solfónica as part of their repertoire.

Lucy Beech, *Cannibals*, 2013

Entering the narrative of Lucy Beech's video *Cannibals* is akin to coming along to a dinner party as a plus one, not knowing your host. This particular dinner party is based on the artist's research into the online community Women Empowering Women. It's noticeable, from being the silent guest of newcomer Dorothy, that there is an agenda to this meeting. The vibe is somewhere on the spectrum of self-help group, pyramid scheme, and cult. What's clear is that the members of this group are dissatisfied in their lives to some extent, and heed the call to receive some kind of benefit, financial even, when they take part in the various stages of the hierarchy. The metaphor at work is to be the dishes served, starting as appetizers when new, graduating to main course, then to dessert (the host) and finally to exit mysteriously, presumably with benefit. We watch as Dorothy sceptically takes part in the marinating session, softening the body and mind through electronic muscle stimulation, salt mouth rinses, smoking, and the sharing of experiences with the group. When it is time to eat, Dorothy has stewed in the ideas of the session, becoming tender, receptive. It's as if she bites into her own flesh, chewing the hard and soft bits alike. This imposition makes the self a product.

Consuming the self produces a lack, an insatiable wanting of more. She can graduate to main course for the next meeting, and as a sceptical plus one, we may consider this a pathway to empty calories and ideas. There is a slippery slope, a hook. A digestive system of manipulation becomes clear in Beech's video, but she allows for ambiguity, the exploitive and emancipatory to coexist.

Matt Copson, *Reynard with a Vengeance*, 2013

The work *Reynard with a Vengeance* by Matt Copson centres around an adaptation of the character of Reynard the Fox, an allegorical figure from French, Dutch, English and German fables that originated in the 13th Century. Often described as a trickster, Reynard stages his own funeral, seeking revenge on his enemies who come to deliver insincere elegies. In these stories, different layers of society are criticized; the nobility are judged for their laziness and incompetence, while the clergy are condemned for their failure to adhere to celibacy. Similarly, farmers are described as primitives and the women in the fables are given names that refer to prostitution. Detailing his existence on the streets of South-East London, Copson's Reynard seeks revenge on those who come to observe him within the exhibition space as he talks about his desire to wreak indiscriminate havoc on every section of society. Submitted to Bloomberg for New Contemporaries, the work was intended as a form of criticism of the contemporary art world, but was then selected for the exhibition. Due to this the artist, and with him Reynard, has become part of the very society that he was criticizing, leading to a different kind of disappointment.

Utilizing the blog on the New Contemporaries website as a platform, Reynard has voiced his opinion regarding the exhibition, stating the following;

"As for the show itself- childish! Mounds of Play-Doh and sand castles were interspersed between TVs (presumably to stave off the boredom). The crowd seemed sedated enough by it, instagramming the hell out of me and my neighbours, whilst gawping at the mechanics of my anatomy. I spat out more and more vitriolic hatred at the horde, who – much to my bemusement and disgust – applauded my every syllable."

Jonathan Meira, *Castle*, 2014

Coming of age in this age is not without some level of disillusionment and "disappointment" as Alice Hartley's work announces. The realities of life after school—economically, professionally, socially—become palpable. Jonathan Meira's *Castle* appears like a wistful recreation of childhood, but through the eyes of someone who is no longer naïve. Constructed from wet sand and molded into the shape of a castle's tower, there is an immediate recognition of this

image as an object of nostalgia, a symbol of simpler times. Even the smell permeates the room, eliciting olfactory memories of this time past. Besides its role in the canon of childhood, the image of a castle historically connotes strength and security. It is often one step removed from conflict, an impenetrable beacon of power. Yet here we do not see a castle in its entirety, complete with ramparts and moat, but instead a single tower, a possible implication of the often solitary experience of transition and its accompanying struggles. With even closer inspection the cracks and crevices in the sand become apparent, as does the work's impending fate. Like a sandcastle that inevitably succumbs to the elements, this work's permanence throughout the remainder of the exhibition is precarious. However, Meira will eventually rebuild--an important part to his work--in a physical and symbolic gesture of resilience.

Lydia Ourahmane, *HARAGA - 'The Burning'*, 2014

"Please connect to WiFi network HARAGA - The Burning to view the work" written below a label positioned on a division wall is the only hint to indicate the artwork of Lydia Ourahmane. Her unusual approach might cause visitors passing the captions without even realising it is a work. Instead of trying to claim space or attention with the way it is presented, the work offers a less intangible experience.

The video that appears on the screen once logged in, shows Houari and his 12 friends trying to illegally immigrate by sea from Algeria to Spain in August 2013. Sitting in a motor powered inflatable boat they get excited by 'entering the waters of Spain' and start talking cheerfully about their future plans. Nevertheless, the situation remains tense. Emotions full of hope for a new life are present, yet simultaneously merged with the fear of getting caught.

As it is stated at the beginning of the video, Ourahmane received the footage via bluetooth while meeting Houari and his friends. Watching the footage at the ICA using the WiFi connection instead of displaying it and downloading it to one's own device gives a similar more private impression of the shown situation. As we are used to fake and questionable footage it fuels scepticism though. Therefore and as it leaves the outcome of the scene open, one might consider to research the background of the shown images. Due to the unobtrusive presentation of the video as some might miss it and to the exclusion of those visitors who do not own a smart phone, conversations about Ourahmane's approach are a further essential part of the work.

Marie Jacotey-Voyatzis, *Be young, be wild, be desperate*, 2013

Filling practically an entire wall in the first room of the exhibition, London based French artist Jacotey-Voyatzis' work is visually commanding. Comprised of a grid of 60 drawings, a story

starts to develop—one of love and loss. It takes on the look of a storyboard, a graphic novel or even a diary, with text often accompanying an image. While at times there seems to be a natural cadence in terms of narrative from left to right, the figures or “characters” fluctuate. It is both fragmented and unified at once, a format that mimics that of the content. Jacotey-Voyatzis uses observations from internet social media sites and overheard conversations in addition to personal experience as inspiration for her depiction of relationships. If examined within this larger umbrella of “disappointment,” love can exist in different stages and be both electrifying and heartbreaking. Perhaps this ebb and flow of emotion is most heightened at these points of major transition, when figuring out oneself as individual and as a partner within a relationship are happening simultaneously. Her image-text ranges from that of a young couple in a passionate embrace with the words “Paradise kiss” to an imageless “There is nothing left to wait for, yet she was waiting, at this party, belly torn, split, when he never showed up.” There is, however, a sense of hope amidst the turbulence. “After all, tomorrow is another day” she includes.

Laura O'Neill, *Smasha*, 2013

Laura O'Neill – Artist's Statement

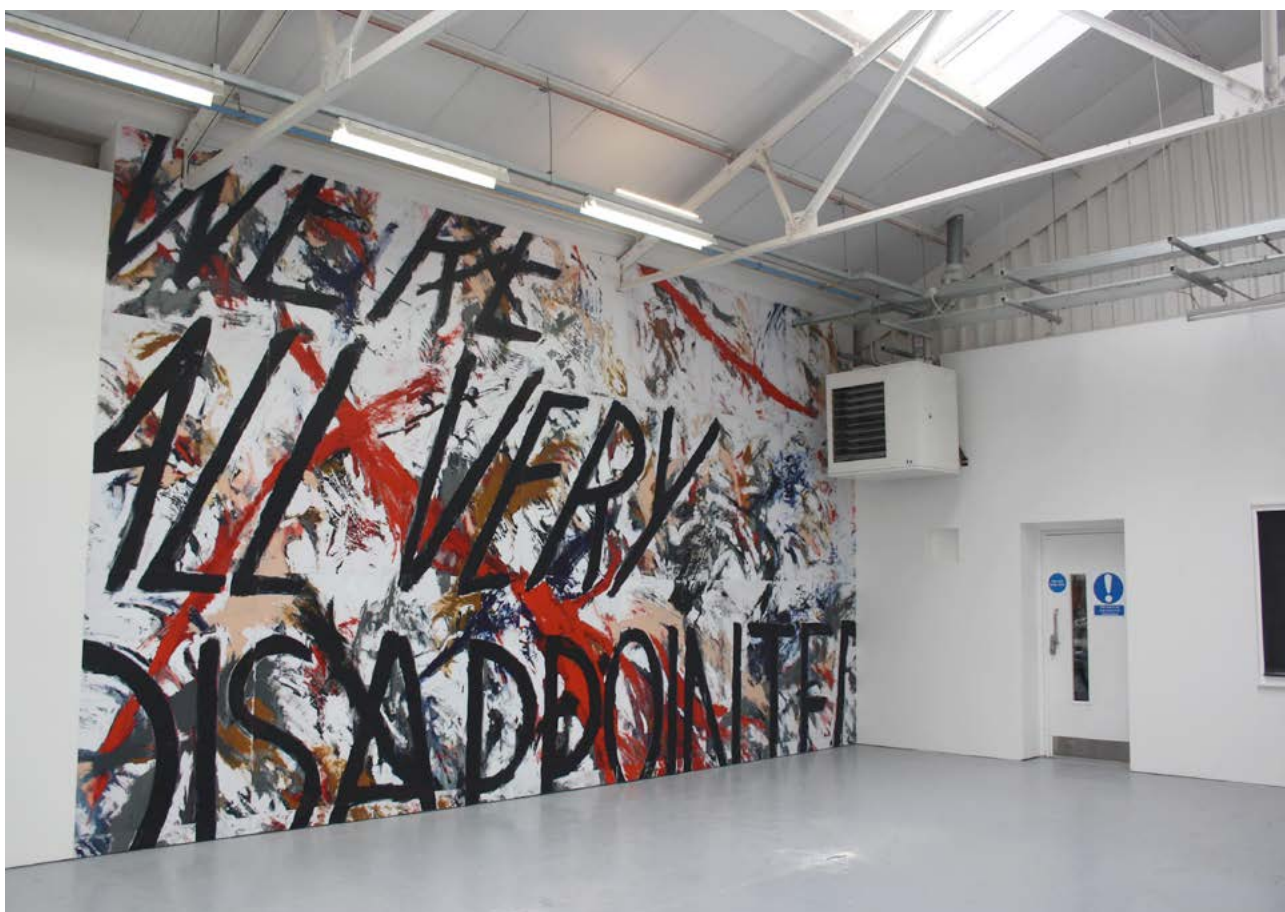
[The page contains several rows of musical notation, which are mostly illegible due to extreme blurring.]

Researching Laura O'Neill's work there is nothing but her artist's statement, nothing but a semicolon in between single quotation marks again and again and again. In a way this could be a humorous comment, a refusal to write a statement or just a symbol, acting as a typographical

version of her work entitled *Smasha*: A fractured hand glazed tile showing an eye on two nails with dirt on the wall. The quotation marks would probably represent the nails, the semicolon in between could be the symbol for the smashed tile. Nevertheless, the statement refuses any declaration, reflects our view and engages us to decode the work by ourselves, finding our own interpretation.

Thinking of Luis Buñuel's film *An Andalusian Dog* the work seems to be linked to surrealist approaches. It could be seen as a violent act against the representation of one of the most precious parts of our body, which enables us to observe art and the surrounding world.

Following the thoughts of surrealism this claims freedom of imagination and creativity as a weapon to change the status quo. At the same time O'Neill is threatening a certain status quo by showing her work in an unfamiliar small size, nearly so small one could miss it. This could be perceived as disappointment but rather as a determined intervention against a tendency in making things big to claim attention. The dirt as it is contradicting the white gallery wall is another small but accurate way demonstrating a subtle trace from the violence against the tile/eye. O'Neill's way of working is not based on effects but emphasizes that small things can be crucial and elementary as well. The attitude of the artist is reflected not only in the seemingly unpretentious but rather her very precise gesture through her work.



Alice Hartley

We're All Very Disappointed, 2013. Screenprints on blue back paper, 470 x 780 cm.
Monoprint on paper. Courtesy the artist



Marco Godoy

Still from Claiming the Echo, 2012
Video, colour, sound, 5 min 25 sec. Courtesy the artist



Lucy Beech

Still from *Cannibals*, 2013

Video, sound, colour, 15 min 40 sec. Courtesy the artist



Matt Copson

Reynard With A Vengeance, 2013

Painted mural, video projection, audio.

Installation view of Bloomberg New Contemporaries at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

26 November 2014 - 25 January 2015

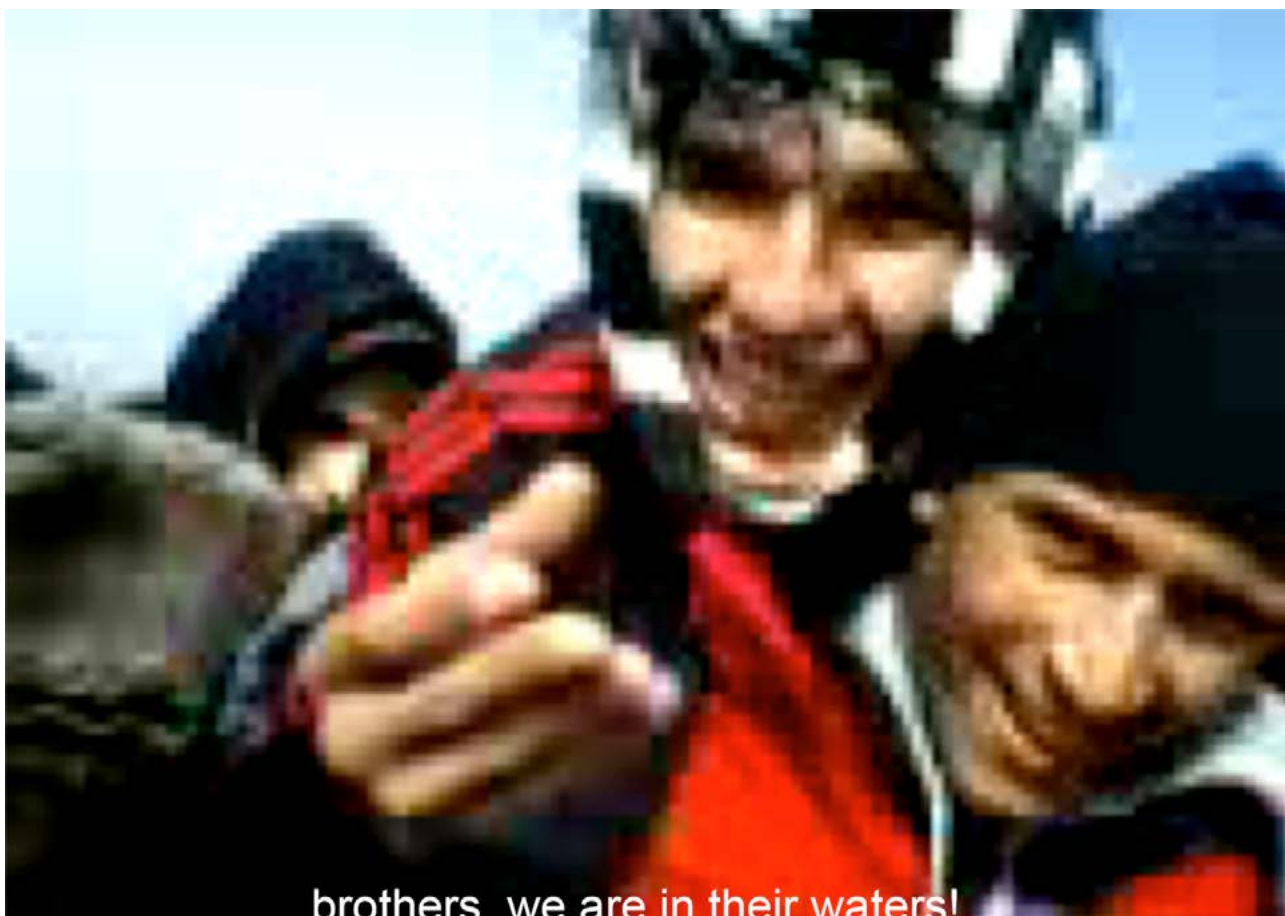
Photo: Mark Blower



Jonathan Meira

Castle, 2014

Sand sculpture. Courtesy the artist



Lydia Ourahmane

HARAGA (The Burning), 2014



Marie Jacotey-Voyatzis

Be young, be wild, be desperate, 2013

Coloured pencil on paper



Laura O'Neill

Smasha, 2013

Hand-glazed tile, nails



Other install images

Installation view of Bloomberg New Contemporaries at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London
26 November 2014 - 25 January 2015

Photo: Mark Blower