

FLORENCE TRUST

Florence Trust Winter Open Studios 2019

Opening: Friday 1st February, 6-9pm

Open: 2nd – 3rd February, 12-6pm

Siobhan Beaton

David Cuesta

Theo Ellison

Anne von Freyburg

Rhiannon Hunter

Ralph Hunter-Menzies

Yva Jung

Rona Lee

Natalia Markowska

Davinia-Ann Robinson

Abel Shah

Press Release

The artworks presented by The Florence Trust residency artists for their 2019 Winter Show comprise a diverse range of themes, exploring the dynamics of collaboration and the politics of representation, as well as ecological concerns. The works employ a variety of media including installation, video, drawing, photography and painting. Some respond to the church's architecture, such as its grand arches, while others draw inspiration from its communal and ritualistic functions.

Casting visitors into what might appear to be Plato's Allegory of the Cave, the artist duo **Abel Shah's** new installation comprises of an array of floor-lit sculptures creating shadows on the wall, a disembodied machine voice, like a computer sprung to life, emanating from a rock on the ground singing the nonsensical 'lorem ipsum' text commonly used by graphic designers as a temporary placeholder, and a large cast sword hanging from the ceiling that wends to the floor like an unspooling tongue, in a loose reimaging of King Arthur's originally all-powerful, and inescapably phallic-like, weapon. However instead of the chained prisoners in Plato's version, visitors weave among elastic bungees that suspend, for example, a cast human ear that appears to stretch out like a cartoon character being tortured. Engaging with the big questions of philosophy and science, the duo seeks to playfully disrupt the power structures embedded in language, such as gender stereotypes and inequality, and how they pervasively colonise and corrupt our current technology.

The Canadian, British and Colombian artist and designer, **David Cuesta**, has recreated a white cube gallery space within the context of his studio. Inside, Cuesta presents a range of new performances, screenings, image-based works, and sculptures. In a new video by the artist, Cuesta interviewed a female subject asking her to describe a personal experience in which ritual played a significant part. The woman candidly recalled how her mother bestowed on her the importance of performing a regular ritual that involved writing and repeating a series of verses dedicated to her deceased relatives, then lighting a candle in their memory. She then re-enacted the ritual inside the artist's gallery space. In addition to exploring issues around post-colonialism in relation to personal identity, Cuesta's practice examines the anxiety of influence of art history. Like Duchamp, Cuesta blurs the line between art and biography, implying that everything he touches as an artist can become a work of art.

Ralph Hunter-Menzies creates abstract portrait-format paintings that combine spray paint, acrylic and oil-stick. He employs a unique process of power-washing, using the same industrial equipment as street cleaners, in order to blast away the top layers of acrylic paint and reveal the layers of colour and raw canvas beneath. Hunter-Menzies then cuts up the canvases and resews them, creating a jagged patchwork that implies movement and rhythm. With a colour palette of

bright neons and pastels, the content and form of his work is inspired by graffiti and street art, in particular what's left of graffiti on buildings, trains and hoardings after city workers try to repaint it using roller brushes that leave behind large grey blocky shapes. The artist is fascinated by these readymade designs caused by the city's ongoing attempt to erase and renew.

Theo Ellison's practice questions some of the motives that underlie art making, drawing parallels from the animal kingdom and natural phenomena. A dark-hued framed photograph taken by the artist of a taxidermied pigeon set against a monochrome black background emphasises the bird's glistening purple and blue plumage and the evolutionary role it plays in seducing a mate, like an artist to a viewer. In another work, a CGI video depicts a Dutch-style landscape at dusk featuring three artichokes in the foreground, that on closer inspection don't quite mesh with the composition's perspectival scale. The image's sleek, fine detail creates a hypnotic effect, while an artificial lens-focus periodically calls attention to the constructed nature of the scene. Alongside the video hangs on the wall a poster-size image of a close-up of the surface of the Thames shimmering in sunlight, its mesmerising beauty suggesting a similar parallel to the pigeon's shiny coat feathers.

Davinia-Ann Robinson's installation "Plasticised Sensation" explores the writer Audre Lorde's essay *Uses of the Erotic* (1978), in which Lorde discusses the power of the erotic and how women have been 'mis-sold' what the erotic truly is. Lorde states that the erotic has been misinterpreted as a fake 'plasticised sensation' that is overtly sexual, fake and holds no true room for women's real pleasure or power. Like a strange oily fountain, Robinson's sculpture is topped by a flesh-coloured vessel containing wood varnish mixed with plasticiser, which slowly drips down onto elastic bands, fake hair, and the floor. The smell, foul and caustic, is enough to overpower the visitor. Over time, the varnish appears to transform the piece into a version of Lorde's "Plasticised Sensation." Robinson's work dissects layers of intersectional oppressions - race, gender and sexuality - and how they affect black women in Western culture and Britain today. Robinson examines the related notions of how black women are viewed in Western culture as the 'Other' and 'un-woman,' seen through the lens of the object, the abject and the grotesque, and how they are displaced into the periphery of society. Her work draws from the lived, everyday experiences of patriarchal and racist systems of power, critical research into Black Feminist Thought, race and gender studies.

With the impact of human activities affecting planetary systems on a geological scale, **Rona Lee's** current body of work, "In Love with the Lithosphere," responds to the breakdown of our shared sense of culture and natural resources. In a video work shown on a monitor, a pair of hands stacks and re-stacks a collapsing pile of flint rocks that alternately hide and reveal green-screened footage depicting an assortment of domestic interiors, cliff-scapes and road tunnels. Recalling the myth of Sisyphus, the work taps into the mixture of awe and everyday use which characterises our relationship with the natural world. In another series, Lee collects ephemera from the 1960's: coffee-table books, scenic postcards, travel magazines and interior design manuals. The artist then uses these to create tracings onto carbon paper that she frames inside reproduction Chinese scholar's table screens. The screens, originally designed to assist the thinker in their musings (Sigmund Freud had one on his desk), are here transformed into intimate, mirror-like portals through which we might view ourselves in a dream-like tableaux, merging the human and geological.

Anne von Freyburg's work fuses elements of painting, embroidery, and tapestry while seeking to unpick idealised conceptions of the female form, in particular how women's bodies are scrutinised and 'packaged' by the media for viewers. Von Freyburg's works start from scantily clad photos of the artist that she collages onto a large unframed canvas. Floral patterns are painted on top, with women straddling some of the vine-like forms as if they are stripper poles. The artist then cuts shapes into the composition and stitches on swatches of floral and paisley upholstery. The works take inspiration from Renaissance-era paintings and grand aristocratic interiors, as well as music and high street fashion. Her practice spans a range of genres, reinterpreting ancient myths and blending sexual taboos with fantasy, pornography, and the way in which women are made 'horrific' by the horror film genre. The resulting compositions are both seductive and grotesque, profane and middle brow, a feminist riposte to Hieronymus Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights."

Yva Jung continues her artistic enquiry into creating opportunities for shared experiences between the artist and visitors. Jung's work "Morning Dew on Monday Morning" comprises of twenty gouache drawings on paper arranged on the wall in a grid-like pattern, evoking an oversized monthly calendar containing abstract watery forms and symbols. Each drawing is an interpretation of the stories people 'paid' the artist in exchange for a dew sample the artist collected. Alongside these is a series of large, lush photographs depicting the artist as she collects the morning dew. On the floor is a concrete sculpture that conjures an enlarged water drop rising from the ground, or perhaps a pregnant belly, or the moon.

Siobhan Beaton's practice often follows a process-based approach. Abiding by a simple set of rules since the start of her residency, the artist has been collecting and cataloguing found objects on her daily walk between Highbury & Islington tube station and the Florence Trust. With the basic materials, Beaton then constructs readymade sculptures from her slowly expanding archive. The objects included range from disposed utensils, Styrofoam cups, plastic straws, a colourful children's hair clip, and more, reflecting the range of personal and consumer-based items that we often casually dispose of on our way to somewhere else.

Natalia Markowska is interested in the convergence of performance and video in relation to feminist rituals. Markowska is currently in the process of developing her own 'visual language' based around the senses and 'bodily knowledge.' Her recent series of videos comprise of recordings the artist made while hitting on a ceramic cast of a wooden drum that breaks apart into smaller and smaller pieces. Markowska conceives of the drum both as a kind of tool for communicating with and understanding her relationship with her mother—in particular the philosopher Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic and symbolic—as well as to document the dynamics between the destructive impulse, restraint, and the power of ritual to dissolve our sense of self.

Rhiannon Hunter's work consists of immersive installations and layering of form, collage and repetitive designs that explore how the built environment informs and dictates our communal interactions and constructs our identity. One of Hunter's previous projects responded to a community's narrative about their 'ideal' town, in which the artist used recycled cardboard to turn their ideas into structures reminiscent of domestic-like interiors or propositions for new ways of living. Her new piece for the Winter Show is inspired by the ever-present cannibalisation and construction of urban space, in which the artist has created dynamic forms and surfaces that eat into her studio space.

For press information contact Sarah Williams – sarah@florencetrust.org

Florence Trust
St Saviours,
Aberdeen Park
London
N5 2AR

Twitter @florencetrust | Facebook Florence Trust | Instagram @florencetrust #florencetrust