

Double vision - 9 NSA collaborations at the Newlyn Exchange

Alessandra Ausenda & Ruth Wall, Jessica Cooper & Richard Hawkins, Gareth Edwards & Liz Le Grice, Bernard Irwin & Howard Silverman, John Keys & Graham Fitkin, Jesse Leroy Smith & Paul Becker, Ken Turner & Julie Kitchen, Bren Unwin & Helen Cornish, Kate Walters & Karen Lorenz

Collaboration is not a new idea. From the early 20th Century, close artist friendships like Braque, and Picasso produced collaborative works. Surrealists, exploring the sub-conscious, produced works together. Conceptual artists in the 60s used collaboration to question misapprehension of individual art genius. Contemporary collaboration is rarely used to question impersonal authorship, it stems largely from practical ideologies.

Firstly it enables artists to more consummately fill all the necessary roles, from maker, to conceptualist, from networker, to curator, and manager. One practical aspect of artists working together is that they are able to combine skills to realise work. The evidence of this is in the number of famous contemporary collaborators, Langland & Bell, Jake & Dinos Chapman, Jane & Louise Wilson, are but a few examples.

Secondly the shift towards hybridity in contemporary art means that conceptually art is increasingly an eclectic mix, and a process of synergetic forces. One thing rubs up against another and becomes something more.

Most of the more challenging work in this show is produced by the tensions and meeting points of not only two distinct people, but two distinct fields of expertise. What makes this manifestation of collaboration so different is that these are artists who would not necessarily have chosen to ever darken collaborative doors. The NSA has given artists the opportunity, and the platform to explore and experiment. The experimental nature of the work is supported by a detailed programme of talks and exchanges. Much of the show follows the spirit of dialogue, and critical discourse initiated by the collaborators.

The first thing that strikes you as you enter the space is the amount of work that has been 'packed' in. The very striking, colourful sculpture, and wall painting *Armoured Piñata* by Bernard Irwin and Howard Silverman greets you as you enter the space. Working with architecture, and site, the two artists engaged in a dialogue of practice and site to produce an almost theatrical piece.

Site was also key to *Tidal 28 Minutes*, which followed 'intensive seven day periods' on Treen beach during Spring tides, John Key's tidal drawings on the ramp are illuminated by the light from the windows, and also music written for the experience by Graham Fitkin. Both animate, and express the idea of time and rhythm of spring tides. The work shown is almost a mere trace of the process of making. A performance of time spent with the tides, dragging sand

up the cliffs from the beach, for the drawing process. Documentation provided in the Engine room provides more insight into the really interesting bit: the process and dialogue in the collaboration.

Visitors to the space are invited to come again, and again to see new installations, and performances as some of the artists rotate. At the opening Thai food was served to visitors who were also invited watch Thai boxing in a large ring. Large crowds gathered to watch Ken Turner's 'gymnasium of the mind'. After drawing in response to the performance of kickboxing, Ken invited audiences to draw the spectacle, as a 'means to thinking'. Now that this space has turned into a library, there is a sense that gallery space is increasingly being turned into the outside world, shifting boundaries, and initiating new mimeticism, and participation. The documentation in the engine room evidences this participation as well as the critical discourses behind a project that has the intention of 're-start[ing] thinking in shaping life'.

Gareth Edward's exploration of the relationship between research and practice in his collaboration *Exchange of Ideas*, is much more appealing, and accessible for the average visitor, than Dr Bren Unwin's presentation of dense dialogue in her *Media and Meaning*. The opportunity to join in regular dialogues with a series of local artists about the way in which the site of the Penzance Arts Library feeds and supports the arts community here in Cornwall, is brilliant. Librarian Liz Le Grice has long deserved credit for providing non-academic based artists with excellent research material. The art is in the dialogue and conversations that are taking place with the public, about how research feeds artistic practice. Bren Unwin's video sound fills the space, churning and corresponding to her project of redundant tin-mining imagery. She also shows prints. It will be interesting to see how the public engage with this kind of 'non-traditional knowledge and communication' in a project that 'explore[s] key concerns from the dual perspectives of practice and public engagement'.

The most curious collaboration is that between Leroy Smith and Paul Becker. Two fine artists they present a bizarre collection of texts, images and video about Palmer White, allegedly a local 'outsider artist'. Collaboration for these two artists led them beyond their typical practices, and freed them to work conceptually and imaginatively. Weaving fact and fiction, any examination of the texts, raises more questions than answers. It is a thoroughly engaging project, that like a detective novel with no villain, and no resolution leaves you bewildered. Beautiful and intriguing, it will be interesting to see what happens to the shamanistic Palmer White.

There were some real departures for many artists. Especially for artists Jessica Cooper and Kate Walters. In both of their collaborations they flexed their conceptual muscles and tried very different and personal projects. In *Along the Same Lines*, Jessica Cooper works with surfer Richard Hawkins. Together they have installed a workspace with surf related material, and like Kate Walters and Karen Lorenz produced a collaborative artists' book. Kate and Karen's work *Death of an Author*, includes small-scale installation-

sculptures on a table into which are integrated small video screens, They use the opportunity to 'unpack ... experiences' in a cathartic and personal way.

It will interesting to see how artists use this experience, or are inspired by it. Will there be a spate of new collaborations? New artistic pairings? Time will tell. Certainly in producing a show of this kind there has been a huge amount of collaboration between all the artists involved, the NSA team and Newlyn Exchange. This is a collaboration of ideas, and energy which the public is invited to join.

So, there is still more to come. More talks, more dialogues (see Newlyn Exchange website for times), and look out for Alessandra Aussenda and Ruth Wall's opening event for *the Operators* on 18th December, with a collaboration that engages with a critical exposé of sweatshops and the fashion industry.