

One decides fairly quickly, anyway, to ignore or be amused by the connective tissue and head off on a truffle hunt. In the melee, judgement becomes a matter of assessment according to internal criteria, not made easier for general audiences by the absence of supporting information that you don't have to pay for, the standard problem of artists being represented, not infrequently, by a lone work, and the fact that sometimes the most attention-grabbing work isn't the best. The ideal tactic here is perhaps a combination of quick hit and slow burn, as in Roy Voss's found postcards featuring single words (cut from the handwritten backs, flipped around and reinserted), in which ready wit is steadily supplanted by drifting pathos (Profile AM384).

Nevertheless, there are larger historical forces at work. Artists are still deeply invested in process (Guy Patton's canvases involving photosensitive emulsion), in various types of 'expanded field' (too many examples to list) and in Modernism (eg Tim Ellis's roughhousing, blank but banner-like abstractions). Even while looking back, what guides many practices is the latterly vaunted, if slippery, 'contemporary'. Inevitably this often means acknowledgement of the blandishments, deceptions and permissions of digital culture. See the numerous, heels-dug-in, craft- and artisanal-related practices here: the Wattses, Salvatore Arancio's luscious aquatic and fabulist ceramics and etchings, the Grantchester Pottery's throwbacks to the Omega Workshops et al and Emma Hart's abject ceramic stack of bashed-up, torn-open lockers, privacy denied in a manner that has obvious analogues with the present. By contrast, in Adham Faramawy's confident, brightly coloured, New Age-aping videos of figures receiving mud massages, being drenched in liquids etc, 'fluidity' becomes a free-floating representative of mental states, conditions of reality and myriad gels and potions advertised as life enhancers, and an inchoate neo-psychedelia takes hold. And Dominic Hawgood's assured, digitally tweaked lightbox photographs, featuring an arsenal of effects ranging from lighting design to CGI and ambiguous, hyperreal stagings of religious rituals, including exorcisms – drawn from evangelical African churches around London – again query what is real.

Point, counterpoint, counter-counterpoint, and so it goes: this is less a weak show than a tumbling ride, and one would perhaps not wish it otherwise. It showcases our era's substitute for a style, omnidirectional activity, and without many outright clunkers; even the seemingly preordained videos of someone dancing – Dominic Watson's comical compressions of British establishment culture, the best of which finds the artist in nature, doing a pitch-perfect impression of Mick Jagger performing 'Start Me Up' to a pair of indifferent Henry Moore statues – come across persuasively. But the London Open also feels inevitably instrumentalised now. It is a billboard for the cross-generational fecundity of art in London, a defence of experimental culture against swingeing cuts and ideology, an appeal to incomers (who can afford to live there), a Sisyphean thing.

London, a show like this reminds us, is a cultural capital that has succeeded too well. Its cultural producers of today and yesterday have helped make it barely tenable for the cultural producers of tomorrow. Stoner's painting of a couple walking away into a sunlit Essex may point to where, at best, artists who aren't independently wealthy will be operating from in

future. Now appearing on drop-down lists of London airports, one should note, is Southend-on-Sea. ■

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## Resource

### The Bluecoat Liverpool 18 July to 27 September

What purposes do our public art spaces serve? How might they and the works shown within them act as resources for their visitors? Such questions lie at the heart of 'Resource', a group show at Liverpool's Bluecoat. In setting out to examine the institution's specific conditions of operation, curator Marie-Anne McQuay poses a series of questions that resonate across a range of contemporary artistic and extra-artistic practices and institutions today.

McQuay took inspiration from a line in the Bluecoat's 1927 founding constitution which states that the 'diffusion of useful knowledge generally' should be among its principal objectives. The resulting show spreads through the building as if by osmosis. Elements from the studios, stores and workshops make their way into the galleries, and artworks find themselves in the courtyard and cafe or embedded into the infrastructure of the show itself. Liverpool-based design group JONZO's contribution to the show becomes the poster and an animated GIF on the gallery's website, while Daniel Eatock's numerous playful interventions sometimes go almost unnoticed, but once spotted highlight elements that would usually remain unconsidered. Eatock draws on the residual accumulation generated by the exhibition programme in *Gallery wall painted with a mix of all the paint left over from previous exhibitions at Bluecoat*, 2015, which explains itself. The purple-pink mix is available to take away in a tin, provided the viewer agrees to honour an 'ethical obligation' to use it on a wall in their house and send a photograph to the artist.

Many works have been created specially for the show, responding to the numerous uses and functions of the Bluecoat or drafting in groups that use the building. Jack Brindley's *I'll be your mirror*, 2015, presents two large-scale canvases made by inviting users of the print workshops to leave their traces in the weeks leading up to the show. The results are a dense layering of T-shirt and poster designs specific to the cultural ecology of the city. Laurence Payot and Anne Harild have both collaborated with Blue Room – a group of artists with learning difficulties who make regular use of a studio in the building, often working in response to the exhibitions in the space. Here they become contributors, working with Harild on *Procession*, 2015, a collaboratively designed arch constructed in the public courtyard during the run of the exhibition, and on Payot's 'Symbiosis' series, 2015.

'Symbiosis' presents glove-like and mirrored sculptures alongside engraved lengths of copper, all of which can be handled and manipulated by visitors, engendering participation and interaction. The work affects a shift in how viewers experience the space and implicates them directly in the conceptual enquiry of the exhibition – acting like a proposition, it asks: 'how you are going make use of what is here?'

Spatial concerns extend across several works: Brindley's *Pretend to be in the way*, 2015 – a binaural audio guide – reorients the listener's sense of their own bodily presence. Sean

Edwards's *Untitled (Amis)*, 2013, standing in for a dividing wall, manages to be imposing and formidable while still articulating the artist's familiar, softly spoken sculptural language.

Also in this line is Ian Whittlesea's *Becoming Invisible*, 2013-15 – a highlight of the show. Drawing together esoteric yogic instruction, Rosicrucianism, Theosophy and Newtonian optics, it invites the viewer, through video, a book and numerous wall-based works, to undertake a series of exercises in visualisation with the promise of making those willing to take part invisible. Whittlesea is also showing *The Demonstration of Gentleness*, a video featuring two identical twins demonstrating judo. His approach to art-making is one of serious and sustained engagement (inspired by learning that Yves Klein was a judo master, Whittlesea became a black belt and translated Klein's 1954 book *The Foundations of Judo* into English before making the work). The works balance playfulness and wit with sincerity, offering promises of personal transformation through artistic means.

*The Piracy Project Reading Room*, 2010-, is a collection of variously pirated printed materials, operating provocatively in the contested and precarious zone of physical publishing in the digital age. Along with a series of reading groups set against the backdrop of The Serving Library's salon-style hang of archival materials, it provides a more direct example of the gallery as resource. A show that asks the questions posed here can quickly get away from that most traditional function of the art gallery: the display of visual artworks. It is a strength of this show that it keeps a foot firmly in the display of works with a strong visual sensibility, in balance with the more conceptual and discursive elements. Clay Arlington's stage-set with chroma-key green backdrop, stage lighting, script and outsourced copies of Vern Blosum flower paintings are a case in point, as are Ben Cain's *Sometimes I think I'm just another resource*, 2015, and *Group Work*, 2015. For all its extra-artistic interests, the show remains visually sensitive.

The exhibition questions, proposes and provokes, but it doesn't attempt to resolve: 'This is your space,' it seems to say, 'come and use it.' A gallery space can be many things, but without the people who make use of it isn't anything. Questions that are posed and left unresolved also relate to the political potential of the artwork and the artspace. These appear in Cain's *Group Work* – which feels like it wants to make its way to a protest or procession – and also in Brindley's aforementioned audio-guide with its incitations to 'be political', 'to make less and be more'. Maybe this is what we need to take away from 'Resource': a challenge to us as audience members and visitors to become more involved, to make use of



'Resource'  
installation view

what is here and not just passively consume what is on show. These are timely issues for a public institution to take on when headlines threaten 40% further cuts to public arts funding and public services are made to fight their corner, justifying their continued existence. ■

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## Stockwell Depot 1967-1979

University of Greenwich Galleries London

24 July to 12 September

Stockwell Depot studios came into being in summer 1967 when Roland Brener, about to finish studying at Saint Martin's, took a lease on 5,000sqm of space at the abandoned brewery in Combermere Road. He was soon joined by Shirley Cameron, David Evison, Roger Fagin, Gerard Hemsworth, Peter Hide, Roelof Louw and Rita Marshall, all of whom had passed through that art school. Together they inaugurated a new kind of display in which artists collaborated to organise exhibitions in the spaces where the work had been made. The first studio show occurred in May 1968 and, by September 1970, Caroline Tisdall could claim in the *Guardian* that these annual events were 'important landmarks for anyone interested in the course of English sculpture'.

A factor in shaping the sculpture made at the Depot was

## THINGNESS?

Artists: Oliver Braid, Anouchka Oler  
Philosopher: Joseph Fletcher

### Cooper Summer Residency Exhibition 2015

Exhibition: 18 September - 10 October 2015

Preview: Thursday 17 September 2015, 5.30-7.30pm

In conversation: Thursday 17 September 2015, 4.30-5.30pm

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Cooper Gallery

