



Jason Dungan interviewed
by Ellen Mara De Wachter on
23 May 2012



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Artist’s presentation
Jason Dungan
Friday 15 June, 7pm

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is a new initiative dedicated to presenting UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a commercial gallery in the UK. Taking the form of monthly solo presentations, exhibitions will result from an open-ended invitation to exhibit new work.

Reverse: Jason Dungan, still from *Mariner*, 2012
Performer: Joe Moran
Director of Photography: Peter Emery
Gaffer: Dan Norrish
Production Assistant: Rebecca Helen Page
Shot at V22 Workspace, Bermondsey
Equipment supplied by Panalux

176 Prince of Wales Road
London NW5 3PT
Opening times
Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm
Other times by appointment
FREE ENTRY

zabludowiczcollection.com

Ellen Mara De Wachter: *Mariner* is the title of the new HD video work you have made for your Invites show. It’s a work that follows the light moving around a domestic setting in which a man sits reading. The light is evocative and it produces a meditative feeling as well as a sense of losing time. It’s interesting that you produced this seemingly natural effect of light using artificial means. The work was shot in a constructed studio, using a film light. Could you talk about your interest in the phenomenology of light, space and bodies and how it has led you to make this work?

Jason Dungan: The work grew out of a number of other videos I made in the year leading up to this, and a lot of those were made by shooting out in the street, and using the street as a kind of improvised studio. I was making videos which took that public space as a subject and as a site of production. In those situations, because I was thinking of them as a kind of studio, I became very aware of the fluctuations and transformations that light from the sun brought to the situation I was working in. And because I was working over a period of months, the nature of that light changed quite dramatically, which influenced the films. What emerged from those works was an interest in how a kind of contingent meeting between light and space and some kind of action could result in something we might think of as a film. I was making these films, but at the same time, it was interesting to me that things that could be thought of as films were happening all the time in whatever environment one might choose to focus on. I became interested in focussing on that in the studio because I wanted to be able to look at every element of that situation, so rather than depending on the particular effects of light on that day, or who might be walking by, I wanted to create a completely constructed environment, and particularly so that the light could be a creation. And this creation would allow me to expand and

stretch time out. We built a very simple set and while we were shooting, the actor was basically going through the same motions for much of the piece. He was reading, shifting in his chair, getting used to his body in that space. And for a lot of the time, the light would be in the same position for several hours, which meant that that moment, rather than being a briefly passing moment, was massively stretched and expanded. By moving the lamp around we could not only treat the light as a malleable substance but we could also treat time as a malleable entity, and we could control the way it was perceived by the camera. For me the conception of the piece was very much about using the camera as a device to scrutinise these different planes, surfaces or projections within the setting of the flat. The logic that pushed me to use certain shots was to look at surfaces which acted as projection screens in some basic way. I looked at the skin on the man’s neck, the surface of the book page, the back wall as shadow was being cast on it. Most of the shots are in close-up because the camera isn’t filming action or depicting a narrative, but it’s observing these different screens within. The logical flow through the film is a kind of observational logic.

EMDW: The action of the film is very spare. The plot of *Mariner* consists of a lot of stillness and doing nothing, and then very slight movements by the protagonist. This is antithetical to much moving image work being made today. The dominant mode in mainstream cinema is one of action and movement. Can you talk about why you are attracted to this minimal type of action, and about the effects you hope to produce, both within the work and on the viewer?

JD: This was a film, more than any other film I’ve made, in which the process of shooting and editing and watching are very much like one another. While we were shooting, assistants were manipulating

the lighting in various ways, the actor was reading, the camera was running and I was watching a monitor to see what the shot looked like. This process was very slow and observational, and because we were shooting digitally, we could shoot very long takes, so I would let the camera run for 10-20 minutes at a time, and I would turn myself into a viewer and understand what was happening by the effect the shots had on me. The editing process was much the same, and because the video is made of very few shots – only about seven or eight – it was really about watching and getting a sense of how the shots feel next to each other. There is often a lot of space within each shot, before moving on to the next one. The cuts are quite big shifts between shots, and this cutting is analogous to shifting one’s perception and looking at something different in the room, and not the kind of cutting of most movies or advertising, where you’re juxtaposing things really dramatically.

I also thought about it in the logic of sitting in a space and looking at something. The final installation of the work is very conscious of what it would be to sit in the space and look at the film, which would be very much like sitting in the space and looking at the shadow on the wall, or looking at a detail of this man’s body. The film is very focussed on the projection of light and shadow, and so the projection of the video is related to that, particularly in the shots where the shadow is the only thing in shot. I almost wanted to purge myself of my habits and what I understood film logic to be. I wanted to get into a logic of being a person in a space, looking. And by slowing it down so much, I wanted to encourage a particular kind of looking, a thoughtful looking which would allow people to have a particular kind of experience. Part of this had to do with technology, and using a certain kind of camera and lens, which allow for enough detail and nuance in the image and encourage your eye to spend time and to look in a very

simple way. The video asks people to adjust their timing to its own time.

I’m interested in people being aware of themselves in the space and I also wanted to encourage people to look around at the space itself in a different way, leaving a mark on one’s own perceptions after looking at the video.

EMDW: Can you discuss the place that sound has in this work, and what kind of sound you have chosen to include?

JD: The sound for the work took its cues from the video in the sense that I was interested in creating a particular kind of experience for the person watching the video. I was interested in having some kind of sound in the gallery but it became clear as I was shooting the work and watching the monitor, that there is a lot going on in the video, even though on paper it feels like almost nothing is going on. The subtle shifts in the light and the movement of the person are very visually demanding on some level. What I wanted to think about was again this thing of a body in the space, and how you sit in the gallery in relation to the projection, watching this other body on screen.

The sound is just a very high quality recording of an empty room. I haven’t done any foley sound, so you don’t hear the sound of someone sitting down or turning the pages of the book. I feel like the mind fills in those sounds. For me the slight ambient sound creates a kind of bodily presence for the image, and acts as a kind of bridge between the image and the person watching. At some moments, you might find it hard to distinguish between the sound on the video and the sounds going on in the street outside the gallery, which is quite important to me.

EMDW: You’ve included a selection of works on paper in the show. They also address the play of light and shadow with a spray paint technique. Could

you talk a bit about this practice and its relation to your moving image work?

JD: I’ve made a number of works in the past few years using spray paint and paper. Each time I come to it, I tend to adjust the way I do it, and rather than using the paint to try and draw a thing, I’ve tried to use the actions of the paint itself as a guide for how an image might be made. In the case of these drawings I was thinking about a piece that was analogous to something happening in the video, but which could also exist on its own. As they are going to be shown together in this exhibition, they exist as mirrored works, and I’ve tried to use the paint to look at the shifting play of light on the wall. There are five works, which will be hung in a linear sequence. The stencilling in this case has been a kind of negative, so the places where the light hits the image show up because there has been a stencil covering the paper, and the shadow is made by the paint. I made a number of these works until I settled on the five that I am showing, in part because I was trying to find a way to create a density with the paint in such a way that you could see that negative space as light. They require being seen in a daylight setting, and you become very aware of light in them. You have to tune your eyes to see them, which I think is a good introduction to the video, even though visually they look very different from what you see in the video. You can see the drawings as a sequence and read them as such, but you can also go backwards and forwards, you can look at them all at once, you can look at one for a really long time. So these drawings are like a film in space, but their durational aspect is open, and left up to the person seeing them. Using the paint and stencils in this way, because it’s about positives and negatives, becomes like using a photographic negative, because you are blocking out the light part. In a formal way it becomes an inverse of the film-making, where the shadow is what you block out.

Upcoming Invites
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Richard Sides
27 September–21 October
Ruairiadh O’Connell
25 October–18 November
Leah Capaldi
22 November–16 December

