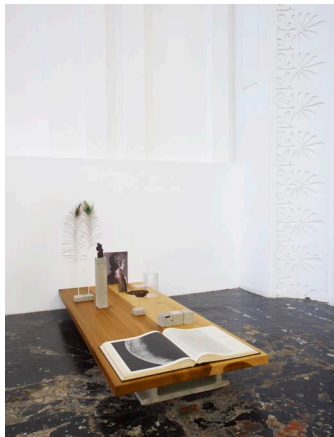


We Will Live, We Will See

Throughout the writings of Bruno Schulz, Italo Calvino and Franz Kafka, linear and sequential storytelling is substituted with a notion of time that is spooled and unwound, prone to slippage and fragmentation. This malleability of time disarms the reader's rational apprehensions, instead forging a way for subconscious and intuitive interpretations. Similarly, art works may contain and trigger multiple temporalities, destabilizing assumed readings. *We Will Live, We Will See* includes works from the Zabłudowicz Collection and beyond that engage with time and its relationship to the limitations of memory and recollection, emphasizing the importance of subjective experience, remaking and reinterpretation.

Delineating the multiple facets of Modernism has occupied a number of key recent exhibitions, (notably *Modernologies*, MACBA; the ongoing *Former West*, BAK and soon *Ostalgia*, New Museum), while themes of the archive, document, publicspace and architecture have assumed central preoccupations for artists such as Monika Sosnowska, Goshka Macuga and Deimantas Narkevičius. Yet referencing and incorporating historically specific narratives (e.g. the fall of Communism) and their physical traces (the archive) inevitably invites the question of 'truth', a perilous demand if placed upon an artwork. Plucked from the past and salvaged from forgetting, the chipped and worn artefact stands before us, witness to a particular time. This seductive appeal of objects as 'real' and 'true' referents to a given age or narrative is a slippery one, and a crucial ambivalence drives many of the works on view. The tabletop installations of **Carol Bove** and **Geoffrey Farmer** are relevant here, collating natural flotsam, man-made objects and imagery via a Surrealist tableau not dissimilar to that invoked by Alberto Giacometti or Giorgio de Chirico.



Carol Bove,
Driscoll Garden, 2005.
Private Collection, Austria; courtesy Georg Kargl
Fine Arts, Vienna



Goshka Macuga,
After In Our Time by R.B. Kitaj, 2005;
Geoffrey Farmer,
Lost Dogs and Half-Eaten Apples, 2011

Framing these elements together jolts shifting kaleidoscopic contingencies unfixed from the usual temporal and geographical restrictions of linear storytelling. That is not say these works rest merely on appeal - the constellations of meaning they energize are far from auto-telic. Both Farmer and Bove acknowledge the inherent ambiguity and flexibility in reconstructing the past, and by dismissing the pursuit of truth, their works foreground intuitive readings over fixed patterns or systems. Their tableaux carry a sense of openness and the potential of re-arrangement and, again recalling the Surrealist notion of replay embodied by the writings of Tristan Tzara and Stéphane Mallarmé, emphasize the importance of chance in forging new subjective experiences.

Modes of museological display play a crucial role in an object's naturalization and assumption into hierarchies of truth. The reification, subsequent isolation and elevation of an object within a structure commanding the viewer's attention and awe – whether table-top, shelf or vitrine – is especially relevant to **Steven Claydon**'s assemblages of quasi-artefacts.



Goshka Macuga,
After In Our Time by R.B. Kitaj, 2005;
Steven Claydon,
A Lark Descending (Preparations for Leda), 2008

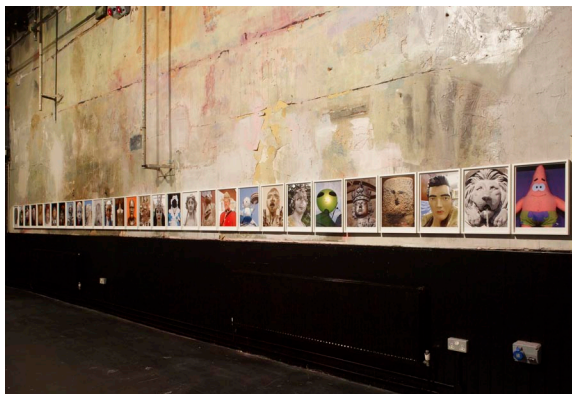


Steven Claydon,
A Lark Descending (Preparations for Leda), 2008

Displayed upon hessian covered structures (the ultimate mark of 'scientific' and archaeological displays), the elements he brings together exude historicity and command reverence, yet their origins evade precise definition. Effectively, it is their indefinable appeal and patina that feed the work with an ambiguity of temporal misplacement. Claydon's installations remind us of the power of display and the ambiguous contemporary resonance of early 20th century avant-garde exhibition designs. Undoubtedly, much contemporary installation art and sculpture is formally indebted to (and takes cue from) the proliferation of viewpoints and significance of corporeal experience evidenced by the seminal designs of Friedrich Kiesler, El Lissitzky and Herbert Bayer. Yet, fundamentally, Claydon's installations remind us of

the hollowing out of their once underlying ideological and political forces – the role of propaganda in Bayer's *Road to Victory* (MOMA, 1942) and Lissitzky's Soviet pavilion designs come to mind here. With the demise of World Fairs (their crumbling pavilions now modern ruins), the utopian possibilities of public exhibitions have shifted from explicitly charged propaganda to environmentally minded public projects – embodied most recently by Peter Zumthor and Piet Oudolf's Serpentine Pavilion.

It would seem the relevance of exhibition design has waned, its aesthetic discontents subsumed by installation art. Yet a string of recent exhibitions attests to the importance of display and the sensual enjoyment of chronologically misplaced objects – evident in the Claydon-curated *Strange Events Permit Themselves the Luxury of Occurring* (Camden Arts Centre, 2007) and the biennial Vervoordt Foundation projects at the Venetian Palazzo Fortuny. These exhibitions attest not only to the primacy of objects, but also to the importance of taste and affinity. Of key importance here are René d'Harnoncourt and Harald Szeemann, two curators whose exhibitions brought together ahistorical arrangements of ancient and contemporary art objects, artefacts and ephemera. Exhibitions such as d'Harnoncourt's *Arts of the South Seas* (MOMA, 1946) and Szeemann's *A-Historische Klanken* (*A-historical sounds*, Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen, 1988) were symptomatic of a break from didacticism, a dissociation from evolutionary accounts of culture and the loosening of distinctions separating styles. Both exhibitions brought together an array of cultural objects of disparate origins to tease out affinities and alliances beyond the boundaries of taxonomies and conventions dictated by art history. The slipperiness of these terms (affinity, alliance, resonance) did not go unnoticed and the exhibitions were criticized by some as attesting to solely the curator's sensibility as, effectively, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* pursuing the timeless, universal and essence of the creative act, beyond order and classification. The issue at stake here is one of poetic license. Inherently bound to the curatorial is epistemological ownership – to produce an exhibition is also to propose a structured context for interpretation; a narrative or grouping. *We Will Live, We Will See* strives to suspend this incessant pursuit of normativity, instead emphasizing the interstice between personal and collective interpretations of past narratives as a source of proliferation of meaning and blurring between truth and fiction.



Rachel Harrison,
Voyage of the Beagle, Two, 2008



Aaron Curry,
Pixelator (Infinite Mask), 2008;
Matthew Monahan,
The Magpie Dirge, 2009;
Thomas Houseago,
Portrait - Double Sided, 2009



Thomas Houseago,
Portrait – Double Sided, 2009
Daniel Silver,
Untitled (2008)

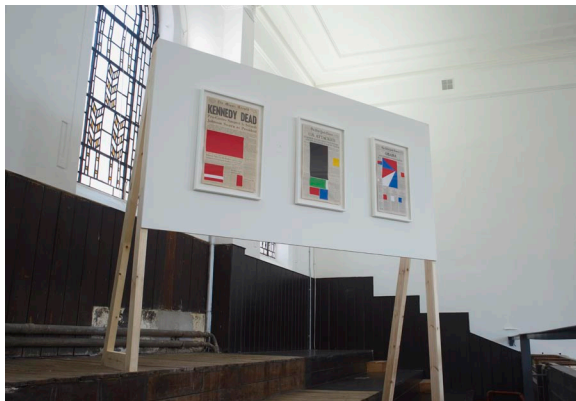


Edward Lipski,
Pazuzu Death Head (2010),
Courtesy The approach, London
Daniel Silver,
Untitled (2008),
Aaron Curry,
Pixelator (Infinite Mask), 2008;
Daniel Silver,
Untitled (2008),
Thomas Houseago,
Portrait – Double Sided, 2009

It is tempting to consider the *lapidarium*, the site of splintered ancient stone monuments and archaeological finds, as the ultimate place where the hierarchies of aesthetic styles and tastes cease to apply. Overgrown with weeds and soiled with dirt, *lapidaria* explicitly emphasize the transience of aura and grandeur – all is destined to be detritus, erased of narrative and identity. Faced with this prospect of inevitable impermanence, one might consider the grouping of works by **Matthew Monahan, Thomas Houseago, Aaron Curry, Daniel Silver** and **Edward Lipski** as a future *lapidarium*. Despite having only recently come into the world, these expressive, anthropomorphic busts seem to be marked by a patina of a much greater age. Upon closer inspection, the juxtaposition of classic (marble, bronze, wood) and contemporary materials (foam, bubble wrap, plywood) reveals the source of this confusion. Most invoke the pedestal, perhaps the most unpopular mode of display in these unmonumental times, giving the objects they bear a commemorative and monumental character. Far from Rosalind Krauss' definition of modernist sculpture as 'the negative condition of the monument', these sculptures allude to figures and narratives, myths and legends¹. Key modernist aesthetic preoccupations are rehearsed – their plinths recalling the blurring between display and art object (Brancusi), the primitivist imagery of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, the muscularity of Rodin's sculpture, the 'truth to materials' ethos of Henry Moore, Picasso's abstraction of the figure and the organic shapes of Jean Arp and Isamu Noguchi's sculptures. Gods, warriors, spirits – imaginary figures harking back to dim prehistory recur throughout this future *lapidarium*.

At what point did the expressive, figurative and mythical invite increased consideration? The human impulse to portray aside, perhaps it is the enduring appeal of narrative and storytelling as sites of meaning-making that resonates today (Brancusi's aphorism 'works of art are mirrors in which everyone sees his own likeness' comes to mind²). The just finished millennium supposedly epitomized dispersion and scattering, the death of the author, and not least – the dematerialization of the image. In lieu of dissolution, objects carry increased resonance in the sprawling expanded field, to return to Krauss. Themes of the timeless, unitary and immovable permeate the works of Monahan, Curry,

Houseago, Lipski and Silver, where allusions to the beginning of time attest to a preoccupation with the universal, rather than a drive to raptly historicize the present. The sculptures on view are exhibited in a spotlight grid; a layout typical of d'Harnoncourt's ahistorical displays at the Museum of Primitivism, that at once accentuates their primitivist references and isolates them, seeking mutual affinities and similarities. Yet, intimate sculptural assemblages and monumental busts are not the sole focus of the exhibition, which extends its preoccupation with the opacity of truth to narratives of collective, socio-political scope. Display, again, occupies a key role here, and bringing together works by **Richard Prince**, **Glenn Ligon** and **Marine Hugonnier**, mounted upon freestanding, upright panels seeks to emphasize the contemporary pervasiveness of imagery in the public space.

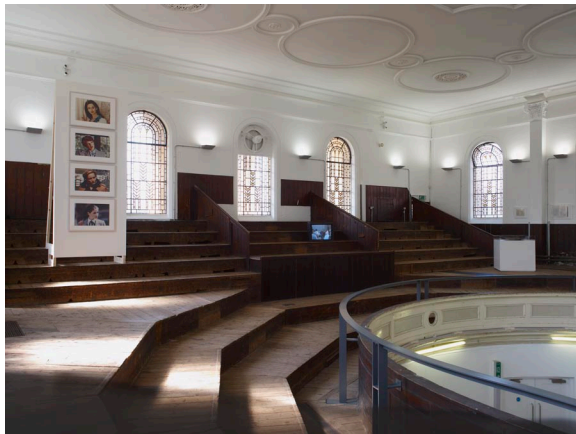


Marine Hugonnier,

Art for Modern Architecture Miami Herald – Kennedy's Death – November 23rd 1963, 2009

Art for Modern Architecture New York Times – September 11th 2001, 2009

Art for Modern Architecture New York Times – Obama's election – November 5th 2008, 2009



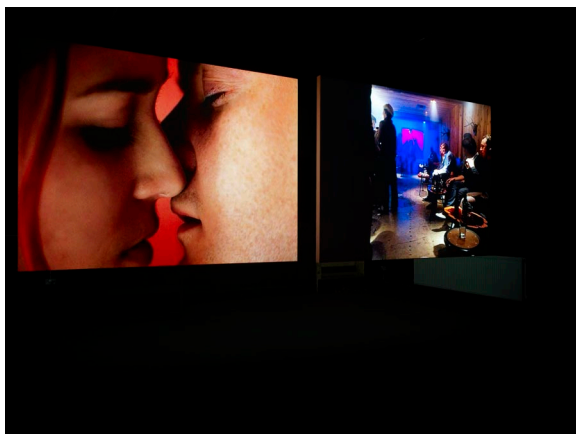
Richard Prince,

Untitled (Four women looking in the same direction), 1977

Phil Collins,
baghdad wedding, 2002

Ruth Ewan,
Anti-bell, 2010

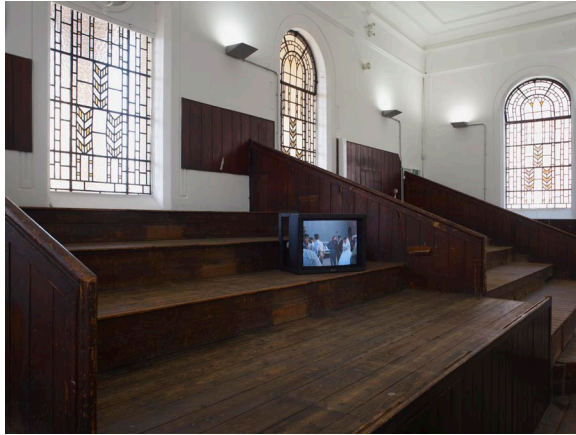
News, advertising and protest imagery are sites of power that normalize representations and statements. Subverting the tacit process of attaching meaning to imagery is central to **Omer Fast's** *The Casting* (2007), which manipulates documentary footage and dramatized re-enactments, emphasizing the familiarity of war imagery and the way its media handling produces 'true' accounts.



Omer Fast,

The Casting, 2007

Employing storytelling and re-enactment, the video installation negotiates the slippery distinction between fact and fiction and explores the performative character of recollection. Similarly, **Phil Collins'** hauntingly beautiful *baghdad wedding* (2002) occupies an ambivalent position between exaggerated aestheticization and circumstantial poignancy, finding beauty in the universal.



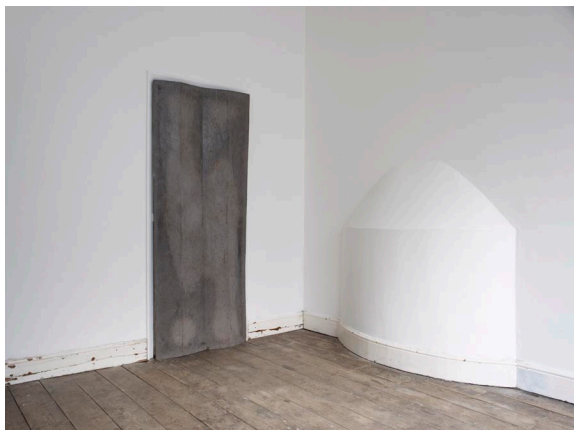
Phil Collins,
baghdad wedding, 2002

Central to many of these works is the gap between individual and collective interpretation and the changes affecting a narrative, between its actuality and subsequent representation.

Although devoid of explicitly political referents, **Michael Dean's** sculptures are testaments to these gaps.



Michael Dean,
door (working title);
door (working title) verso, 2011



Michael Dean,
door (working title) verso, 2011

Translating the typographic layout of a word, Dean encapsulates its fleeting presence – a voice, an utterance – into weighty, concrete forms that resemble

ancient artefacts or fossilized remains. Although rooted in a universal vocabulary, Dean's works resist narrative, instead exposing the possibility of multifarious interpretation. Here, the limitations of language in communicating the subtleties of corporeal experience, a theme also resonating in the works of **Mirosław Bałka** and **Monika Sosnowska** on view, attest to heightened individuality and the falsity of communicating uniform, collective experiences.



Monika Sosnowska,
Handle, 2008
Cranford Collection, London



Mirosław Bałka,
120 x 136 x 44 cm, 2007

We Will Live, We Will See seeks not to affirm a single overarching historical narrative, but instead emphasizes processes of reinterpretation, the interstice between individual and collective experience and the importance of objects in triggering recollection. Dubious of most recent declarations of altermodernity, syper-hybridity – the concomitant proliferations of high modernity – the exhibition examines moments in which taxonomies and classifications are stretched and ruptured. It is within these anachronistic and anomalous moments that forgetting, fictions and humour come forth. The exhibition embraces the fluidity of art historical hierarchies (their protagonists staring blankly back at the viewer in **Rachel Harrison's** *Voyage of the Beagle, Two*; 2008) and historical narratives, and points towards the arbitrary nature of the legacies and monuments we inherit. Demanding no sense of truth from artworks, *We Will Live, We Will See* strives for moments in which history is remade and replayed to both ludicrous and somber ends, accentuating new interpretations and the importance of subjective experience.

¹ Krauss, R. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" in *October*, vol. 8 (Spring 1979), pp. 34

² Hulten, P; Dumitresco, N; Istrati, A (ed.) (1987) *Brancusi*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. pp. 56