

REAL - ITY CH - ECK

Reality Check
Press release

Galerie Rudolfinum
6. 3. - 8. 6. 2003

Reality Check

Recent Developments in
British Photography and
Video

Roderick Buchanan

k r buxey

Phil Collins

Alan Curra11

Graham Fagen,

Ori Gersht

Dryden Goodwin

Luke Gottelier

Nigel Shafran

Lesley Shearer

David Shrigley

Keith Tyson

Michelle Williams

Saskia Olde Wolbers

Shizuka Yokomizo

Bettina von Zwehl

Curated by

Kate Bush and Brett Rogers

An exhibition jointly
organised by
the British Council and The
Photographer's Gallery,
London

Exhibition partners

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The
Photographers'
Gallery

Reality Check

Reality Check brings together sixteen of British art's rising stars, in an exhibition which presents the very latest developments in UK-based photography and video installation. Each participating artist shares a belief in the camera's capacity to transform real experience - whether through re-enactment and visual replay, or through close observation and obsessive documentation - into the realm of the poetic. **Reality Check** is an exhibition inspired by real things in the real world - by events, people, relationships, places, things - while moving between differing levels of truth and imagination, perception and pretence. A 'reality check', that self-conscious moment of taking stock, of gauging the actuality of something at an instant it threatens to dissolve into its opposite - hyper-reality, fantasy, fiction - stands as a metaphor for the exhibition, and ultimately, for photography itself.

Dislocated subjects

Traditional portraiture works to encourage a sense of intimacy or empathy between subject and viewer. For many of the artists in **Reality Check**, an intense transaction occurs between photographer and subject, but one which stresses instead a feeling of deliberate detachment or manipulation. In **Shizuka Yokomizo's Strangers** series, the photographer never gets to meet her subjects, while the subjects can barely see the photographer - who lurks behind her camera outside their windows in the dark - yet each is strongly aware of the other's presence. Yokomizo's portraits are filled with a sense of fear, curiosity, or trepidation. She also contributes a stunning new video installation: a study of elderly people asleep, which takes us from high in the sky to the depths of the ocean. **Lesley Shearer** makes dark, sinking, romantic portraits. She captures people at the moment that they slip from everyday awareness into a catatonic, dream state. Made monumental in scale, and bathed in a Caravaggiesque light, her portraits have a disturbing intensity. Conversely, **Bettina von Zwehl's** portraits are cool and classical. She subjects her sitters to different types of physiological manipulation - such as forcing them to vigorously exercise in a hot room - before recording their physiognomies in minute detail. The compositions are as beautiful as paintings; the approach as forensic as a scientist's. **k r buxey** and

Michelle Williams put themselves, rather than others, in the centre of the picture. Both perform scenarios to camera, which, drawing on morbid or aggressive eroticism, make for uneasy viewing. Michelle Williams' *Sunday Afternoon II* summons a disquieting conjunction of death and bestial eroticism, while **k r buxey's** performed parodies of pornographic situations are defiantly hardcore and quite literally, in your face.

Painting the everyday

Photography might claim to be the Art of the Everyday, and it's unsurprising that British photographers - from Fox Talbot to Richard Billingham - have rooted their work in the world immediately around them. **Nigel Shafran** takes some of the most quotidian subjects imaginable - charity shop interiors, impromptu street markets, and the corner of his kitchen, with the washing-up done and drying after a meal - and crafts a series of exquisitely luminous still lifes which graft poetry onto the surfaces of the everyday. **Ori Gersht** brings a sense of Modernist painting to his study of 1950s post-Blitz English school buildings. His rigorously composed panoramas chart a point where ideal aestheticism collides with the rough realities of British life. **David Shrigley**, widely celebrated as a draftsman and occasional sculptor is less known for his superb photographs. These photographs document fugitive interventions made directly within the landscape. Shrigley's interventions mostly take the form of drawn and written signs which helpfully annotate bits of the world most of us would walk past: a hole in the fence, a fallen tree, a forgotten Filofax. **Dryden Goodwin** also finds the subject of his work in the world around him. Inspired by the spaces of the city and people he chances upon within it, Goodwin orchestrates gorgeous symphonies in video and sound, which examine the flux and anonymity of urban life.

Fabulous Realism

Luke Gottelier and Saskia Olde Wolbers create architectures of the imagination, using real things to build spaces of fabulous invention. **Luke Gottelier's** lo-fi photographs tread a daring line between inchoate nothingness and eccentric imagination, as they conjure large vistas from materials as unpromising as a dollop of custard, a manky carpet and a piece of string. **Saskia Olde Wolbers'** narrative videos are prompted by tales of real-life

human drama, onto which she embroiders fantastic, rambling stories, set against spectacular revolving landscapes. Her stories of individual calamity are parables about life in an increasingly technology-driven world. **Alan Curraill** is another teller of tall stories. His works are the video diaries of someone attempting to answer life's more awkward existential questions. Curraill's self-effacing, faltering delivery masks a wild imagination, and quite possibly, a superhuman existence.

Politics personified

Political and social complexities are addressed in **Reality Check**, but not in the form of simple realism. **Phil Collins**, for example, works against the grain of social documentary photography in order to question the truth of its images. Collins has made work in a Macedonian refugee camp, on the streets of Belfast, and, most recently, in the city of Baghdad. Here, he shows *Becoming More Like Us*, a study of the lives of young Serbs in post-war Belgrade. Former official war artist to Kosovo, **Graham Fagen's** work also addresses contemporary issues such as class and conflict: he refracts these subjects through the prism of older forms, drawing on classical theatre, the novel, and allegorical painting. Fagen presents his *Weapons*, and a new series of photographs entitled *Owners*.

Reality Checked

The most purely documentary work in the exhibition - in the sense that it exists simply to record an event in the real world - is supplied by the conceptual artist **Keith Tyson**. And yet Tyson's series of *Expanded Repeaters* could not look more dissimilar to traditional photography. Each is realised as a three-dimensional assemblage, in order to scrupulously record an invisible subject: 60 seconds of time, one degree celsius of temperature, one metre of movement. Where Tyson's expanded photography is based on empirical observation, **Roderick Buchanan's** video installation *Catch 60' 60"* charts a gap between perception and illusion - between what you think is there, and what actually is - to take its own very particular reality check.

Artists' Biographies:

Roderick Buchanan (b. Glasgow, 1965) won the Beck's Futures Prize, 2000
K r buxey (b. Reading, 1967) has shown at Ibid Projects, London
Phil Collins (b. Warrington, 1970) was the recipient of a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Art Award in 2001 and is currently on a PS1 scholarship in New York
Alan Curraill (b. Stoke-on-Trent, 1964) has had solo exhibitions at Stills Gallery, Edinburgh and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
Graham Fagen (b. Glasgow, 1966) has had solo exhibitions at the Imperial War Museum, the Henry Moore Institute and Matt's Gallery
Ori Gersht (b. Tel-Aviv, 1967) is the subject of a forthcoming solo show at Art Now, Tate Britain
Dryden Goodwin (b. Bournemouth, 1971) recently exhibited at Art Now, Tate Britain
Luke Gottelier (b. London, 1968) has shown at the Window Gallery, Prague, Entwistle Gallery and Bethnal Green Police Station
Saskia Olde Wolbers (b. Breda, 1971) has had solo exhibitions at Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam, and forthcoming at Gallery Tydehall, Helsinki
Nigel Shafran (b. London, 1964) has had solo exhibitions at Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo and Fig-I, London
Lesley Shearer (b. Glasgow, 1968) recently graduated from the Royal College of Art
David Shrigley (b. Macclesfield, 1968) has made solo shows at Camden Arts Centre, UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and Bard College, New York.
Keith Tyson (b. Ulverston, 1969) has had solo exhibitions at South London Gallery and Kunsthalle, Zurich, Turner Prize 2002
Michelle Williams (b. London, 1979) participated in Bloomberg New Contemporaries, 2001
Shizuka Yokomizo (b. Tokyo, 1966) is the subject of a solo exhibition at Museo Arte Contemporanea, Rome in 2002
Bettina von Zwehl (b. Munich, 1971) has exhibited at the Hasselblad Center, Göteborg, Victoria and

Albert Museum and Victoria Miro Gallery

Reality Check is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue, featuring an introductory essay on the exhibition by Kate Bush and individual texts on the artists by Brett Rogers and Alex Farquharson

Exhibition curators

Kate Bush

Kate Bush has been Senior Programmer at The Photographers' Gallery, London since 1998 where she produces a programme which brings into dialogue diverse aspects of photographic practice. Exhibitions by international artists such as **Richard Wentworth**, **Jean-Luc Mylayne**, **Catherine Opie** and **Annelies Strba**, are complimented by historical shows and new projects by emerging artists such as **Piotr UKlanski**, **Hellen van Meene**, **Shirana Shahbazi**, **Amy Adler** and **Malerie Marder**. In 2001 she curated *The Fantastic Recurrence of Certain Situations* for Madrid's Canal Isabel II, a group exhibition which introduced new artists such as **Shizuka Yokomizo**, **Sophy Rickett**, **Dryden Goodwin** and **Julie Henry**. She writes catalogue essays, most recently on the work of **Liza May Post** for the Dutch Pavilion, **49th Venice Biennale**, on **Erwin Zwakman** (Stedelijk van Abbaye Museum, Eindhoven) and on **Keith Tyson** (Kunsthalle Zurich). She is a regular contributor to *Artforum* magazine.

Brett Rogers

Brett Rogers is currently Deputy Director and Head of Exhibitions, in the Visual Arts Department of The British Council London. She trained in art history (MA Twentieth Century Art, Courtauld Institute, University of London) and arts management (Arts Administration, Harvard University) and has a long and distinguished record of achievement in curating and managing exhibitions. Beginning her career in Australia in the late 1970s, she moved to the UK in 1980 and undertook various freelance exhibition projects before joining The British Council, initially to formulate a programme and policy for photography. Before moving into the post of Head of Exhibitions and Deputy Director, she worked on a wide range of exhibitions, from **Anish Kapoor** (Venice Biennale 1990), **Shirazeh Houshiary** (1994) to **Something the Matter** (**Cornelia Parker**, **Helen Chadwick**, **Cathy De Monchaux**) 1994, **Boyd Webb** (1995)

and the **3rd Istanbul 1992 (Damien Hirst, Hannah Collins)**. She has lectured and written widely in her specialist field of photography, *Documentary Dilemmas, A Brief History of British Documentary Photography* 1993; *Be Original or Die; Madame Yevonde* 1998; *On the Bright Side of Life NGBK Berlin* 1998; *Shifting Focus; Photography in Britain 1850-1900* (with The British Library)1995; *Regeneration, A Reappraisal of photography in Ceylon 1850-1900* (with The British Library)2000; *Photos and Phantasms; Harry Johnstons photographs of the Caribbean* 1998 (with Petrine Archer-Straw)and most recently, *Reality Check; Recent Developments in British Photography, Film and Video* 2002 (with Kate Bush). Over the course of the past decade, she has been actively engaged in various arts organisations, representing the Council on the Arts Council of England Visual Arts Committee, Scottish Arts Council Visual Arts Committee, The Crafts Council. From 1994-2000, she was a Trustee of the Photographers Gallery and in 2002 a judge for the John Kobal Portrait Prize (National Portrait Gallery, London).

The Photographers' Gallery

History

The Photographers' Gallery, the first independent gallery in Britain devoted to photography, was founded in 1971 at 8 Great Newport Street. This building now houses the Gallery's primary exhibition space and a bookshop. In 1980 the Gallery also moved into 5 Great Newport Street, initially rented, the freehold was purchased in 1986 thanks to a successful funding campaign. The Gallery has developed a reputation as this country's primary venue for contemporary photography. One of its major achievements has been to establish photography within a wide viewing public, making it more popular and accessible. The gallery was the first in the country to show key names in world photography such as André Kertesz, Jaques-Henri Lartigue and Irving Penn, and has been instrumental in encouraging the inclusion of photography in the programme of leading galleries and museums. An integrated programme of exhibitions and educational events continues to present the most innovative developments in photography as well as nurturing new talent. In 1993, both buildings in Great Newport Street underwent extensive refurbishment, designed by architect Nick England

Current

The Photographers' Gallery has been instrumental in establishing and promoting the names of contemporary British photographers including Martin Parr and Fay Goodwin. More recently, the Gallery has introduced significant international artists working with photography, such as Rineke Dijkstra, Annelies Strba, Catherine Opie and Boris Mikhailov, to audiences in Britain. We also place strong emphasis on facilitating the production of new work by emerging artists, both from Britain and abroad, in the form of commissions. The Gallery stages exhibitions which throw new light on the history of photography through exhibitions such as Francesca Woodman, Robert Capa, Gordon Parks and Garry Winogrand. Every year, the Gallery hosts and produces Citibank Photography Prize, now recognised as one of the most important international art awards. The Gallery is a registered educational charity (No. 262548) committed to increasing visual literacy and access to photography. The Photographers' Gallery receives some funding from London Arts, and raises additional income from the Bookshop and Print Sales Gallery. However this is insufficient to cover running costs and the development of our programme, so we rely on the generosity of individuals, companies, trusts and foundations to enable us to continue to develop our innovative programme of exhibitions and education projects.

The Photographers' Gallery
5 & 8 Great Newport Street
London WC2H 7HY
www.photonet.org.uk

Tour of the exhibition

SLOVENIA, Moderna Galerija,
Ljubljana 29 August - 6 October
2002
LONDON 14 Wharf Road, London N1
24 Oct - 24 Nov 2002
**CZECH REPUBLIC, Galerie Rudolfinum,
Prague 6 March - 8 June 2003**
POLAND, Bunkier Gallery, Krakow
4 July - 3 August 2003
LATVIA, Arsenal, Riga
20 October - 16 November 2003
CROATIA, House of Artists Zagreb
Dec 2003 - Jan 2004
