The research bulletin

Rooney, J

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Welcome to the June research bulletin from The Salford School of Art and Design. If you have any comments or would like to submit work for inclusion email Deborah Woodman here.
Brendan Fletcher creates industrially fabricated, vacuum formed plastic paintings. Each work is made up of simple plastic components that can be assembled in different colour combinations. The choice of material is crucial. Plastic is synthetic, inexpensive, easy to manufacture and versatile. It has become a synonym for our ersatz, kitsch and ‘throw- away’ culture.

The work draws upon the language of abstract painting but the mythic touch of the painter is erased in the industrial process. Here is a painting practice that eschews the traditional means of executing a painting; there is no pigment/binder and no process of application, in its place we are left to contemplate what it means to look at pre fabricated plastic ‘paintings’ complete with their vacuum formed frame. Fletcher’s work sits, confusingly, somewhere between cool industrial minimalism and high kitsch.

The work explores the commercial logo, the quintessential emblem of our consumer culture, but in Fletcher’s work the motif is empty and vacant; it fails to operate as a sign for a commercial brand and their carefully crafted identity, nor as a marker for someone’s taste, sensibility or social aspiration. Fletcher draws parallels between the logo and objects of religious devotion - paintings/icons/statues/relics - and examines what we choose to venerate and worship and exposes the way in which the sacred and secular collide.

It is these apparent contradictions in the work that in the end cast doubt on the possibility of them actually belonging to either the spiritual or the commercial and they become instead a critical voice that questions the very essence of devotion within our culture.

Brendan Fletcher is a lecturer in Visual Arts at the University of Salford. He is currently a recipient of a VC Scholarship 2009 – 11.

Brendan would like to thank Tim Bailey, Martin Hughes and David Wingate at the University of Salford and Warren Lee at North West Prototypes, Manchester.
Liberate your Avatar

MAKING REALITY

REALLY REAL
This paper brings together the practice-based creative research of artists Charlotte Gould and Paul Sermon, culminating in a collaborative interactive installation that investigates new forms of social and political narrative in multi-user virtual environments. The authors' artistic projects deal with the ironies and stereotypes that are found within Second Life in particular. Paul Sermon's current creative practice looks specifically at the concepts of presence and performance within Second Life and 'first life', and attempts to bridge these two spaces through mixed reality techniques and interfaces. Charlotte Gould's Ludic Second Life Narrative radically questions the way that users embody themselves in on-line virtual environments and identifies a counter-aesthetic that challenges the conventions of digital realism and consumerism.
This book aims to provide insights into how ‘second lives’ in the sense of virtual identities and communities are constructed textually, semiotically and discursively, specifically in the online environment Second Life and Massively Multiplayer Online Games such as World of Warcraft. The book’s philosophy is multi-disciplinary and its goal is to explore the question of how we as gamers and residents of virtual worlds construct alternative online realities in a variety of ways. Of particular significance to this endeavour are conceptions of the body in cyberspace and of spatiality, which manifests itself in ‘natural’ and built environments as well as the triad of space, place and landscape. The contributors’ disciplinary backgrounds include media, communication, cultural and literary studies, and they examine issues of reception and production, identity, community, gender, spatiality, natural and built environments using a plethora of methodological approaches ranging from theoretical and philosophical contemplation through social semiotics to corpus-based discourse analysis.

Telematic Dreaming (1992) turns a bed into the support of high-resolution images that might show a partner, intimately alive although being thousand kilometers away.

The light-intense projection of the other results in a remarkable suggestion which turns the touch of the projected body into an intimate action. Sermon aims at expanding the senses of the user, while it is obvious that the other cannot really be touched but that only swift, decisive, possibly tenderly reactive movements can experience the suggestion of touch - a moment of contemplation, as many users observed. The synaesthetical, sensual impression lets the hand and the eye fuse, and it is this effect that characterizes this work as well as the works to come in the following years.

Sermon, P 2011, ‘Telematic Dreaming in Extimacy: Art, intimacy and technology’

Exhibited at: Es Baluard Museu d’Art Modern i Contemporani de Palma, Palma de Mallorca, Spain, from 28/01/2011 to 01/05/2011.
Extimacy: the intimate is Other (Pau Waelder, curator of “Extimacy. Art, intimacy and technology”)

Inside the immense flow of data exchange, the new technologies have facilitated an interdependency between the spheres of what is private and what is public, between interior and exterior, leading us to reveal, in an increasingly natural manner, our experiences, thoughts and feelings, enlarging the circle of intimacy to the point of sharing our inner life with the invisible, abstract audience of Internet users. Things personal become collective, things belonging to others become our own and intimacy is no longer something that is preserved and kept in our innermost circles, but something that is projected in all directions in an eccentric movement. Thus intimacy turns into extimacy, to use the term created by Jacques Lacan to define the existence, within the most intimate sphere of the I, of a “foreign body”, that which is external to the individual and with which one identifies.

We need to share our intimacy because what we are is defined both by our subjectivity and by what surrounds us. In the realm of digital art, several artists have worked with the new parameters of subject, body, interpersonal relationship and intimacy introduced by the new technologies. Their works enable us to initiate a reflection on the ways in which the mobile phone, e-mails, chats, social networks and instant messaging systems modify, increase or condition our communication with others. They also allow us to consider where the boundaries of our personal space lie, where our “I” ends and that of others begins.

“Extimacy. Art, intimacy and technology” is a group digital art exhibition which puts forward a proposal that spectators reflect on these concepts through the presentation of works by recognised artists from the international scene. Interactive installations, mainly, that involve spectators in what is active participation with the work, which never ceases to be a piece with its own identity, the fruit of the firm artistic background of creators who combine art and technology in their work. In an era in which the user adopts an active role in the diffusion and manipulation of information on the global network (known as web 2.0), in art, too, a change in roles between spectator and work is taking place, with interactive art as the best expression of this new paradigm. The works of some great names from this sphere, such as Christa Sommerer and Laurent Mignonneau, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer or Paul Sermon, for instance, are combined with the creations of promising artists like Gazira Babeli, Clara Boj and Diego Díaz, Gregory Chatonsky, Carlo Zanni or Martin John Callanan. All of them exhibit the multiple facets a concept as complex and at the same time as simple as extimacy can present, from different angles and with diverse intentions.

Sermon, P 2011, ‘Telematic Dreaming in Extimacy: Art, intimacy and technology’

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In February Carson & Miller gave a paper at the conference Modern/ Contemporary Art and the Curiosity Cabinet, (Seton Hall University, New Jersey, USA). The paper, Playing in the Wunderkammer, was co-written with Dr Patricia Allmer (Senior Research Fellow, MMU). This paper explored Carson & Miller’s curatorial project The Story of Things (2009-10) which saw them work with a museum collection, not in the traditional manner of a curator but as artists using the collection as their materials; materials that might be altered and played with. The conference gave them the opportunity to reflect on a number of ideas; in particular where this work sat in relation to the long tradition of cabinets of curiosity, and the relationship between the methodology of the curiosity cabinet and Carson & Miller’s use of play as a way of producing art.
The Emotive City
The Emotive City

Recent and upcoming presentations
Media, Digital Technology & the Creative Economy Workshop +
SPARC 2011
Salford Postgraduate Annual Research Conference
University of Salford
4th Annual Information Studies Postgraduate Symposium MMU
AVANCA | CINEMA
Conferência Internacional Cinema Arte, Tecnologia, Comunicação Cine-Clube de Avanca. Portugal
Research to be published in “Communication in Debate Collection”, by the Cine Clube de Avanca Editions

How can a city, with its connections, people and architecture be viewed as a living cultural artefact?

“Information visualization is becoming more than a set of tools, technologies and techniques for large data sets. It is emerging as a medium in its own right, with a wide range of expressive potential.” Eric Rodenbeck (Stamen Design), keynote lecture at Emerging Technology 2008 [March 4, 2008]

Every city has at least one ArtSpace; larger urban conurbations have a multitude of spaces devoted to art. The ArtSpace is a venue designed to contain art, in some cases, the artwork can only be considered art whilst inside the ArtSpace.

This research explores the idea to use the geographic borders of a City to signify the ArtSpace. Work will exist outside of the traditional Gallery setting. Research methodology uses codes and signs as a form of information aesthetics plus emotional content.

The ArtSpace in the city serve different functions for different groups of people. Communities engage with the arts in all forms. Modern Art, Dance, Sculpture and the theatre appeal to the visually literate. Families engage in more physical interactive connections in Museums. These spaces are diverse visual centres built to house creative expression for community engagement.

The Postcode defines the ArtSpace Postcodes were introduced in the UK in 1959. as specific house, street codes used for mail de software. Manchester and Salford are divided in to 50 postcode zones. The M3 code area joins Salford into Manchester. The river Irwell, a natural border in a man made location, bisects Manchester and Salford. Deconstructing the word offers more meaning, and relevance to the research methodology. Post, is to be informed of news, and what has passed. To be supplied with up to date information. + Code; to translate a message from one form into another. A series of shapes and symbols as substitute for language.
In November, Debra Leighton, Senior Lecturer in Heritage Studies in the School of Art and Design presented a paper at the ATLAS 2010 conference ‘Niche Tourism v Mass Tourism’ in Limassol, Cyprus. ‘Challenging the Traditional Culture Vulture: Experiential Marketing in the Cultural Tourism Sector’ explores the role and significance of cultural tourism as an example of a niche tourism market, focusing on heritage tourism in particular and examining the emergence of an experiential approach to the marketing of cultural heritage attractions. The UK tourism sector has been slow to adopt an experiential approach, and yet those cultural heritage attractions that have moved away from a traditional product focus toward an experiential focus have succeeded in maintaining or even increasing visitor numbers in the face of adverse market conditions. They may have located –or even created– new, niche visitor segments or they may simply be engaging traditional visitor segments in new ways. The traditional culture vulture is identified as one potential segment, based on the Arts Council’s typology of visitors. The analytical basis for the evaluation is provided through a comparative case study analysis of two cultural heritage attractions – Jorvik Viking Centre in York and Warwick Castle. Despite the location of the cases in historic tourist centres, the analysis reveals marked differences in their apparently similar experiential marketing strategies. The paper concludes by offering suggestions to practitioners considering taking forward experiential marketing as a timely and effective niche marketing strategy. The work builds on the University’s long standing involvement with ATLAS (Association for Tourism and Leisure Education) and ATLAS Africa. Established for over 20 years, ATLAS promotes staff and student exchange, transnational research and curriculum and professional development.
This AHRC Funded Collaborative PhD Project is now in its final year and due for completion in September 2011. Project researcher, Natasha Simons, is a former Salford Masters student and graduated with a distinction in Heritage Studies. The project examines the attitudes of teenage visitors to a Science Centres and to specific outreach programmes and assesses how such informal activity affect and/or influence learning. The collaborative partners are the School of Art and Design at Salford (supervisor Prof Pat Sterry) and Techniquest Science Discovery Centre in Cardiff.

Techniquest, like other Science Centres and Museums, is a unique provider of accessible science that is open to all, yet teenagers are infrequent visitors to Science Centres and there is currently little research to understand why this might be the case. This is an age group that has traditionally been seen as hard to reach. This research project will discover teenage attitudes, assumptions and knowledge, and evaluate learning that takes place during a visit.

The research involved undertaking an attitude survey of 600 teenagers, followed by in depth study across five schools where the outreach workshop activity from Techniquest had taken place. With the first and second phase complete the impact study is ongoing and looks closely at what teenage pupils ‘start off with’ and compares this directly with what they ‘finish with’ by way of pre and post interviews (supplemented by observations). In this way a ‘picture’ of what these workshops actually do for the teenage participant is emerging.

Preliminary results show improvements in key skills (especially solving problems, following instructions, arguing a point, asking questions and working as a team). The other significant finding, so far, is the increase in verbal fluency of the pupils when asked more descriptive questions about the topic to be covered in the workshop. Every pupil interviewed showed an increased ability to talk about and reflect on the topic covered in the workshop when interviewed even two months after the workshop. Pupils did not demonstrate any significant improvement on fact-type questions and very little on improvement ‘speaking out loud to the class’ (this was especially apparent when interviewing pupil’s aged between 15 and 16).

These results are significant to the Science and Heritage sector as they demonstrate not only an effective way of evaluating impact regardless of a pupils educational ability and/or social background but also shows that hands-on can also be minds-on if well designed.

For more information on this project contact Pat at: p.sterry@Salford.ac.uk and Natasha at: ncsimons@googlemail.com
Northern Arts and Science Network presents a one day arts and science conference. The conference will provide an insight into the varied types and modes of discourse and conversations that are currently emerging from combinatorial areas of arts/science research and collaboration. The conference will ask the core question: How do collaborations of arts and science manifest themselves?

www.northernartsandscience.com/projects/conference-2011/

Visualising the Invisible – led by Karen Heald Building upon work developed at the psychiatric NHS unit (www.karenheald.co.uk/ablett-residency/), this collaborative arts and science workshop seeks to present new perspectives into the effects of anti-depressant medications. This collaborative practice explores these interests through creative, patient lead, artistic expressions of change alongside conventional, reductionist measures of changing depressive symptoms producing sophisticated fusions of art and science.

The workshops will consist of a brief introduction, followed by round table dialogues working with either a scientist or an artist and finally there will be an open forum discussion. Karen Heald is an artist, researcher and academic. She also works as an Artist in Residence in a UK, National Health Service, acute inpatient psychiatric department.

Seminar presenters - Karen Heald, Dr Susan Liggett, Dr Richard Tranter & Prof Rob Poole.

Conference 2011: Dialogues (19 March 2011)

Supported by Arts Council England
Saltburn Pier Hosts Unique Photo Exhibition

SALTBURN Pier, the North East’s sole-surviving pleasure pier, is being turned into an open-air art gallery for a unique photographic exhibition this summer. Photographic artist Lawrence George Giles is exhibiting 54 large-scale photographic panoramas depicting all of the country’s remaining seaside pleasure piers along the railings of Saltburn pier for a period of six weeks.

Redcar and Cleveland Council, working in partnership with the Friends of Saltburn Pier, has commissioned the exhibition by the Liverpool-born photographer to coincide with the launch of National Piers Week, a national celebration of Britain’s piers and their heritage, and the biggest nationwide event on Britain’s piers since the Year of the Pier in 1996.

Lawrence George Giles is currently Programme Leader for the BA (Hons) Photography programme at Salford University. He has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally including Toronto, Berlin and Prague.

This project has been realised with financial assistance and support from Arts Council, Salford University Research Department and the Arts Humanities & Research Board of England.

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Time and tide
Private view launch: friday 11th march 2011 @ 12.00pm
Admission: free
Photographic Exhibition Of Pleasure Piers Panoramas.

Try and ignore the statistics, even though they’re staggering: tens of thousands of photographs, and thousands of hours of editing and stitching, to make 54 panoramas, one based around each of the remaining seaside piers in Britain; quite possibly the world’s longest photography exhibition. These seemingly disparate photographic moments of time are then finally knitted together by hand to produce the series of beautiful and seamless large-scale photographic time-scapes that make up the final exhibition.

As Giles states: “The work not only captures the entire environment, they extend this. They also extend time and allow a greater sense of naturalism to filter through. As individual photographs they are akin to the snapshot, as a collective and combined panoramic whole they become a series of publicly share private moments, more akin with a family album”.

Time & Tide explores the place seaside pleasure piers hold in childhood and in collective memories. As a comprehensive study, Time & Tide highlights the cultural importance of these sites, but as individual artworks, the photographs defy time – on occasions figures re-appear in a different part of the image, and the changing of the light, building of sandcastles, a stroll along the beach or a football game are part of the recorded experience.

At the turn of the last century, almost a hundred piers existed; now, only half remain and several face an uncertain future. Although the architectural significance of these sites is well documented through the photographic medium, little available visual work has focused upon their importance as sites of popular culture, leisure and social interaction. Indeed the significance of these sites lies not merely in their structural or historic importance but also in their ability to function as a catalyst for the creation and sharing of early and formative memory. Giles intends that his panoramas will help to draw out these memories.

This series of 54 large-scale photographic panoramas will be displayed as public artworks along on Saltburn Pleasure Pier for a period of 6 weeks Friday 11th March – Tuesday 25th April 2011.

The Observer
Our senses stretch out in all directions, 360 degrees, like Lawrence George Giles’s glorious panoramic seaside pictures.

Each of Giles’s artfully constructed bather’s-eye views turns on one special device, one that all but defines the British seaside town: the pier. The photographer’s all-encompassing eye has captured 54 of these essentially Victorian structures.

Flux Magazine
These panoramas baulk against the isolation of one instant and the clichéd representation of the seaside as a backdrop for the working-class-at-play.

National Pier Society
A series of beautiful and seamless time-scapes. The final result not only captures the physical and social interaction but also extends the normal visual and temporal perspective of the viewer.

BBC Radio 4 Front Row
Future generations unable to rely upon memory alone will be able to consult a remarkable set of photographs.

Redeye North West Photographic Network
These are the stories of all our childhood days out, a superreal reflection of what it is to wander enjoyably and aimlessly for a few hours; a Bayeux tapestry for the leisure age.
Jill Randall

Dia de Los Muertos + The Copper Kingdom
Jill Randall travelled to Mexico in October on a research study trip to witness “Dia de Los Muertos” - “Day of the Dead” Festival in Mexico City and Oaxaca. Randall is interested in the sculpture and making traditions associated with Day of the Dead, especially the use of simple materials like card and paper to make large and intricate works, and the erection of “home altars” with symbolic objects relating to the deceased. In addition to seeing sculptures being made in both cities, Randall travelled to see Oaxacan wood sculpture being made in the village of Arrazola, and was able to study at first hand the philosophical concepts behind “The Skeleton at the Feast” - the culture of death and immortality, and the veneration and decoration of physical body. Jill Randall is currently exploring the possibilities of an Artists Residency and Guest Lectureship at the School of Fine Arts, Universidad de Benito Juarez, Oaxaca.
Jill Randall recently completed the third in a series of public art commissions for Amlwch, Anglesey, as part of a business partnership scheme undertaken with Menter Mon (Anglesey Enterprise).

The relief sculpture, made in steel, size 4 metres x 2.5 metres, celebrates Amlwch’s shipbuilding heritage, and depicts the schooner “Eilian”, the last ship to be built in the Amlwch shipyard. This commission is the 3rd in a series of 4 based on the “Copper Kingdom”, a celebration and interpretation of the industrial heritage of Amlwch. Randall has also established and developed new working relationships with several metal fabricators based in Anglesey.