



Art

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Interviewed by Lisa Le Feuvre

Art & Gentrification

Larne Abse Gogarty

Art & Unemployment

Bob Dickinson

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Profile by Marcus Verhagen

a hot summer afternoon in the country, peace, forgotten values, simple pleasures'. Also in 1982 she inaugurated *Tree Mountain* (an elliptical pattern of 11,000 trees 420m long, 270m wide and 38m high, intended to grow over 400 years) that took a decade to be established in the gravel pits of Ylöjärvi, Finland – 'the largest monument on earth that is international in scope, unparalleled in duration, and not dedicated to the human ego', she wrote. *Tree Mountain's* stolid arboreal pointillism is a commitment to futurity that looks, even in photographs, like a blueprint.

It looks like the sumptuous, finely inked speculative diagrams elsewhere: projects unmade or nearly impossible. In the 'Map Projections', 1973-79, begun as Arno Peters was presenting his redrawn, proportionate Peters World Map, Denes reshaped the globe as, among other things, a hot dog, an egg, a snail and a doughnut, continents distended to fit. Reality is stretchy, these quixotic visions insist. In the hundred-plus works of her related 'Pyramids' series, 1967-, Denes unfolds a superabundance of 'logical structures, architectural innovations and society building'. The improbably up-curving *The Probability Pyramid – The Crystal Pyramid*, 1976, is a 'one of a kind superstructure that represents our era' to be constructed from 10,000 glass bricks and designed according to relativity theory and the probability curve. I stand in front of such fabulations, though, and first cross-reference with the anti-architecture of the time – Archigram etc – then retreat into aesthetics as the maths soars uncaringly over my head: thinking about how plainly gorgeous is the silver-dusted, blue-ink lithograph of *Flying Bird Pyramid – A Space Station*, 1994, like a ray in Elysian water – and also about how well this work complements Firstsite's own curvilinear Calatrava architecture.

Denes, in any case, doesn't demand that her work be grasped in its technical specifics. One might balk at the dense, philosophical, text-laden diagrams of *The Human Argument*, 1967-, (or waste time resolving to master, in their services, Newton's *Principia Mathematica*) before identifying them as cool-headed analyses of the human capacity to overthink. Even the brightest thought can go dark eventually, suggests *4000 Years – 'If the Mind...'*, 1976, whose pyramidal stacks of hieroglyphs suggest how communication is stymied over the ages. We are rising into space here, out into time; Denes, you might infer, rarely thought in periods of less than a century. Elsewhere she could be wildly playful: see her annotated drawing for a Duchamp-like *Liberated Sex Machine*, 1970/2013, with its delineated aspects 'Stiffener', 'Stud Processor', 'Hot Dipping', 'Return Stroke', 'Oval Shaft' and the like. Engineering and rationalism are goaded, and such is the tension in Denes's work: she is interested in knowledge but of a hypothetical sort, rather than the rationalist-empirical type that, via science and technology, has arguably piloted ecological disaster.

Against that, Denes presents as an optimist in the Yoko Ono mould, forged in the *Whole Earth Catalog* era – desirous, as she wrote in a 1970 manifesto, of 'seeing reality and still being able to dream'. Art, here, hews to a classical definition of its purpose as a spur to alternative thinking: Gaian thinking, specifically. Perhaps it is fitting, then, that Denes's unrealised projects generally captivate more than her realised ones, where no inhabitable gap can exist between idea and reality. I want to see a real flying bird pyramid. I also just want to gaze, eyes and mind afire, at the diagram. ■

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Agnes Denes
*Tree Mountain – A
Living Time Capsule*
1992-96/2013

North-west Round-up

Tate Liverpool • Castlefield Gallery • Untitled Gallery

With the 100th anniversary of the First World War approaching, it is an appropriate time to remember the historical importance of left-wing ideas on western art, given the effect of political forces like communism released by that conflict. But it is an earlier war that provides the starting point to **Art Turning Left** at Tate Liverpool: Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Death of Marat*, 1793, depicts the assassination of the French revolutionary in his bath during the fledgling French republic's first war, against Austria, Britain and Holland, in an alliance formed in response to the execution of Louis XVI. It was the need for the unifying, explanatory potential of art during the confusion of warfare and revolution that led to David's painting being reproduced and paraded around for the purposes of propaganda. The trouble is, David's painting should be the first thing you see when you enter this exhibition. Instead, it is installed towards the end and hemmed in, like much of the rest of the show, by explanatory signage.

But there is no getting away from the significance of two long-term experiments undertaken by the left in 20th-century art, both of which are reflected in this show. One is the evolution of Modernism through its collision with the left, especially seen in the work of Russians like Kazimir Malevich, whose *Analytical Chart*, c1925, attempted to replace the idea of individual originality with 'bacteriology' in painting. Alexander Rodchenko, whose ventures into advertising embraced Vladimir Mayakovsky's poetry, and Vladimir Tatlin, whose design for *Monument to the Third International*, better known as Tatlin's Tower, 1919-20, expressed the lost hope of the Bolshevik revolution, not least in the poignant fact that it could never be constructed. The second, more far-reaching but less



Atelier Populaire
Je Participe 1968

Public Movement
Honor Guard 2013
National Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall,
Taipei



conclusive experiment concerned the deconstruction of artistic elites. Printmaking collectives are well represented, including the 1930s Mexico group Taller de Gráfica Popular, the insurreccional 1960s and the Atelier Populaire of Paris, and the Guerrilla Girls of 1980s New York. Attempts to hand art over to ordinary people, encouraged and documented by artists like Joseph Beuys, Piero Gilardi and Martha Rosler, make Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane's *Folk Archive*, 2005, seem merely sentimental.

But it is from the demise of Soviet communism that some of the most surprising work originates. Former Yugoslavia forms the basis for a display representing the Retroavantgarde, including the work of another Kazimir Malevich, whose neo-Suprematist paintings are all dated 1985, the year of his 'Last Futurist Exhibition 0.10' in Belgrade, reproducing the Russian Malevich's show of 1915. From Ljubljana, which in German is Laibach, came the band of that name, formed in the early 1980s and famed for their disturbing paramilitary uniforms and confrontational concerts, predicting the nationalistic break-up of the Federal Republic. From the same city, the IRWIN group has issued more than 14,000 of its own passports, many of which helped people escape from the civil wars. And from Sarajevo, Braco Dimitrijević foregrounds in his art the anonymous person in the street, his enormous monochrome image *Casual Passer-by I Met At 1.43PM, Venice*, 1976, that covers an entire wall.

More recently, the Russian, Marxist collective Chto Delat? (which translates as What Is to Be Done?, quoting Lenin) worked with Liverpool's radical bookshop News From Nowhere to create an installation of useful reading matter addressing the current political climate, as well as exhibiting their film *Partisan Songspiel: A Belgrade Story*, 2009, using Brechtian alienation techniques to examine the forced eviction of Roma families to make way for new commercial housing in the city. It sounds like an off-putting proposition but sustains attention because each of the four central character types – worker, Romany, lesbian, disabled war veteran – adopt a personal, eccentric dance to express their position in the drama, to be mocked by contemporary politicians and commented on by a chorus of partisan statues from the Second World War.

At the opposite extreme, perhaps, Christopher Kulendran Thomas, who sees contemporary art as the manifestation of global neoliberalism, buys works by emerging artists from his home country, Sri Lanka, where numerous 'white cube' galleries have sprung up in the economic revival that followed the suppression of the Tamil Tigers in 2009. Thomas then alters these works to suit European artistic preferences and sells them, donating his profits to create an Augusto Boal-inspired Forum Theatre for victims of Sri Lankan violence.

There is something of an overlap between some of the contemporary aspects of 'Art Turning Left' and **Radical Conservatism** at Manchester's Castlefield Gallery, which features more work by IRWIN, in this case based on Orthodox Christian icons. Curated by London-based artists Pil & Galia Kollektiv (Profile AM305), the show examines the radical possibilities of work stubbornly 'holding on to the past', to quote the curators, who were inspired to just do this by the career of another Yugoslav artist, Oscar Nemon. Once a participant in the Avant Garde, Nemon fled fascism in 1938 and made his name in the UK with sculptures of

David Mabb 'Announcer'

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establishment figures like Winston Churchill, Sigmund Freud, Field Marshal Montgomery and that key radical conservative, Margaret Thatcher, a bust of whom is owned by Conservative Central Office. Two studies for it, c1978, are included, one brutalist in style, plus a very different, sedate, finished model, manufactured by Wedgewood in 1988. Before this, Nemon had proposed a 'Temple of Universal Ethics' to be built at Kings Cross, and if the model shown here, from 1939, is anything to go by, it would have radically changed the London landscape long before the Gherkin. Like Tatlin's Tower, though, it was never built.

Another kind of building is explored by Chris Evans in his video *Company*, 2009, an example of one of the artist's collaborations with ambivalent subjects, in this case an Egyptian construction company engaged in developing luxury housing in the desert. These speculative developments are explained via carefully paced pieces to camera – by the company's CEO, Walid El Kafrawy – which seem like exercises in self-questioning. 'How', he wonders, 'do we find a new community?' Televised news coverage of two recent projects by the Tel Aviv-based 'performative research body', Public Movement, shares a sense of shock when uniformed symbols of power bend rules normally accepted by the public. *Honor Guard*, 2013, made during the fourth Asian Art Biennial, introduced a new state choreography to the military presence protecting the National Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, Taipei. Soldiers are shown freakishly flipping over their rifles, and one underperforming miscreant is ceremonially pushed over. Police and firefighters were used in *University Exercise*, 2010, to invade the University of Heidelberg, causing a near-riot; students are seen dividing into factions and, in one sound bite, someone comments, 'We're pack animals'.

Another art form normally associated with shock, however, contains profoundly orderly aspects: heavy metal music, as interpreted by the fanzine *Buried*, edited by Patrick Moran and published in hardback, lovingly hand printed in gothic fonts with blocks of print shaped like coffins. Issue 4 was launched at the gallery. That opening also featured a live performance of new music, sounding rather like medieval metal played on traditional instruments – hurdy-gurdies. Joseph Lewis builds these hand-cranked, droning machines, making a noise that evokes peasant dances and village anarchy in the EU. More performances, featuring Public Movement and Chris Evans, take place in Manchester on 31 January and 1 February.

If Malevich took painting to 'zero form' with *Black Square*, 1915, the Teeside artist **Deb Covell** frees paint itself from its conventional flat fate, placing it into a surprising three dimensional form, as demonstrated in her new exhibition 'Zero', a title consciously referencing the Russian Suprematist. Her technique uses thickly applied acrylic paint, curled or draped and eschewing any need for canvas or frames. Her six new works, all in black and white, some installed on the walls, and one, *Back to Front*, 2013, on the floor, brought the grey-painted space of Manchester's independent, subterranean Untitled Gallery to life in an entirely unexpected way. Another kind of left turn, perhaps. ■

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London Round-up 1

Chisenhale • Cubitt Gallery • Vilma Gold

There is a blissful state of profound enjoyment that one can glean from the consumption of contemporary art, whether stimulated by an intellectual or aesthetic engagement. Rarely do I find myself elevated to this state more readily than when lounging on a carpeted floor in a darkened room. It was in the Austrian pavilion at 2013's Venice Biennale that it came to me that the intensity of my reception to works of art is heightened in these circumstances due to some dormant childhood association with sitting cross-legged on the sitting-room floor, gazing up wide eyed at a screen. The significance of such regression presented itself to me in front of Mathias Poledna's *Imitation of Life*, 2013, because, of course, it spoke to me in my childhood's most fluent visual dialect: cartoons. (Admittedly, Anri Sala's French carpeted black box evoked similar emotions, but they were more visceral and less wistfully nostalgic.)

The same sensation occurred in front of **Jordan Wolfson's** *Raspberry Poser*, 2012, at Chisenhale Gallery. One of the most immaculate installations of projected artwork I have ever seen occupies the whole of the Chisenhale's gallery space. The work fills the space in a way so lavish as can only be achieved when all sense of necessity is abandoned – a monolithic projection screen splits the space in two, one side is the viewing space, the other is simply a darkened non-space. The floor is carpeted with an expensive-feeling pile and, as if this – combined with the loud and extremely precise sound system – wasn't enough to make any gallery-goer forget all sense of decorum and drop to the floor in a heap of childlike rapture, Wolfson (or perhaps those who paid for the carpet) have requested shoes to be abandoned prior to entry.

It is no accident that Wolfson propagates this sense of extreme comfort. Having rocked its audience to sleep, the work executes a violent assault on the senses, the soundtrack ranging from uncomfortably loud Beyoncé tracks to sweet ballads, and then sudden and absolute silence. The video, the third in a trilogy that also includes *Con Leche*, 2009, and *Animation, Masks*, 2011, follows the performances of two central protagonists: a red-headed cartoon boy and a live-action punk played by Wolfson himself. As with Wolfson's other works in the series, the combination of live action and animation is heartily discordant and exudes a sense of dreamlike psychedelia. The cartoon boy

Jordan Wolfson
Raspberry Poser 2012
video installation

