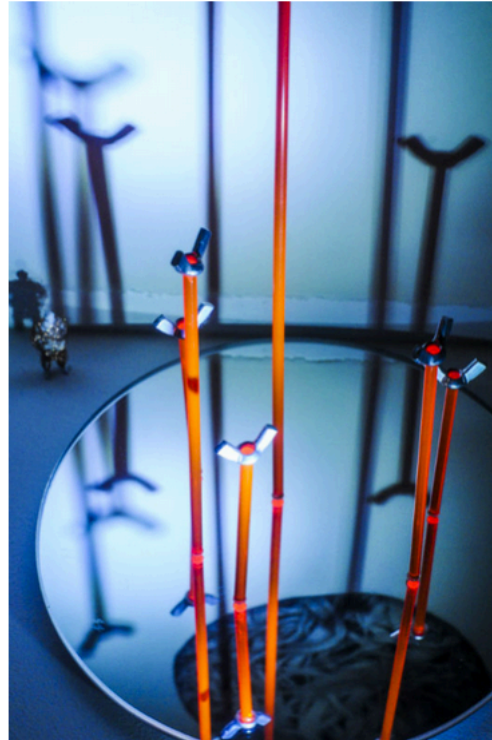
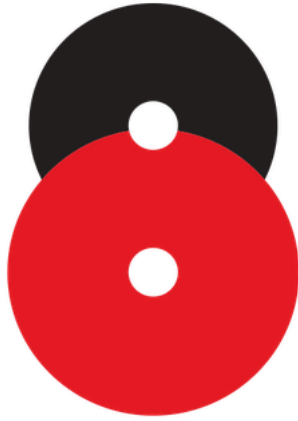


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### Review: 30 Years of the Future, Castlefield Gallery, Manchester

Posted on January 23, 2015 by Lauren Velvick

Online

Text by Tom Emery

*This feature is accompanied with images by Francesco Cuttitta, who is currently undertaking a photography placement exploring contemporary art and performance in Manchester.*

To celebrate their 30th year, Castlefield Gallery have done something unexpected. *30 Years of the Future* takes key figures from the gallery's past – artists, curators, writers, – who rather than contribute directly, have each been tasked with nominating an emerging artist who they believe to be someone to look out for in the future.

Coincidentally, Ikon in Birmingham are also marking a significant milestone, celebrating their 50th anniversary in their 2014/2015 season with the *Ikon 50* series of exhibitions and events. By way of contrast they are bringing artists such as Cornelia Parker, Yinka Shonibare, and Julian Opie back to the gallery. This is not necessarily a failure on their part, the group show *As Exciting As We Can Make It: Ikon in the 1980s* was a highlight of the summer, while an opportunity to see work from Cornelia Parker is always welcome. However, in spite of how well this approach has worked for Ikon, it is refreshing to see Castlefield Gallery approach a similar idea differently.

*30 Years of the Future* is perhaps the ideal way for the gallery to celebrate their own history. They have always championed emerging artists, and to make an exception now would be in contradiction to those ideals. In reality, the novel approach taken (established art-world figures nominating emerging artists) allows Castlefield to have the best of both worlds, gaining the gravitas of attaching names like Ryan Gander, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Bob and Roberta Smith to the exhibition.



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The relationship between the nominator and the nominee makes this exhibition particularly interesting, significantly affecting the way that the artists and artworks are perceived. Simply from a logistical standpoint, bringing fifteen artists together in such a small space, and without an overarching theme risks a chaotic, messy exhibition, not unlike a degree show. But these same factors also hint at the excitement these emerging artists must feel to have been included. For them, a nomination functions as a seal of approval from the art-establishment. The artist's names sit alongside those of their nominators, each becoming inseparable from the other.

This list of names is one of the first things apparent to the viewer, and listing the nominators alongside the nominees affects the way that you see the work. Almost instinctively, you look out for the artists nominated by figures that you are familiar with. You may be unaccustomed with the work of Josh Bitelli and Felix Melia, but the omnipresence of Hans Ulrich Obrist may colour your perception of their work.

However, the most important factor in the nominator/nominee relationship is that the fifteen nominators provide fifteen separate visions of the future, therefore while the artists may not exist independently from their nominators, they do exist independently from one another, and more importantly, so do the nominators. If the exhibition were curated by a jury of nominators working together, we might be offered a vision of the future, that suits the agenda of the jury. The 1997 Turner Prize had an all female shortlist (in response to the all-male shortlist in 1996), while last year year Glasgow School of Art nominees dominated. This is not inherently negative, but by its nature it is limiting, and in a show such as this that tasks itself with looking to the future, it is right that nominators work independently.

That being said, it is interesting to look for individual agendas. Why did our list of nominators make these nominations? There is a pattern of the artists acting as nominators, nominating artists whose work is somewhat similar to their own. Emily Speed nominates Jay Delves and, sure enough, we see an artwork that examines space through choreographed movement; Ryan Gander nominates Timothy Foxon, another artist who deals in artworks as punchlines.

*30 Years of the Future* manages to look backwards and forwards at the same time, demonstrating art's ever-present relationship with its own past. It will be fascinating to see whose vision of the future comes true, and where these artists will be in thirty years' time. We may find that some of these artists have turned the tables on their nominators, as critics fade from importance. It might seem quaint that JJ Charlesworth was ever in a position to lend his approval to an emerging artist, or Ryan Gander might be remembered as a pre-cursor to Timothy Foxton, in the way that Arshile Gorky is remembered as a pre-cursor to the more well known Abstract Expressionists. *30 Years of the Future* may look to both the past and the future, but the power-dynamic between the nominator and nominee shows us the present state-of-play, which is perhaps why it dominates the show.

*30 Years of the Future* continues at Castlefield Gallery until 1 February 2015

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