



The Naming of Things

1 September - 3 October 2021

Curated by Bryony Dawson

Artists: Sriwhana Spong, Charlie Godet Thomas, Jeanne Constantin, Sarah Tripp, Jessica Higgins, Lydia Davies, Bryony Dawson.

'What is it to summon something in your mind? To choose a word, then keep it hidden. That is what the body can do. Hide thought, then release it. That is what the body can do.'

- Sarah Tripp, *24 Stops*

What sort of desire is expressed by the act of naming? To own - to organise - to map - to preserve? Language doesn't only describe the world; it constructs it too. When we speak or write - when we assign names to our experiences - we reinvent and arrange the world according to the position and perspective of 'I'. But in doing so, do we not also invent ourselves?

The artists in this exhibition use writing as both tool and material within moving-image, sculpture and sound in order to interrogate the act of naming: its desires, textures, moods and spaces; but also its complex role in the performance and construction of selfhood. Engaging with quantum physics, 12th century mysticism and psychological space, these works invite questions about the authenticity and authority of a speaking subject, as well as the slipperiness of meaning when language leaves the body.

Sriwhana Spong's *A hook but no fish* (2017-18) centres around the esoteric language "received" by 12th century mystic Hildegard Von Bingen in order to question complex relations between naming and knowing, gender and authority. Hildegard's '*Lingua Ignota*' is riddled with puzzling gaps or omissions - and the film's narrator wonders what sort of arid, apocalyptic future world this language sought to describe. The film then jumps to a more contemporary case of unknowing: a woman struggling to identify her own body in a series of online photographs. In both narratives, intimacy, interiority and selfhood are projected outwards, only to become strange and unfamiliar. The film combines documentation, autobiography and fiction, with a score composed by musician Frances Libeau, from Aotearoa (New Zealand).

Sarah Tripp's practice incorporates writing, moving-image and live events. Drawing from psychoanalysis and literature, her recent works consider the status of strangers, gestures of resistance and modes of dialogue. *24 stops* (2013) is a sequence of 24 short films - one for each hour of the day. Each film begins by synchronising the sound and image of an everyday object used as a percussive instrument. This percussive gesture is then undone: the image remains but the sound is replaced with a voice linking the image to the mood of a given hour. Through this rhythmic pairing of tactile gesture and disembodied voice, thoughts and phrases take on the haptic quality of domestic objects; external things to be handled, touched, examined.

Lydia Davies likewise uses the voice as material to interrogate relationships between language and selfhood. Her works play on the temporal and perspectival modulations inherent in narrative, agitating the idea of self-continuity. In *Dog hairs* (2020), a voice recounts a series of interconnected vignettes of conversations, thoughts, and encounters. These segments are formed out of neglected souvenirs, debris, receptacles, cavities, and the embodied experiences of the narrator – a sideways glance, an object reached for at a stretch, the gravitational pull as they run down a slope. The pace of the voice drags and tightens against percussive and instrumental rhythms, and occasionally snags on a phrase in the flow of speech.

Jeanne Constantin's practice investigates abstract and intangible phenomena that are difficult to communicate in language. She describes an interest in 'the fragile relation between what is/is not, where each verifies the other's solidity and permeability'. *The Journey of a Lost Air Particle* (2019) draws from her research into quantum physics and the Mean Free Path: the average distance travelled by a moving particle between successive collisions. The precarious boots anthropomorphise an air particle anxious to avoid collision. In the accompanying booklet, a voice oscillates between desire and desperation as the particle schemes, panics, becomes lost in its quest, and at last, "gets back on its feet".

Desire and vulnerability are echoed in **Charlie Godet Thomas' Song of Innocence** (2018). A mostly vacant vitrine collects a thin layer of fragmented, illegible text like discarded off-cuts. The title nods towards William Blake's collection of illustrated poems, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, (1789) where 'Innocence' describes the naive state of childhood prior to the corruption of 'Experience'. Godet Thomas' practice explores connections between visual art and literature, the act of writing, the autobiographical, the tragic and the humorous. With sculptural work often performing gestures of holding and collapse alongside slapstick humour and wordplay, he engages not only the spatial possibility of language, but also its absences, failures and entropy.

Jessica Higgins uses (auto)biography, acts of fictioning, and improvisation as methods to develop live performances and texts. Often, these address an emergent situation, an event which fails to arrive, or 'a gesture at the porous boundary between perception and presentation.' Constructed from drawings cut in clear perspex and shop-bought aerial antenna parts, her sculptural series *la* (2021) notates scrawled variations of sonic utterances or sung sounds that slip the grasp of language. *la* takes as its title the ubiquitous syllable in the Solfège, or "moveable-do" system (*do re mi fa sol la...*) as well as the archaic exclamation "la", meaning: "oh look!"

Bryony Dawson's recent work investigates modes of translation, questions of authenticity and performativity in language. In *The person recognisable as me* (2021), Dawson recreates a scene she witnessed through a psychoanalyst's window during a conversation in which, overly conscious of therapy clichés, all attempts at authentic expression felt like a disingenuous performance. By combining and manipulating various screenshots from Google images searches, Dawson has reconstructed the window scene from memory. This process parallels an initial attempt to record the encounter in writing, where linguistic rules and aesthetic choices began to destabilise her memory, revealing frictions between her desire to create a 'faithful' translation and surrendering to the constraints of the medium.

The Naming of Things was selected from proposals submitted by Castlefield Gallery Associates by guest selector, artist Ryan Gander OBE and Castlefield Gallery's Curator & Deputy Director, Matthew Pendergast.

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