# frieze

CONTEMPORARY ART AND CULTURE

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**GOSHKA MACUGA**
*Disobedient Curiosity*
**SOPHIA AL-MARIA**
*'The present is less than dust.'*
**CATHERINE OPIE** *Artist Project*
**TRACEY ROSE** *Chaos Queen*

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*Race, Sexuality, Photography*
*Artists & Ceramics*

UK £6.95 US $12 €10

1

UK

## Julie Born Schwartz

### UNION PACIFIC, LONDON

With my ear to the wall, I tilt into the small sound of *Poraset 6 Act 1* (all works 2016) playing from a round speaker set into the ground-floor gallery at Union Pacific. The composition is part of *Elephant Man* (2013), by the Danish composer Louise Alenius, which also forms the soundtrack to *The Invisible Voice*, Julie Born Schwartz's 14-minute video work, projected in the basement. The soundtrack's thumping cello and pizzicato violin come crashing up the stairs, making it difficult to listen to *Poraset 6 Act 1* without my attention being divided between the two levels of sound and space.

Not listed as a work is the vinyl that covers the entirety of the large, street-level window, saturating the room with a rich blue light. Blue has, traditionally, been the colour of backstage theatre lighting. Two bronze chandeliers from Schwartz's personal archives interrupt the technician's realm with their dusty front-of-house glamour. On the balustrade, a small library of antiquarian books on loan from The Court Theatre in Copenhagen, alternatively marks the space as a rehearsal room or prop store.

At the bottom of the stairs, a thick curtain gives way to the darkness of the basement. Despite the brightness of the video, which flashes details of the theatre after hours against one long wall – dressing rooms, trap rooms, a dried rose dangling from the light flex – visibility is almost zero. 'No one must notice you,' says a voice. 'Then you are invisible,' says another.

The voices in the video are those of theatrical prompters – professional readers positioned between the actors and the audience and suspended above the stage, or hidden among scenery or in boxes built into the stage floor. 'If you were in the audience you would see a rock,' explains one prompter in voice-over. Interestingly, another describes the trust shared by actor and prompter as 'rock solid' as, onscreen, the camera rests on a set painting in which a volcano erupts. Another compares the decline of the prompting profession with the environmental damage caused by diverting a river. Voice after voice describes a landscape of emotional dependency, the tricky terrain between memory and action, internal and external performances, human and non-human worlds.

Coincidences of language and image are complicated by the film's interest in language as music. One prompter lists the languages he has worked in – German, English, Czech, Russian – adding that he can only 'parrot' the latter, marking the script with phonetic approximations. The prompters' spoken Danish is relayed in English subtitles. For viewers not fluent in Danish, the subtitles are to be taken on trust, their transparency tested when a typo intrudes: 'Becausse then you are invisible.' This is all the more fascinating for appearing in a work that examines human error as an anticipated part of the performance, an affirmation of a humane interdependency. In the film's final scene, we see the prompter's hand – the only moment in which a body is visible – marking her script. 'I write with small letters,' she explains; a pause and she laughs: 'I have misspelled.' The whirr of the prompter's mechanical eraser resonates beyond the cut to black.

The only time the interviewer's voice is heard, it is prompting a prompter who searches helplessly for a word. 'Magic?' the interviewer suggests, the word appearing in the centre of the screen, replacing an image of a caterpillar suspended by an invisible thread, which recalls the prompters hanging in harnesses from the rafters. This moment of brief departure from the theatre's interior also gestures towards structures of support hidden within communities and personal relationships, the lifelines that bind us together in responsibility, but also in love. 'Magic!' the prompter immediately replies.

HOLLY CORFIELD CARR

UK

## Playing by the Rules

### THE ROYAL STANDARD, LIVERPOOL

From street signs to unspoken codes of conduct, rules are everywhere. 'Playing by the Rules' at The Royal Standard continues curator Tom Emery's exploration, seen in last year's 'An Arbitrary Exhibition' at TOAST in Manchester, of the factors that determine how decisions get made.

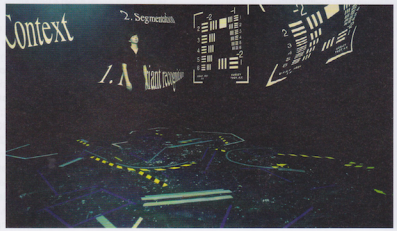
The show opens with Ana Hjort Guttu's *Freedom Requires Free People* (2011), a film following eight-year-old Jens, who has a problem with his school rules ('Nothing that is fun is allowed here') and the unthinking way they are obeyed by others. He complains that no one listens to his objections; that one of the rules is to follow the rules; and that another is 'Don't get mad' – leaving little recourse to debate or resistance. The film closes with Jens acknowledging that he only feels free when alone, suggesting a conflict between the benefits of independence and those of social interaction that is not confined to childhood.

Andy Holden presents an element of his five-year project, *Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape* (2011–16), which will conclude with the live-streaming of a final lecture on the subject from Glasgow International in April. Here, a wall text outlines the principles of cartoon physics, appropriated from the 1980 *Esquire* article 'O'Donnell's Laws of Cartoon Motion': '1. Any body suspended in space will remain in space until made aware of its situation.' Each of the ten laws is illustrated by a compilation of animated clips. (Wiley Coyete runs off the edge of a cliff, treading thin air until he looks down and then … uh oh!) By categorizing cartoon gestures, Holden illustrates their role in helping children make sense of their surroundings: much of their humour derives from breaking the rules of the real world.

Newly commissioned conceptual works by Manchester-based artists Peter Sweetman and Carly Bainbridge transgress rules of language and ownership respectively. Bainbridge's *i* (2016) reconfigures an existing work by Sweetman from 'An Arbitrary Exhibition' into a black wall relief, of which she is the sole credited author. *i* bears no resemblance to Bainbridge's original piece, despite being made from it, questioning the persistence of an object in an inverse of Plutarch's Theseus Paradox. Sweetman's moving-image work *Fires, Shipwrecks, Catastrophes* (2016) derives from another paradox: Roland Barthes's description of the photograph as 'a message without a code'. The video shows Sweetman's studio covered in CAPTCHA-style text; a performer interacts with the distorted forms, using gesture to suggest images of fires, sunsets and shipwrecks. Described as a 'visual essay', it's an exercise in free association with ideas communicated then obfuscated.

Also newly commissioned is the first in Simeon Barclay's 'Gatefold Series: I Wish I Knew Then What I Know Now' (2016). The 'gatefold' comprises three blue panels, referring formally to flaps in record sleeves or plush magazines such as *Vogue*, which Barclay has long been obsessed by. To a young man growing up in Huddersfield, *Vogue* offered both aspirational glimpses into luxury living and an awareness of his distance from them. The left panel shows a screen shot of Diego Maradona's hand ball in the 1986 football World Cup; the right, a brass plaque engraved with a hand; and, in the middle, the faintest written word, 'SLIGHT'. Beyond the infamous rule-breaking incident, that World Cup match, only years after the Falklands War, can be read as a prompt to consider the fall of empire and ideas of national identity and belonging. This conflation of distinct cultural spheres – fashion, football, politics, combined with self-consciously minimalist formal references – results in work that is deliberately difficult to pin down. In truth, as in Hjort Guttu's film, this show is most interesting when it is not about the rules, but breaking them.

ELEANOR CLAYTON

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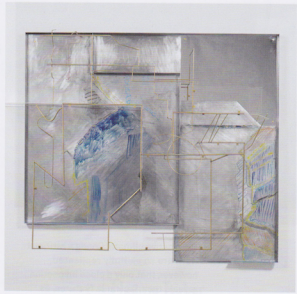

3

UK

## Sara Barker

### THE FRUITMARKET GALLERY, EDINBURGH

Sara Barker's sculptures are mathematical objects plotted along vertical and horizontal lines, but they are also lean acrobats: poised female bodies that flex against the gallery walls. A solo exhibition of 18 works at Edinburgh's The Fruitmarket Gallery demonstrates the artist's ongoing enquiry into the body as a room and the boundaries of personal space. Barker often cites modernist literature as the starting point for her sculptures – in particular the writing of Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, both masters of the psychological interior. As Woolf famously argued, a room of one's own is an integral condition for creative freedom – not only as a metaphor for interiority or a site for epiphany but, more importantly, as a private domain, and one she demonstrated was rarely available to women.

'CHANGE-THE-SETTING' is organized across two floors, which Barker employs as separate 'acts'. The first is populated by withdrawn, brooding figures that shadow the walls, often turning inwards. *Sampler* (2013), for example, is a crouching figure made of folded steel rods and shreds of aluminium pegged back together. It's akin to a ragged arte povera assembly and flaunts its bolts, buckles and scuffs with a scavenger's wry grin. Meanwhile, *Woman at the Window* (2012), also drawn with strips of aluminium, recalls a skinny ballerina, standing upright at human height and frisking the floor with two silver slippers. These sculptures begin as paintings: Barker cuts into the painted metal sheets until only slivers of it are left, glimpses of silver and blue brushmarks. These figures seem to be on brink of something, but it's hard to say exactly what. Are they high-modernist ballerinas stepping out onto the stage or secretive writers pulling down the blinds? Are they portraits, I wonder, of Woolf?

Alongside the figures, Barker displays a set of three light-boxes (all 2016), which can be read as self-contained rooms or private spaces of work. They are small, staged habitats sunk into the gallery walls, as in a reptile house. The warm lairs are decorated with misty green and burnt umber and sealed behind Perspex windows. In one chamber, wire has taken root and sprouts a spiky, secret alphabet, as if a language is incubating.

Another set of hanging aluminium trays (all 2016) is protected by hooks and flicks of brass wire. But peer between the spikes and you will see a painted interior – a living room emerging from the unprimed metal and its darkroom of greys. There's a mulberry settee and watery teal carpet redolent of an exquisite impressionist-era parlour in which a woman sits by the window. It's the most explicit figure Barker offers – no longer a silhouette with posed slippers, but a painted form. Its title, *The Work We Do While We Wait* (2016), suggests that work, at least in this room, is a lingering moment of reflection: the mind, as much as the room, is a space of shelter and privacy.

Upstairs, Barker's sculptures have grown in size and prowess, as if nurtured by the quiet parlours below. *Metamorphosis of Friends* (2016), a freestanding sculpture that no longer needs the wall, dangles curling letters and ciphers. In another piece, *Film of Dust on Ruins* (2016), translucent paintings float like apparitions in mid-air, held aloft by offshoots of wire. Most strikingly of all, *The Letters F&M Are Characters* (2016) is a large aluminium sheet, this time left whole, which offers up its painted surface without reserve. As the exhibition's title suggests, there's been a change of setting, a departure from the room, as Barker dispenses with the grid and flexes a language of her own.

IZABELLA SCOTT

1
Julie Born Schwartz
*The Invisible Voice*, 2016,
HD video still

2
Peter Sweetman
*Fires, Shipwrecks, Catastrophes*,
2016, video still

3
Sara Barker
*Sea Heaves in a Glass*, 2015,
brass rod, folded aluminium sheet,
Perspex, automotive paint,
115 × 140 × 22 cm