

Art

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Interviewed by Martin Herbert

Art Criticism

Mark Prince

Art Education

Peter Suchin

Beatrice Gibson

Profiled by Christopher Townsend



Nuppen's film, the 106-year-old pianist and camp survivor Alice Sommer Herz inspiringly discusses the role classical music has played in her life as a survival strategy and a means of richness. However, while Nuppen's film is a portrait of its protagonist, Gordon's is a self-portrait.

Aside from the fact that the idea for Gordon's film apparently evolved from an initial invitation from his partner to travel with her and the two musicians, one of whom, Shiloah, is her ex-husband, to the concert in Warsaw, *Straight to Hell; No Way Back*, 2011, compounds the autobiographical strains of *k.364*. This mixed-media installation comprises an elaborate museum-like chest of drawers in which tussles between life and death are staged using mirrors and other props, the surrounding walls self-consciously covered with postcards and magazine cut-outs – Gordon's gallery of influences – as well as copies of his birth certificate and other ephemera. Gordon's fascination with hysterical masculinity emerges from this display: two of the many relevant pictures that come to mind are of Ian Curtis and Freddie Mercury, both of whose masculinity was effeminised by bodily contortions, the epileptic fits of the former, the hyperbolic performances of virility of the latter.

One of the disjunctions between the single-channel edit and the installation edit exemplifies Gordon's interest. In the single-channel version, Shiloah recounts how Levitan got away with wearing long hair during military service, the camera framing Levitan laughing hysterically. In the installation, the conversation is edited out and Levitan's laughter, which here is unexplained and silent, ruptures his looming face into a monstrous grimace that testifies to a bodily delirium equally tortuous or pleasurable. What ultimately captivated me as a spectator were the paroxysms of the musician's bodies that transformed masculinity into a delirious intoxicated fluidity in which body parts, both human and mechanical, flowed into and out of one another in a baroque wave directed by the female conductor's magical wand. ■

MARIA WALSH lectures at Chelsea College of Art & Design.

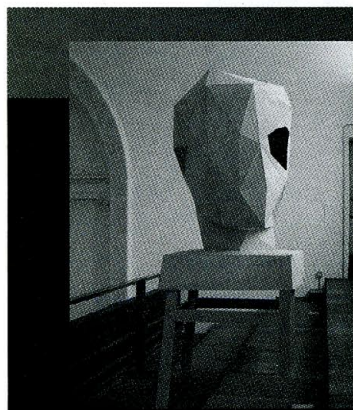
Lindsay Seers: It has to be this way²

Baltic Gateshead 21 February to 12 June

Lindsay Seers's new exhibition reflecting on her stepsister Christine's mysterious disappearance ten years ago doesn't feel as though it has to be this way. On the contrary, 'it' (Christine's disappearance) feels like one of those events about which there can never be one definitive account. Initially therefore the title seems ironic. The first part is a 22-minute looped film in a blacked-out corner of the darkened main room which you reach by climbing up some stairs. The artist's elderly, gravelly voiced mother muses guiltily, regretfully and sometimes angrily on how she came to abandon Lindsay and Christine when they were young for a man who turned out to be a diamond smuggler in Ghana, how she never really loved Christine and how these two things are somehow connected to the horror of the African slave trade, traces of which can still be found on the Gold Coast. The images tally with her words although not always very obviously. Ancient snaps of Christine, the artist, her mother and her stepfather take their place alongside footage of a solitary, female figure in a historic colonial soldier's uniform walking around the ramparts of an ancient slavers' fort, malign-looking vultures, a man sweeping a Ghanaian street by night, happy times on the beach, insects scurrying across the sand, crocodiles, an aeroplane, a pet chimpanzee and, sometimes in computer-graphics form, a diamond.

The second part is a film on a TV monitor in another equally dark room. The focus here is a bit different; you learn about such things as the interest that Christine and her father took in the occult when they were in Africa, Christine's fixation with her strange, brilliant, elusive namesake Queen Christina of Sweden, and the artist's penchant for dressing up in a specially made 17th-century soldier's uniform which had a hidden camera sewn into the hat. It is also different in that it is documentary in style; people are labelled when they first appear and speakers include a calm, articulate woman labelled as the artist's 'friend'. This makes it seem somehow intrinsically more likely to provide useful information, particularly about what is clearly the main matter at hand – namely, what happened to Christine.

Nevertheless, gradually it becomes evident that however informative in various ways this second film is, it is not going to help with the big issue. So the next step seems to be to read one of the copies of the 175-page book which Seers has left



Toby Ziegler The Alienation of Objects

8 April – 19 June 2011

Brian Griffin The Black Country

8 April – 19 June 2011

Toby Ziegler, *The Alienation of Objects*, 2010. Photo: Stephanie White. Courtesy Zabludovski Collection, Simon Lee Gallery, London; and Max Hetzler, Berlin.

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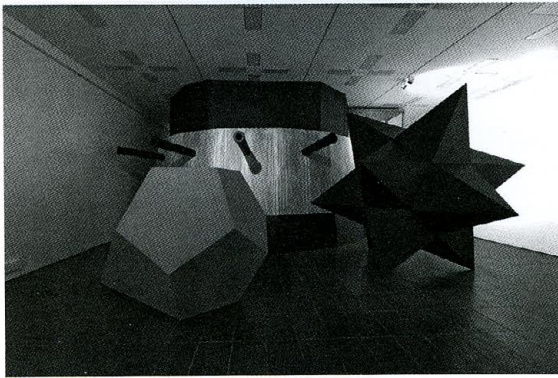


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Michael Fortune

PEER London 9 February to 2 April

Lindsay Seers
It has to be this way?
2010 installation view

for visitors to take. *It has to be this way?* the 'novella' is full of extra bits and pieces and very readable: excerpts from notes, letters and an unpublished novel written by a variety of people around Christine, including Seers herself, illustrated by grey, often enigmatic WG Sebald-type photographs. However, what happened to Christine remains a mystery.

Viewing the two films and reading the novella takes considerable time. Nevertheless, I suspect there are those like me who stay the course because of the intrinsic interest of much of the material; I for one, for instance, never knew that Sweden possessed an African slave colony in the 17th century. There is also the looming presence of three huge MDF structures: a ten-point black star (the black star of Ghana), a pink diamond and a slavers' fort complete with cannons – 3D realisations of key elements that appear in the films. These sinister objects are strangely intriguing; it is hard not to feel more and more drawn into the tragic, spooked, Jean Rhys-ish world of Seers and her family.

Up to a point, that is. As you would expect of any artwork by Seers, there is also a Brechtian aspect to the exhibition. For example, the first film is projected, not vertically in normal fashion, but as a monocular, telescope-like image on the ground which you are obliged to look down on from above from a balcony – think of the 18th-century camera obscura beside Edinburgh Castle. Along with offering a gripping, emotionally charged 'human' story, therefore, *It has to be this way?* also offers ample opportunity to coolly inspect the difficult, sometimes traumatic process of sorting out how memory and projection help to shape our understanding of the past. ■

PAUL USHERWOOD is an artist and critic based in Newcastle.

This exhibition of single- and multi-channel video works patches together images and myths from Michael Fortune's home in rural County Wexford, south-east Ireland. Through the presentation of family life and rituals both personal and more general to that region, Fortune documents the social ecology of his home. This occasionally provokes discomfort at the intimacy of his work but, more frequently, sheer boredom at the tedium of viewing what are essentially someone else's home videos. Primarily, this exhibition highlights the inherent problem of showing participatory work without context in a white cube. Produced over months and even years in close collaboration with his family and extended community, Fortune is capable here only of imaging a slim representation of what must be a complex, long-term social process. One might argue that these videos merely present a chance for voyeurism, with Fortune capitalising on the unfamiliar specificity of his homely aesthetic, all knick-knacks and trinkets lining the shelves. However, in knowing that this work is born out of more than a shallow adoption of community as subject, to lapse into such criticism would be crass. Ultimately, this presentation at PEER raises the question of why we as viewers are potentially interested in the minutiae of someone else's family, and what meaning this work can generate outside the boundaries of the site which hosted its production.

Hunter Gatherer, 2007, begins with a shot of a huge pile of food, not yet unpacked from carrier bags, weighing down on a kitchen table. Younger and older members of the family pitch in to labour at the task of packing away the tins, vegetables and enormous frozen chickens. Shots of a wobbling Pepsi-Cola can tower and a cat emerging from behind a stack of teacups slice through the repetitive domesticity of the film. *Hunter Gatherer* overwhelmingly reminded me of the physical sensation of being a child and unpacking shopping, hungrily waiting for the chore's completion; inevitably, the film will jog similar memories for many. However, this mnemonic provocation at the heart of the film results in a reductive end point incapable of generating further meaning beyond the importing of one's own nostalgia.

The Sinnott Horde, 2008, takes a fisherman, Toss Sinnott, as its subject. The fixed-frame video documents Sinnott's scavenging and recycling of Coca-Cola drums into receptacles for capturing

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