

Collyer Bristow

GALLERY

StrangeLands

Exhibition 22 June to 4 October 2017

Collyer Bristow Gallery, 4 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4TF

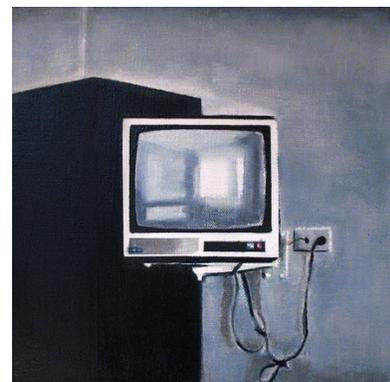
Alan Baker, Richard Baker, Michael Calver, Ben Cove, Emma Cousin, Nick Dawes, Cristina De Middel, Amanda Doran, Tamara Dubnyckyj, Richard Ducker, Gibson / Martelli, Justin Hibbs, Richard Perry, Alison Pilkington, Freddie Robins, Nicolas Ruston, Wendy Saunders, Dylan Shipton, John Stark, Joan Sugrue, Kelly Sweeney, Mollie Tearne and Joanna Whittle

Collyer Bristow presents StrangeLands Curated by Rosalind Davis

*These are extraordinary times.*¹

Of unanchored worlds, ruptured spaces
Fabricated and dislocated places
Alternative languages, signs and systems
Confusions of reality and fictions.
Here are the dispossessed and the reinvented
The unfathomable, the inexplicable
The vampyres, visitors and hoodlums.

These are StrangeLands.



Images left-right: Ad-Lib Ben Cove, Afronauts Cristina de Middel and An Instant Longer, Richard Baker

StrangeLands opens with the story of the *Afronauts* depicted by **Cristina de Middel** of a reimagining of the true story of a Zambian science teacher named Edvard Makuka who in 1964 decided to train the first African crew to travel to the moon. His plan was to use an aluminium rocket to send a woman, two cats and a missionary into Space. First the moon, then Mars, using a catapult system. He founded the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Astronomical Research to start training his Afronauts at his

¹ US journalist Dan Rather's Facebook post of 22 January 2017 currently has over 220k shares and 21k comments.

headquarters. Other landings are evidenced by **Richard Ducker's** abstract, meteorite-like sculptures suggesting an anthropomorphised alien form; staged pre-CGI props of displacement, desire and a loss of confidence in the present. Illusions continue in **Gibson / Martelli's** world of virtual reality — their piece '*Golem (mudman)*' refers to the ancient Jewish mythical creature, magically animated from clay, a digital image compiled from hundreds of screenshots created by 3d software, emerging from the process of moulding an avatar. '*Golem*' exists somewhere between a figure and a landscape.

Ben Cove's practice is grounded in a different kind of mythology; that of Modernist practices. Questioning of singular positioning, his work examines the interrelationship and interdependence between the object and the image, physicality and ideology, abstraction and representation, brashness and sobriety, construction and collapse. The language of high Modernist Abstraction continues in **Nick Dawes'** work: he appropriates colour and text from the Highway Code. Referring to the reality of today's world where words and images are constantly in transit, Dawes questions the allegiance between pure fact and its displacement, collapsing the relationship between image and text, while simultaneously enabling content and the historical languages of the medium to reconfigure it inventively.

Justin Hibbs' recent works *Dis-united States* investigates the ruptures of distorted and fractured spaces. Hibbs took as a starting point The Guardian newspaper's red striped graphics accompanying its coverage the day after the US election in 2017. Reconfiguring these motifs on to antique 18th century paper references a dislocation in time representing a glitched and unrecognisable future. Introducing ideas of illusion and the blurring of 2 and 3-dimensional realms, **Richard Perry's** sculptures look at the possibility of the object as both a factual and an implied presence. **Dylan Shipton's** vision is of an idealized, if dilapidated, world - his 'Tower' piece is a glimpse at a new society which is restricted neither by aesthetics, nor by political and social values. Made from remnants and left-overs, it proposes a provisional and humanistic world view.

Freddie Robins' works investigate the pertinent contemporary issues of the domestic and gender and express the human condition - themes of violence, fear, pain and loss are manifest. A sense of violence is prevalent in **Michael Calver's** works which are recollections of both real and imagined dystopian events in urban spaces, in which at any time, in any place, disaster can leap upon us. **Emma Cousin's** painting *Hybrid 'plays with ideas of vulnerability and questioning one's sense of self and autonomy. Elements of human, animalistic and inanimate features overwhelm the canvas, and the viewer is left wondering about what kind of 'hybrid' we are.'*²

In **Joan Sugrue's** work, source material is constantly being reassembled and dissembled. Figures in her pieces, drawn from art history, are ambiguous and somewhat disguised. Disguises abide in **Kelly Sweeney's** sculpture *The Hoodlums* sitting between the identifiable archetype and the strangely unfamiliar. The androgynous misfits lurk with a sense of not belonging whilst **John Stark's** paintings present a world of magical realism. Inflected with the suggestion of paranormal phenomena, Stark's works often reflect an ill-fated world struggling with the dissonance of spirituality, materiality, religion and science. **Joanna Whittle's** paintings contain imagined or incongruous elements from the past or present. They become hallucinatory - lost islands found between places; created from land masses which break away and become illusory like memories, floating and segregated, 'other' from their context. They are lost civilisations, although of small places, insignificant, ciphers of a larger world. *Cinnamon Gardens* is a place in Sri Lanka that artist **Mollie Tearne** has never visited but only knows through images and ephemera. Her collaged prints are created through everyday objects and found photographs to explore the hidden histories within an undisclosed location. Tearne investigates memory and migration with a particular focus on the people and objects around her. Each work

² Review by Issey Scott

offers us glimpses into a world where belief and artefact are closely linked. They express a multi-layered collision of cultures, histories of unknown people, and a strong sense of place, both familiar and strangely unreachable.

Wendy Saunders' painting of female heads without features provoke a deeper intuitive response that goes beyond simple interpretation. Within these featureless faces one instinctively 'reads' them, from fleeting impressions and the subtle combination of elements. **Alan Baker's** intricate drawings of temporary sculptures are drawn with the idea that they are intended to trap or snare an animal which could of course, include a human. Equally uncanny are **Alison Pilkington's** painting of the Resurrection, within which Pilkington looks at idea of the psychological self and how it might be invented and reinvented and how these familiar yet comic images have the potential to disturb or disorientate. Amanda Doran's work is based around her personal interest in and understanding of subcultures and how we choose to identify and portray ourselves as individuals.

Light and light sources, the passing of time, and the altering of real space are recurring themes within **Tamara Dubnycky's** works. Places on the edge are often scene setters; there is evidence of a real place, but in which veils, shields or night time light obscure, reinvent and cancel out time. In the context of StrangeLands, Dubnycky's *Furnace* indicates a more sinister form of redaction of both humans and truths.

Nicolas Ruston is fascinated by the way in which mass media images bleed into our constructions of reality, questioning concepts such as beauty, truth and desire. *The End* is a collaborative project that examines the notion of 'The End' appropriating the look and feel of stills from movie title sequences - the resultant fifteen paintings provoked short fictions by fifteen writers. **Richard Baker's** paintings investigate the hidden human histories behind seemingly insignificant objects. Often ignored, these objects bear witness to human sensuous activity, be it remembered, lived, forgotten or mythologised. *An Instant Longer* depicts a screen from which we witness a lens [held] to the world, to its alternative and bending realities and a surveillance of alternative facts..... these are StrangeLands.

General Opening Times

Monday – Friday 9am-5pm. To visit the exhibition, please call reception at Collyer Bristow in advance:
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7242 7363

Artists Biographies can be found [here](#).

Editors notes: For more information on the artists or specific works in this exhibition please contact the curator Rosalind Davis, Tel: 07813 076 251 | rosalind.davis@network.rca.ac.uk

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Collyer Bristow Gallery is a bespoke gallery space with a dynamic exhibition programme. Collyer Bristow LLP is a leading UK law firm with offices in London and Geneva. The firm provides business and personal legal advice to a wide range of clients both in the UK and internationally. Collyer Bristow has been championing emerging talent in contemporary art for almost thirty years.

Rosalind Davis is an artist-curator and a graduate of The Royal College of Art (2005) and Chelsea College of Art (2003). She was appointed permanent Curator at Collyer Bristow Gallery in Summer 2016 and all her exhibitions there have been reviewed by Art Top 10; '*Cracking Show. Superb Artists. Brilliantly curated.*' Davis has co-directed and developed two innovative artists' educational, membership and exhibition arts

organizations; Zeitgeist Arts Projects (ZAP 2012-15) and Core Gallery (2009-11,) based in South East London. Previous co-curatorial projects have been at Standpoint Gallery, Arthouse1, Geddes Gallery and with ZAP at Bond House Gallery (ASC).

Davis is co-author of '*What they didn't teach you at art school*' commissioned by Octopus Books which is internationally distributed across the world and has written a number of articles for a-n and other arts publications. She lectures at universities, galleries and organisations across the country including the RCA, ICA, Camden Arts Centre. University of the Arts and for Artquest. She was also an Ambassador and curatorial mentor for UK Young Artists. (2016) www.Rosalinddavis.co.uk

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