

Larry Achiampong | Gabriele Beveridge | Cecilia Bonilla | Sasha Bowles | Stephen Cooper
Ben Cove | Tim Ellis | Jo Israel | Bohyeon Bona Kim | John Stezaker | Kate Street
Sarah Kate Wilson | Ruth van Beek

Blyth Gallery, Imperial College, London

22nd September - 27th October | Mon – Fri (10am – 5pm)

Curated by Stephen Cooper & Kate Street

Press Release

AFTER_image takes its cue from the inflection whereby an image continues to appear within the eyes after exposure to the original. It is a physiological reaction, however it can also be viewed as a psychological one where the image lingers within the mind's eye. What is it about a certain image that stays with us, or resonates over and above itself? This exhibition brings together thirteen multidisciplinary artists who carefully select and reappropriate imagery from the visual chaos of global culture. Identifying with, and understanding, the potential for subversion within each frame. Through varying means of disruption, manipulation, construction and dissection, they restage images to create new dialogues or to focus our attention.

Appropriation and sampling of found imagery is at once a break with traditional forms of 'making' and paradoxically a now widely accepted contemporary process within art practices. Adopted in the 'synthetic' era through Picasso and Braque in their attempts to assemble disparate elements into a coherent whole, collage was the perfect vehicle for challenging established formats and ideologies around image making. It heralded a new modern approach to art utilising fragments of the world to formulate a commentary on it, rather than replicating it through a singular perspective. In his 1977 essay *The Death of the Author*, Roland Barthes puts forth the suggestion that writing eliminates all individual voice and point of origin because it happens within a creative process that is the practice of signification itself. It's true origin is its form; therefore, the creator is more like a craftsman, who is skilled within this means rather than being the point of origin. Text, he argues, is composed of multiple writings brought into dialogue with one another and by refusing a singular 'author' there is a denial of assigning an ultimate reading, and instead we have a fluid set of meanings. But can this also be applied to contemporary art practice?

This genealogy of thought is more recently reinforced by Nicholas Bourriaud in his 2002 essay *Postproduction*, where he suggests that the modern day artist could be considered more as a DJ with their sampling of detritus from modern life, and raises the point that the quality of a work depends on the trajectory it describes in the cultural landscape. It constructs a linkage between forms, signs, and images (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 40). This is what binds the participating artists in *AFTER_image* – their awareness of the potentials within imagery when coupled, layered, punctured, assembled or represented. Within their varying fields of research comes a raft of differing sources – from Achiampong's family archive that speaks from an intimate perspective about global/social issues of race and prejudice, through to Beveridge's sun-faded hair salon advertisements that talk of the intimate care and how we manufacture ourselves to be represented publicly. These polemics of public/personal criss-cross through the exhibition and it is the linkage through construction and juxtaposition that is at the core of their concerns. In essence they become the curator within their own creative processes. Central to the show is the physical act of making in its various forms alongside the exploration of imagery – its origins, inherent associations and its afterlife in light of new meanings brought forth.

Bourriaud, N. (2002) *Postproduction*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg
Mitchell, W. J. T. (2005) *What do Pictures Want?* Chicago: The University of Chicago
Barthes, R. (1977) *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana

Participating Artists

Larry Achiampong

Achiampong intersects imagery from social, historical and personal archives with a postcolonial perspective to reveal racial stereotypes and social hierarchies. His *Glyth* series of works utilises inherited photographs from his own family archive, that are digitally altered using his own stylized sticker motif of golliwog descent, which he refers to as 'Cloudface'. This level of dark humour and violence creates a rupture on what is at once an intimate and collective family memory, thus revealing a set of complex narratives around identity, race and class. With the images from this body of work being instantly dated to his childhood, our collective memory calls forth the hostilities in 1980's Britain towards 'otherness'. For *After_image*, Achiampong has revisited his *Glyth* series and produced a one-off hand manipulated print to respond to the themes within the exhibition.

www.larryachiampong.co.uk

@larryachiampong

Gabriele Beveridge

Beveridge's imagery comes directly from sites of commerce, notably sun-faded hair salon advertisements. The idea of the beauty 'industry' and how we prepare and present our bodies lays at the heart of her photographic and sculptural practice. Polished and buffed women stare into the far distance in a catatonic state, as if lost in their own perfection or dream life of consumer culture. The distracted model is then unwittingly coupled with heavy, yet elegant, counter objects such as geode rocks, hot folded glass and shop fittings; the objects functioning as accessories, much in the way that we adorn and display ourselves. We the viewer; the desiring machine.

www.gabrielebeveridge.com

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Bohyeon Bona Kim

Kim explores the framework of painting through sculptural intervention, using found scientific imagery and data; understood by some and curiously indecipherable to many. Employing found objects and digital images woven into sprawling installations, anthropomorphic and surreal qualities emerge. Probing the relation between object and subject, Kim's practice is centred on deconstructing layers of form, colour, shape and texture, agitating the materiality of surface. Being part of the internet generation, she seamlessly explores the relationship between digital phenomena and ecosystems, combining both a futuristic and archival approach to synthesizing and presenting information. Kim aims to seek out the elegance of anxiety, or excitement through the tropes of experimentation and pataphysics, examining and speculating on the dialectical relation between object and subject. For *AFTER_image* Kim has taken over the cabinets within the gallery to present us with an alternative set of propositions to factual display.

www.Oxy00xxyy.com

@bona_bohyeonkim

Cecilia Bonilla

Bonilla's multidisciplinary practice often appropriates mass-produced 'seductive' imagery from sources such as fashion magazines, product catalogues and the internet. Taking this existing imagery, she subverts its original meaning through subtle alterations or amendments which reconfigure, pervert and dismantle the original image source. Her sculptures and installations follow the same subtle approach; playfully, yet seriously, she creates ephemeral constructions, often combining discarded domestic material with 'randomly' selected objects. Throughout her work, themes of domesticity, the ideals of beauty, 'life-style', and other social constructs are questioned, corrupted and undermined through minimal, yet skilful modification and assemblage.

www.ceciliabonilla.com

@ceciliabonilla_studio

Sasha Bowles

The 'hairy interventions' set forth by Bowles upon her plate printed pages of classical portraits, summon to mind Surrealist objects and uneasy nightmares. Displayed in pristine museum-like vitrines, the works take on an artefact quality, as if being presented as relics for some forgotten tribe of hairy humans. They also open up discussion about the substance of hair itself; and its cultural significance. Across a broad range of cultures there has been involved complexities and prejudices around hair, particular that of women. Whether it be seductive, disgusting, religious or charming; hair occupies a central role around how we view our bodies, especially when it is deemed out of place. The hairy interventions into these pieces seem to overwhelm the sitter, but not in a startling or unwelcome manner, more through an accepted and suffocating symbiotic relationship.

www.sashabowles.co.uk

@sashabowles1

Stephen Cooper

Cooper's work is explicitly positioned between dialogues on site-specific installation, architecture, and expanded ideas of painting and photography. Implicitly, the work is dealing with concerns around consciousness, perception and aspects of memory. Each piece of work is made for its environment and responds to the specifics of an individual space. The work attempts to be inclusive of its audience whilst posing questions through the juxtaposition of imagery. The work made for *AFTER_image* intentionally uses a mixture of media that combines concerns about order and chaos, memory and time in this cornered space of the Blyth Gallery.

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Ben Cove

Cove explored the potentials of painting as an object throughout his career and utilised found imagery as a way to open up further dialogues between the representational and the abstract. His adaptability with interchanging paintings within relief constructions and large format archival imagery enabled him to work in a modular fashion, testing various combinations of elements in order to create new associations and meanings. Having trained initially in architecture, Cove was interested in debates around Modernist ideas, such as the nature of materiality, ideals, utopias, and ultimately their shortcomings.

www.benjamincove.com

@ben_cove

Tim Ellis

Sharing the concerns of Ben Cove, Ellis explores the role of Modernism and what the function of art can be after a Utopia has fallen. Taking a Post-Modern magpie approach, his constructions combine an interest in aesthetic art movements and geometric patterns with embedded portraits from cigarette cartons. This insertion of imagery into abstract forms came from a period of illness where Ellis was confined to his bed and restricted to working on top of these palm size images, that once out of these restrictions formulate their own constructed islands. The masked characters portrayed in the works offer an insight into a new inhabited space with aesthetic cues that hint at specific periods of history. Ellis intuitively responds to displaced and forgotten imagery and materials: adding, adapting and abstracting the information in order to develop a series of wall-based constructions that suggest the appearance of another culture or alternative society, yet they remain unspecific, leaving the viewer to determine their origin.

www.timellis.org

@time_ellis_studio

Jo Israel

In her *Betwixt* series, Israel seeks to create singular images for contemplation in an age of image-multiplicity. Using a primitive form of X-ray, Israel shines light through the pages of old picture books which have images printed on both sides of the page. The two previously separated images combine, exposing an unseen image world – an unknown space that we all inhabit unconsciously in our world of media images. Israel detaches and houses the appropriated pages in bespoke light boxes (which she calls Shadow Boxes) in order to preserve the moment of image discovery in perpetuity.

www.jo-israel.com

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John Stezaker

The images that Stezaker takes his knife to are instantly recognisable as having been generated by classic film production companies. The language of framing and lighting is immediately recognisable, however the protagonists within the images are often not. Opting for actors who were photographed for publicity stills, but never actually made a film, adds a layer of faded glamour and unfulfilled desire to the sliced, punctured and layered imagery. Often referring to the process of cutting through photographs as akin to slicing through flesh, this surgical-like precision and approach creates ghostly, uncanny, and ultimately absent, stand-ins for our collective memory. For *AFTER_image* Stezaker is showing a new work from the *Double Shadow* series, collages produced over the last 18 months, during lockdown. Unusually these new works employ colour images, mostly the vivid primaries of technicolour and film-annual reproduction. Related to the earlier *Dark Star* and *Shadow* series from the 70's and 80's the *Double Shadows* employ a doubling of silhouette contours and of star personae to create a third hybrid image.
www.theapproach.co.uk/artists/john-stezaker/images/

Kate Street

Often drawn to analogue publications by their physical presence and pre-digital print quality, Street's practice allows the image/object to lead the formation of works. Drawing upon figuration, landscape, hobby craft, cultivation and erotica, pieces manifest themselves through collage and sculpture, creating a new set of suggested narratives from the original sources. Delicate details from the pages become monstrous through her 'Frankenstein' approach to collaging; this coupled with industrial remnants (such as hooks, clamps, reels and latex) create familiar, yet uneasy, objects. For *AFTER_image* Street is showing new work from her *Book Club series*; an ongoing series that borrows from familiar pre-digital publications once found on the shelves and under the beds, of typical middle-class British homes. Now relegated to car boot sales and second-hand books shops, they are metamorphosed into suffocated and inaccessible beings, which contain elements of restraint and desire in equal measure.

www.katestreet.net

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Sarah Kate Wilson

The surfaces of Wilson's shrink-wrapped paintings are loaded with 'things' - magazine pages, empty packs of paracetamol, studio debris, crockery, trainers, dresses, jewellery, money, drawings, and books. These objects are forcefully bound to the paintings surface using rolls of shrink-wrap plastic, in a process akin to embalming. As objects are wrapped into the works, they seem to transform 'things' to images, with each layer of 'sediment' obscured by the next. Importantly, Wilson is not the sole creator of these works, through invitation others can gift and wrap objects into the paintings, so that anything enters the works orbit can end up, captured in the paintings body, eternally. The objects-cum-images saturate the paintings with lived life, and simultaneously keep the painting 'alive'. Her paintings cannot be experienced all at once. These paintings are never complete. Any experience of the work is merely just one of many momentary experiences.

www.sarahkatewilson.com

@sarah_kate_wilson

Ruth van Beek

Ruth van Beek's work originates from her ever-growing archive. The images, mainly from old photo books, are her tools, source material and context. Van Beek physically intervenes within the pictures. By folding, cutting or adding pieces of painted paper, she rearranges and manipulates the image until her interventions reveal the universe that lays within. Merely by suggestion, van Beek triggers the imagination and therefore the discomfort, of the viewer. Passive human hands are animated, objects turn into characters and abstract shapes come to life. The original image may have been taken out of context, but the familiar imagery - the formal photography of an instruction book, a clearly displayed object, or a staged action - remains recognizable and thus speaks to our collective memory. For *AFTER_image* van Beek is exhibiting a collection of her most recent publications and book works alongside an accompanying poster *The Largest Rabbit*, 2017.

www.ruthvanbeek.com

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