

TIMEWARP: ARTISTS EXPLORE TIME

In 1975 the futuristic Timewarp dance was becoming famous for its essential role in the film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Five years earlier Robert Smithson had created *Spiral Jetty*, his 1,500 foot long spiral made of 6,650 tons of black basalt in the Great Salt Lake of Utah, a "cosmic clock counting down our human time".⁽¹⁾ Since the fascination in the 1970s with different universes, space travel and virtual exploration, the age-old preoccupation of artists with the theme of time has expanded to include experiments with the forms, structures, codes, social and emotional meaning, and the potential for fantasy and narrative connected to the subject.

Although every work of art is by definition the result of a temporal process and the accumulation of memory, a number of contemporary artists make the theme of time a major focus of their practice. The exhibition *Timewarp* brings together the works of 12 international artists, from different generations and working across a range of media, that share an interest in how the passage of time can, through production, recording or manipulation, be expressed visually. Inseparable from ideas concerning place, memory and meaning, time, for some artists, is explored in deeply personal terms. However its physical, philosophical and emotional aspects continue to be some of the most universal of human preoccupations.

Several of the artists represented in the exhibition are engaged in measuring and recording the duration of an activity over a long period of time. Jill Baroff's serial drawings give stringent visual form to her systematic observations of natural processes, while Susan Morris translates her own bodily functions and psycho-

logical behaviour into abstract graphs resembling notations or scores. This essentially mark-making process is no less rigorous in the physical materiality of Patrick Rohner's layered and densely worked paintings. Although incorporating chaotic processes and unpredictable results, they are based on the photographs, drawings and systematic notes that Rohner uses to record the minute variations in the landscape in which he lives.

The activity of collecting lies at the heart of Hans-Peter Feldmann's scrutiny, since the 1960s, of popular culture. Resembling the practice of a historian, his archival ordering of stereotypical images taken from postcards, personal photo albums, magazine illustrations and posters quietly reflects the time and place in which they were created.

Unseen changes at the heart of the city are recorded via the movement of sunlight across the dynamic facades of 1960s and 70s high-rise buildings in Perry Roberts' films while his paintings, described as a paean to desultory nothingness, depict changes to the shade of the linen over the course of a day. The physical phenomenon of light is used by a number of artists in the exhibition to express both the mundanity and poignance of time passing. Re-inforced by the passage of the accompanying music, the images of floating, glowing or flickering light in Sophy Rickett's portrait of an opera house are stand-ins for human presence, as well as the focus of the film's abstract narrative structure.

Light is the means by which Pascal Danz depicts the minute shift between two moments. In combining the obliteration of familiar imagery with an unidentifiable source of light, a parody of science fiction, it is also employed

to suggest the simultaneity of time and space zones.

A number of other artists in the exhibition are interested in the aura of memory that attaches to old, used materials and the psychological shifts that are created by juxtapositions of objects associated with different periods. Both Anna Barriball and Vanessa Billy take us deep into the physicality of everyday life, slowing time down as it snags on the trivial stuff of material existence. Barriball's drawings and Billy's sculptures are mute gestures, hovering between documentation and metamorphosis in a permanently suspended state of transformation.

The medium of film has long provided artists with an implicit flux of form, a forum for exploring mechanisms such as repetition or synchronisation to create a dislocation of time. Christelle Lheureux's parody of cinematic structure and Johannes Maier's pseudo-documentation depict the filmic image as a simulacrum of reality in which language is an unstable form of communication and their own authorial control is disrupted.

The time-based nature of much contemporary art is also reflected in Schirin Kretschmann's ephemeral work that either metamorphoses during the course of the exhibition or is site-specific. Extending the definition of painting beyond brush and canvas, she explores colour through light and movement, combining static objects and video projections to affect our perception of space.

The passing of time is not only the subject matter of the work in *Timewarp*; it is also the condition created in the viewer in experiencing and responding to the exhibition. We become palpa-

bly aware of time, of our own concentration and absorption in the detail. Encompassing stalled time, fugue-like boredom, a sense of the present filling up with the past and the irretrievability of the moment, we are reminded that "Time, like mind, is not knowable as such. We know time only indirectly by what happens in it".⁽²⁾

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(1). Tacita Dean, *The cosmic clock with Ballard at its core*, article in *The Guardian*, Monday 27 April 2009

(2). George Kubler, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things*, New Haven, 1974, p. 13