

## MODERN ART OXFORD

variety of formats including photography, video, music, poster formats and short stories often presented within elaborate theatrical settings which draw heavily on the burlesque. *Goodnight Goodnight* (1997) was their first self-portrait: cast resin and latex sculptures of the artists as rotting corpses still in their pyjamas which they placed inside an oak veneered coffin carried in a funeral procession through the streets of Edinburgh to the gallery. More recent video work points to themes of the macabre and irrational with reference to a cinema of horror and violence.

*We Are the People - Suck On This* (1999) was commissioned by the ICA, London for the exhibition *Crash*. Graham Ramsay takes on the role of a look-a-like Travis Bickle, the crazed taxi driver played by Robert de Niro in Martin Scorsese's 1976 film *Taxi Driver*. We see Ramsay, sporting a Mohawk haircut, arriving by train in London and gaily popping pills as he makes his way to Whitehall, where he delivers a petition to number 10 Downing Street before being led away by the police. The sound track, comprising incidental music from *The Ipcress File*, gives an innocuous air to the video and the underlying menace of Ramsay's drug-dazed character. The ease with which he enters the Prime Minister's residence adds an ever greater sense of unreality that suggests democratic protest as a gesture that is ultimately without meaning.

In their new video, *Untitled (Glitter Island)*, the artists assume the pose and gaze of the rarefied dandy. Reclining on a gold glitter desert island complete with a fake palm tree, the artists resemble decorative motifs from a Rococo décor, dressed in white and sporting white wigs, their faces covered with pancake makeup replete with Pompadour beauty spots on their cheeks. The sheer fatuousness of their largely inanimate tableau combined with the distant and somewhat superior gazes assumed by the artists might be interpreted as a wry comment on contemporary lifestyle culture – a consumerist aristocracy, disengaged from more immediate realities, or a vainglorious memento to the meaninglessness of things in general.

*Graham Ramsay* (b. 1970) and *John Beagles* (b. 1968) graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 1996. Since 1997, they have shown in numerous exhibitions in the UK and internationally. A new exhibition of recent work is on show at Tramway, Glasgow from 24 February until 26 March. The artists live in Glasgow. More information on the artists can be found at [www.beaglesramsay.co.uk](http://www.beaglesramsay.co.uk)

### Harold Offeh

#### *Smile*, 2001

**Video transferred to digital video; 2:58min.**

Harold Offeh works with short-form video and animation. Influenced by early filmed performance work from the 1970s, Offeh assumes the role of protagonist in his modestly produced video works to address notions of desire, identity and the stereotyping of race within the everyday and popular culture. According to the artist:

"*Smile* was very influenced by the work of artists like Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman and Joan Jonas. *Smile* arose in part as a response to a work by Vito Acconci and in part a literal translation of the song *Smile*, written by Charlie Chaplin and, in this case, sung by Nat King Cole. Chaplin's lyric sets out a specific set of instructions, "smile through your fear and sorrow". The video simply follows this instruction. In the original version of this piece the smile is maintained for 34 minutes. In this version it is cut to the length of the song, just over 3 minutes."

*Harold Offeh* was born in 1977 in Accra, Ghana. He graduated from Brighton University in 1999, and with an MA in photography from the Royal College of Art in 2001. His work has presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the UK and Europe. He lives and works in London.

JEMIMA STEHLI is in conversation with Modern Art Oxford Senior Curator Suzanne Cotter on Saturday 25 February at 3pm.

**FILMPERFORMANCE** is curated by Suzanne Cotter and Miria Swain, with the assistance of Erica Burton.

### FILMPERFORMANCE

**21 to 26 February 2006**

**10am - 7pm Tuesday to Saturday 12pm - 6pm Sunday**

Programme notes by Suzanne Cotter

Printed by Holywell Press, Oxford

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## FILMPERFORMANCE PROGRAMME NOTES

**FILMPERFORMANCE** is a week long exhibition of work by artists using performance as a subject for film. Addressing ideas of enactment, ventriloquism and the proxy or stand-in, the exhibition presents work by Beagles and Ramsay, David Blandy, Juneau/Projects/, Harold Offeh, Jemima Stehli and David Ward.

### David Ward

#### *Untitled (Catherine Tucker Dancing) 1988, 1988*

**Super 8 film transferred to digital video; silent, 8min.**

David Ward trained as a painter before expanding his practice to incorporate photography, light, sound, performance and interventions in public spaces. Despite the multi-dimensional nature of his practice, Ward's work remains essentially painterly in its emphasis on the visual in terms of composition, contrast and the temporal nature of looking. His recent light and sound installation, *Nocturne*, installed in the City of London in December 2005, involved the projection of an image of a starry constellation as seen in the night sky onto the south wall of St. Michael Paternoster Royal Church. The monumental light-painting was accompanied by bird song and sounds of a summer woodland projected into the winter stillness of the adjacent Whittington Gardens. His recent collaboration with the choreographer Siobhan Davies consisted of a changing abstract composition in light which was projected onto and structured the stage for the company's dancers.

Ward made *Untitled (Catherine Tucker Dancing) 1988* at Chisenhale Dance Space, above the Chisenhale Gallery, in London in 1988. Made on Super 8 cine-film the work has not been shown previously. Without sound, the film is shot from a fixed position to frame an area of wooden floor and brick wall which divide the frame horizontally and into two almost equal halves. There are no zooms, or pans. The lighting of the space remains constant. The sharp changes of exposure are due to small adjustments made by the camera during filming. Ward conceived of the work as a kind of painting in action. The picture plane and picture frame combine with the volume of the performance space, defined by the horizontal floor and vertical wall, and with the edges of the film's frame, through which the dancing figure of Tucker moves.

“The movement of Catherine Tucker divides the film into three overlapping phases:

- a Running or jumping into the space or frame from the edge, losing balance and falling out of the frame.
- b Entering the frame and making still shapes before leaving the frame.
- c Dancing towards the camera, across the camera and away from the camera so that the body relates to or touches the edges of the screen”.

*David Ward was born in Wolverhampton in 1951, attending Wolverhampton College of Art and Winchester School of Art from 1968 to 1973. His individual and collaborative work has been presented throughout the UK and abroad and he has taught at Goldsmiths College, London, Glasgow School of Art; the Architectural Association and the Department of Architecture, Westminster University, London. He has been artist-in-residence at Kings College, Cambridge and at Harvard University. His projected light work for the Siobhan Davies Dance Company’s Bird Song was performed at the Linbury Studio, Royal Opera House in 2004 and at Sadler’s Wells Theatre, London, in 2005.*

### **Jemima Stehli**

#### ***Large Perspex, 2004***

**Video transferred to digital video; 10:57min.**

**With thanks to Lewis Amar**

Over the past ten years, Jemima Stehli has used photography to record performative moments that take place in the studio. While her earlier work was distinctly sculptural in nature, Stehli soon began using her own body as the object and to indicate the subjective presence of the artist in the work. In her photographic series, *Strip 1999-2000*, Stehli invited a number of male writers and critics from the London art world to take a series of photos as she undressed. They are given the cable release and invited to take the shots of the naked artist. In a kind of reverse voyeurism the writers record their own responses, catching themselves in the act of looking or not looking.

*Large Perspex* (2004) comes out of series of works Stehli has been making in the studio over the past two years involving sculptural elements which she would construct and photograph with the help of her assistant Lewis Amar. The work has developed into a set of recorded performance pieces. Reminiscent of early video and performance works of the 1960s and 70s in which artists such as Bruce Naumann, Robert Morris and Richard Serra performed specific actions with sculptural props in the studio spaces, Stehli, here, directs her assistant who manoeuvres a large transparent sheet of perspex within the confines of her London studio. Simultaneously the one who positions and who is positioned by the artist off camera, his movements alternate between an awkward choreography to the Leonard Cohen music playing in the background and an elegant weightlessness as his form is lost to the luminous reflections of the surrounding space.

*Jemima Stehli was born in 1961 in London. She graduated from Goldsmiths College with a BA in 1984 and with her MA in 1991. Stehli’s work has been exhibited throughout the UK and internationally. She lives and works in London.*

### **Juneau/Projects/**

#### ***my wretched heart is still aglow, 2004***

**Video transferred to digital video; 8:16min.**

#### ***the beauty royale, 2005***

**Video transferred to digital video; 5:50min.**

Artists Phil Duckworth and Ben Sadler formed Juneau/Projects/ in 2001. Their works are performed experiments in which they test the physical limits of technology, such as mobile phones, computer hardware and recording equipment, which they subject to extreme conditions. Their recorded performances are generally presented on small monitors surrounded by the detritus of the performance as part of a sculptural mise-en-scène. Taking place within rural or outdoor settings, the artists carry out their ‘tests’ with deadpan aplomb as if scientific observers of absurd situations.

In *my wretched heart is still aglow*, the artists make a small outdoor fire into which they drop a hand held microphone, recording the shrieking sound of its gradual meltdown. *the beauty royale* is set in a forest at night where the artists methodically feed small microphones attached to wooden dowels through a wood chipper. Bringing to mind Bruce Nauman’s early sculpture *Box With The Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), the sound of the microphones’ own destruction in Juneau/Projects/’ film *my wretched heart is still aglow* offers a thought-provoking metaphor for technological promise fuelled by a parallel culture of obsolescence.

*Phil Duckworth was born in Iserlohn, Germany in 1976 and graduated from Coventry University in 1999. Ben Sadler was born in Birmingham in 1977 and graduated from the Ruskin School of Fine Art, Oxford in 1998 and the Royal College of Art in 2004. Juneau|Projects| has had solo exhibitions at f a projects, London and The Showroom, London (both 2004). Their work is currently on show in the British Art Show 6 in various venues across Manchester. The artists live and work in Birmingham.*

### **David Blandy**

#### ***The Way of the Barefoot Lone Pilgrim: The Soul of the Lakes, 2005***

**Digital video; 25min.**

#### ***what is soul?, 2002***

**Digital video; 2:46min.**

David Blandy’s video work deals with popular culture and the slippage between fantasy and reality in everyday life. His thoughtful and humorous works pose questions about how much of the self is formed by the mass media of popular

music, films, television and the virtual imagery of computer games, and whether it is possible to have an identity outside of them. In his short video *what is soul?*, Blandy shoots a close up of himself energetically miming the words to Ben. E. King’s 1967 version of the song of the same name, his face tightly framed as he becomes immersed in the music coming through the headphones. The explicit silliness of the piece underscores the contrast between the song and its associations with soul music from the protest culture of 1960s America and Blandy’s goofy white English guy sitting in his bedroom.

*The Way of the Barefoot Lone Pilgrim: The Soul of the Lakes* is part of a larger body of video/performance pieces in which Blandy integrates real life and virtual adventures. Donning the orange robes of a Buddhist Shaolin Monk, his portable record player in hand, he has been a hermit in an 18th Century park in Surrey, made an American road trip and searched for places in New York that had associations with soul songs. In this most recent pilgrimage, Blandy’s monk headed for the Lake District in the north of England to search for the “Soul of the Lakes”, walking between the two record shops in the area:

“After returning from the Big Apple on his trusty cloud, The Barefoot Lone Pilgrim wandered across Cumbria. From the Rare Records Shop in Keswick, he walked barefoot over Catbells, through Borrowdale, venturing across the Cumbrian mountains, following the trail to Action Reply in Bowness.”

Intercutting the footage of the “real” journey with segments from films such as *Shogun Assassin* and *Princess Mononoke* and television programmes *Kung Fu* and *Monkey*, Blandy weaves together an idiosyncratic tale of self-discovery which is all the more believable for its shifts into fantasy and personal reverie.

*David Blandy was born in London in 1976. He graduated from Chelsea College of Art in 1998 and the Slade School of Art in 2003. His work has been presented in exhibitions across the UK and internationally. He has been the recipient of commissions with Artangel Interaction, Grizedale Arts and of numerous awards including the Medway Open and the Mostyn Open. He is the recipient of an Artsadmin Artists’ Bursary. His work is distributed by LUX. Blandy is featured in the forthcoming two person show Represent at Gasworks Gallery, London.*

### **Beagles and Ramsay**

#### ***We Are The People - Suck On This, 1999***

**Video transferred to digital video; 3.36min.**

#### ***Untitled (Glitter Island), 2006***

**Video transferred to digital video; 5min.**

Beagles and Ramsay have worked collaboratively since 1997. Their early sculptural pieces, drawings and installations dwell on death, the grotesque and the dark side of human nature incarnated by the twin or body double. The artists have worked with a