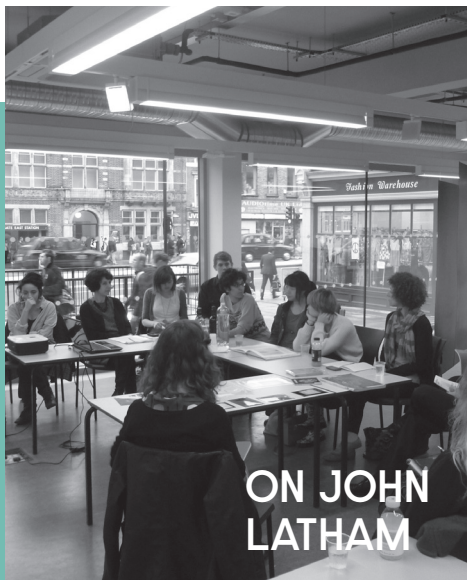


PERFORMING SURFACES



#03

INTRODUCTION

*Damien Roach, Magali Reus,
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Performing Surfaces investigates conceptual and formalistic approaches towards the performative aspect of artistic production through a selection of sculptural paintings by four London-based artists and the format of the exhibition itself. Two events, to be held in the exhibition space, will act as an extension to the show, while a research desk located at the gallery will operate as a platform for the production of three publications in response to the artworks and the events, providing alternative readings on the exhibition.

Performing Surfaces brings together works that assume and embody the performative character of the artistic gesture, being the outcome of an

ongoing development of actions between the object and the subject. The exhibition extends the concept of performativity, a term much associated with performance art emerging in the 60s, in order to reflect on the bodily processes that shape the material, as well as the formal and conceptual nature of the artwork.

Following that, a certain notion of performativity can be used here as a key to unravel the common thread that runs from artistic conception to the viewer's interpretation: an understanding of the creation of meaning through the relations that emerge within the artwork itself and between the artwork and the viewer.

ON JOHN LATHAM

On John Latham completes the series of three publications that were produced and published during the exhibition *Performing Surfaces*. On 10 May, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Archive Curator of the Whitechapel Gallery and Claire Louise Staunton, Curator of Flat Time House, talked about their specific fields of knowledge of John Latham within the context of the exhibition. Latham's diverse practice has affected the curatorial approach of the exhibition from the very beginning, in particular his theory that considers objects as secondary phenomena and traces of events is a concern that *Performing Surfaces* has been trying to address. Staunton presented a part of Latham's theoretical work, illustrated by the documentation of his artwork even *tsructu re*. Yiakoumaki let us in on her approach to curating the exhibi-

tion *AnArchive* at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2010, by presenting her references and position towards curating archival material.

The propositions of Staunton and Yiakoumaki evoke an understanding on curating and art practice, having as a starting point Latham's work and activity. Extracts of the talk are included in this publication supported by a selection of quotes and references which can be viewed as a reading of the exhibition in hindsight.

“DEVELOPING ALONGSIDE THIS CONCISE VISUAL LANGUAGE, FROM THE MID-1950S ONWARDS, WAS A COSMOLOGICAL THEORY, FORMULATED THROUGH HIS [JOHN LATHAM’S] ART-MAKING DISCOVERIES, THAT CONSIDERED TIME AND EVENT TO BE MORE PRIMARY THAN THE ESTABLISHED MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING, BASED ON SPACE AND MATTER. TERMED TIME-BASE THEORY (SOMETIMES FLAT TIME THEORY OR EVENT THEORY) IT OFFERS AN ORDERING AND UNIFICATION OF ALL EVENTS IN THE UNIVERSE, INCLUDING HUMAN ACTIONS, AND ALLOWS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE SPECIAL STATUS OF THE ARTIST IN SOCIETY.” *ØI

“TO EXPLAIN TIME BASE THEORY, LATHAM STARTS FROM THE POINT OF CRITICISM, CRITICISING OUR WORLD IN THE WAY THAT WE SEE IT. WE SEE OBJECTS IN SPACE, WE SEE THINGS AROUND US AND TAKE THESE FOR GRANTED, HE WANTS US TO REWIND AND THINK INSTEAD ABOUT THE EVENT AND TIME.” *02

“ART EXISTS AT TWO DISTINCT EVENTS: THE EVENT OF MAKING AND THE EVENT OF SPECTATING. MEANING IS NOT ONLY A FUNCTION OF ART OBJECTS BUT ALSO THE VIEWER’S ABILITY TO ATTEND TO THEM SELECTIVELY.” *02

“WHAT IS THE RELATION BETWEEN WHAT’S HAPPENING NOW AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE PAST? HOW CAN THE NEW EMERGE FROM THE OLD IF IT IS DIFFERENT FROM IT?” *02

“WITHIN HIS THEORIES HE IS TALKING ABOUT HOW SOMETHING CAN BE NOTHING AND GOING TO THIS MOMENT WHEN SOMETHING BECOMES NOT-NOTHING; HE CALLS IT THE LEAST EVENT.” *02

“ HE [JOHN LATHAM] FOUND A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE ‘LEAST-EVENT’ IN A CAN OF SPRAY PAINT, WHOSE SINGLE BURST OF DOTS ONTO A WHITE SHEET OF PAPER PERFECTLY SYMBOLIZED HIS SENSE OF AN ACTION THAT RICOCHETED FORWARD OUT INTO THE WORLD FROM A SINGLE POINT OF ORIGIN. ” *06

“ THERE IS NO ARCHIVAL EXHIBITION WITHOUT RESEARCH. EVEN IF IT IS ONLY TO THE POINT THAT YOU CAN’T DISPLAY DOCUMENTS WITHOUT HAVING READ THEM AND UNDERSTOOD EXACTLY WHAT THEY ARE, WHAT THE CONTEXT IS OF THE WORKS YOU ARE SHOWING. SECONDLY THE SITE SPECIFICITY IN A MORE THEORETICAL AND ABSTRACT WAY, IS AN EQUIVALENT WITH AN ART PRACTICE. YOU’VE GOT TO WORK WITH IN A PARTICULAR CONTEXT. ” *07

SHORT GLOSSARY OF LATHAM'S TERMS:

INCIDENTAL PERSON *08

Artist as an 'incidental person' not an object maker [...] who has an integral role in social activities.

OBSERVER PRINCIPLE *09

The witnessing of events is a separate event in itself; making a picture is one event and showing it is another.

MINITS OR TIME SIGNATURES *02

In one second drawings works were coded using an stamp and labelled with the different 'Minit's':

Minit 1: The viewer is to concentrate on the make event. It's about making rather than thinking about the showing of the work.

Minit 2: The viewer is to concentrate on the spectator event. It signifies that the showing of the work is the work as opposed to the making of the work.

Minit 3: Talks about the temporality of the work. How does it exist now and how did it exist in the past and how might it exist in the future?

Minit 4: Is about the change of its state or the kinetic quality of the work. How does it exist as an object in the space and in movement?

Minit 5: A work that refers to an event, other than its own structure. It can be seen in the socio-political geographic context of the work, what is happening around it and outside of it.

SOURCES

- * Ø1 "Flat Time - An Introduction," Flat time House, 2012,
www.flattimeho.org.uk/project/8/
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- * Ø3 "Context is Half the Work," Peter Eleey, Frieze Magazine, 2007,
http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/context_is_half_the_work
- * Ø4 Yiakoumaki, Nayia. 2012. On John Latham. Performing Surfaces. Roundtable Talk. London Metropolitan University: 10 May 2012
- * Ø5 Conzen-Meairs, I; Keiner, M; Latham, J; Sachsse, Art after Physics: John Latham. Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1991
- * Ø6 Measham, Terry, John Latham. London: Tate Gallery, 1976
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