

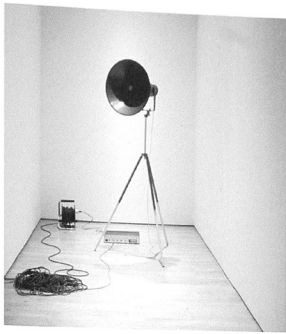
## 1 Nina Canell and Robin Watkins

Exhibition, 5–12 May 2008  
ICA Upper Galleries

Nina Canell (born Växjö, Sweden, 1979, lives in Dublin) and Robin Watkins (born Stockholm, Sweden, 1980, lives in Dublin) are long-term collaborators. Canell creates sculpture in the most expanded sense, assemblages that fuse matter, light and sound to create surreal testing grounds. Working together, Canell and Watkins have previously realised several film works and musical recordings as well as numerous live performances and events. For *Nought to Sixty* the artists made a new gallery-specific installation, one which brought together a number of recent works to form a sculptural whole. The film work shown was *Digging a Hole* (2008), which portrays a man in his overalls digging in a bog. The sculptures included *A Meditation on Minerals and Bats* (2007), *Heat Sculpture* (2007) and *Score for Two Lungs* (2008).



Nina Canell and Robin Watkins / Heat Sculpture / 2007



For her most recent solo exhibition, *Slight Heat of the Eyelid*, mother's tankstation, Dublin (2008), Canell created an installation of seven sculptures, independent yet complementary. The works seemed like elements in a periodic table that had been energetically shaken, leaving them re-ordered and re-charged. The title of the show goes some way to indicating the interests of the artist, who explores what Samuel Beckett called "all that inner space one never sees." In Beckett's *Molloy* (1955), the character 'C' decides one day to climb a hill rather than simply peer at it from afar, and moves from observed to physically-learned experience and on towards a third, more intuited realm. Similarly, the flickering sights and sounds of Canell and Watkins' ICA installation – the first solo presentation of their work in London – were best navigated by the incalculable, intuited or imagined.

One central characteristic of the works of Canell and Watkins is their use of unorthodox sculptural materials and combinations – including found debris as well as precise custom-fabricated objects. *Heat Sculpture* (2007), for example, comprises a leafless branch, trapped or cradled in the fingers of four neon lights, the whole composition tied together with cables. Another characteristic of the duo's work – and one which emphasises its extra-linguistic properties – is its use of music. In a recent interview Canell and Watkins said that, "in contrast to audio-art which foregrounds perceptual effects,

technological progression, and self-referentiality, [we are] interested in engaging with acoustic phenomena as a catalyst for collective imagination, the construction of a magical image [...]". Music, whether played live, pre-recorded or merely signified by the presence of instruments, is a key mechanism within their work, and always an agent of transformation.

Isobel Harbison

## 2 Babak Ghazi

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Babak Ghazi (born London, 1976, lives in London) is the mastermind of an irregularly published magazine called *Not Yet* – a title that hints at what his overall practice proposes: the idea of things existing in a temporal narrative that is available to him to re-order and re-present. Ghazi's practice draws on notions of appropriation and history; he dips back and reframes past works of art and cultural imagery, presenting them as new, unfamiliar and changed – or simply suddenly remembered – in the present.

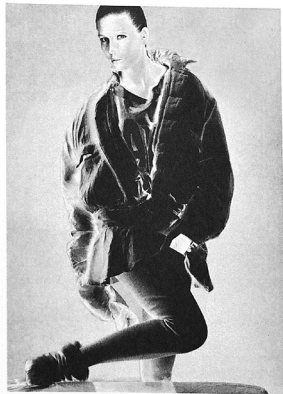
For a work shown in 2007 at the Chelsea Space of the Chelsea College of Art and Design (where Ghazi teaches), the artist bought a 1975 issue of *Data Arte* magazine that had been missing from the school's library, put it on display and donated it to the institution after the exhibition was finished, literally recuperating the contents of the publication. The 1970s and 80s are key to his practice: for other works he has mined photo spreads, album covers and 'designer' objects from these periods, including Perspex cubes and glam-dripping sunglass advertisements.

Ghazi's work owes a great deal to Pop Art and the latter's inclusion of popular material as both affirmation and critique; like that movement's best-known star, Andy Warhol, he also pushes such material close to abstraction. A series of altered images of David Bowie, entitled *ShapeShifter* (2004), depicts the singer with his face swollen and stretched as if in a funhouse mirror. Another series, *Untitled* (2004), overlays a magazine photo of sunglasses with kaleidoscopelike fragments of

broken CDs. Finally, in the work shown at the ICA, *Model* (2008), Ghazi pays homage to Warhol's exceptional series of paintings, *Shadows* (1978). Warhol's paintings are made from silk-screened images of shadows, used in both negative and positive form, and perhaps surprisingly summon up the Abstract Expressionist style that he had earlier helped to displace. Ghazi's work, in turn, employs an image of a model wearing a Katherine Hamnett slogan T-shirt from a 1984 issue of *Vogue* – a pouty image very much of its time – and reproduces it in a number of negative and solarised versions, hung around the room in a manner which mimics the serial installation of the Warhol original.

Ghazi's *Model* evokes Pop, abstraction and the will towards trauma within Warholian repetition – as well as both 1978 and 1984, and the present moment of encounter with the 'digitalised' image. In creating a new inventory made by accumulation and repetition, it frames the strident projection of identity contained within the dated magazine image. And in the gap between Warhol and himself Ghazi invokes the shifting territory of selfhood, and the borderline areas of public imagery that are at once superficial and politicised.

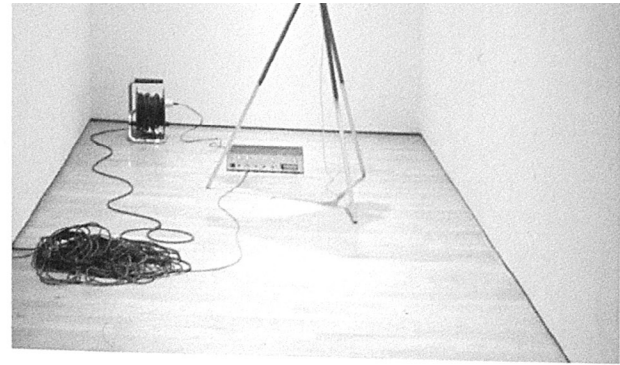
Melissa Gronlund



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