

this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

Uri Aran: Five Minutes Before
South London Gallery
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Review by Rachel E Guthrie



Artist : Uri Aran

Title : Installation view of Five Minutes Before at the South London Gallery

Date(s) : 2013

Website : <http://www.southlondongallery.org/>

Credit : All images: Photo: Andy Keate. Image courtesy the artist, mother's tankstation, Dublin, Gavin Brown's enterprise, New York and Sadie Coles HQ, London

Set up on the ground floor of the South London Gallery is Uri Aran's 'Five Minutes Before', a presentation of drawing, sculpture and film. The video dominates the space both physically and in its impression. Projected onto a screen that is pushed forward so far from the end wall, it is amid the gallery that is twice as long as it is wide. As you watch it, it begins to determine your perception of the rest of the things in the room.

The objects (framed drawings, photographs, collected things) scattered across the room are



Uri Aran, Installation view of Five Minutes Before at the South London Gallery, 2013

guardians of knowledge. They are not only items that serve purposes, have set values or can be categorised, but they are signifiers, which provide a narrative – offer sense – to the collective whole, the assemblage that is the exhibition. But as the artist himself tells, these items are not laid out as though a narrative itself, which can be read in an order, but as a storyboard that has been dissembled, its components spread.

The film points to avenues of thought, introduces the artist's preoccupations in making this exhibition (many of which are prevalent in Aran's prior work), and authorises ways of understanding the work; it focuses the eyes and steers the viewer gently around the rest of the exhibition. In the opening minutes, drawings from about the room flash up as though a part of a memory game, masking at points the moving image below. The basis of this film is a monologue delivered by Uri's friend who sits in a chair next to a window in the artist's flat. He starts by speaking over us with what could be an extract from an encyclopaedia. The text describes the progression from child to adulthood, grouping ages together and listing – stage by stage – the characteristics of each phrase.

Uri Aran's desire to categorise – through language, and physical placing – remains strong following his presentation at the 55th Venice Biennale's 'The Encyclopaedic Palace' (May–November 2013). This is brought to mind when the voiceover tells how between the ages of 10 to 14 a growing adult becomes knowledgeable about the world. With these references to growing up, a sense of pervading nostalgia creeps into the exhibition and shapes the viewer's perception of the duration of time, widening the gap between the real-time experience of the



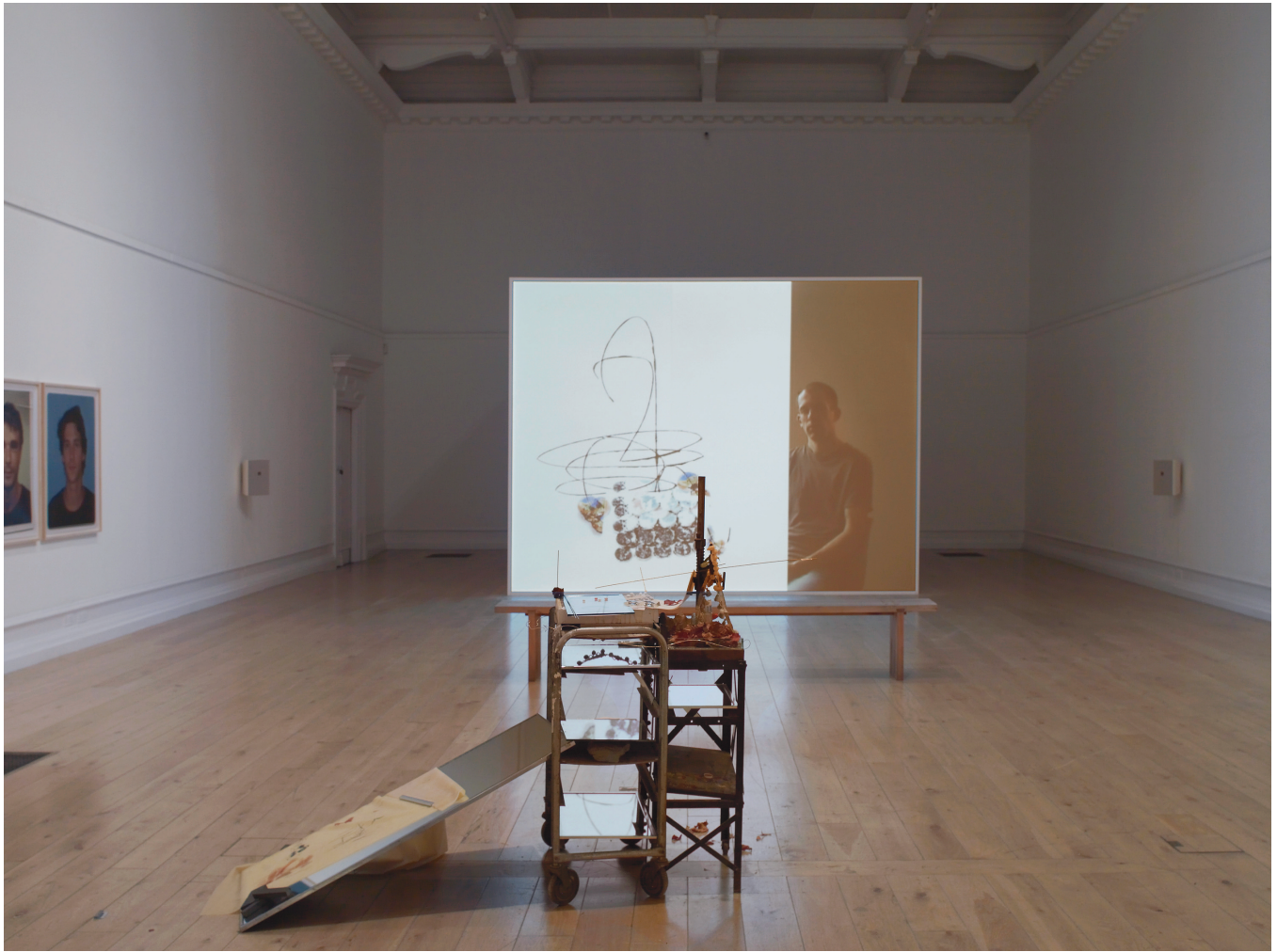
Uri Aran, Installation view of Five Minutes Before at the South London Gallery, 2013

exhibition, the period in which the work was designed and made (over the artist's residency in summer 2013), and the time in which the narrative of the show appears to take place.

There's an undeniable tension between the latter two measures of time that means the sense of nostalgia is not straightforward: what exactly is the nostalgia over, and does he yearn for something that did exist and could exist again? The knowledge, for example, that 'Five Minutes Before' is the product of the artist's residency in Peckham during 2013 is not easy to consolidate with the knowledge of the artist's upbringing in Israel, and the personal, or at least seemingly intimate encounter with the exhibition's subject's past.

For example, the video describes a family dynamic, paralleling them to a royal hierarchy, in which the Grandfather is almost definitely the King. Despite the fact that Uri is not reading this text aloud, the conviction remains that the narrative is the artist's and, as a consequence, that the line up of photographic portraits along the left hand wall depicts his own family. They look alike enough to be so, and where else would he have gathered this neat set? The illogical sense of nostalgia extends. Scenes of boys on bikes in a park that has Canary Wharf as its horizon are played whilst stories that are read as the highlights of the artist's childhood, are told through his spokesman.

Meanwhile, piano music fills the gallery with the soundtrack to a fantasy that is dreamlike but insincere, proving sinister at points. The soundtrack is consistently grand, but many of the words spoken, and the images presented, are un sentimental. One writer has described his



Uri Aran, Installation view of *Five Minutes Before* at the South London Gallery, 2013

earlier video work as ‘manipulative depictions of sentimentality’, and curators Alex Gartenfeld and Haley Mellin have told how Aran’s work reveals ‘scepticism about identity and sentimentality’ – both of which ring true for ‘Five Minutes Before’.

The consequence of the unnerving nostalgia is that the integrity of the symbols of play amongst the room can also be questioned. From the dog and horse that are thrown into the family portrait, to the burnt umber, yellow and blue marbles that pepper the drawings. Just how much has the artist intended to produce a culture of play, and how much is this just the more transparent layer of its many potential layers of understanding? In some ways ‘Five Minutes Before’ takes childhood habits – games of recall, grouping and listing – as means of learning, handling objects as a way of understanding their use; but in others, the title suggests that what has just occurred ‘five minutes before’ is just as relevant.