

mother's annual 2014

In Free Circulation

Sam Anderson, Fiona Hallinan, Fiona Marron, Alasdair McLuckie, Magnhild Opdøl, Matt Sheridan Smith
April - May

In free circulation (Saut dans le vide)

"Once all conditions have been satisfied, non-community goods will become community goods. They will obtain the same status as goods that have been produced, harvested or mined within the area of agreed/permitted circulation..."¹

The notion of *free circulation* divides the philosophical realms of the empirical and theoretical: it is a leap into a void (*saut dans le vide*), wherein a chasm swallows down cloddish 'things' (propelled by the *essentialism* of gravity). In contrast to weightfulness, unbound thoughts float away. The separation simultaneously liberates the building blocks – the ideas that become words (nomenclature) – from the necessarily odious task of constructing sentences (linguistics), which like accrued, weighted nature, falls and piles, layer upon layer, forming stratified landscapes, topographies of collective understanding. This undulating heap of constituted *stuff* requires naming by negotiation, authentication – certificates and passports are needed to admit it and permit it. Question: *Purpose of visit?* We must studiously establish origin, nature, intent, destination and finally, stamp it.

Conversely, thought is inherently mobile, an abstraction freely fired into a void – *no questions asked* – the unsaid into the unknown: where a point of origin can be the most transient whim, whose perfect fragility may solidify or catch fire without warning or anticipation – crushing or scorching everything in its path, people, buildings, regimes (sometimes). Rarefied occlusion brightens and penetrates the everyday. Ideas, like things, too can have both form and function, but the formal similarities are stopped short at boundaries. Ideas do not have beginning or end, front nor back, middles; thought, rather, can be *thought of*, as 'work' *in progress*, ideas pass in free circulation.

In keeping with an exhibition, which in some respects deals with thought freed to the breaking point of anarchy, I am in turn breaking a rule. It has for the longest time been gallery policy to write, or commission the writing of essays to accompany exhibitions promptly or, at the very least, within the easy stretch of memory. This is different, in that the group project including the work of Sam Anderson, Fiona Hallinan, Fiona Marron, Alasdair McLuckie, Magnhild Opdøl, and Matt Sheridan Smith, has literally been in circulation to the point that, at the time of finally writing, it is about to celebrate its fourth birthday. Happy birthday! Given such causative distance, what sits powerfully at the front of my thinking is the idea of a work that was not even in the exhibition, but as I recall it (correctly or otherwise), was or should have been, but ultimately resides as an idealised, but unrealised curatorial trigger; so I am going to reflexively write it back in to the show's theoretical history, anyway.

In 1957 the maverick (*Nouveau réalisme*) French artist, Yves Klein created an un-limited series of blue stamps² for mailing invitations to the opening of two pivotal exhibitions, cementing the arrival of the artist's trade mark 'IKB'. The pair of exhibitions featuring monochrome blue paintings (the second of which made a positive out of an administrative cock-up by hurriedly developing objects rendered in *International Klein Blue*) opened only two weeks apart, and both in Paris in May 1957, at Galerie Iris Clert and Galerie Colette Allendy respectively. The postal authorities were 'cajoled' by Klein into accepting his very unofficial, handmade stamps as if they were actual postage printed by the French government, and they delivered all of the invitations – over three and a half thousand of them within Paris alone. History records that Klein argued the reality of his stamps as works of art with equivalent, real world *authority* to that of *officially authorised permits of recognised passage* (stamps). Given that Klein was incompletely educated, nor as a result highly articulate, and was heavily dependant on the critic and his champion, Pierre Restany, who acted as the authorising vocalisation of his ideas and practice; it is more likely that the truth comes down to the banalities of bribery. Essentially monochromes in miniature, and according to Clert, these mailings, abstract acts of thought transmuted to action and hardwired into the framework of

the actual world, were arranged by paying the normal required postage, while simultaneously bribing postal clerks to "cancel the postcards or envelopes over or near Klein's mailings"³. I am working on the assumption that over three and a half thousand, other things, did not get quite so freely circulated. Furthermore, Klein also proceeded to successfully mail everything for the proceeding two years, with his homemade blue-void postage, effectively prefiguring all Fluxus mail works and other performative, art mail 'outings'. At the Iris Clert opening, Klein and Clert served a blue cocktail, a mixture of Gin, Cointreau and methylene blue spirit, prepared by the notorious Left Bank bar, *La Coupole*. To Klein's delight, all those who partook, found their urine stained blue the following day. All conditions being satisfied... the same status was obtained as goods produced, harvested or mined within the area of permitted circulation, 'IKB' truly achieved free circulation...

Matt Sheridan Smith's 2012 works, *if you see something say something (viscous)* and *(anything but)*, inherit the persuasive guile of Klein's mail-void/void-mail strategy. Purchased, small format, kit-form painting stretchers, unassuming monochromes, are covered in materials impossible, or at least impractical, to paint upon, brown wrapping paper, in one instance and translucent vellum in the other. With a thumb and patience, the artist explores edges, wood grain, joints, knots and flaws, newly revealed and etched into the texture of the 'wrappers' and titled with the generic permission to 'rat' upon suspicious activities, as defined by US Homeland Security and the MTA. These are paintings that are not paintings, but sculptures about paintings that are not essentially sculptural, created by acts of non-creation, but activities that are closer to being "harvested and mined", than made.

If, arguably Matt Sheridan Smith's titles comment upon the liberty to restrict the freedom of others, then the cultural theorist, Terry Eagleton notes; that in the contemporary world, the most "sublime phenomenon" of all is the *idea* of freedom itself: "...which like the god Dionysus is both angel and demon, beauty and terror. If there is something sacred about liberty it is not only because it is precious, but because it can destroy as well as create. In answer to the query, 'Where does it come from?' modernity has tended to reply: 'From itself'."⁴

For Alasdair McLuckie, such a freedom gives permission to look at modernism's influence from 'primitivism', and the *lionisation* of the early practitioners, who liberally lifted ideas and motifs, *freeing* their work from the regulative constraints of the canon and the historiographic narrative of western art. In his installation *Cosmic Love* (2014), eight framed inkjet prints, derived from collaged photographs are hung over the top of a rhythmic, wave-like wall painting. The heads of modernist 'giants' Picasso, one of his many partners Jacqueline Roque, Dali, and his wife Gala are literally replaced with those of great cats. The stylised temporal sequencing in McLuckie's works is further echoed in both Fiona Hallinan's *Abacus*, and Sam Anderson's floor work, *Market* (both 2014). Fiona Hallinan's abacus, takes on fundamental things of life, a child's cot, transformed into a sort of primitive abacus, a place of sanctuary for human young marries to the birthplace of computing. The head section of the cot is threaded with dried, lovingly oiled avocado pits, which over the duration of the exhibition proceeded dry out and layer, after layer, to eventually free themselves from their threaded, calculating, containment.

Sam Anderson, who is very much a product of Los Angeles/Hollywood film and TV, lens-based macro-envisaging (boom-arm realities), is concerned with this *dialectic of contraries*, where one must go beyond ontology to experience what is large in what is *contained* in the small; *où les enfants regardent grand* (to where children see enlarged)⁵. In *Market*, her eight section floor sculpture counter-intuitively, *filling* the large space to the right of the main gallery, requires hyper-attention as its enlarging glass; where detail increases an object's stature and the microscopic subject, itself, has oneiric powers of amplification. But this is a door that opens only if the viewer (*l'enfant*) has a willingness to find freedom through and beyond the threshold of absurdity. A tiny wreath composed of star anise, set upon tripod legs bent from hairpins, embodies no lesser degree of mourning than if it were 'full scale'; an equally symbolic freedom from life in death. Next to it, a neat a grave of a thousand errant poppy seeds forced into barely-willing rectangularity, which threatened to scamper in all directions every time a vacuum cleaner came within ten feet of it. Were it not for a purpose-made, temporary compound, they trembled and started to roll away, as if escaping the fate of their funerary imprisonment, back to edible circulation; bread and pastry toppings.

In contrast, there is no feeling of improvisation, or liberalised metaphor to be had from the faux wood grain of Magnhild Opdøl's donut boxes, whose Artschwageresque *falsehood*, *fakeness*, claims them for 'art' rather than as their erstwhile *in-der-Welt-sein*⁶ counterpart, of functional food transportation units. Similarly, the finch, a Great Tit specifically, perched on a perfectly convincing, but actually less 'real', cast bronze twig, apparently growing out from the walnut veneered gallery wall, is not only taxidermied (stuffed literally and metaphorically), but badly so! Lovingly scruffy; slightly moulting, pigeon-toed, purchased on eBay for its flaws and visibly *wired* to its perch... *it's a dead Blue Tit / No it's only sleeping!*.. The sun-soaked forests of the paired pigment prints, positioned on the wall, relative to the bird, might once have been its circulatory home, as if viewed from above. But unlike their sense of boundless space; air and light, real outdoor freedom feels confining, in being less digitally enhanced. Across the uncrowded room, Opdøl has placed a pair of rocks on the floor, one lifted, liberated, from the confines of within a mountain, the other, its perfect bronze cast surrogate. Art beside nature, itself co-opted.

Speaking of crowded rooms, Fiona Marron's video projection echoing a Dylan Thomas title, weightlessly conjures one into the gallery's, darkened front space. In Thomas' enigmatic 1953 recording of *Adventures in the Skin Trade*,⁷ of which, *Plenty of Furniture*, is chapter two, 'boundless imagination' voices a room crowded with heavy things; it (de)materialises solids and liberates gravity. The linguistic conjuring fills nothing in no-time, with multitudinous 'stuff' that (in reality – whatever that is?) would take hours, days, of physical labour to install, catalogue, move, dust, sit on, lay on, see oneself within... Yet, in *free* circulation *everything*, even the meaning of *nothing*, endlessly shifts. The poet's premature death, in the same year as his thundering pronouncement of "hills of desks and chairs..." - transmutes his fragile "work in progress"⁸ to a complete, but ever-unfinished "(...trying to avoid the word) novel"⁹, blocking-off the 'ever' in ephemeral, with the 'end' in no-more-to-(be)come. The exact mental clarity of heavy wood, fabrics, clouded glass settles like air-borne dust, as Thomas' cumbersome objects tumble from his mind to our floor. Clatter, clutter, rustle... A phone rings, Fiona Marron's digital video projection shares Dylan Thomas' vision of a furniture-laden purgatory. Endless hills... nothing but circulation, no escape, no end. A man, merging into, or emerging out from, brown wood, occasionally looks up from his paper. The phone rings: Flaubert calls from an era before...

In a letter to his mistress, Flaubert laid out his artistic ideal: "what I should like to write is a book about nothing, a book dependent upon nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its style, just as the earth, suspended in the void, depends on nothing for its support: a book which would have no subject, or at least in which the subject is invisible, if such a thing is possible."¹⁰ If the invisible idea of nothing, unlike its concrete appropriation or finished articulation, its 'end', is, or can, remain a *work in progress*, 'it' (nothing), stands potentially, as a beginning perpetuated, perfectly, without end. How is such a 'thing' possible? Perhaps it is not, but that does not effect the free circulation of the idea that it is.

"A fine beginning."¹¹ No end at all. Onwards... (*sauter dans le vide bleu*)

David Godbold

¹ Extracted from EU statutory customs regulations.

² Measuring 2.5" x 2" (6.35 x 5.08cm) and in Klein's ideal 5:4 ratio, their only relativity to actual stamps was the combination of their size and their perforated edges.

³ Iris Clert from a 1972 interview.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Holly Terror*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pg 68

⁵ In reference to: *Qu'les enfants regardent grand* (to where children see enlarged), Philippe de Boissy, *Main première*, pg 21 quoted in Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pg 155

⁶ 'Being-in-the-world'; Heidegger's favoured replacement for terms such as subject, object, consciousness, and world.

⁷ Dylan Thomas, *Adventures in the Skin Trade*, 1953, Complete citation. Available on spotify...

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Cited and quoted in Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, pg 148-9

¹¹ *ibid*, 7-9