

Iain Forsyth  
& Jane Pollard  
*Kiss My Nauman*  
(No. 1 *The Starchild*)  
2007 video still

painted, atmospheric ground. Disturbing images include a photograph of a woman's crotch covered with a tarantula, a shy drawing of two glamorous women and a long-haired, frightened-looking man in dark glasses, all of which seem to point towards a complicated game of gender politics; scratch the surface and amid the confusion this concept re-emerges again and again, throughout the exhibition. ■

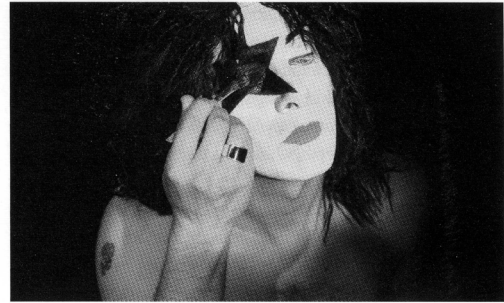
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## Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard: Publicsfear

South London Gallery London 4 February to 18 March

When I was young, I used to trawl record shops for bootleg tapes of my favourite bands. The recordings I preferred, I soon realised, were the hoariest and murkiest: a decades-old live gig or covertly taped rehearsal glimmering through muffle and hiss. Something about straining to experience the thing made it feel excitingly real, even though the music sat at an impossible remove. Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard's *File Under Sacred Music*, 2003, is finely attuned to how time and degradation midwife such tenuous magic; it is also keen to deconstruct the process. A re-enactment of a legendary gig by The Cramps at the Napa State Mental Institute (footage of which, for comparison, is locatable on YouTube), the performance's documentation has been lovingly distressed to look like a bootleg videotape, complete with the sort of wobbles and static dropouts you get from an overplayed VHS. The performance itself is an assiduous mimicry – particular kudos for Poison Ivy's hairdo – but my favourite aspect of it is that the singer impersonating Lux Interior looks like Val Kilmer playing Jim Morrison in Oliver Stone's 1991 film *The Doors*. With that perhaps-accidental nod, the work sets up a hall of mirrors, all imperfectly reflecting the past. That's where we live now, and we can't find the exit.

This effect of watching a valorised spectre as it is forced to walk in the present – irrational excitement cut with depression, basically – repeats throughout 'Publicsfear', Forsyth & Pollard's eight-work, eight-year retrospective. *Performer, Audience, Fuck Off*, 2009, for instance, finds comedian Iain Lee reperforming Dan Graham's cherished *Performer/Audience/Mirror*, 1975, in which Graham appeared before an audience, described his appearance and attitudes and then the audience's, then turned to face a mirror (in which the audience saw themselves and him), and did it again. As Lee updates the work as observational comedy of a twitchy and intermittently cruel stripe, Graham feels both respected and distant. Again, the hall of mirrors: here on video is an audience seeing themselves, knowing they are mirroring the past; at the South London Gallery, meanwhile, one can turn away from the video to watch it reflected (and see oneself) in the polished steel letters spelling out *PUBLICSFEAR*, 2011.

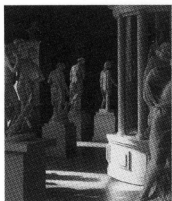


This is effectively art as self-reflexive cover version, a description that also fits *Walking After Acconci (Redirected Approaches)*, 2006, and *Walking After Acconci (Misdirected Reproaches)*, 2008, in which rappers Plan B and MissOddKidd update Vito Acconci performance videos for our Facebook-friendly age of emotional over-sharing, via splenetic verbal attacks on a 'you' that is both the viewer and their ex-partner. *Kiss My Nauman*, 2007, meanwhile, features four simultaneous 47-minute videos that show the members of the world's longest-running Kiss tribute band putting on their make-up, in an explicit nod to Bruce Nauman's *Art Make-Up*, 1967. It is a neat but slightly laboured expansion on Jonathan Monk's 1992 photograph of himself wearing Kiss greasepaint, and Monk seems like Forsyth & Pollard's closest relative in terms of seeing contemporary art as a lockstep process of doing it again, making it perpetually yesterday once more etc.

*Silent Sound*, 2006, is an Ambisonic installation – a high-end type of surround sound – in a luxuriously upholstered, darkened, circular listening space, where one can experience a replay of an orchestral piece by J Spaceman of English symphonic rock group Spiritualized. This music (whose circular piano motifs and swelling strings have strongly Arvo Pärt-ish contours) was originally performed live, under the artists' auspices, at St George's Hall in Liverpool, the site of an 1865 seance by Victorian entertainers The Davenport Brothers. That spooky historical overlay is partly lost here, but supposedly there is some subliminal messaging going on while the music plays (as the 2006 audience was also primed to think): in the installation a sound-metering device jitters its dials and glows strange colours at certain points, as if some kind of presence were registering inaudibly.

If we buy into such shenanigans, it is because – consciously or not – we want to. Forsyth & Pollard's art, as this selection makes admirably clear, is very much about our desires: for what we understand the past to have been, for the connecting succours of music. If that plaintive tenor is what humanises their art, it fights against a countervailing impression of cultural inertia. So much of this work is about making audience members recognise their own presence and behaviour. As such, and as Forsyth & Pollard presumably accept as a bleakly relevant aspect of what they do, it doesn't move appreciably forward from the concerns of Graham, Nauman and Acconci. The details are different; the song remains the same. ■

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ANDREW GRASSIE. 11 March – 10 April 2011.  
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