



Part of the thrill of the sea is its inherent danger and the exhibition is not afraid to play this up. A sample of Susan Hiller's collection of luridly tinted postcards of rough seas around Britain are here blown up to look even more apocalyptic, with their looming skies and treacherous waves that appear to be dissolving cliff faces and swallowing boats. Thomas Joshua Cooper takes silver gelatin photographs of seas using an 1898 Agfa Field camera and then hand prints the negatives; a technique that makes the work as difficult to place in time as in geography, for these are remote places of the world that he selects, travels to and then photographs only once. In Zineb Sedira's film *MiddleSea*, 2008, colour shifts to black and white at the moment when the camera shifts its focus from the ship to the sea, adding another layer of tension to the enigmatic narrative of a lone man aboard a seemingly empty ferry.

It always seems incredible that, in an age of GPS and Google Earth, there should be blind spots in our view of the oceans, so that pirates can operate with relative impunity off the coast of West Africa and a fisherman can wash up a year after his disappearance. Impressively, Tacita Dean managed to track down the shipwrecked boat of amateur yachtsman Donald Crowhurst, who had attempted to circumnavigate the globe as part of a *Sunday Times* competition in 1968. Dean's forlorn photograph of the boat, washed up on the Caribbean island of Cayman Brac, marks the final chapter of an extraordinary story of a man possessed by ambition and sea madness, who first faked his co-ordinates to avoid the embarrassment of losing and then later apparently committed suicide. Next to the photo is displayed a real Navigator, the navigational device that Crowhurst invented and would have used. It looks a bit like a barcode scanner; with the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to say that you wouldn't want to risk your life relying on it.

The famed oceanographer Jacques-Yves Cousteau is the subject of Simon Patterson's *Cousteau in the Underworld*, 2008, a series based on 18th- and 19th-century Admiralty charts on which are inscribed sometimes contradictory extracts of Cousteau's biography culled from the internet and of Homer's *Odyssey*. Patterson amplifies Cousteau's mythical status, yet among his choices of anecdote, one about Cousteau's life-long physical ailments, for example, reminds us of his human limitations.

In Isaac Julien's film *WESTERN UNION: Small Boats (Leopard)*, 2007, over at John Hansard Gallery, piles of wrecked boats and discarded clothing floating in the sea evoke the plight of thousands of migrants who attempt the crossing from Libya to the tiny Sicilian island of Lampedusa. Julien juxtaposes imagery of the paradisiacal beaches with the obscenely opulent interior of the Palazzo Valguarnera-Gangi, location for Visconti's film *The Leopard*. Gold, water, sun, singing and dancing provoke a dizzying sensation of excess which metaphorically mirrors our blindness to the refugee crisis.

In the next room, Catherine Yass's film of the modernist Royal Sovereign Lighthouse off the coast of Bexhill, *Lighthouse*, 2011, uses shifting camera angles – circling, upside down, inverted, underwater – to similar giddy effect. As the viewer examines the station from all angles, like a forensic specimen, it becomes clear that the cabins are empty. The lighthouse was automated 20 years ago and now resembles a ghost ship beached high above the waves, or a sculpture on a podium.

The exhibition always returns to the way in which the sea, in its blankness and timelessness, seems to absorb and reflect our desires, fears and memories. It poses real danger, and yet it is this very danger that attracts us to it. Our relationship to the sea

is changing, so that travelling by it is now associated with the oligarch superyachts of the very rich or the overcrowded migrant boats of the very poor. Global trade and ecology are the pragmatic parameters by which the sea is now often discussed, but 'Ship to Shore' emphatically urges us not to forget its mystery and poetry. ■

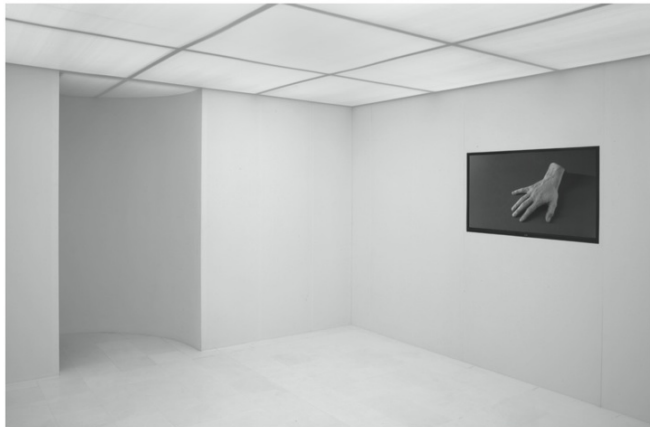
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London Round-up

Peles Empire • Kate MacGarry • Laura Bartlett Gallery • Matt's Gallery

'No one has ever tried to establish chaos as a system, or to let it come,' claimed sound artist Henri Chopin in his 1967 polemic against the hegemony of the intelligible word, 'Why I am the author of Sound Poetry and Free Poetry'. 'Undoubtedly there would be more alive beings and fewer dead beings, such as employees, bureaucrats, business and government executives, who are all dead and who forget the essential thing: to be alive.' Talking sense, writing sense – to him it was all making us ignore the strange and wonderful sounds and irrational ways of communicating we have at our disposal. While Chopin's work is currently on view in Colchester's Firstsite, his anti-sensible, divergent-sensory spirit could be found zipping around London, albeit in the guise of plastic bags, tree leaves and green goo. The small group show **Flow** at Peles Empire perhaps spoke most directly of the lives of the bureaucrats and executives whom Chopin derides, making use of the generic advertising imagery and stifflingly managed environments these 'dead' people might inhabit. Eric Bell and Kristoffer Frick's *Generator (front)*, 2014, is a sterile portrait of a small, egg-shaped machine that claims to be an 'Ozone Generator'. On *Not Yet Untitled*, 2014, one of the small mechanisms is mounted on a blank sheet of white polyurethane foam, whirring away, supposedly pumping ozone into the gallery. The gizmo is sold as an air purifier for stuffy office environments; it doesn't smell any different (I find out afterwards direct inhalation is harmful) and the sound of its rush is the type of white noise that is initially calming but soon becomes disconcerting. Crammed in the corner are two PCs set on a cheap chipboard table; complete with flimsy fold-out chairs, rough lino on the floor and crappy headphones, the means of presentation for Lloyd Corporation's video *Form follows feeling*, 2014, is a scarily accurate recreation of the cramped, rushed constructions of an internet cafe. The two flatscreen monitors alternate in flashing up unconnected, well-composed images of mountains, a rocking chair and several scenes of electronics being assembled. In one section, we see in close-up a cigarette lit by a heated filament, hearing the low crackle of the burn but no other movement or breath as nobody is there to smoke it. Between the works, it feels like a place not just abandoned but creepingly hinting at designed spaces that are actually working against us. 'Flow' holds a compact mirror to the corporate atmosphere, and finds that it is slowly pushing us out of the picture, or killing us off altogether.

Instead of looking at screens and billboards for inspiration, **Josh Blackwell** at Kate MacGarry felt more like he was looking in bins and gutters. His 'Never Uses' series is like a private yarn-bombing campaign, in which plastic bags are his material of choice adorned with erratically stitched, colourful patterns. His 'plastic baskets', as

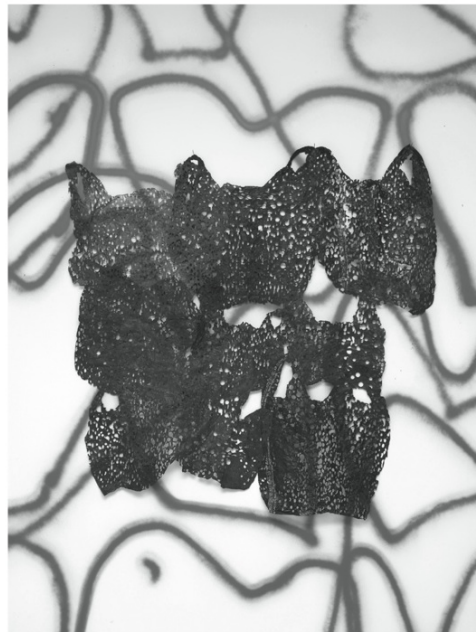


Benedict Drew
Heads May Roll 2014
installation detail

Josh Blackwell
Plastic Baskets (College Drive) 2013

he calls them, are an enthusiastic embrace of detritus, using the bags' colours and designs as the basis for what look like textile designs, masks or animal-like shapes. They are quick, hurried compositions, even the most intricate of them – like *Plastic Basket (Zappai)*, 2013, with its multi-coloured patches and fat, striped worms of yarn on a yellow bag – feel like playground efforts. Over a dozen of them adorn the walls, with a roughly bag-shaped motif spray-painted in black as a backdrop on one wall and a pile of as-yet-unused bags sitting in another corner. *Plastic Baskets (Stay Gold)*, 2013, is a mass of nine ironed-together black bags with bright yellow yarn embroidering the outline, their original gold stripe design messily reiterated in heavy gold marker zig-zagging in various directions. Blackwell's incessant attempts to transform the bags are fun, but he seems satisfied with the process, stopping at making kitsch semi-formal patterns. He has taken on discarded ephemera as a system and, as if by rooting around in the rubbish, discovered a form of scuffed-up modernist primitivism.

Becky Beasley's search was a much more even-tempered, pedestrian affair, looking instead to the natural world, or at least what is left of it in our lives. 'The Walk...in green' at Laura Bartlett Gallery reimagined the urban neighbourhood as a walled garden of sorts, suitable for a contemplative evening stroll. A suspended bronze stick rotates slowly in one corner of the gallery, although closer inspection reveals different textures and junctures – evidence that we are looking at the joined segments of five different sticks. Making a new branch, the compacting of time and space represented in *Bearings*, 2014, is Beasley's emblematic walking stick for this journey: the 15 images in the show were taken by the artist between 1999 and 2003, reconfigured here as one green-thumbed walk. *Flora, A Life*, 2013, was a postcard rack, filled with green-tinted postcards of various shrubs and trees that each bear the identifying name and facts on the origins of the plant ('the edible fig is one of the first plants that was cultivated by humans'). Beasley's stroll is pleasingly aimless, and quietly engaging. The centre of her walk seems to be somewhere between two adjacent photos; *AUX (1) (Passive Voice)* and *AUX (2) (Passive Voice)*, both 2013, are large prints of photos framed underneath green Plexiglas that depict a large pile of wilted leaves, palm fronds and other dumped plant matter sitting on the kerb outside an apartment block. One is printed in reverse, creating a photographic vortex where, impossibly, you are seeing the same side of the pile from apparently different angles. It turns out that Beasley's subject



isn't the plant but rather the photograph of the plant, and in its rhythms she finds a calm, quiet, paradoxical maze.

Benedict Drew's 'Heads May Roll' at Matt's Gallery may be closest to courting chaos as a system, but then Chopin's essay is cited directly in the press release accompanying his exhibition. Drew's installation is a set of three progressively more anarchic settings. The first is the detox room, a white box with a single screen. The video is a fast-cutting stream of textures and body parts, a twitching disembodied hand or turning knees interspersed with close-ups of pink gloop and ice flakes, all with a sparse soundtrack of blips and occasional hi-hat sounds. But if the first room is the clinical precision of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, the second room is *Plan 9 From Outer Space*: red, blue and green lights lining the floor reflect off shiny silver foil on the walls, two stacks of old speakers barraging us with a digital decrescendo spacey sound effect. And finally completing the journey from slick sci-fi to b-movie sci-fi, we arrive in the jumbled circus of the last room. Two projections loop on layered screens propped up on stages, while in the corner a confetti swamp monster in vaguely human form slouches over a snare drum, occasionally giving it a weak tap. In one video, an astronaut is apparently discussing crying in zero gravity, a wobbling glob of liquid jiggling in the recession between his nose and eye; in the other a black motorcycle helmet oozes green goo, coating its visor. So, this sensory immersion has been reorienting and priming us for ... what? The chaos that Drew has tried to 'let come', as Chopin put it, is that of contemporary life – its stumbling technologies and entertaining illusions. But even if this final room plays the unfiltered subconscious to the other rooms (or even the world outside), its media jumble and arbitrary indulgence is still all-too-familiar to us. 'Heads May Roll' accepts, and tries to amplify, the chaos of contemporary life as a brain-melting confusion, evoking some half-formed being trying to figure out, through the noise, how to be alive. But I get the feeling that the Chopin whom Drew cites might have been seeking chaos of another – less familiar, and perhaps more aspirational – order. ■

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