

DOUBLE AGENT

21 May - 17 August 2008

Pawel Althamer/
Nowolipie Group
Phil Collins
Dora García
Christoph Schlingensief
Barbara Visser
Donelle Woolford
Artur Zmijewski

Curated by: Claire Bishop/Mark Sladen

Double Agent is an exhibition of art works and collaborative projects in which the artist uses other people as a medium. All of the works raise questions of performance and authorship, and in particular the issues of ethics and representation that ensue when the artist is no longer the central agent in his or her own work, but operates through a range of individuals, communities, and surrogates.

One of the starting points for the exhibition is recent and conspicuous rise of interest in performance and performative gestures among contemporary artists. But today's generation, unlike their precursors in the 1960s and 70s, do not necessarily privilege the live moment or their own body. Instead, they engage in strategies of mediation, delegation and collaboration.

Such strategies can work to undermine the idea of the authentic or authoritative artist, who is substituted instead by a variety of figures. Such strategies can also promote unpredictability and risk, as the artist's agents may prove to be partial or unreliable. In some instances the use of third parties can also raise ethical issues and questions of exploitation.

Double Agent includes seven artists, represented by a range of media including video and live performance. It includes the UK premieres of a number of significant works, as well as new commissions. After its showing at the ICA the exhibition will travel to Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, its content refreshed by new commissions at the respective venues.

Claire Bishop

Assistant Professor of History of Art, Warwick University

Mark Sladen

Director of Exhibitions, ICA



Production still from the shoot for *The African Twin Towers*
© Aino Laberenz

Artist, filmmaker and theatre director Christoph Schlingensiefel is represented by a video installation entitled *The African Twin Towers—Stairlift to Heaven* (2007). The main feature of this installation is an 80-minute film, telling the story of a megalomaniac theatre director who wants to stage a version of the 9-11 story in a former German colony in Namibia. The invocation of colonialism and terrorism are typical of Schlingensiefel's exploration of contemporary taboos, as is his use of myth and ritual—in this case drawing on Norse sagas and African shamanism—and the excessive and purgative manner in which he brings such elements together.

Equally characteristic of Schlingensiefel's work is its collaborative and participatory quality. In the aforementioned film the roles are played by the artist, by the Fassbinder actress Irm Hermann, by local people, as well as members of Schlingensiefel's regular troupe of non-professional performers—many of whom have physical or mental disabilities. Two of the artist's regular collaborators can be seen in another short film that features in the installation, and which requires viewers to literally incorporate themselves into the work, as it is visible at the top of a stairlift that cuts across the main projection.

Biography

Born 1960 in Oberhausen, Germany, lives in Berlin.

Solo exhibitions include: Migros Museum, Zurich (2007), Haus der Kunst, Munich (2007), Vienna Burgtheater (2006), Volksbühne Berlin (2006), Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig (2006), Museum f. Moderne Kunst, Salzburg (2006), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2005), Reykjavik Art Festival (2005), Biennale di Venezia (2003).

Group exhibitions include: *Into Me/Out of Me*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2006), *AC/DC*, Museum Ludwig, Vienna (2006), *Church of Fear*, La Biennale di Venezia, Venice (2003).



Instant Narrative (IN), as staged at Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, 2007

Dora García began making performance works in 2000, using hired actors as a substitute for her own presence. Some of her performances take place inside exhibitions, as in *Proxy/Coma* (2001) in which a woman lounges around the gallery space, captured on surveillance cameras. Others blur into the outside world and can potentially last for years, as in *The Messenger* (2002), where a performer (The ‘messenger’) must deliver a message in a foreign language—but to do so must search for someone who can identify and understand that language. In all of the works, García strikes a fragile balance between scripted behaviour and the performer’s interpretation of her instructions.

Instant Narrative (IN) (2006–2008) comprises an observer positioned within the exhibition space who makes notes on visitors to the exhibition—notes which are simultaneously projected onto the wall of the gallery. The resultant text forms a real-time story in which the viewers are the protagonists, but the authorship of this narrative is a function of continual displacement—from the artist to the writer to the visitor.

Biography

Born in 1965 in Valladolid, lives and works in Brussels.

Solo exhibitions include: Centro de Arte Santa Monica (2007), GfZK, Leipzig (2007), SMAK, Gent (2006), FRAC, Bourgogne, Dijon (2005), Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2005), MUSAC, León (2005).

Group exhibitions include: Skulpture Projekte, Münster (2007), *Actions and Interruptions*, performance programme, Tate Modern, London (2007), *Whenever it starts it is the right time, strategies for a discontinuous future*, Frankfurter Kunstverein (2007).



Last Lecture, 2007. Courtesy Annet Gelink Gallery

Barbara Visser explores issues of authority and authenticity, often taking an apparently untouchable icon as her starting point, and then proceeding to dismantle it through processes that include translation, copying and re-enactment. Visser's works include photographs in which pieces of modernist furniture are literally falling apart; a recorded performance referring to the Lennon-Ono 'Bed In for Peace' at the Amsterdam Hilton in 1969; and—in the case of the work shown here—a series of performances in which the authenticity of the artist's own persona is brought into question.

In 1997 Visser staged a lecture in which—unknown to the audience—an actress stood in for the artist, receiving instructions from the latter via an earpiece. In 2004 Visser staged a second lecture, using a new actress (this time one who actually looked like the artist) to comment on footage of the first lecture. In 2007 Visser staged a third performance, presenting herself as a silhouette cast onto a screen on which a video of the previous event was projected, while dubbing the second actress' voice. This latter performance is the basis of a video, *Last Lecture* (2007, 20 mins), which is screened here.

Biography

Born 1966 Haarlem, Netherlands, lives in Amsterdam.

Solo exhibitions include: De Paviljoens, Almere (2006), Villa Arson, Nice (2002), Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam (2003), Underground Gallery, Athens (2002).

Group exhibitions include: *Space for your Future*, MOT Tokyo, Japan (2007), 27th Biennial of Sao Paulo, Brazil (2006), *I (Ich) Performative Ontology*, Wiener Secession, Vienna (2006), *Mediascapes*, Fundacio "La Caixa", Tarragona (2005), *Wunderland Unframed*, Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam (2004), *Surfacing*, Ludwig Museum, Budapest (2004).



you'll never work in this town again (mark), 2006. Courtesy the artist



you'll never work in this town again (claire), 2006. Courtesy the artist

Phil Collins' work frequently invites people to perform for a camera: to strip in a hotel room, to participate in a disco-dancing marathon, to recount their experience of appearing on reality television. The complicity that results between the artist and his performers is complex, since payment is rarely involved and both parties hope to gain something from the exchange. The five photographs in *Double Agent* continue the artist's interest in using the camera as the premise for a performative situation.

The five images on show are from *you'll never work in this town again* (2004–ongoing), a series of photographic portraits of curators, critics, dealers, collectors and other figures in the art world—photographed on the understanding that the image would be taken immediately after the artist had slapped each sitter hard around the face. The work can be seen both as a pre-emptive strike by the artist towards those who have the capacity to make or break his career, and as a shared moment of intimacy, while also revealing the narcissism of those who want to be in a work of art—even if it means physical pain. The photographs on show were all taken in London in 2006, and include the two curators of the current exhibition.

Biography

Born 1970 Runcorn, lives in Glasgow.

Solo exhibitions include: Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas (2007), Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2007), Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Gent (2006), and Milton Keynes Gallery (2005).

Group exhibitions include: *Turner Prize 2006*, Tate Britain, London (2006), *British Art Show 6*, various venues (2005–06), 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005), *Universal Experience: Art, Life and the Tourist's Eye*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and tour (2005).



Nowolipie Group, Newcastle. Courtesy BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, 2008.

Pawel Althamer was one of the first artists to produce events with non-professional performers in the early 1990s; his early works involved collaborations with homeless men and women, gallery invigilators, and children. Much of Althamer's practice stems from an identification with marginal subjects, and comes to constitute an oblique form of self-portraiture.

For over a decade, Althamer has led a ceramics class for the Nowolipie Group, an organisation in Warsaw for adults with multiple sclerosis and other disabilities. The experience provides a rich source of ideas for Althamer, for whom the educational process cuts two ways ('they teach me to be more mad!'). Each class revolves around a given theme—such as castles, or portraits of the Pope—but one of the participants, Rafal, prefers always to make clay biplanes.

Double Agent includes a display of ceramics by the group in Warsaw and the video *Do It Yourself* (2004, 9.20 mins). Made in collaboration with Artur Zmijewski, the latter shows Rafal's fluctuating emotions—from enthusiasm to frustration—during the course of a class.

In April this year, Althamer invited Rafal and another member of the Nowolipie Group, Remegius, to lead workshops at the BALTIC focusing on ceramics and wood respectively. The participants were members of the Newcastle and Gateshead branch of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. This exhibition features a selection of the works created.

Biography/Pawel Althamer

Born 1967 Warsaw, lives in Warsaw.

Solo exhibitions include: Centre Pompidou, Paris (2006), Zacheta, National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2006), Bonnefontenmuseum, Maastricht (2004).

Group exhibitions include: *Kontakt*, MUMOK, Vienna, Austria (2006), *The New Reality of Europe*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2006), Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (2004), La Biennale di Venezia (2003), Manifesta 3, Ljubljana (2000).



Them, 2007. Courtesy Foksal Gallery Foundation

Artur Zmijewski's work frequently raises ethical questions of representation, particularly in relation to his constructed events and activities in which specific groups of people are invited to perform. One of his most controversial and potent videos shows a group of deaf teenagers attempting to sing Maklakiewicz's 1944 Polish Mass; another shows the Polish army marching naked in a dance studio.

The video *Them* (2007, 27 minutes) documents a series of painting workshops organized by the artist. These events feature groups of Christians, Jews, Young Socialists, and Polish nationalists, who are encouraged to respond to each group's symbolic depiction of its values. Over the course of the workshops, tensions build between the groups and culminate in an explosive *impasse*. As in many of Zmijewski's videos, the artist adopts an ambiguous role and it is never clear to what degree his participants are acting with their own agency, or being manipulated to fulfill the requirements of his pre-planned narrative.

Biography

Born 1966 Warsaw, lives in Warsaw.

Solo exhibitions include: Neuer Berlin Kunstverein (2007), CCA Wattis Institute of Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2006), Kunsthalle, Basel (2005), MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA (2004).

Group exhibitions include: Documenta 12, Kassel (2007), Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2007), The Polish Pavilion, 51 Biennale di Venezia, Venice (2005).



Image courtesy Pierfrancesco Celada and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. 2008.

As his contribution to the exhibition, Joe Scanlan presents the up-and-coming artist Donelle Woolford, who is using a studio in the exhibition space at BALTIC to construct her own. Woolford is a young Afro-American artist and former studio assistant of Scanlan. She makes wooden assemblages that reference Cubism and which are designed to coincide with (and challenge) the 100th anniversary of that movement.

Scanlan has previously collaborated with Woolford on *The Massachusetts Wedding Bed* (2005), a press conference in which Woolford, Scanlan and his brother lay in queen-sized bed in an Amsterdam gallery, answering questions about America. This work, as well as his presentation of Donelle Woolford in BALTIC, brings together several of Scanlan's interests: the fine line between work of art and commercial product (on his website www.thingsthatfall.com, you can purchase artist-designed coffins), the role of word-of-mouth and fabrication, and the relationship between myth-making and salesmanship.

Donelle Woolford will use the exhibition space at BALTIC as a studio and will be working in the gallery on selected days throughout the show.

Biography/Donelle Woolford

Born 1977 Detroit, MI, lives in Harlem, NY.

Solo exhibitions: Wallspace, New York (2008);
Galerie Chez Valentin, Paris (2007).

Group exhibitions include: *New Economy*, Artist's Space, New York (2007); 8th Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates (2007); *Data Mining*, Wallspace, New York (2006); *BMW, IX Baltic Triennial*, Contemporary Art Center, Vilnius (2005).

Double Agent is an ICA touring exhibition which features at the following venues:

Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (ICA)

14 February-6 April 2008

Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre

26 April-28 June 2008

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead

21 May-17 August 2008

Double Agent is an ICA touring exhibition supported by Arts Council England. Additional support has been provided by SEACEX (State Corporation for Spanish Cultural Action Abroad), the Mondriaan Foundation, and the Polish Cultural Institute.

The ICA would like to thank all of the artists for their help in the preparation of this project. We would also like to thank the artist's representatives, including Foksal Gallery Foundation, Hauser and Wirth, Victoria Miro Gallery and Galerie Micheline Szwajcer. In addition, we would like to thank the following for their help and advice: Annick Kleizen, Sinisa Mitrovic, Julian Pörksen. Elena Crippa, Davina Drummond, Annie Fletcher, Raphael Gygax, Lois Keidan & Daniel Brine, Anders Kreuger, David Kulhanek, Lars Bang Larsen, Raimundas Malasaukis, Becca Marston, Chus Martinez, Viktor Misiano, Francesco Manacorda, Cristina Ricupero, Joshua Sofaer, Adam Szymczyk and Eva Wittcox.

BALTIC would like to thank the Newcastle and Gateshead MS Society for their participation in Pawel Althamer's Nowolipie Group workshop; in particular, Ann Davidson, Brian Rowe, Carol Rowell, Helen Cable, Linda Rowe, Margaret McArthur, Neil Gibson and Tom Norton and Helen Sorensen

Supported by:



LOTTERY FUNDED



Sociedad Estatal
para la Acción
Cultural Exterior



Mondriaan Stichting
(Mondriaan Foundation)



www.PolishCulture.org.uk

The Mall
London SW1Y 5AH
020 7930 3647
www.ica.org.uk/doubleagent



BALTIC

www.balticmill.com

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead Quays, South Shore Road,
Gateshead NE8 3BA UK Tel +44 (0) 191 478 1810.

Opening Times: daily 10.00-18.00 except Tuesday 10.30-18.00. Free Admission.

info@balticmill.com

www.myspace.com/balticmill

