

Double Acts

Double Acts "celebrates and surveys" collaborative arts practice in the UK today, at the Phoenix Gallery, Brighton, until 9 June 2007.

Guest curator Sally Lai brings an unusual emphasis to Double Acts, the first of two exhibitions she will present for Phoenix Arts Association in Brighton. With a strong background in Chinese artistic influences, Lai's curatorial portfolio takes in two contemporary galleries in Hong Kong, where her family are from; Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester; and she recently brought Arrivals and Departures: New Art Perspectives of Hong Kong to Urbis, Manchester.

At Phoenix, the impact of Lai's Chinese British-informed vision of contemporary art is more oblique. Her focus is on creative collaborations and the dynamic juxtapositions that occur when people with different ideas and influences join forces to evolve a creative idea.

Lai expresses collaboration as "deliberately altering artistic identity from individual to composite subjectivity". This is a process that, often involuntarily, many artists coming from more than one cultural tradition must encompass. The exhibition and associated events aim to illuminate questions such as how did the collaboration begin and why does it continue, what roles do the collaborators fulfil, and what are the expectations of loyalty and empathy.

A common theme in Double Acts is the bringing together of divergent technical abilities that allows for the new-media art that is well represented here. For The Owl Project, Anthony Hall's constructions using everyday objects and Simon Blackmore's streaming skills team up with Steve Symons' experience with sound to produce the Sound Lathe. This explores of the sonic properties of woodwork to produce a performed audio rendition of wood turning, the video of which is screened in the exhibition.

The Colour Conundrum is an updating of nineteenth century optical games such as the Magic Lantern, which allowed Jonathan Gilhooly to continue his play with perception, while bringing in the technical understanding of colour of Stig Evans. This conjunction of interests was born out of the physical proximity of the two artists, both members of Red Herring Studios at Phoenix in Brighton.

Semiconductor artists Ruth Jarmon and Joseph Gerhardt combine their skills in acoustic manipulation, film and digitisation. Earth Moves, their installation for Double Acts, mixes audio and visual inputs to produce short films of landscapes, where the physical, viewed, world ripples, fizzes and bulges to the heard soundtrack of the landscapes. In this, Semiconductor posit sound and visual stimulus as co-collaborators in the created piece "We have sought to physically tie the senses of sight and sound in an attempt to transcend their difference."

Caroline Jupp and Sam Brown, the artists behind The Library of Unwritten Books, admit that as well as different technical expertise (Caroline has a background in the written word whereas Sam comes from sculpture, photography and installation) it is their different temperaments that have allowed this particular project to thrive. "Caroline is good at getting people to open up during interviews", while Sam's attention to detail has resulted in the beautifully produced mini-books that result from each interview about the book the interviewee always wanted to write. "The main thing is the support we give to each other to keep going with a long term project such as this." However, here too the artists feel they are collaborating with forces external to their partnership. "We think of the library as a multi-authored work. As the driving force behind the project, we prefer our profile not to be at the forefront but I don't think the 'author' disappears in our library; in fact it's a celebration of authorship."

Double Acts at Phoenix Arts Association, Brighton [www. http://www.phoenixarts.org/](http://www.phoenixarts.org/)
April 28 – June 9, 2007. Tues - Sat, 11 - 5 (closed Sun & Mon).

© Rachel Escott, UK 2007. www.rachelescott.co.uk/writing