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Chris Brown a-n Magazine Coordinator.

LETTERS

Got a burning issue to raise with artists and arts professionals? Send up to 800 words to edit@a-n.co.uk

Re: Art is not hardware

One has to take issue with Fiona Flynn regarding her article about retail outlets as art spaces. One has to ask why the art in these spaces should in her words, "end up, inevitably, being a window looking out onto the mediocre end of the art spectrum."

Just because art is displayed in a shop does not mean that it is going to lose its quality and importance as a piece of artwork, offering something vital to those who choose to look at it.

Further to this, it has to be noted that these retail spaces are available as temporary exhibition spaces and not galleries. They afford an opportunity for a whole range of creative groups, organisations and individuals to "take part in the exhibition process: something that might 'piss off' the gallery owners rather than the public."

Anyone who remembers Coventry in the 70s recession era would have a better understanding than perhaps Fiona Flynn displays as to why it is important to put these spaces to good use.

Boarded-up shops are ugly and create a hostile environment where crime flourishes. It has taken Coventry a long time to shed its image of a 'Ghost town'. It has achieved through the hard work of a great many people, not least among them, artists who have been prepared to take art to the people through community projects that have offered inspiration, self esteem and a sense of value and belonging to those people.

If this new venture does the same then it will achieve something worthwhile. If it fails then we can get out the board and nails. I personally know which one I favour. Perhaps Fiona Flynn should step out of the London 'bubble' and visit some of these places.

John Starkey

I read with interest Fiona Flynn's 'Art is not hardware' article regarding the announcement by the Government towards the 'empty shop' funding. I agree that art is not the solution to the crisis affecting the 'High Street'; setting up a temporary commercial gallery partially funded by the tax payer where other shops have already closed down really helps no one. But why can't artists show art that "offers a new way of understanding ourselves and our world" in a pre-arranged temporary empty shop rather than by squatting?

Outside of London, artists find it tough to show work that is not very commercial and domestic in scale, and there are few studio or project spaces available on a temporary or fixed term basis. The 'High Street' in most towns is overdue for a radical change, as we now shop at out of town mega-stores or over the internet. Why can't we use this opportunity to re-build a cultural element on the High Street with art that is perhaps challenging to the community while supporting artistic ventures that are not just another 'shop'.

In Bracknell, Berkshire, a town scheduled for massive, yet now postponed regeneration, the local council and the main property developer have been working with local artists for the last few years to make use of some of the empty shops. Six visual artists, including myself, have had the opportunity to use three shops as studio spaces; a local theatre group has another one for a rehearsal space, and there's now a community arts space. My studio group decided to offer our large front window as a 'project space', which gives regional artists an opportunity to experiment and show work that perhaps pushes their practice in new directions.

We also formed a network group, ReOrsa that will be holding our fourth project this autumn utilising

empty shops, windows and the 'High Street', giving the community a chance to experience contemporary art outside of the traditional gallery setting, many for the first time. It's also helping to build a stronger visual arts community in the region by bringing artists together on a regular basis. We have done these projects with very little public funding, so the recent announcement will not convince me to start the form filling that I'm sure will be required. But perhaps it will help local councils and artists come together to think about what else we can do beyond setting up more shops to sell objects. As Dan Thompson writes in his Empty Shops Network a-n projects blog, "Using empty shops is about celebrating the local, engaging with the character of empty spaces, exploring new ideas and exciting the community."

Janet Curly Cannon
www.reorsa.org
www.jcurlycannon.com
www.artistsandmakers.com/staticpages/index.php/emptyshops

"Artists need to raise their profile in the debate about the ethics of artistic practice."

DEBATE

As part of our role as the UK's leading information and advocacy organisation for artists and their collaborators, please contribute your views on cultural policy and the environment for contemporary practice to edit@a-n.co.uk

Ethical regulation: a challenge to artistic innovation?

Should artists cultivate more self-reflection on the implications of their work for those experiencing it? In this month's Debate, Nell Munro and Robert Dingwall discuss whether art can retain its power to shock and disturb in ways that university regulators would be unlikely to countenance.

Arts education has been increasingly moving into higher education. Colleges of art have acquired university status and it has become more common for practitioners to combine their work with research. This has already generated important clashes of professional cultures. Artists have been challenged to meet the demands of the Research Excellence Framework by publication, seeking funding and demonstrating the economic impact of their work. However, a further aspect of university life is becoming increasingly significant, but has passed largely unnoticed by the artistic community. This is the regulation of research ethics.

Formal regulation of research ethics is not new. Since the 1970s, federal regulations have required US universities to establish procedures to evaluate the ethics of all research involving human subjects. More recently, UK universities have also had to comply with the demands of research funding councils to introduce research ethics committees.

This kind of prospective evaluation has been widely criticised by social scientists, who have argued that it undermines creative research using innovative methodologies. The risks of employing a new method may be hard to calculate, and ethics reviewers tend to be cautious when reviewing proposals that do not conform to an existing template. We expect this to be a similar constraint on artists.

But artists may encounter an additional difficulty. Some, particularly those working with interactive and performance art, want to engage with the coercive and deceptive practices which regulation has increasingly barred to

the social sciences. Examples include Rod Dickinson's theatrical restaging of Stanley Milgram's compliance experiments and Artur Zmijewski's work *Repetition*, which included a re-enactment of the infamous Stanford Prison experiment. However, artists can readily anticipate problems when working on such obviously controversial projects. Problems with research ethics regulation are more likely to arise at the margins, with works that appear to carry a low risk of harm to participants, but which still transgress the ethical boundaries observed by most social science research. We have identified two examples, which both involve deception and non-consensual participation to achieve a specific artistic end.

The first involved one of the authors, who was invited to participate in a work entitled 'Anywhere-Somewhere-Everywhere', which took place in Nottingham in April 2008. It was billed as "a guided tour where you are the guide". Participants were issued with mobile phones and instructed to walk the streets at will. They were not informed that they would be shadowed by a 'double' who would observe them, and phone at intervals with instructions to visit specially staged spectacles. Unlike traditional performance settings, in which audience members can anticipate, and even willingly engage in, being deceived, this framing as a "guided tour" did not alert participants to the likelihood that a deception was to be performed on them. The author found her experience deeply unpleasant, but it became clear that the organisers had not made arrangements to debrief or reassure distressed participants. Afterwards, when asked how they had addressed the ethical aspects of their work, the organisers replied that their funders had been happy, and no one else had complained.

Similar issues are raised in an article in *Performance Research*, where an Australian artist, Kirsten Hudson, describes a work she staged. This involved anonymously posting a series of objects to an audience who had not asked to participate. Some audience members felt threatened by the mailed objects and went to the police. When the police declined to press charges, aggrieved participants complained to the university where Hudson was studying for a PhD. The university responded by asserting that Hudson had failed to follow their procedures for ethical review, and banned her from using this work in her thesis.

Both of these works denied participants the opportunity to make an informed decision about whether or not to get involved. In both cases, however, such concealment was intended to contribute positively to the audience experience. While both works also frightened some participants, some artists might claim that intense emotional responses to a work are highly desirable. Finally, in both cases, the artists claimed personally to have considered the ethical impact of their actions before carrying them out, although they had not been processed through a formal review.

It is works like these, with highly uncertain risks and benefits, which seem most likely to be compromised by the growing imposition of external research ethics regulation in higher education. All regulation comes at a price. Social scientists have long argued that the price of formal research ethics regulation is too high. Junior scholars are deterred from empirical work, innovations are suppressed, and researchers whose work has been approved have been accused of "contracting out their conscience", and failing continuously and critically to consider the ethics of their methods. The costs imposed by research ethics regulation on artistic practice have yet to be assessed, but we would be surprised if they were very different. Safety will be valued over innovation, the very complexity of ethics review will discourage some practitioners from working with human participants, and those whose work is approved may lazily assume that this is sufficient justification for what they wish to do.

Artists need to raise their profile in the debate about the ethics of artistic practice. In particular, they need to communicate with a much wider audience than their own community about why they do what they do.

Nell Munro is Lecturer at the School of Law, University of Nottingham.

Robert Dingwall is Professor at the Institute for Science and Society, University of Nottingham.

This is based on a presentation to an AHRC workshop on Risk and Innovation in the Arts, Cambridge, 16 April 2009.



1 Reactor, *Munkanon* – 'This will make you laugh' training in the ibs & fibs, 2008.

2 Reactor, *Munkanon* – Mubs play 'Munkanite's Corner' in the D-GR, 2008. Reactor's projects interrogate the passive role an audience member might expect to have with an artwork.



SNAPSHOT

Megan Wakefield with highlights of what's on in September around the UK and beyond.



1 "What keeps man alive?" is the question posed by Croatian collective What, How and for Whom? at the 11th International Istanbul Biennial (12 September – 8 November). Reviving Brecht's Epic Theatre for the twenty-first century, they seek to readdress the role of the audience and art's relationship to the social. You may want to contribute to man's survival by reducing your carbon footprint and staying closer to home, in which case 'FIX 09' the Belfast Live Art Biennial (Catalyst Arts, 26 September – 4 October), has a similar emphasis on social engagement, but with a professed "light-hearted" touch. Take part in collaborations, screenings and workshops with Irish and international artists. For radical new film made on a shoestring check out Split International Film Festival (12-19 September, Croatia), but if a slice of the collector's market and is more to your taste there's always 'Art Forum Berlin' (24-27 September) or the 'Shanghai Contemporary 09' (10-13 September).

www.iksv.org/bienal11
www.catalystarts.org.uk
www.splitfilmfestival.hr
www.art-forum-berlin.de
www.shcontemporary.info



2 In his first UK solo exhibition 'Poison Protocols and Other Histories', Joachim Koester (Stills Gallery, Edinburgh, to 25 October) shows lens-based work portraying real and idealised drug-induced experience, ritual dance and the artist's transgressive re-imagining of iconic works by Robert Adams, Gordon Matta-Clark and Bernd and Hilla Becher. Also playing with historical context is winner of the ArtSway 08 Open, Benjamin Beker. Monuments and domestic interiors are plucked from their Belgrade setting and re-staged in a fictional photographic environment (ArtSway, 5 September – 8 November). Paul Carter resituates the artist's studio for his installation, 'Hotel' at Matt's Gallery (London, 9 September – 1 November) and there's still a chance to see how the king of copper sulphate Roger Hiorns has transfigured a derelict flat near Elephant and Castle into a crystal cave; 'Seizure' has been extended due to popular demand, (Artangel, 151-189 Harper Road, London, to 18 October).

www.stills.org
www.artsway.org.uk
www.artangel.org.uk



3 The crackle of static interference, projections on retro furniture, water and electrical wiring, comprise hazardous installation work by Haroon Mirza, as part of the A Foundation contemporary sculpture series (A Foundation, Liverpool, 4 September – 23 October). Mirza is showing alongside artist and filmmaker Ben Rivers, whose work, part-documentary, part-fiction, traces the life-worlds of characters on the edge of society. *Ah, Liberty!*, *This is My Land* and other films are screened in a gallery transformed by the artist's models and etchings (A Foundation, Liverpool, 4 September – 17 October). That classic outsider and truth-teller, the tragic-comic figure of 'The Fool' is the proposition for a show with (amongst others) Natasha Caruana, Alex Pollard and Clare Stephenson, at the Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, (Sunderland, to 19 September).

www.afoundation.org.uk
www.ngca.gov.uk

1 Morgan O'Hara, *Live Transmission: movement of the hands of percussionist Esteban Robledo while performing at the 2nd Bienal Internacional de Performance, Comuna Mapuche, Santiago, Chile, 2008*. Photo. Courtesy: Catalyst

2 Joachim Koester, still from *Tarantism*, 16mm film installation, 2007. Courtesy: Stills

3 Haroon Mirza, detail from installation *Adhān*, 2009. Courtesy: A Foundation