

Future Refrains

ASC Gallery

The Chaplin Centre, Taplow House, Thurlow Street, London SE17 2DG; www.ascstudios.co.uk
www.PeerSessions.com

18th September – 27th October 2017

Private view – 6-9pm Friday 15th September

Event day – *Collaboration in Question* 1-5:30pm 23rd September

Press Release

Friendship means sharing a refrain, a semiotic set that allows us to see the same vision and helps us create a world out of chaos.¹

Peer Sessions is proud to present *Future Refrains*, an exhibition at ASC Gallery featuring newly commissioned work funded by Arts Council England. Peer Sessions is a London-based nomadic crit group, established in 2009 by artists Kate Pickering and Charlotte Warne Thomas. Peer Sessions' monthly meetings provide a forum for artists to come together to discuss and receive feedback on recent work in relation to current concerns in contemporary art and culture. In addition, we organise projects: workshops, exhibitions and residencies focusing on direct artistic collaboration.

For *Future Refrains*, Peer Sessions selected three member artists and invited each to choose a recent MA Fine Art graduate with whom to collaborate. *Future Refrains* will feature these three new commissions, alongside works from established artists Adam Chodzko and Lindsay Seers, who have each guest moderated recent Peer Sessions crit groups. As part of *Future Refrains*, a performance and screening day with live panel discussion, *Collaboration in Question*, on Saturday 23rd September will explore the processes and implications of collaborative practice for this project and in the wider world of contemporary art.

Peer Sessions derives its name from the double meaning of the word *peer*: both in terms of examining something in depth and referring to a group of equals – artists who have recently completed postgraduate education. Peer Sessions' ethos is one of mutual support, extended through the practice of regularly gathering together, offering rigorous and reflective feedback and providing opportunities for experimentation and collaboration.

Future Refrains sets out to explore the potentials and limits of this mode of working together in the current socio-political climate. What claims, if any, can be made for collaborative artistic practice, beyond the direct benefit to the artists themselves? *Future Refrains* proposes that these emergent collaborations, in their inherent equality, mutuality and sharing, create a form of friendship that both refuses the individualism of neoliberalism and suggests tentative but potent models for future collectivity.

In Franco Bifo Berardi's recent book *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, Berardi attempts to build a map of 'social futurability', to divine the possibilities and potentials of the social body in the wake of Daesh, Trump, austerity and resurgent social-nationalism. He considers the attack on modern social civilisation sustained by neo-liberalism as resulting in a kind of explosion of madness. Berardi contends that 'the painful sentiment that things are flying away, the feeling of being overwhelmed by speed and noise and violence, of anxiety, panic, mental chaos'² results in a craving for (a non-existent) order, a need to build bridges between difference, between singular minds. In this building of bridges, Berardi proposes friendship serves to create shared meaning through dialogue:

The condition of the groundless construction of meaning is friendship. The only coherence of the world resides in sharing the act of projecting meaning: cooperation between agents of enunciation. When friendship dissolves, when solidarity is banned and individuals stay alone and face the darkness of matter in isolation, then reality turns back into chaos and the

¹ Berardi, F. (2011) *After The Future* AK Press: Edinburgh, Oakland, Baltimore p.160

² Berardi, F. (2017) *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility* Verso: London p.24

coherence of the social environment is reduced to the enforcement of the obsessional act of identification.³

Artistic collaboration has been broadly defined as encompassing a host of participatory, community based, interventionist and socially engaged practices⁴. Theorists Claire Bishop and Grant Kester have contested the competing political, ethical and aesthetic claims within these collaborative forms - Bishop attacking the approach of judging these works on a solely ethical basis ('good' forms of collaboration as opposed to exploitative/ 'bad') at the expense of aesthetic merit, whilst Kester affirms the ethical as a fundamental aspect of collaborative practice which enables artists to overcome their privileged status and to make work in a truly dialogic and participatory way⁵. Lindsay Seers, in her recent blogpost *Collaboration is too fucked up- let's CORROBORATE*, provides a further variation on collaboration, considering that the employment of technicians and craftspeople to enable the realisation of her work is also a form of collaboration⁶. Taking the definition to its limits, Jessica Warboys in the exhibition *The Studio and The Sea* (Tate St. Ives), asserted she had collaborated with the sea by putting her canvas on it.⁷

In contrast, *Future Refrains* follows the tradition of direct artistic collaboration (Rubens and Brueghel, Dada, Gilbert and George, ULAY and Abramovich, Feschli and Weiss). It is therefore less mired in the problematic entanglements of working in unequal partnerships, or for monetary exchange, and rather than being a solely formal experiment, exists as a means of rejecting the romantic myth of the solitary genius. Instead, by fostering co-authorship, *Future Refrains* creates models of bridge-building through discussion and exchange between peers. These germinating collaborative structures are significant in the current climate of instability, anxiety and precarity in offering up an image of friendship as a stable framework to achieve common goals. Lindsay Seers advances the term *corroborate* as a more positive, nuanced alternative to *collaborate*. Circumventing the problematic associations of labour in the term *collaborate* (to 'co-labour'), Seers states that to *corroborate* suggests "strengthening and arriving at truths through co-operation". As part of this definition, she considers that corroborators:

- seek for common truths between each other;
- support these truths and reinforce them together;
- strengthen in a group;
- share a common goal in the collective but allow for differentiated outcomes;
- are clear about their doubts even to each other and use criticism to consolidate and reinforce the group.

This working definition has served as a fruitful framework for this project, and holds within it a potential schema for future collective forms.

Future refrains will showcase collaborative commissions by:

Peer Sessions member **Alicja Rogalska** chose to work with **Daniel Dressel**

Peer Sessions member **Anita Delaney** chose to work with **Simon Gerrard**

Peer Sessions member **James Ferris** chose to work with **Paula Linke**

The exhibition will also feature new works by **Adam Chodzko** and **Lindsay Seers** who have contributed to recent Peer Sessions crit groups as guest moderators.



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³ Berardi, F. *ibid* p.25

⁴ Bishop, C (2006) 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents' in *Artforum*, February 2006, pp. 179-185. p. 179

⁵ Kester, G (2004) *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* University of California Press

⁶ Seers, L (2017) Collaboration is too fucked up - let's CORROBORATE [Online] Available at: <http://www.lindsayseers.info/blog/collaboration-too-fucked-up-lets-corroborate> [Accessed 24.7.17]

⁷ Tate.org.uk (2017) Jessica Warboys [Online] Available at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-st-ives/exhibition/jessica-warboys> [Accessed 24.7.2017]