

# ***Mimesis; Narrative; Against hegemony!***

An exhibition celebrating 10 years of Peer Sessions

Dave Charlesworth

Ben Cove

Merike Estna

Justin Gainan

Katie Goodwin

Catherine Hughes

Trevor Kiernander

Alia Pathan

Emily Rosamond

Lisa Selby/bluebaglife

Systems House

Ross Taylor

Annabel Tilley

Monica Ursina Jäger

Will Webster

Poppy Whatmore

Madalina Zaharia

An exhibition of works from the Peer Sessions archive, selected  
by **Ian Gonczarow**, director ***Painting at the End of the World***  
co-curated by **Peer Sessions**



Architecture de choix: Façade 2018, **Will Webster**  
Framed archival print 58 x 49 cm Image © the artist

For the fourth show in the **APTShots** programme, APT is delighted to host a survey of work from Peer Sessions, marking its 10th anniversary. Using a nomadic crit group model, Peer Sessions has developed into an invaluable and unique peripatetic forum for constructive feedback between practicing artists. These practices vary widely, but collectively reflect a strong engagement with current concerns in art and culture. Peer Sessions also organises projects focused on facilitating and supporting artistic collaboration – indeed its remit has expanded during the last decade to include residencies, exhibitions, educational and collaborative workshops for artists, and public education workshops on engaging with contemporary art. What stands out is the emphasis on the collegiate aspects and possibilities of artistic practice – the core act of critique between peers fosters openness and generosity. Artists supporting artists is at the heart of what Peer Sessions does, acknowledging the intellectual and emotional challenges of art practice as both a solitary pursuit and one necessarily engaged in a wider contextual discourse. This ethos of shared interests and mutual support is one that has clear parallels with APT’s remit of engagement beyond singular art practice, an emphasis on enlightenment and education, and connection with community.

**Dexter Dymoke**

*Chair, APT Gallery and Projects Committee*

Kate Pickering and I founded Peer Sessions in 2009, just after we graduated from Goldsmiths MFA programme. It was the depths of the recession, and opportunities for freshly graduated artists were few and far between. It quickly became apparent that if we wanted to survive in this rapidly changing artworld, we would have to do it ourselves and form our own support networks. We decided to meet up once a month in our studios, aiming to have some good discussions and maintain the momentum and camaraderie we'd gained at college. We always said we'd stop doing it when people stopped turning up, but they never did. And that's how we ended up creating a crit group, almost by accident.

Thus far Peer Sessions has provided a forum for the discussion of contemporary art, offering constructive feedback to over 100 postgraduate artists, with a fluid informal membership of around 500 artists. In each session two artists present recent work to the assembled participants, who discuss both for an hour. Peer Sessions follow a silent crit model; the presenting artist initially provides relevant practical details (title, media, context) for their work, and does not participate in the ensuing discussion. The sessions are moderated by me and Kate Pickering (or occasionally by selected guest moderators), using a pedagogical technique we have honed over the last 10 years, based on our research into Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) and our own independent teaching practices.

Peer Sessions continues to welcome postgraduate artists in all media to our crits, which take place every few months at 7pm on a weekday evening. The only stipulation is that artists wanting to present work attend at least one Peer Session before applying to present. We look forward to seeing you there!

For ***Mimesis; Narrative; Against hegemony!*** Peer Sessions has invited Ian Gonczarow, founder and curator of *Painting at the End of the World* and one of our original members, to make an independent selection of works from Peer Sessions artists. Together we have curated ***Mimesis; Narrative; Against hegemony!*** as a celebration of the first 10 years of Peer Sessions, and as a mark of our resolve to continue running crit sessions as long as our artist peers compel us.

**Charlotte Warne Thomas**

*Peer Sessions Co-Founding Director*



This thing is also red

- And this too!

*Ghost Night* 2016, Alia Pathan  
HD Video Image © the artist

## ***Against Justifiable Selection***

Ian Gonczarow 2019

Over the last decade Peer Sessions has worked with an impressive roster of artists from all over the world. Based mainly in London, the 'session', normally involves one or two artists presenting work-in-progress or new work in exhibition format to a group of their peers. Having taken part in several sessions myself, both as presenter and as audience participant, I am delighted to have been invited to select work for the exhibition ***Mimesis; Narrative; Against hegemony!*** as part of the annual APTShots programme.

*Audience* is perhaps not the best way to describe the group of individuals who assemble for each meeting. Audience seems to imply a certain passivity; it implies that these events are a performance to be absorbed without reaction. That is of course not the case. The group of artist and academic peers that assemble are there, of course, to see new work, often produced by friends and colleagues. But they are also there to generate critical discussion, to float thoughts and ideas, to debate in good nature and of course to respond both objectively and subjectively to the works of art that are presented.

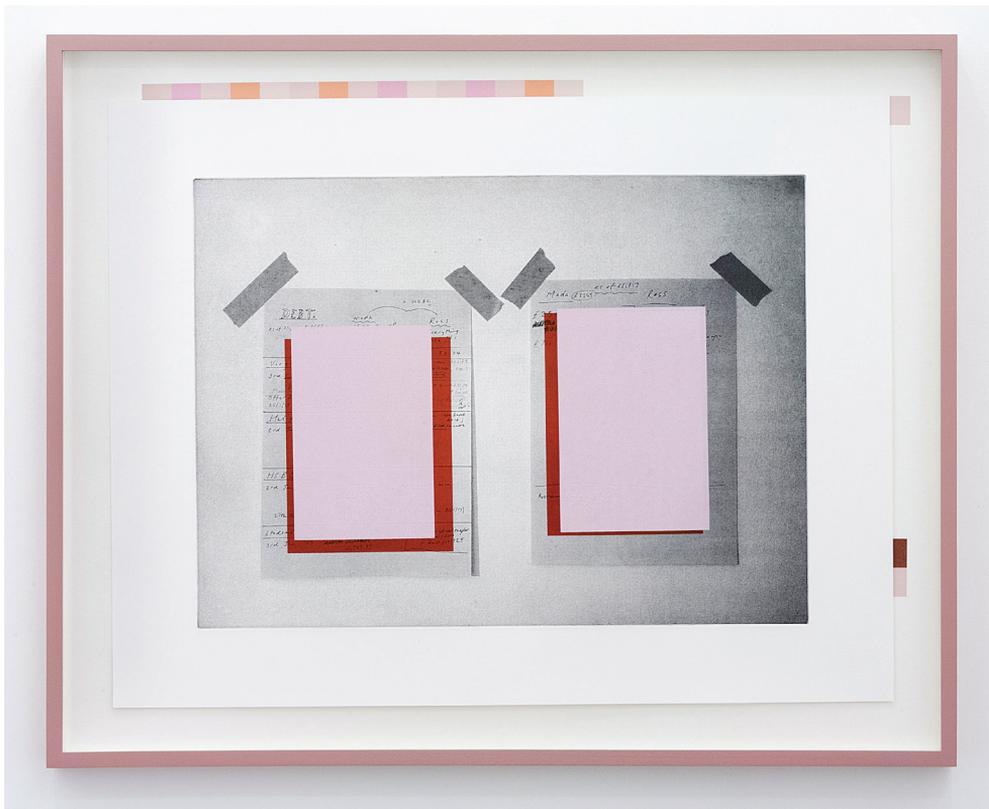
The structure that Warne Thomas and Pickering have developed to probe and moderate discussions is based on VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies) originally developed by educational psychologist Abigail Housen and veteran museum educator at MOMA, Philip Yenawine. There are many such formats for the discussion of art and the teaching of visual literacy, including the Feldman method that I have used in my teaching for many years. What these formats share is a visual probing, via language, of the object on display.

By encouraging participants to 'say what is seen' and reserving or slowing down the urge to pronounce judgement, each session is a rich experience of examining signifier, signified and index in the work of art.

The Peer Session is by no means a straight forward proposition. It is not simply an opportunity for an artist to gain feedback on new work. What the session offers is a multitude of semiotic analyses and interpretative viewpoints from a dynamic range of perspectives. Dynamic, in part because they are provided by artists and often lay outside the hegemonic viewpoint. A key to the session is the collectivist approach to sharing interpretation, anecdotes and intuitive responses to a work of art, that stem from the varying viewpoints and individual realities of a range of makers. The fracturing, and opening up, of a range of artistic paradigm approaches – in the sense of making and doing – are the true value in the exchange. Not all interpretation broadly is either good or useful. The last thing an artist needs when producing works of art is the echo of diverging opinion bouncing around the mind. My feeling however, is that going against hegemony, through an open discourse on the differing experience of things, is the true gift of the collective in this case.

When Susan Sontag wrote the text *Against Interpretation* in 1966, she decried a culture intent on unpicking the components of the work of art in order to unwrap content. Sontag taught us to avoid the questions – *what is it about? what is it for? and where does it come from?* The post-structural proposition, that semiotic forms of interpretation were flawed and only provide a bad or simplistic reading (and in fact those very interpretation- or deconstruction-based techniques themselves ought to be interpreted) have bounced around art schools and big name theory ever since.

Perhaps the desire of *Against Interpretation* and the way in which it sought



*DEBT 2017, Madalina Zaharia.*

Screen print on etching and digitally printed mount 77 x 65 cm © the artist



*Shifting Topographies.05* 2018, **Monica Ursina Jäger**  
Inkjet print on fine art paper, 63,5 x 104 cm Image © the artist

to suspend the need for analysis, in favour of awe or even a sublime response to art, was merely a response to a world rapidly filling with over-politicised conjecture. Sontag was however lucky enough to have experienced several decades in which abstraction was the dominant paradigm, and its accompanying discourse one solely of 'subjective expression'. What she is really decrying perhaps, is that art becomes political allegory or parody. The thing we must remember in these pressing times, half a century later, is that human action deserves a reaction. We can't ignore the sign of the times or the clues to others' experience of our multi-layered existence, can we?

Sontag's thoughts on the mimetic work of art, i.e. a thing that has a direct relationship with the external world and how that Greek notion (via Plato and Aristotle) pervades the production of art (Sontag 1966), is called into question nearly fifty years later by theorist Boris Groys in the 2008 text *Art Power*. Groys responds to the notion of mimesis, as a thing we cannot escape, by laying out a simple distinction between the propositions that describe the 'new' and the 'different' (Groys 2008). Anything that we experience, whether in the gallery or on the street, is only ever an equivalent differential, from or of the thing that came before. The painting produced in 2019 is only slightly different from paintings produced in 1940. Its constituents are still exactly the same, only the configuration, context and conjecture changes. They are not necessarily new. The new, according to Groys is, by its very nature a thing we could not recognise without a mimetic point of reference. The new would go by unnoticed, invisible. Sontag and her contemporaries may have argued that something new, something unknowable, lurked in the drips of a Pollock or Krasner painting, or the performances of Nauman. That particular notion of new, may have lain in the closure of overt and readable content, readily or easily interpreted and assigned mimetic origin or other. The new way of looking may also have been a desire for

art and artists to evade hegemonic control of free thought and action.

Art never really directly responded to the old grand narratives, those perhaps ongoing at the time Sontag wrote her text. Art directly about the cold war, de-industrialisation or the emergence of global capital wasn't *de rigueur* in the 1960s. However, as Sontag rightly says, interpretation can pervert the sum of the work of art, to any and many causes. Retroactively, we can easily reduce and assign the thing in question to the context in which it was made and move forward from there to assign content to index and signifier.

The selection of work for this exhibition then, acutely aware of this problematised historic discourse, perhaps offers a little of both positions, in which the work in question is and can be discussed. For me, the most exciting outcome of any discourse on contemporary art is the revelation of a range of differing realities of each participant.

When Jean-François Lyotard discussed the end of the grand narrative or metanarrative in *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in 1979, in favour of the local, the personal or *petits récits*, he began to hint that what happens in the ether above us affects us all very differently on the street. Although arguably we still live under the shroud of grand narratives or directive structures, such as anthropocene, capitalist bureaucracy etc., the fracturing of the overarching ideology – in our case neoliberal capitalism – is represented by a myriad of economic, educational and experiential differences, and therefore differing realities and interpellations of the real or immanent. These differences, these multitudinal realities, are briefly examined again more recently by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative* (2009). Here notions of individual reality are explored and set against the current economic regime. Fisher outlines a notion that reality is



*Into the Fold; The 'Winter Bliss' Package, Leela Kempinski Kovalam Beach 2012, Catherine Hughes*  
Powder coated aluminium, glass, fluorescent lights, digital print Image © the artist



*Mad Bess* 2015, **Ross Taylor**  
Metal and graphite on board, 73 x 52 x 3 cm Image © the artist

whatever is possible for the individual, and that the real (via Jaques Lacan), is what is suppressed by that reality (Fisher 2009). When we think about being *against the hegemonic*, which of course most artists are, we have to take into account the mass of differing realities of every individual on the planet and wonder how any dominant mass opinion is formed; I only have to think about Brexit in order to be flummoxed by hegemony. Our focus for now, thankfully, are a handful of realities belonging to a handful of artists.

We could start to unpick the mechanics of these hegemonic control systems, by trying to unpick contemporary art from the perspective of the individuals making it. If we were to think about contemporary art and apply the notion of multitudinal reality, we might say that the individual reality of the artist is expressed in potential and possibility via the work. We might also say that what is suppressed by the artist is a criticality of the systems outside of the art ie, the real or big narrative. In a bit more detail, I might suggest that the artist, at the point of creation of the work of art has a multitude of options in terms of content, style genre etc. If we accept that the artist mediates the flow of information around them at the time of creation of the work, invoking a temporally specific context personal to themselves, then the reality locked in the finished work, is the mediated, indexical spirit of the times. We might also say that this is a varying or varied series of representations of the current pervading real; neo-liberal capitalism, global warming etc. Individual realities held in stasis via the work of art then, become the resonant objects of the time or epoch. The art work, becomes an individual expression of a personal struggle with individual reality within the system. Art may have no correlation to the real or the system, but rather skirts its edges. There are many ways we could discuss this further. We should also consider that criticality in the current economic model is arguably an empty gesture, especially in art works that sell

and get flipped for thousands of dollars or pounds, or that are never seen. This may be the post-structural legacy at play.

This exhibition then, a selection of Peer Sessions participants over the years, is broadly grouped into three sections, in order that any direct secondary or even tertiary interpretation is kept to a minimum. It would seem silly to launch into a description of each work in the show according to a solitary interpretation (my own), bearing in mind the discourse above.

The sections are grouped into corresponding sets, in order that the experience of the work selected remains pre-interpretation rather than post-. That said, readers will still have to contend with suggestive denotation, connotation and context. The sets are drawn from the polemics briefly outlined so far: Art as Fetish (mimesis), Art as Condition (narrative) and Art as Weapon (against hegemony).

Because contemporary art today is most likely 'real' neutral as mentioned, and instead a mediated individual reality, it rests at odds with the dominant control sentiment and conjecture (hegemony). It might therefore appear to be intuitive to mix up any soft hegemonic and real signifiers latent in any work, with open statements à la VTS and Feldman etc. But still, allocation to a set that may imply agency beyond the work is of course a dangerous game. This however seems like a fitting format to engender further discourse. So what follows is an attempt to part- liberate and at the same time part- assign the works selected from what I might call 'the justification of selection' by withholding any overt analysis. Against justifiable selection after Sontag, is therefore what follows:

Fisher, M. 2009. Capitalist realism: Is There No Alternative? O Books, Winchester UK.

Groys, B. 2008. Art Power. MIT Press. Cambridge MA

Lyotard, JF. 1984. The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Manchester University Press

Sontag, S. 2009. Against Interpretation and Other Stories. Penguin Classics London



*Untitled (16 Cut-Outs)* 2018, **Annabel Tilley**  
Oil on canvas 105 x 70 cm Image © the artist



*Thunder and Lightning* 2018, **Trevor Kiernander**  
Oil, acrylic, and oil stick on canvas 45.5 x 35.5 cm © The Artist; photo credit Guy L'Heureux

# ***Art as Fetish***

Merike Estna  
Trevor Kiernander  
Alia Pathan  
Emily Rosamond  
Ross Taylor  
Madalina Zaharia



*Dawn of the swarm* 2018, **Merike Estna**  
Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 45 cm © The Artist; photo credit Stanislav Stepaško



*Wifi Coming through the Wallpaper* 2015/16, **Emily Rosamond**  
Acrylic, synthetic hair and mixed media on MDF, 58 x 48 x 6 cm  
© The Artist; photo credit Michael Heilgemeir

millennia object imbued

resemble instead things

post-analogue colour

ritual, softly recast

burning of the mimetic

possessions, left behind

the odour, still fresh

it might bring luck

earthly currencies

detritus and paraphernalia

what the uninitiated may see

welcome to the

pleasure

this case is to re-cast the environment

the resonant object

personification

very long and twisting

blue,

with humanist precision

a small simple token

juxtaposition

hard and soft together

aestheticized post

digital

with snakes

lumpy but smoothed

over

a clear tropical shackled

sacrifice

allow the other to softly emerge...



*Eve* is part of the installation *Adam and Eve* presented courtesy of the **Ben Cove Estate**; with thanks to Brenda, Geoff and Melanie Cove. Image from *Earth Wind & Fire* at Griffin Gallery (7 Sept-20 Oct 2017) curated by Juan Bolivar and Jennifer Guerrini Miraldi.  
© The Ben Cove Estate, Image Credit: Oliver Holms

# ***Art as Condition***

Ben Cove  
Justin Gainan  
Katie Goodwin  
Monica Ursina Jäger  
Annabel Tilley  
Poppy Whatmore



*Dawn of the Rainbow* 1939/2011 **Katie Goodwin**  
HD Animation with rejected soundtrack 3 min 30s Image © the artist



*Deadline 2018, Poppy Whatmore*  
Deconstructed office chairs Image © the artist

taking

the piss out of girls

fetishise

the grammar of ornament

edge of frame

work-a-day

they always invite artists

she stares at it, un-knowing

we all understand the

issues, we all

vacant now, like the Marie Celeste

delicious selection of

palm tree or bones,

sets itself against all the

a lot of irony perhaps

repeating palindrome,

invisible but visible

we are all in this together

laughing about

the end of socialism

does he really enjoy that

of course that is

quite trendy right now

it might be possible for them, but for most

very democratic, careful contextualisation without

how dare they have taken all



*Some are, some aren't (the found ladders)* Ongoing project **Justin Gainan**  
C-print Image © the artist

# ***Art as Weapon***

Dave Charlesworth

Systems House

Catherine Hughes

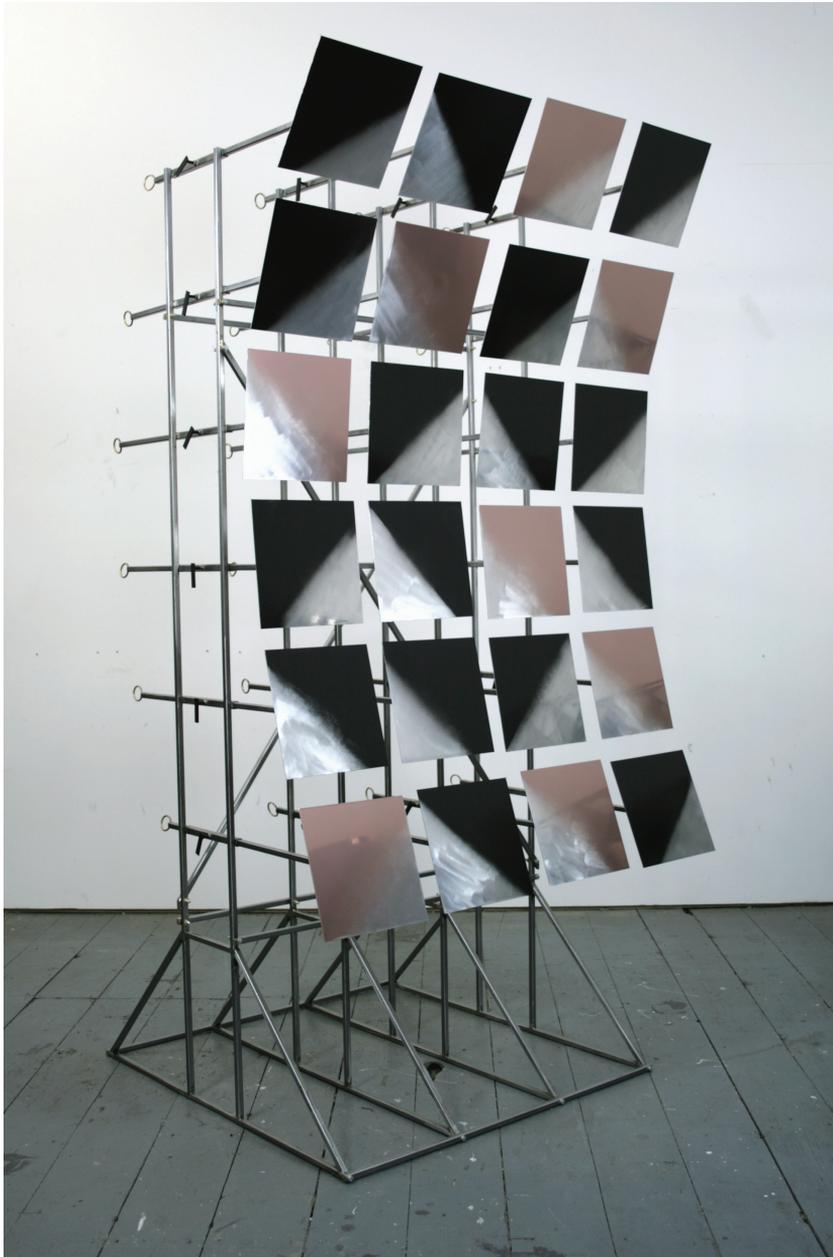
Lisa Selby

Will Webster



*Elliot's Grandad's Funeral 2018* **Lisa Selby/bluebaglife**

Photo Credit: HMP Thameside Prison Officer (Serco) Instagram @bluebaglife



*Barricade Reflector Unit II*, 2009, **Systems House**  
Steel, aluminium, brass, leather & spray paint, 208 x 108 x 100cm. Image © the artist

smashed and broken, but loaded  
images parade upwards

elucidate a theoretical link  
use guilt by association as a method  
scared for us  
sentinel

be more open ended

goes without saying and instead, think  
they shift to also include the face of  
'everything in between' occurs in a series  
spanning childhood to adulthood

Hard to read, dark and often cheerless  
but rather a copy of a copy of  
thing called  
into visions of drunken dance  
a distance from the grave but allowed a precious moment

that would probably have given René Magritte  
something to laugh about.

on the roadside by a lone figure

original but isn't  
that said thing that looks like the  
on average will earn 14% less in the workplace

the absurdity inherent in this image

## SUPPORT PEER SESSIONS!

**Monica Ursina Jäger** created the print *translocation.45* (2016), in support of **Peer Sessions** (all proceeds to Peer Sessions, which has no source of income other than donations). The edition is part of her widely acclaimed "*translocation*" series. It comes from an original collage on paper, which has been transferred into an edition of Archival Pigment Prints (Giclée). The image size is 300mm x 400mm (paper size) – ready to mount in a standard-sized frame.

**Jäger's** drawing series "*translocation*" is executed with pigment transfers and ink on concrete boards. Fine white lines trace geodesic and grid structures – blueprints for buildings that might be or once were. Modernist and Brutalist architecture fuses with organic matter. The series examines notions of overlap between time and space, the shifts that occur in a society in flux and the relations between lived, sensed, memorised and imagined space that result thereof.



### **Monica Ursina Jäger**

*Translocation. 45* 2016

300 x 400 mm (image size 280 x 380 mm)

Archival Pigment Print (Giclée)

on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308gsm

Unframed

Edition of 36+3APs (signed and numbered)

**£70.00**

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