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'Heteroglossia: Art & Science' at Central St Martins, 27th May 2014

Tuesday, May 27, 2014 by londoncitynights



All too often the art world can seem fragmented and transitional. You wander off the street into an interesting exhibition and vow that you're going to keep track of this artist, only to find that they promptly vanish into thin air. Not so with the Art & Science group at Central St Martins. In November 2013 I visited *Experimentations*; an exhibition held by a group of art students probing the divide between the two disciplines. It was promising stuff. In February I attended another: *Live In Your Dreams*, down in the crypt of St Pancras Church. This makes *Heteroglossia* the final instalment of a trilogy, the progression through the exhibitions leaving me with a much clearer sense of what makes these artists tick.

Here the edges of art and science are blurred, tangled and torn. Weird odours bubble from steaming pools, organs float in blissful suspended animation, proteins knot up into new materials, metal deforms around light and hard sterile glass becomes furry and plush. The science that the artists of Central St Martins have cottoned onto is the transmutation of materials, many of the pieces capturing or freezing the exact moment in which change occurs. This is alchemy - the primordial soup of modern science - and it's alchemical symbols, philosophy and rituals that this exhibition returns to time and time again.

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'The Clockmaker's Daughter' at the Landor Theatre, 1st June 2015

The Landor is an awfully dusty theatre.

So dusty that, at the end of *The Clockmaker's Daughter*, a mote got in my eye, producing a ...



'Mad Max: Fury Road' (2015) directed by George Miller

After a stunning series of trailers, each more cataclysmic than the last, I'd prepared myself for disappointment. After all, I...



'Ex Machina' (2015) directed by Alex Garland

Science fiction that ponders whether an artificial mind is truly conscious is hardly breaking new ground. As far back as 1921 Karel Ča...



'Sense of an Ending' at Theatre503, 20th May 2015

I've got to admit, I wasn't exactly looking forward to *Sense of an Ending*. While I love theatre that grapples with weighty sub...



'Jupiter Ascending' (2015) directed by Andy & Lana Wachowski

Jupiter Ascending is about a Russian-American toilet cleaner called Jupiter Jones (Mila Kunis) who's rescued from murderous alien...



'Stuck in Love' (2012) directed by Josh Boone

Stuck in Love is a film where an idiot, writer/director Josh Boone, tries to imagine what smart people act like. I hated this film. ...

In Cinemas:

Altman ★★

Avengers: Age of Ultron ★★

Big Hero 6 ★★★★★

Chappie ★★★★★

Focus ★★★★★ (External Link)

The Gunman (External Link)

*Alchemist Laboratory* - Jaden JA Hastings & Amy Congdon

The most literal interpretation is Jaden J.A. Hastings and Amy Congdon's *Alchemist Laboratory*. Here a labcoat has mutated into the occult robes of a magician, the table covered in glass flasks arranged to form a semi-symmetric sigil. It's an approach to science by way of magical thinking. This train of thought continues in Hastings' excellent *Vitalitas*, with a decellularised pig's heart preserved in formaldehyde within a pagoda-like reliquary. Decellularisation is the process by which the cells are stripped from an organ, leaving behind the extracellular matrix. This lowers the risk of transplant rejection, meaning the heart in *Vitalitas* sits right on the fence between its donor and its intended origin; frozen in time, space and biology.

*Vitalitas* - Jaden JA Hastings

Charlotte Wendy Law continues this exploration into changing materials. Her pieces features a collection of objects seemingly flash-frozen between states. Lumps of jagged slag dot the work, the products of metallurgic experiments that bristle with danger and potential energy. Much these are remains, the viewer unconsciously forensically engaging with them them and deducing the processes by which they were created. In *Action/Ode (Performance Remains)* we see the charred remains of a piano, *A Table* is speckled with shattered detritus, smashed TVs glare out with imploded angry stares from beneath and *A Metallurgic Sutra* projects onto a curved, blasted piece of scrap metal. This is post apocalyptic art; the ruins of the old world repurposed for the artistic needs of the new. Viewed within this shiny new building it's a faintly sinister premonition of future disaster to come, occupying past and future simultaneously.

Jauja ★★★★★

Jupiter Ascending ★★★★★

Kill Me Three Times ★★

Kumiko, The Treasure Hunter ★★★★★

Mortdecai ★

Shaun the Sheep Movie ★★★★★ (External Link)

Unfriended ★★



A Table - Charlotte Wendy Law

The idea of an object being neither one thing nor another, to be stuck in a transitional state is realised in a quite different way in Roderick MacLeod's *Tempete du Monde (Bis)*. Here we have a furry white box with an inviting opening in the middle. You stick your hand inside and... hello what's this? It's rubbery, weirdly textured, kinda firm.. Yup. It's a big fat dildo! I always appreciate work that has the balls (no pun intended) to just straightforwardly *be* what it's about without hiding meaning under layers of obfuscation.



Tempete du Monde (Bis)

Stick your hand in a yonic slit and get a hard cock in the hand for your trouble. The piece is a collision of the sexes, forcing whoever interacts with it to confront the hermaphrodite inside them. It's a piece with a punchline - you can get just as much fun out of experiencing it yourself as watching others pop their hand inside, their faces lighting up with a mixture of shock, surprise and excitement as they grasp the cock.



The one who feels like a fish in the water - Boris Raux

Also taking gender as a point of division is the always excellent Boris Raux, who's as much scientist as he is artist. In two neighbouring pieces he explores gender through smell. The feminine is symbolised by a bubbling, circular pool of water - steam billowing out over the rippling surface. Masculinity is a meticulously constructed wooden box, reeking of rigidity and permanence. Both emit wafts of carefully composed smells intended to symbolise the genders. Smell is rarely exploited in art, it's abstract, technically difficult to create and unable to be replicated either in print or online. This means Raux's work charts relatively new territory, finding a space somewhere in the middle of our senses; artwork we inhale, that lodges deep within our own bodies.

These were just a few of the works on display, but walking around you quickly understand how beautifully the cool, unemotional sterility of science complements the reflexive and wild chaos of art. Both disciplines require a fierce intelligence to function at their best, and both require participants to be able to analyse and process the world around them into something fresh. As a bit of a confession, when I first read about a group of art students tackling scientific means I feared the worst; expecting a naive gaggle of pieces that would tend towards woolly pseudoscience.



The Point of Departure - Jaden JA Hastings

I shouldn't have worried. After three exhibitions I can see how well these artists have understood the potential of the

crossroads they stand at, fully grasping the intrinsic beauty of understanding, the thrill of deduction and the wonder of transforming the world around you into something fresh, new and fascinating. If these works are the conclusion to a strand of their education, it's an endpoint derived of methodical, analytical thinking coupled with an keen eye for stimulating the senses of the audience. Colour me both impressed and happy that I got to see this body of work evolve over the last six months.

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Matthew Thorpe — Well that's a pretty accurate review. Let's hope we get to see her again soon!

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