

Museum of Speech

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Nina Beier

Ian Breakwell

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield

Kris KimpeJohn Latham

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Foreword

Museum of Speech inaugurates a series of three presentations that investigate the mechanisms and negotiations through which art and the institution share or divide the spaces they cohabit. Continued with *Museum of Display* and concluding with *A Slowdown at the Museum*, the series relies, as narrative pretext, on the accelerated scenario of a fictional museum. Neither an allegory of the future programming at Extra City, nor the critique of a localized, specific way of handling art, this narrative of rise, obstruction, disintegration or renewal, intersects different understandings of the 'museum' and the demands for particular conditions of encounter made by the artworks.

A 'museum' can be a space where artefacts or relics are organized to testify to a historical progression, or a claim to symbolic authority, complicit with other modes of control over objects and subjects. Yet it can also be looked at as a mutable collection of works and practices that desire to be elsewhere and comprehended differently, that put forward counterarguments as to how the 'museum' functions and trace a permanently conflicted site of enunciation. The art and the art institution of the last decades have studied, empowered and evaded, impersonated and usurped each other. The abbreviated scenario of the 'museum' and the artistic practices presented in this series are not meant as reciprocal illustration, but coproduce a layered context of inquiry and calibration, staging one another within a space of attention and obligation.

The three episodes speak – with and around the works – about voice and echo, the museological ventriloquism that aims to reassemble presence by articulating voice and absent body, about display as prosthetic device between disparate fragments and ideological wholes. The manufacture of separation and symmetry in the fictional museum is interrupted in the epilogue, which pairs contestation with (historiographic) counterproductivity, with the moment when the archive is ultimately sealed off. At odds with itself, the 'museum' goes on strike: what had been planned as a prologue to a present of belonging and political action, results in dissent and delay.

The conventional script of institutional critique, enacting a spectral transfer of power between radical artist and emancipated spectator, is relocated to the other side of (what that script pictured as) the 'barricade'. In protest against a precarious employment or an oppressive regime, a slowdown multiplies by two the time it takes for an arbitrary decision to reach its practical outcome. What effects would such a suspension have on how the 'museum' displays itself and on our sense of historical position, which truths about art would be withheld or remain unwritten, and what other

sites of ideological unrest would the 'museum' then make visible? In this chronicle of foretold collapse, each moment and element functions as both preamble and afterword.

Museum of Speech collects proclamations, warnings and promises, provisos and hesitations, grandiloquence and its many antonyms, vestiges of the avantgarde pledge to universal signification, an understated poetics of critique or provisional formulations of things that cannot be spoken of and cannot be passed over in silence. The exhibition assembles an apparatus of reciprocities and definitions, and surveys the ways in which what is missing in art interlocks with what is missing in the institution. This accumulation of questions is not geared to achieve or imitate consensus, but to retrace the backward, forward or lateral steps by which variable interlocutors invoke each other, into presence and within interpretive reach.

John Latham

John Latham's exploration of temporality sought to locate and define an Archimedean point from where the totality of human experience could be formulated and addressed to a totality of selves, from worker to scientist to prime minister. A reversed version of modernist universalism, his practice attempts to elucidate, as a 'timebase', what it believes is the essentially identical vanishing point that physics, philosophy and religion have been separately advancing towards. The elaboration of Latham's idiosyncratic epistemology went in tandem with the establishment, together with Barbara Steveni, of the Artist Placement Group in 1966. The APG proposed to implant artists in contexts like governmental agencies and private companies, where unanticipated solutions to routine problems could emerge from a play of research, mutual adjustment and delegated creativity. Documents pertaining to Latham's placement with the Scottish Office's Development Agency point to the vexed posterity of a relationship between art and business – or antagonism and service – that was thus established.

In *God is Great #4* and *THE MYSTERIOUS BEING KNOWN AS GOD ...* (both 2005), the tutelary figure of theologies is taken as pretext in Latham's proposal for an "art after physics", for a theory of everything, expressed here from a point of empty centrality. In the first work, the Bible, Talmud and Quran lie among a formless mass of glass shards, as if the three books – and the divergent conceptions of transcendence they transcribed – had functioned as joints or buttresses in a glass edifice that has just collapsed. For Latham, each book is as incomplete as the others, but their insufficiencies seem to have joined in a construction – a scale model for the reconciliation of doctrines – to then be again disunited by the event (sonorous, tectonic or otherwise) that made the glass house fall apart. In the other work, God's theoretical timelessness is measured on a scale, ample or complex enough to inject temporality into eternity. In both cases, what is at stake is the point of view that can distinguish between the episodic and the foundational, an instance of understanding that Latham describes as a 'noit': the notit, the converse of the 'tion' of cultural or political activity, "the incidence of notnothing on nothing for a least amount of time."

Table with the Law (1988) echoes the destruction of books throughout Latham's career: he has tweaked syntax and criticized language for its divisive, linear character, burnt towers made of encyclopedias and mutilated hundreds of books to construct assemblages. All this to indicate, by metonym, a culture of amputated connections and incomplete conclusions. As glass and books test each other's resilience in the work, the apparent solidity of objects is recast as an 'Insistently Recurring Event'. The 'noit' and the 'event' of restructured knowledge translate in Latham's APG work through

the mediation of the Incidental Person. When invited to make a contribution to an administrative or corporate context, the artist as Incidental Person “takes the stand of a third ideological position which is off the plane of their obvious collision areas. The function is more to watch the doings and listen to the noises, (...) in doing this he represents people who would not accept their premises, timebases, ambitions, formulations as valid, and who will occupy the scene later”.

Latham’s placement with the Scottish Office was organized by the APG in 1975–76. The brief was to find a use for vast area of spoil heaps, hilllike accumulations of residue from the distillation of oil from shale, in West Lothian. Latham was intrigued by the shapes and colors of the bings, by the extraordinary biodiversity they hosted; perhaps more significantly, he decided that the act of creation requested of him seemed gratuitous in comparison to an act of commemoration. He proposed that the bings be declared monuments to the immediate past, ‘Scheduled Monuments’ that glorify nothing and commemorate – while halting – the orgiastic depletion of natural resources. His monumental pronouncement is designed to interrupt the cycle by which art and commerce provide each other with alibis: to visualize residue instead of making it manageable and userfriendly. As a rule, monuments expedite the past into oblivion, but in this case the monument functions as obstacle and incorporates the past in disquieting proximity to the present.

Ian Breakwell

Ian Breakwell’s *The Institution* (in collaboration with Kevin Coyne, 1977–1979) was realized after the artist’s placement, organized by the APG, with the Department of Health and Social Security, at the Broadmoor Clinic for the Criminally Insane – specifically after the video documents of “the insanity surrounding insanity” recorded by Breakwell at Broadmoor were judged too offensive and withdrawn from the public domain under the Official Secrets Act. The work is made at an enforced remove from the context it interrogates and therefore suspends the central tenet of the Artist Placement Group, that “context is half the work”.

The film testifies to Breakwell’s involvement with the AntiPsychiatric Movement, by the tone in which it discusses the limits of sanity and acceptability, but also through two purposeful elements of scenography. After repeatedly circling ‘Walls Street’, the camera crew drives in the direction of ‘Laing’, a reference to R.D. Laing, one of the more idiosyncratic members of the Movement. Laing’s proposal to understand schizophrenia as a theory, as opposed to a fact, is one of the levels at which Breakwell’s work can be inter-

preted. The film dislodges ‘the institution’ from any identifiable disciplinary framework: it brings ‘the institution’ home and eliminates all redemptive possibilities from the trauma it enacts. The episodes of silence and the fretful wait, the protagonist’s attempts to disappear behind improvised assemblages of furniture are as agonizing and as constitutive to the adhoc discourse on insanity as Coyne’s disjointed monologue, his attempt to work out a ‘theory’ of adversity and indignation. If Laing advocated a model of psychiatric practice founded on other principles than confrontation and disempowerment, Breakwell’s film also evokes something of an exemplary counterpart to that position: Robert Walser’s practice of selfeffacement, his “tortured awareness of the inadequacy of words and the compulsion to use them”, paired with the writer’s voluntary confinement in a mental asylum. These layered allusions compose the puzzle of insanity as the voluble silence of thought, as a form of thinking that does not think its own words (as Jacques Derrida rephrases Saint Anselm’s view of the ‘insipiens’, the ignorant, foolish, mad absence of faith.)

Mladen Stilinovic

Mladen Stilinovic’s work engages another, tentacular figure of the institution, the repressive political regime in Yugoslavia in the 1970s. His Slogans speak in tongues and tropes of state propaganda, and replicate its deformities. *An Attack against My Art Is an Attack against Socialism and Progress* (1977) claims to ally itself with censorship and insulate itself against criticism, including the criticism of censorship, in the way totalitarian regimes do – by continually unmasking the enemy and preempting its vile intentions. The work emulates the existential and interpretive conditions of its age and context and survives them as a document of their brutality. *Work Cannot Not Exist* (1976) is a double negation and the cut or erasure of that negation, thinking, after Duchamp, about the possibility of making a work of art that is not a work of art, but also speaking, with the communist regime, about the opposite of artistic work, about how work can evade that which discourages it to exist.

The presentation brings together fragments of a few thematic series that Stilinovic has been engaged with in the last decades. Power, money, hunger, word, work, worth are themes the artist revisits, that map a particular ethics of perseverance, given that the ‘universal’ in his work is of the sardonic and inescapable kind. The starting point is the question of how one expresses something in a language whose words are “not mine”, a language that has been “occupied” by the continuous attribution of meaning through ideology. One of the answers Stilinovic formulates is the possibility of work displaying the same totalizing ambitions as that which it

wants to undo. In his *Dictionary of Pain* (2000–2003), all definitions are painted over in tempera and replaced with 'Pain', so that the whole of the dictionary is reversed into a grueling, protracted definition of 'pain', the concept and its many forms. In this and other cases, the underlying strategy posits work as a quasiinstitution, to be 'as big as' that which it confronts, and capable to emit the same claim – that it will outlive its object. But the assertion is diverted the very moment it is made: in a sequence of photographs, three mattresses, acquiring contextually a solemn monolithic quality, are inscribed with the word 'Pain' and unceremoniously interred. In the last image, planks of wood bearing the same word are erected to mark the three graves.

Stilinovic has painted, collaged and torn money, he has defined work as "a shame" or as "a word", has praised laziness and the cynicism of the poor, has portrayed himself as the salesman of an empty wallet, as a supplier of selfcensorship or as a buyer of foreign currency. He has vandalized paintings with cakes. He has argued that "art always has its consequences" and has devised scenarios for those consequences to be delayed, and for art to take more time. He has written an entire book through the repetition of the sentence "I have no time" and has invited readers to rifle through it when they have no time. He practices and insults anarchy, looks at the revolutions of the oppressed or the revolt of the powerful, and builds into the objects or messages that surround us a full political spectrum.

Nina Beier

Nina Beier's works have a conflictual relationship to art history: where it expected an airy nothingness that it could make its own, the discipline is presented with an avatar of itself, with an object absorbed in figuring and mapping what it will mean and to whom. Where it planned to stage an epiphany, art history finds itself reduced to the condition of a bureaucracy.

In *Shelving for Unlocked Matter and Open Problems* (2010), a series of sculptures are sliced and placed within a system of cobalance: a kind of coffetable functionality is interspersed with a passage through a history of (minor) sculpture. The functional decapitations, whereby 90degree angles are imposed on all pieces in this anticollection, suspend the criteria of correspondence and arrangement that govern the discourse of objectivity in the museum. 'Shelving' points in the directions of both home design and archives, suggesting the accidental revelation of the incompatible norms that structure the archive, an obscure code, or the act of trespassing into the archivist's living room.

The Object Lessons (2009) is a sculpture made of different stones and concrete, broken into pieces and reassembled for each exhibition. As the sculpture takes different shapes each time it is installed in various exhibition venues, it exists between fragmentation (stones disintegrating into ever smaller parts and eventually into grains of sand) and consolidation (the future grains of sand turning into one solid block of concrete). The sculpture maps this structural irresolution against shifts in meaning and 'worth'. *The Capture (The Object Lessons)* (2011) is made from materials similar to those in *The Object Lessons*, but these stones and sands are captured in a frame and confined to being a picture of the other work: a 'photograph' of the current state of the sculpture, a way to grasp its essence before it further deteriorates. An exhibit that could belong in a museum of entropy, *The Capture* marks the gap between the object's becomingwork and becominghistory as the space of representation.

The performance *Repertoire* (2010), scheduled throughout the run of the exhibition, involves an actor who reacts to other works on show as if they were cues in a theater play, and recites a flow of random lines and fragments from his or her memorized repertoire. Taking place between Laure Prouvost's ambivalent homage to John Latham and Ian Breakwell's *The Institution*, redefining the space between the two works and the reasons for their juxtaposition, the actor plays out a surrogate self, borrowing something from the viewer, the artist and curator. The actor attempts to conjoin these mimetic acts into a discourse that would make sense – a hysterical or elegiac, disruptive or enriching sense.

Laure Prouvost

Laure Prouvost's restless film practice assembles instructions, commands, flickers, mistranslations, interpretive errors and episodes of reverie. Exuberant or playfully pedagogic, the films establish bonds within an economy of affect into which viewers are drawn, but also point at how the 'extremities' of cinematic language could grasp an object, at the limits of film understood as a border with something else, something that resembles 'reality'. *It, Heat, Hit* (2010) is a continuous, hypnotic rehearsal of direct address: it embraces and abandons possibilities, narratives and synonyms in an unruly vociferation that demands attention to uncertainties and vulnerability, and engulfs spectators in a sensory and psychological overload, at once seductive and perplexing. As the mood becomes darker and the narration more disjointed, the viewer is invited into a space of experience where the 'virtuality' of film and the 'reality' outside it fuse or overlap. Rather than rehearse the postmodern tropes of the triumph of machines and of the 'simulacrum', this mode of encounter relies on another episode

in the history of film: the anxieties that accompanied the earliest experiences of cinema, the difficulties of the first spectators to distinguish signifier from signified, and conceive of film as representation. *It, Heat, Hit* reimagines this disparity – whereby film can still claim to directly affect reality, to be its analogy and alternative – within a tight sequence of climactic/ anticlimactic moments. Each scene reads like another missed attempt for film to exit its condition, intrude upon the real and come upon its signified, in ways that could be menacing or infinitely delicate.

The exhibition also includes Prouvost's *I Need to Take Care of My Conceptual Granddad* (2010). The mysterious character Granddad makes repeated – and narratively incoherent – appearances in her films, but here he is identified as the artist John Latham. A monograph of Latham's work is treated in a way that suggests, in equal measures, devotion and irreverence, embalming and vandalism. A further contribution to the show is a series of signs that read as instructions or stage directions, as 'notes to self' or as expressions of a desire to evade the constraints of the medium. One sign would like to reconfigure the space and function of the venue, another to be released from its linguistic existence, so that it could dissolve in the sensuous embrace of whatever might be in front of it. The signs work as possible props or protagonists – a calculated indistinction in Prouvost's practice – in yet another film, written, directed and shot on the location of the exhibition, once again feverishly addressing its visitors.

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield

Philosopher Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield contributes two 'scripts' to the exhibition, texts and countertexts that explore questions of authorship and ownership, visualization, erasure and bracketing. *Philosophers enowning that there be no own words* (2010–2011) is a series of citations and ripostes, equal in size. Beyond the reciprocity of voices that they orchestrate, the writers' answers and Dronsfield's questions could be considered something of a contractual foundation for a Museum of Speech, by which what is innermost – or "ownmost" – in writing or speech is what disowns the artist or the speaker. To quote from Dronsfield's introduction to a previous manifestation of the project, "What will return the artist to himself will be his ability to hear and to listen to what is ownmost in the writing, not through his throat but with his ear. If an artist writes 'in his own words', then they will be voiced by one of the abundance of personae that his work tries out or invites to share. His own words will be what he chooses as the right ones from these. He can only do this by working open a space, a working open which would consist in the proliferation of useless words able and unable to be spoken and the positions capable of and

susceptible to speaking them, thus demanding in turn new words by way of response.”

A Picture of French Literature (2011) is a series of spreads that reproduce a text and undermine it, by making visible its archeology, the operations through which it comes into existence and the debts of intellectual gratitude which it repays. The text is a response to Derrida's and Rancière's readings of Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1897). The gaps in the text, making it either undecipherable or ambiguous, sit in precisely the same place on the page where there are words in Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés...* and blocks of black ink in the book of the same name by Marcel Broodthaers (1969).

Kris Kimpe

Kris Kimpe's exhibition design engages the 'abstraction' of the idea of the 'museum'. It proceeds from the degree zero of a square structure, vertically filling the available space and planted uncomfortably in the middle of the gallery. Three kinds of 'rooms' are created in the process: the 'museum' itself, the 'front' and the 'back', each lending itself to a variety of narrative extensions or institutional functions. Space is taken into possession while being calculated in a somewhat improper system. "The dimensions of the square are too big for the existing space", Kimpe says, so that the resulting object operates between a doubling up of the space, an architectural mold of it, an architectural maquette blown out of proportion and a sculpture engaged in a physical competition with its surroundings. It engenders a surplus, or a miscalculation.

The design starts from a situation of perfect permeability, where no clear distinctions between an 'inside' and an 'outside' can be made, or not in the sense that such distinctions would yet carry any ideological weight. The structure does not yet betray its institutional logic, or the fact that it might activate one. It is provisional, in the sense of not having drawn conclusions from its own assumptions, but does not exclude having walls, windows, a roof. "The roof' has that abstract form of 'a roof' in the way that McDonald's or Pizza Hut have 'a roof'. Again, it's about the 'representation of reality'", to quote again from the architect's notes. The reality of this 'museum' might evolve between its use as an open structure, building and backdrop, throughout the episodes in this series of exhibitions. Its present state suggests that ambivalence and decision coexist.

John Latham

(°1921-2006, Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia) lived and worked in England. He studied at the Chelsea School of Art, where he met his wife Barbara Steveni, and taught at St. Martins College of Art, London. In 1968 he founded the Artist Placement Group (APG). One of his major preoccupations was to map the relation between the representation of history and that of scientists approaching the subject from mathematical and common sense perception. His work

St Martins College of Art and Design, which enabled him to make his final Diary work, BC/AD, and to assemble The Diary Re-invented (website: <http://www.anthonyreynolds.com/breakwell/diary>).

Mladen Stilinovic

(°1947, Serbia) lives and works in Zagreb, Croatia. His works include collages, photographs, artist books, paintings, installations, actions, films and video. He was a member of the Group of Six Authors (1975

Charlottenborg. In the fall she had a two-person show at MUDAM in Luxembourg, which was followed by a three-person show in DOX in Prague with Marie Lund and Jiri Kovanda. Group shows included exhibitions at the Neugerriemschneider in Berlin, the Kunsthalle Schirn in Frankfurt, the David Roberts Art Foundation in London, the Project Art Centre in Dublin and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome.

Laure Prouvost

(°1978, France) lives and works in London. She graduated from Central St. Martins College of Arts in 2002. In 2009 she completed the LUX Artist Associate Programme. Her work includes painting, video, sound and site-specific work. Recent solo exhibitions are All these things think link (2010), Flat Time House, London, and IT, HEAT, HIT (2010), Tate Britain Art Now Lightbox, London. She won the EAST International Award 2009 in Norwich, UK, and since 2003 she is also Director of tank.tv, the online platform for artists' work in moving images.

Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield

(United Kingdom) is Reader in Theory & Philosophy of Art at the University of Reading and sits on the executive of the Forum for European Philosophy at the London School of Economics. He has published various papers in continental philosophy, on art and on ethics especially, and presented many more, out of which performances of texts emerged. Currently he is writing three books: one

on Derrida and the visual, one on the use and abuse of philosophy by contemporary art, and another on headlessness. He was a researcher in theory at the Jan van Eyck Academie 2004-2006, with whom he published the book Cryptochromism.

Kris Kimpe

(°1963, Belgium) is an architect who works mainly in the field of contemporary art. His practice involves designing exhibitions, public art and artist studios. Since 1999 he is the international assistant of Dan Graham. He has worked with/ for artists like Nico Dockx, Philip Metten, Willem Oorebeek and Luc Tuymans. Recent exhibition designs include the national pavilion of the United Arab Emirates at the Venice Biennale in 2009, Animism (M HKA & Extra City, 2010, Antwerpen) and Ana Torfs: Album/Tracks A (K21, 2010, Dusseldorf). Since 2006, he publishes the architecture-fanzine UP together with Koenraad Dedobbeleer.

Biografieën

has the Universe as subject matter. He had retrospective exhibitions at Tate Britain in London (2005) and at John Hansard Gallery and P.S.I. in New York (2006).

Ian Breakwell

(°1943-2005, United Kingdom) studied at Derby College of Art. From his early performances in the 1960s he has worked in a diverse range of media, from painting to film, video, performances and installation. He has produced films for television broadcast and is well known for his writing, which includes Ian Breakwell's Diary 1964-85 (1986, Pluto Press). His art works are in public private collections including the Tate Gallery, London; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia. In 2004 he was awarded an AHRC Fellowship at Central

– 1979) and was Director of the PM Gallery in Zagreb (1981 – 1991). He had solo exhibitions in Mala Galerija - Modern Art Museum (Ljubljana, 1994), Museum of Contemporary Art (Zagreb 2003), Platform Garanti (Istanbul, 2007), Vanabbe Museum (Eindhoven, 2008), Center for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2008), Trafo (Budapest, 2008), VOX (Montreal, 2010), E-flux (New York, 2010), and Museum of Modern Art (Warsaw, 2010).

Nina Beier

(°1975, Denmark) is a Berlin-based artist. Her interventions result in anything from sculpture to performance. She has recently held solo exhibitions at YBCA in San Francisco, Laura Bartlett Gallery in London and latest produced a commissioned installation at Copenhagen's Kunsthall