

The possibility that activity could lead to either no finished product, or a 'wrong' one, is playfully explored in this presentation of works. By looking at the currency of terms such as 'right' and 'wrong' within an art context, the works suggest that 'rightness' is merely a product of habit and expectation, and it becomes apparent that these continue to have a degree of influence in how art is displayed. It may not be wrong exactly to show work in a dimly lit space, and to celebrate an exhibition with a meal on closing rather than opening night, but it is at least contrary. ■

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Studies for an Exhibition

David Roberts Art Foundation London

7 April to 11 June

Some exhibitions simply sound better on paper. Over the past few years, curator Matthieu Copeland has devoted his time to examining what that sound might be, its tone of potential and promise, and how far a cry it is from the actual works that inhabit a space. Attempting to align performative and ephemeral artists' practices into a standardised gallery schedule in order to do so is no easy task, and Copeland has padded out his intervention with a series of publications, CDs and DVDs as forms of curatorial missives. Invited to take part as the fourth in the David Roberts Art Foundation Curator's Series, the group show 'Studies for an Exhibition' is Copeland's latest assemblage of live readings, unstable objects and uncertain presences. These 'studies' are posed as a set of sketches and propositions, but not so much towards what this particular nascent exhibition could become, but rather as a generic set of tactics any exhibition curator might employ.

What appeared as the centrepiece of the show is the booklet *An Exhibition to Hear Read Vol 3*, nine texts by artists from Robert Barry to Cally Spooner, recited each day in the gallery space. While contributions from Bethan Huws and Nicolas Gerait create interesting gaps in their performance, jumping between visual and temporal description, other texts where Barry urges us to 'Say SOMETHING in gold', and David Medalla's romanticised diary entry are less engaging as enacted works. The book itself seems to have been included to embody the 'live' element of the show that is otherwise absent from the rest of the exhibition. The scuffed white rectangular and circular canvases of Karin Sander's *Mailed Paintings*, 2004-11, line the back wall, the only marks the artist might have made on them potentially being the handwriting filling in the FedEx forms that are affixed to a few of the surfaces. The black dirt and scrapes of being in transit highlight their edges and contours, but the mute canvases make clear that their meaning isn't here in the gallery – in our encounter with them – but in the movement between gallery and artist as they are sent back and forth from London to Berlin throughout the show. When I visited, a set of empty frames and a gaggle of handouts made up the shifting elements of Elena Bajo's *Illusion, Delusion, Allusion: The Order of Anarchy (Studies for a Movement at 66 r.p.m.)*, 2011. The handouts disclose the artist's conversations with the curator, including a list of proposed events for each day that attempt to convey a living sense of anarchy through minute performances and hidden disruptions. In one event described, a handout was

available with 73 definitions of 'anarchy'. Perhaps tellingly, at least six out of the 66 suggestions on Bajo's list say 'This event intentionally left blank'.

The most visually prominent of Copeland's 'studies' are those of historical recreation. The front windows of the gallery hold a set of posters for the 1956 Whitechapel exhibition 'This is Tomorrow', re-creating an act by Gustav Metzger who adorned his junk shop in King's Lynn, Norfolk, with advertisements for the then concurrent show. In the present, with the Whitechapel featuring a retrospective archival look at 'This is Tomorrow', Copeland reinstates the act, its fandom curbed only by the continually nagging question of what this 'tomorrow' might be. Downstairs, the basement of the Foundation is filled with a 'bootleg' re-creation of a 1964 exhibition at the ICA, 'Study for an exhibition of violence in contemporary art', a show which grouped an enormous range of artists under headings like 'violence as a weapon', 'violence observed' and 'violence imagined: symbolic violence'. Over 200 photographic reproductions and 30 works made up the original show. Here, black and white photocopies and 11 works suffice, providing both historical precedent and a literal but effective illustrative embodiment of the type of study Copeland is proposing.

As the muttered, endless counting of Roman Opalka bounces around the basement and off the wall of photocopies, the audio recording of his ongoing practice of inscribing numbers onto canvas, as a relentless engagement with time, seems more like an interminable listing, an inevitable, claustrophobic cataloguing. Copeland's choice of the sound recording of 1965/1-∞, 1965 to represent Opalka's practice, has a flattening effect and has the feel of a token inclusion. Alongside the trite institutional portraiture of Emma Bjornesparr's *The Commercial Waste Collection*, 2011, where the Foundation's rubbish accumulated during the show gathers under the outside stairs, you begin to get the feeling that for an exhibition about transience, these studies are fairly squared away, finite and neat. Copeland's concern seems more with questions of form, the structural possibilities offered by each included practice, which gives the impression that each artist is simply another box to be ticked in an extended typological list. Framed in this way, 'Studies' has the effect of depoliticising and dulling some of the sharper edges of the show. The decision to re-import Metzger's rural advertising into its original urban origins

Studies for an
Exhibition
installation view



seems only to reiterate a sense of institutional hegemony, a sense reinforced by the TCA re-creation where certain items featured in the original show have been casually replaced by roughly similar artworks by the same artist from the David Roberts private collection. Here Bajo's sense of anarchy is rendered toothless, almost cute.

Curiously, the varied approaches of previous DRAF exhibitions in the Curator's Series from Raimundas Malasauskas's 'Sculpture of the Space Age' to Minhea Mircan's 'History of Art, The' and now 'Studies', nevertheless share a remarkably similar overall tone. The series has each time featured the methods of temporal re-placement and self-displacing objects, re-presenting the history of the dematerialised art object like some sort of game of disappearing chess, where the moves are already set and can only be replayed. With 'Studies', Copeland bravely attempts to push at the temporal and physical limitations of how we understand the parameters of the exhibition, but in using wider, expanded art practices as strategic chess pieces, he prevents them from creating the sort of absence which the audience can then also imagine. ■

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Walls

Union Gallery London 9 April to 8 May

Four walls, four artists and four works may appear a rather blunt and basic 'formula' upon which to hang an exhibition whose theme is the superficially simplistic one of 'walls', but sometimes such directness supports its own engaging complexities. The further division into that of two painters, Shane Bradford and Brian Reed, and two artists using photography, Rut Blees Luxemburg and Soonhak Kwon, moves such literalness one step further along. The fact that almost all colour within both the artworks and the gallery space itself is stripped down to black and white seems appropriate here. There is a sort of 'matter-of-factness' about the selection of works that echoes the small neat space of the gallery containing them.

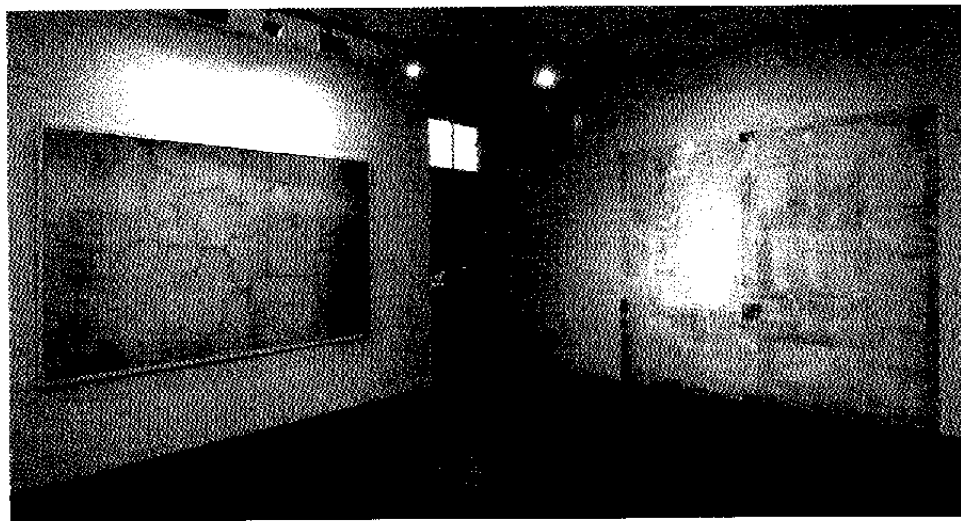
All four artists in 'Walls' have shown at Union prior to the present exhibition, a factor directly addressed in Bradford's *Rehang*, 2011, a large-scale painting employing gloss paint, metallic

emulsion and resin on paper. When Bradford first displayed work in 2010, positioned in exactly the same place in the gallery as it is today, it was a vibrantly coloured concatenation of dense patterns, shapes, letters and signs. But in its present incarnation the original surface has been covered over by a thin but variegated skein of white, turning the painting into a ghostly re-presentation of its former self. This curious act of self-censorship relegates the earlier painting to the past, as if to suggest that in re-showing work the modernist battle cry of 'make it new!' should be enacted literally and without restraint.

Bradford's decision to obliterate the painting is, however, not so much an act of destruction as one of radically redirecting the work and the viewer – towards a different range of painterly and conceptual concerns. *Rehang* has been transformed into a painting whose focus is the diversity of textures and tonalities of its now bleached surface. What the work now addresses are those traits one normally takes into account when looking at that category of painting known as monochrome. What is unclear – and perhaps Bradford himself has not made a decision about it – is, should this work be shown on a future date, whether the artist will again rework it.

The other painting in 'Walls', Brian Reed's *The Nurtured Release*, 2011, represents a rather different approach to the work of Bradford. At first sight it appears to be an exercise in the manner of Robert Motherwell or Franz Kline, scaled down and cut away from its apparently original context of American avant-garde art of the 1950s. Concocted from oil, acrylic, cardboard, marble and plaster dust, the work is in parts two or three inches deep, a factor which helps one to see it has nothing of Greenbergian insistence or intrinsic flatness or formal purity – about it. One thinks, when inspecting the work, also of Antoni Tàpies, Joseph Schwitters or even Harry Thubron, so that in the end the work is one of a clever and quite amusing mix of modes, as opposed to the choice of working within an already established genre and its prescriptive constraints.

Inserted into the upper middle half of *The Nurtured Release* are 23 rolled-up prayer cards carrying scripts downloaded from a Christian faith website, the overall implication of this scrambling of texts being that none of the systems of belief represented here – Christianity, Judaism, Islam – hold greater importance than any other, a point that parallels the plurality of artistic models referred to. Reed's painting, which in its own way parodies the ideology of the spiritual in art, is quirky, and a bit cack-handed, but carries this off in a rather attractive way.



Walls
Installation view
Rut Blees Luxemburg
The Pattern of Prayer
2004
Shayne Bradford
Rehang 2011