



The Thing is the Thing

ASC Gallery

5 Nov - 17 Dec

The Thing is The Thing

Curated by Benet Spencer

Central to the science fiction writing of H.G.Wells is a remarkable clash of culture he presents through situating the most otherworldly events within the tranquil setting of suburban late Victorian or Edwardian England. We are treated to a time machine in Richmond, a Martian landing near Woking, and flying machines in Wimbledon. The theme for science fiction is often very simple - something happens, and that something creates shockwaves that resonate throughout society. It is the big 'what if' that provides the inspiration.

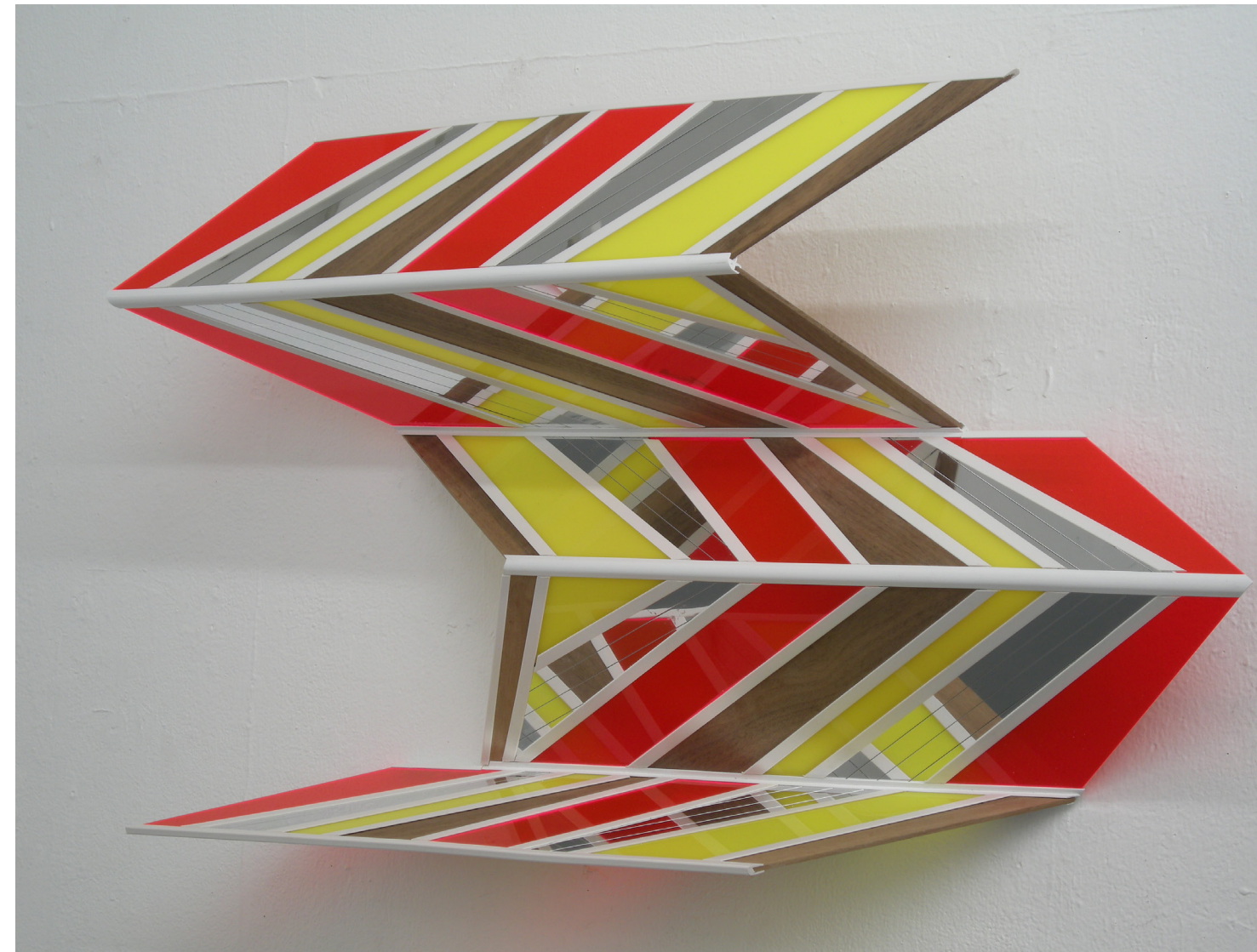
For artists referencing science fiction, this leap of faith provides a useful point of departure. If the grand narrative of science proper is one of empirical debate and a history of experimentation handing down the information that we need to understand our world and make it better, then the contribution of science fiction opens up such an area for speculative investigation, towards the visionary and purely subjective.

Taking a simple conceit as a starting point, The Thing is The Thing is an exhibition that seeks to explore these relationships in the context of the work of seven con-



Julian Hughes Watts
'Product Range Repeat', 2010,
Digital Animation (loop)

Front Image:
Neil Ayling
Cut and Float, 2010
Perspex, Transparent vinyl



Hiroe Komie
Plastic Dynamism, 2010
Acrylic, wood, mirror
50 x 40 x 10cm



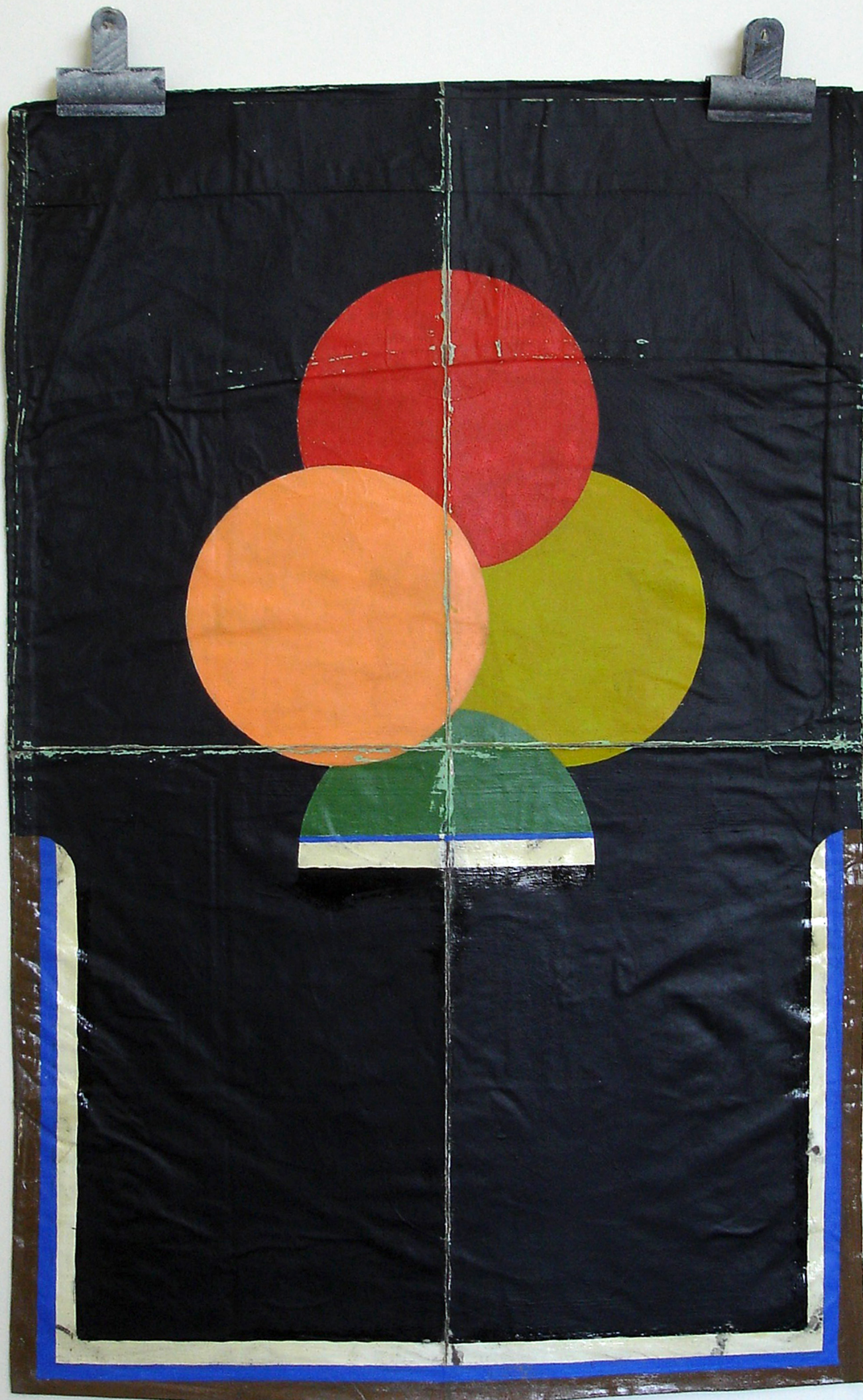
Benet Spencer
Untitled City I, 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 140 x 220cm

temporary artists from London. Two key themes run throughout the show, one the formalist principles of modernism in terms of colour, pattern and form, re-examined in the context of science, technology or architecture; alongside are iconographic representations of fictitious modernist structures, or culturally-mediated and personal reinterpretations of images and objects from science and technology. None of the artists trace a linear path back to an earlier exploration of related subject matter. All have allowed the complex nature of modernity, with its conflicting signs and signifiers, to infuse their work a poetic and resonant quality.

As a project, this exhibition started with a very small and simple idea from thinking about Sci Fi films and late-modernist sculpture and painting of the 1960s. The monolith at the beginning of Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey; the biomorphic extra-terrestrial monsters in John Carpenter's The Thing, but also the polemical debates of minimalism and particularly the work of Frank Stella, Donald Judd and Robert Morris. The thing in this context becomes an object of speculation, charged through its restrained form and pseudo-apocalyptic endgame arguments. The *thing arrives* remains a constant both in architecture and film, as well as modern art. Through minimalism it was part of a rigorous purification of aesthetics; 40 years on it forms part of the continuation of a broader model for social change, as seen in the remod-

Gordon Cheung
Harbinger, 2011
 Taxidermy Snowy Owl (endangered species), modified antique display case, 2-way mirror, gold mirror, lights and truncated pyramid structure
 Dimensions variable (approx 50 x 50 x 200cm)





eling of cities through 'spaceship' architecture landing in unlikely locations, as seen in Bilbao with the Guggenheim.

It is customary in exhibitions on art and science, and there have been a few, to reference examples such as the meeting of Galileo with the English poet John Milton. History is so peppered with such pairings that for this project I wanted something less definable in linear terms and more personal in orientation, to couple with an underlying interest in technology, science fiction or the modernist aesthetic. In this context the exhibition could be described as much as an exploration of the inner world of artistic inspiration, as the outer world of empirically sourced data. For artists, the thing that most concerns them is how to make new work that is original and different. Knowledge is everywhere, but how to use it constructively without repetition or pastiche is the key. For the contemporary artist, both science and science fiction present a world that quickly becomes an area of exploration and research - a pseudo-fantasy that seduces through a combination of mystery, beauty and spectacle.

Perhaps a key point can be located in the early years of the C20th when Dadaist methodologies led artists such as Picabia or Duchamp to look at technical drawings of car engines and see beauty in an invention that was already changing the world. The resulting machine paintings, and most notably Duchamp's 'Large Glass'

Tim Ellis
United in Different Guises XLIX, 2011
 Acrylic and varnish on cotton
 72 x 43 cm

Gordon Cheung

The Collapsed Highway, 2011

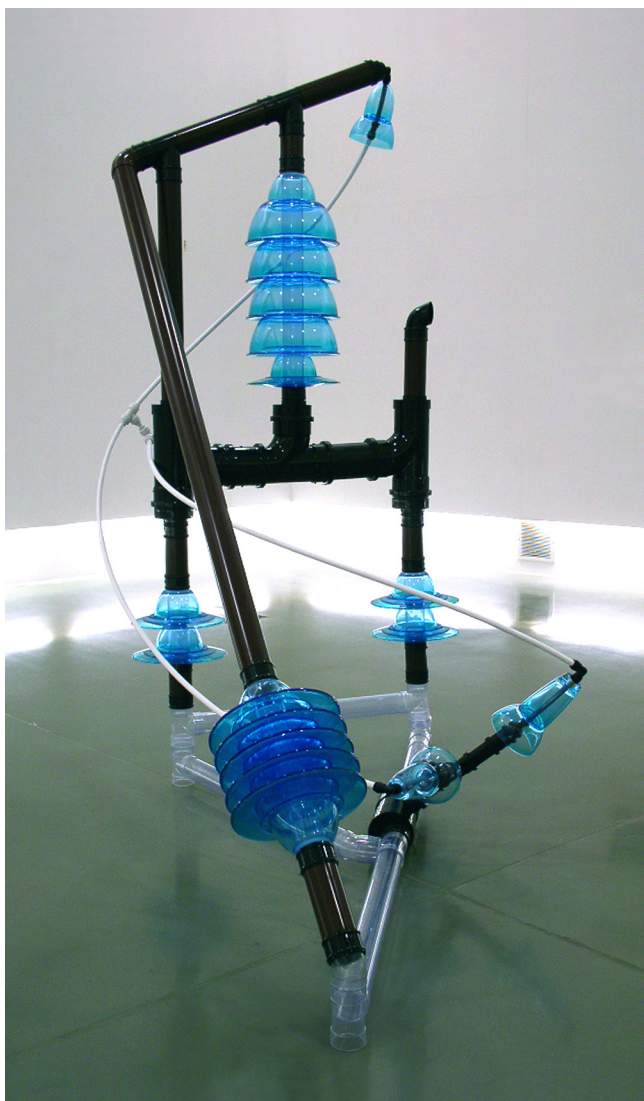
Newspaper stock listings and acrylic on canvas and polycarbonate
150 x 200 cm



(1923), are not de-humanised representations devoid of emotion or feeling, but explorations of erotic fantasies and emotional states through a language of machinery, which is depicted as only one stage removed from human form. “Giving plastic reality to inner states of the mind” was Picabia’s 1913 description of the aim of modern painting. Through these works, a model for organic and inorganic transformation was established that has echoes throughout art of the 20th, and a relationship to science that was both personal and idiosyncratic.

The artists in this exhibition share this quizzical interest in the transformative nature of everyday objects and images, from the recycled plastic ephemera of Stewart Gough’s sculptures to the purist aesthetic of Julian Hughes Watts digital animations. The resulting work is imbued with a poetic resonance and articulation that transcends the origin of materials. Terms like ‘techno-sublime’ have been used to describe a similar process of assimilation, suggesting that the production of art naturally leads to a higher level of experience that sits within a tradition that can be linked to Romantic Art of 19th.

And what of suburbia? All the artists live and work in London, though not all live in the suburbs. It is clear that the city has been a significant influence on their practice,



Stewart Gough

Untitled Sculpture, 2006

Plastic drain, dust extraction pipe, plastic picnic plates and bowls.
220 x 150 x 200cm. (approx)

provoking a response to either successful or failed attempts at urban planning, that at times are not far short of Sci Fi montages. In this context J.G.Ballard is interesting to think about, sitting in his Shepperton semi writing tales of dystopian modernity that struck a chord with artists, writers and musicians. He wanted to connect with the everyday lives of people through his experience of an ordinary world around him, and needed his 1930s bricks and mortar to fire his imagination. Artists, too, need a primary experience upon which to reflect and respond, but also a connection with culture and knowledge that helps locate them within their environment, as both science and science fiction can.

Benet Spencer, October 2011

Picabia quoted in Hapgood, “A Paris Painter” The Globe and Commercial Advertiser, 20 Feb 1913, p.8, cited in Borràs, Picabia (Paris:Albin-Michel; London:Thames & Hudson, 1985) p.107



Stewart Gough

Green Man - Darwin. 2010

Watercolour and pencil crayon on handmade paper, carved oak floorboards, hessian, UV glass

Neil Ayling

Born: Ascot, 1983.

Studied: Royal College of Art, 2008-2010; Winchester School of Art, 2003-2006.

Exhibitions: 'New Relics', Cello Factory London, 2011; 'Since Tomorrow', Eb & Flow, London 2011; 'Nixon ArtMosh', Munich Germany, 2011 and A-Foundation London, 2010; Peak Gallery, Toronto Canada, 2010; 'Idiot Strength', Tim Pritchard Gallery, London, 2009; 'Launch Collaborative', Oxford, Construct/Deconstruct, 2009; Bank Of America, group show, London. 2009.

Gordon Cheung

Born: London, 1975.

Studied: Royal College of Art 1999-2001; Central St Martins College of Art Design 1994-98.

Exhibitions: 'The Light that Burns Twice as Bright', Alan Cristea, London, 2011 (solo); 'Gordon Cheung', ROOM Gallery, London, UK, 2010 (solo); 'Altered States', Arizona State University Museum, USA, 2010 (solo); 'The Sleeper Awakes', Other Gallery, Shanghai, China; touring to Beijing and Wenzhou in 2011 (solo); 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse', The New Art Gallery Walsall, 2009 (solo); 'The Promised Land', Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, USE 2009 (solo).

Tim Ellis

Born: Chester, 1981.

Studied: Royal Academy Schools 2006-09; Liverpool John Moores University 2000-03.

Exhibitions: 'Sons of Pioneers', Furini Contemporary, Rome, Italy (Solo), 'The Tourist' Spacex, Exeter England (Solo) 'A Foundation for Exchange', Primopiano Lugano Switzerland 2010 (Solo), 'Secret Societies', The Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt Germany, 'Friendship of the Peoples' Simon Oldfield Gallery, London, 'John Moores Exhibition', Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool 2010, 'Newspeak - British Art Now Part 1' Saatchi Gallery London 2010. 'Tag 3 to 36 New London Painting' Brown Gallery London 2010. 'New Sensations' The A foundation London 2009.

Stewart Gough

Born: Leeds, 1977.

Studied: Goldsmiths 2001-02 and 2003-05; Staffordshire University 1996-99.

Exhibitions: 'The Future Can Wait' presents: Polemically Small', Torrance Art Museum, Los Angeles, USA, 2011; 'Privet Topiary' (solo) Field Projects, The Bunhouse, London, 2011; On Becoming a Gallery - Part Three (in collaboration with Tom Ormond), Angus Hughes Gallery, London, 2010; 'Rhizomatic', Departure Gallery, London, 2010; 'Terminator', Camberwell Project Space; Surface Warp Factor, The Aubin Gallery, London, 2010; 'Dawnbreakers', John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, 2010.

Julian Hughes Watts

Born: Cardiff, 1969.

Studied: Royal Academy Schools 1991-94; Birmingham City University 1988-91.

Exhibitions: 'Graceland', London, N8, 2011; 'Dawnbreakers', John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, 2010; 'Product Range Repeat' (Trisant), Depford X, 2010; Saxon, Schwartz Gallery, London, 2009; 'Reconstructing the Old House', Nunnery Gallery, London, 2009; 'Intervention', Fieldgate Gallery, London, 2007; '10th Planet', Tower Bridge Business Centre, 2006; 'Seeking Tacit Utopias', Surface Gallery, Nottingham, 2006; 'Eau Savage', Lucy Mackintosh Gallery, Switzerland and Fieldgate Gallery, London, 2006-07.

Hiroe Komai

Born: Kyoto, Japan.

Studied: Goldsmiths 2000-03; Camberwell College of Arts 1997-2000; Kyoto Seika University 1989-1993.

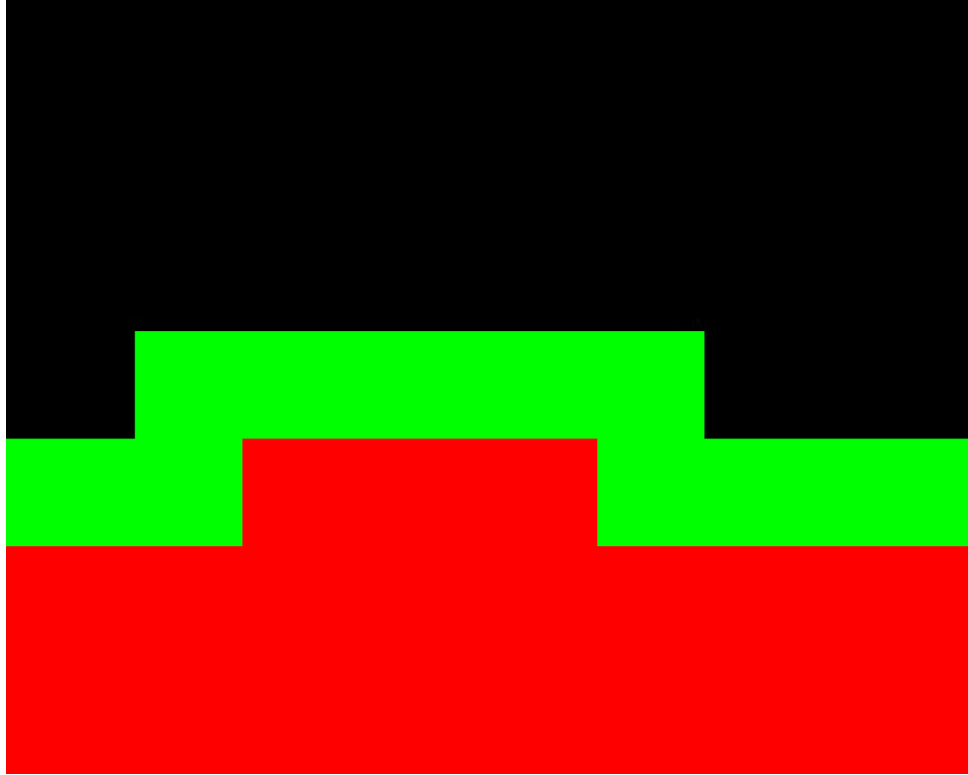
Exhibitions: 'Collage' (solo), Slaughterhouse, Valencia, Spain, 2011; 'Peckham Space Open', 2010, London; 'Terminator', Camberwell Project Space, London, 2010; 'Depot', Vulpes Vulpes, London, 2010; 'Paperfile on Tour', Gallery oqbo presents, Edvard Munch Haus E.V, Wardemunde, Germany, 2010; 'Sunshine Hit Me' (solo) Gallery Haneusagi, Kyoto, Japan, 2010; 'Criteria of Beauty', The Hive, London, 2009; 'Papieroftensiv', Gallery oqbo, Berlin Germany, 2009; 'Modern Living' (solo), Shin-bi, Kyoto, Japan, 2009; 'Three By Three 4', Yinka Shonibare's Space, London, 2009.

Benet Spencer

Born: St.Albans, 1969.

Studied: Royal Academy Schools 1992-95; Birmingham Polytechnic 1988-91;

Exhibitions: 'Museums in the Incident', Monash Gallery, Melbourne, Australia, 2012; 'The Perfect Nude', Wimbledon School of Art Gallery, London, 2011; 'Safe Haven', Brunswick Gallery, London, 2010; 'Reconstructing the Old House', Nunnery Gallery, London and Ruskin Gallery, Cambridge, 2009; 'Saxon', Schwartz Gallery, London, 2009; 'Drawing with Dolphins', Crimestown, London, 2009 and 'Worlds End - Future Perfect', The Carlton Hotel, Melbourne, Australia, 2008.



**Julian Hughes Watts
(Trisant)**
'Outflow', 2008,
Digital Animation (loop)

This catalogue is supported by Anglia Ruskin University research funding and is printed to coincide with the exhibition 'The Thing is the Thing' at the ASC Gallery, London, 5th Nov - 17th Dec 2011, curated by Benet Spencer.

The ASC Gallery is directly funded by ASC, a registered charity that exists to support artists, promote art and educate the public in the arts.

The gallery aims to establish and forge excitement, appreciation and enjoyment in contemporary art, to make art accessible to a diverse audience, to act as a test bed for emerging ideas in art and to exhibit work that, as a result of its ambition or non-commercial nature, cannot easily be shown elsewhere.

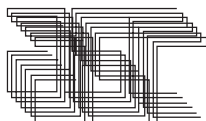
ASC Gallery

Erlang House, 128 Blackfriars Rd, London SE1 8EQ

Catalogue Design: mark@alphabetthreat.co.uk
Printing: Labute, Cambridge.



Anglia Ruskin
University



Cambridge
School^{of} Art