

THIS ORIENTATION

Extracts from gallery talk

Summit Gallery, Hackney Wick

Sunday, 17 February, 2013 (15:00 - 17:00)

Speakers

Steven Ball :SB

riccardo iacono : RI

Audience : A

Guy Sherwin: GS

Mary Mullen: MM

Michelle Deignan: MD

>>>

SPILOVER

SB: One question I had, which would be a way of kicking off this idea of doing a talk, is about the relationship of your film and video practice to this installation, if we can call it an installation, your film and video practice and this space, I think there's a kind of continuity.

RI: Usually I show people around the show, because I'm always in the space during the exhibition and the conversations that ensue become part of the work. So I give people a tour basically.

When I first came to the gallery it was an empty space and I was struck by the view.

[Riccardo opens window blind]. Oh look at that light!

So, I wanted to make a piece of work that you could only see from this window. So the gallery would be empty and you'd have to come to the gallery and look through this window and see it outside. And I was also interested in this surface (the window), this transparent plane, which for me was a bit like film, celluloid.

SB: So we are getting around to the idea of the relationship between the pane of glass is taking the place of the film strip.

RI: Yes, so this whole space becomes a kind of film space, an event space. Basically, I

wanted to make a camera-less film and when I first started painting on to film i didn't use a camera, but the abstract film that is showing over there, [[SKZCP, 1997/2000](#)] that's one of my early works, made in the early 90s and it looks like its got a dark background but its actually painted onto completely clear film, just like that window, and it involves lighting from different angles so that it captures the textural qualities of the film and it makes the background look opaque. So I suppose I was trying to emulate those qualities with this window. But also, that film there requires the use of a camera. It couldn't exist without the use of a camera. So it's a composition for camera.

SB: That's something you were saying last time that I was here, that you'd been arranging the objects in the space to photograph them, and so actually, a visit to the space is not necessarily visiting a space that can be viewed within the space that it's in, but is primarily for the view of the camera. Is that still the case or have you since moved things around?

RI: I think it can be viewed in lots of different ways, with the naked eye, with a camera, with a photograph, with conversation actually. In the actual opening of the exhibition I was still hanging the show and people at the opening were actually helping me put things up. It was an event and creative process that involved other people, sharing and feedback.

SB: But the entire show has been like that.. It's continued to change.

RI: Its ended up pretty much as it started really.

SB: Well, no. I don't think so. It's quite different to the opening. There's a lot more in here.

RI: The starting point is when you come through the door, or it's when you actually read the press release and you get guided to a venue, to a place.

SB: Yes, but there are also other ways, like the website or the blog could be a starting point as well, because often it's the way things are disseminated if you like, via the blog and then they come back here. I mean, I noticed the way that we've been working on the blog things have become kind of manipulated and changed and reordered and edited, just in that space, if it is a space, as much as they have in here. So I see it as a completely dynamic environment, not just the environment of the room, but the environment the show projects itself into outside of the room. Also I find it interesting the way that the immediate surrounding area finds its way into the space, with the tyres and the photographs of the view from out there and various other things. So there's this kind of continual spillover from one space to the other.

WORK IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

RI: This piece here (digital painting printed on PVC banner material) is a still from one of my digital animations and was actually on a rooftop outside. It was wrapped around a piece of wood, one of these pieces of wood here and it was going to stay on the rooftop, so you would see it from that window. I did put it there but it was really windy, so I had to take it down and bring it back in, because I thought it might kill somebody. There are various pivot points that the work revolves around, this is one of them. It's an early digital painting. I used it as part of a computer animation (*Cold Tape, 2000*). I'd never actually printed it.

It was an opportunity to look at my work in a different light, because previously it's either been on my computer screen or on video. I work a lot with computers now and I find it very difficult to get a sense of what you are working with in terms of what kind of materials, until you actually print it out. There are so many different ways of outputting digital images, you have to modify them for different media. So I took the opportunity to see what it would look like as a PVC print. Then I had all these other photographs that I'd taken on my mobile and I did get some printed as C-type prints that I was going to mount on aluminium-dibond, which if you go to photographic exhibitions you will see these frameless mounts, floating photographs, very slick; but there was no contact.

[Riccardo points to hand-cut photographs on the wall]

These were originally tests, which I printed out on an inkjet printer at home. So I was actually able to touch them and feel the paper weight, feel them as physical objects. For me that was really exciting, to think that this thing that I had originally created in-computer or captured with a camera could be touched and manipulated in another way. It could capture light and have more of a physical presence in the space.

CRAZY, THOUSANDS OF IMAGES AND VIDEOS

SB: You are always taking photographs on your phone. It has been a kind of constant presence.

RI: I've got this project that's been running for two years. It's called [Lamp Posts](#) (2010-13) and basically I take photographs all the time, almost every five steps. It takes me ages to go to the corner shop.

SB: I know. I've been there.

RI: It really does. It takes absolutely ages. I have amassed this crazy, thousands of images and videos that I have shot, focussing on very tiny things. Some of them are showing in this exhibition. You know, I could only show you a handful. It would be too overwhelming... In fact I thought, when I was first offered the opportunity to show here, that just maybe one or two would be enough: just something small. Most memories, precious moments are very brief and just to have one image, one moment captured on video and presented, framed in an empty space would be a perfect way to show and give it focus. Then I got carried away.. as you can see.

SB: Something that interests me about that aspect of the work you do, is these little observations of details in the world that otherwise would seem to be completely mundane and incidental and accidental. You draw attention to them, but at the same time instead of taking just one small image and saying okay this is a very particular thing that I am interested in, you have thousands of them, literally thousands, probably how many?

RI: I have lost count. I've stopped counting

SB: So it's interesting that you decided to print out only a handful of them for this show.

RI: It was like dipping my hand in a lucky bag. It really was. I hadn't sorted them. They were in lots of folders and I just dragged them across and threw them on the timeline and burnt them to disc.

So there is a bit of chance involved.

SB: But its the same kind of chance process as when you are wandering around and taking photos in the first place.

RI: Yes. There are chance encounters. It's not that I go somewhere with the intention of capturing an image. I just record things that I encounter along the way.

THREE DIMENSIONAL PAINTING

RI: It's worth noting that I have been working in this space for the last two weeks. What you see here. It's not always been like this. That big area of blue happened over time. You are kind of walking into a photograph and you are animating the photograph as well by your presence. This monitor was just a regular monitor at first and gradually the tape (gaffa/sellotape) moved from the wires to the wall, the ceiling, down the other wall, the surfaces and onto the monitors. Just like the window where I am exploring refraction through the glass, I started using sellotape and paper to control the amount of light coming off the screen. That photograph was over there and these videos were playing as well and then gradually I started switching monitors off and began thinking of the objects used for presenting things as sculptural forms.

SB: What's nice about that is that it's kind of emblematic of the whole show. You don't really seem to make any distinction between your materials and your media and the stuff that you bring into the show. It can be a photograph. It can be a video. It can be on a screen. It can be a bit of tape, you know some blue paint on the wall. It can be a conversation you are having on the phone. All of these things seem to find their way back into the work. This is an ongoing process of evolving consciousness or something, if that's what we can call it.

RI: Yes. I started out as a painter and the way I got into film I suppose was with an interest in the activities in the space surrounding painting. So sound and light, people talking... the space and people's state of mind and what they were actually bringing to the image, how they actually encountered it. So I started to explore the relationship between the painting and the environment. I became more interested in sculptural form and that led me to the realm of filmmaking, which is also a sculptural medium.

SB: I was also thinking about materials and media a sort of indifferenciation between all those things, both in the show and in your practice generally. You come from painting considered as a three dimensional practice in a way.

HACKNEY WICK

A: There seems to be a lot of Hackney Wick in here, in terms of the objects you've chosen. Is that because you are here in Hackney Wick or is that a specific choice?

RI: Well, I used the tyres because at the opening I thought that the space would be full of people and I thought they would prevent you from seeing the works if they were on the ground, so I used them to raise the monitors. We didn't have any plinths and I didn't have time to make anything and it didn't seem appropriate to use plinths so I found some tyres outside. I also wanted a bench for people to sit on because I knew that some of the work would take time to view. I mean, the space is designed to make people feel relaxed

rather than inhibited as most gallery spaces do. That's why I painted the edges of the floor and the photographs are quite sensual objects. Yes, there is a lot of outside inside.

A: The objects, as well as the way they are arranged is very natural.

RI: Yes. It's a kind of lived-in creative space.

A: There are no definite associations between the way something has been laid out and something else has been laid out. It's very relaxed.

RI: It's almost like an observation that I have captured by way of this kind of process that imitates what is happening outside, but it's not really contrived. These pieces of paper are the offcuts of the photographs made when I was mounting them and they fell to the ground and I quite liked the way they fell to the ground and then I started putting them back on the wall again as you can see. I didn't have any slides but I had two slide projectors, so I made some makeshift slides with that (glass) tabletop. The wood is from the yard outside.

There is a mural outside as well, that you can see. Apart from this (PVC print) that was outside but is now in here, there is a mural that you can see through the window. There is a car park down below which you probably walked past, and there are lots of murals, then there is a big white wall on the other side that I painted. Its marks are based on some writing on the canal and the car park is also used for burning wood, so I painted the flames and the steps up to Hackney Wick station as well. I had to do it quite quickly.

I LIKE TO WORK IN THE DARK

RI: The show is also about how whenever you see something in a different place or time it changes. So one of the ideas feeding into this exhibition is how these old works presented alongside newer works, how light might be reflected off them and what kind of correspondences they might have in the same proximity. Also working with them and transferring them into different media as well; transferring that digital image into a PVC print and printing onto paper and then cutting it up and collaging them. I mean it's very much a collage of different works.

They are different works but in this exhibition they form one work. They are integrated. It's about how they relate to one another, how they relate to this space and how people encounter them. So in order to get to this image, you have to come up the lift. You have to walk through this space and your peripheral vision is preoccupied with all this noise, but the focal point is me. I draw you to this object. I'm actually doing it now. I'm controlling the amount of time you spend looking at this object as well. So it's another form of time manipulation, time control and time management, framing. Conversation is a way of framing things.

Another thing is that, I like to work in the dark. I like to improvise. I mean its great to have an idea, but that for me is just a starting point and it will prompt me to take an action. That action will lead to a shift in perspective. It will move me from one place to another and raise new opportunities and perspectives and I like to address those engage with them. I like to be open to what's happening around me rather than just staying on the spot. We do need these frameworks to get around though sometimes we have problems getting out of them.

MANY THINGS IN CONTINUAL FLUX

SB: Your earlier work consisted of fairly discrete pieces using specific media: a film, a video piece, maybe a painting, and so on. Then a few years ago in The No Show at Castlefield Gallery in Manchester, you included a whole lot of media and objects all at once, you continually changed the exhibition as it went along, which became quite recursive as you documented the show and then represented those recordings back in the space, and so on. There's a similar kind process going on here, it's a kind of atomisation, with parts of things exploding all over the place, many things in continual flux and a sense of controlled chaos, which is part of the way you work. You're moving things around. It seems as though you don't quite know where things are going to go yourself, so then the visitor doesn't know where to find things next time.

RI: This was something I had a chat with Carmen Billows about, how when you make a piece of work you make your own sense of things, you make your own world if you like and then when you've finished it, it becomes something quite separate. It's a bit like a culture shock, the creative process is very unstable ground. When you leave it you find ways of grabbing hold of something. You make something and then you let go of it and grab onto something else, words or just another framework for putting that in context, so you can share it with other people. For me that's a shift in perspective, a cultural shift. When you are between works and sharing it, you are actually moving between different media and vantage points and different viewing systems and distribution networks, communication networks.

SB: So does this exhibition exist only in the process of doing that, as an abstracted process and you can only see what it is after you've done it?

RI: But even then you don't know what it is. I'm still thinking about that abstract film (SKZCP) that I started in 1994 and my idea of it still changes. When I was making it I had so many ideas that came to mind and I tried to somehow work them in there and then I forgot about them and then I saw it as something else, because I saw them all within this timeframe and I had certain motives for looking at it, certain interests, preoccupations that were concealing the whole picture. The whole picture is never really fully presented or experienced all at once.

DO YOU NEED A GALLERY?

GS: I was just wondering what your attitude to working with a gallery is. I mean, do you need a gallery?

RI: I don't rely on galleries. Art can be distributed in any medium; as long as it can take the form of a communication it can be distributed in any medium, anywhere, so I don't feel bound to the gallery system, but I do think it's interesting.

MD: Ok. So you are talking about the gallery system.

RI: It's a system just like photography is a system. Obviously, it's important that my work is shared and there is a medium to do that. So yes, I do need galleries in that respect, but I'm not dependent on this kind of gallery system.

SB: But of course this show would never have happened without this gallery because it's been made in, with and for this space.

RI: Yes. It's a response to the properties, the architecture, its location, and people.

SB: Guy's question could also be about the institutionalisation of art practice in a way. Your work kind of resists commodification at every level. There is no way for this show, as a work, to be considered a stable enough object to be commodified at any point in its existence. In the mainstream commercial gallery scene commodification is incredibly important because it's based on capitalist models of buying and selling. I can't see your work fitting into that in any shape or form. Or am I wrong? Would it or would you want it to?

RI: Yes. I don't make work to make money, but it would be nice if somebody gave me money to make work.

THROWING PEAS AND OTHER THINGS

[Riccardo directs the audience to a video screen leaning against the wall at the other side of the gallery]

RI: The video here, I don't know if I mentioned this earlier, is actually of the pea prints at night. The glass, the view through the window at night and the marks are actually pea blemishes.

SB: Tell us about the pea throwing. You mentioned the pea prints..

RI: Ok. What do you want to know about them?

SB: Well I don't know if people are aware of your pea throwing practice.

RI: I have made lots of videos that involve throwing peas. I guess it started out as a playful thing as a child, but also I'd been reading a lot of Paul Virilio's writing and Sun Tzu's, The Art of War. I was basically interested in observation and conflict, how to manage time, space and energy. Virilio writes about the camera and how it was used to surveil terrain and access information and bring it back to your location. I guess that's where the throwing thing comes in. It's about connecting to something that's in the distance and recording the sound and image that comes back. So you throw it and you capture the sound and the image of whatever you are throwing it at. So, it's a way of sound and image sampling really. It started out like that.

I was interested in colour and questions about nature and genetics. One of the first genetic experiments was done on peas and it occurred to me that this thing wasn't as natural as I thought it was. It looks untouched, beautiful green yet it has been treated. I wanted to question what we see, and think about what is happening beneath the surface; to interrogate both the environment and the medium that we use to see and survive.

GS: Did you throw the drapes?

RI: The drapes? No, that was staged. I haven't thrown any drapes. That is something that you might have seen in one of my videos where I have been throwing wet pieces of cloth, but this cloth was never wet. I just used it to filter light and help guide people's attention

through the space and focus on different parts of the space, to frame the window and force you to move around in order to encounter an object at a different angle, to create kind of obstacles.

GS: Have you thrown anything apart from peas and wet flannels and things?

RI: I've thrown socks, wood, garbage. I've worked with leaves.

GS. You've thrown leaves?

RI: Well, petals.

GS: What at?

RI: In the river. I was picking the heads off flowers and throwing them in the river and basically it's all recorded on video and then it's edited so you get this kind of raining petals that were targeted at different things I was looking at. The same with the peas. The pea videos are all edited.

I did a piece for a screening in Madrid ([Cinema Piece](#), 2006) where I asked the audience to throw things. I had done a screening of throwing videos and at the end I asked the remaining audience to throw something at the screen and I threw them back. They threw the programme notes, their shoes, socks. They threw cigarette lighters, cigarettes, chewing gum. They threw their sweaters

GS: At you?

RI: At the screen! I videoed that and walked round to the front and I threw it back at them.

GS: You weren't throwing things at the camera?

RI: No.

SB: Is it the case that most of this throwing activity is for the camera?

RI: It is. It's a process, just like the painted film. It requires a camera to make sense. Though in the Madrid performance, the camera was almost obsolete. It was almost like a camera-less film if you like. Like a belly button.

SB: It's interesting that you were still in a cinematic space. You were in a screening room. Film happens to be shown.

RI: Well, basically I asked them to make a projection and throw something at the screen. It's interesting what they came up with and it was fun.

DISORIENTATION

MM: Is movement a big part of your work would you say?

RI: Yes absolutely. [Riccardo points to the monitor showing SKZCP] That is as much an

exploration of movement as anything.. Now I'm exploring camera movement and how my body can affect movement. In the pea throwing videos for example, the throwing action amplifies and exaggerates the small movements of the hand or the blood. As I follow an object. The camera swerves and then it comes back. So, I move away as I track an object and then return to the same position. I do this repeatedly and I edit it in such a way that it becomes quite disorientating to follow. Basically, the actual camera is tracking my eye movement, apart from the object that's flying through space. These videos and those on that monitor there (Viaggio in Treno, 2012 and Hackney Buses, 2013) are also about tracking objects that are in the camera frame, following them and using them to throw people off balance. They play with people's expectations.

One of the things that interested me about filming on trains for example is that when you get on a train, you establish that you are safe and you are going somewhere, so that you can perform other tasks. So you can use your mobile phone. You can eat. You don't have to worry about this stuff that is going past you because you know you are on a safe mode of transport and that is also guiding you through space. You are actually sitting in a camera if you like. Once you've established that, what happens at the platform when the train stops, you've probably experienced it; you still see the platform moving even though the train has stopped.

MM: That reminds me of when you are on a still train and another train starts moving and you feel like you are moving, but in fact you are not.

RI: Yes. It's the same kind of thing. It interests me how people secure themselves and establish a safe ground on which to base their decision making, but actually it's not necessarily safe at all. It's not fixed. It throws people off balance. I guess this project is a bit like using stepping stones to cross a river, moving between safe places, but never knowing whether its a crocodile that you are standing on or a stone.

////.

www.riccardoiacono.co.uk/projects/thisorientation