



Luke McCreadie interviewed by curator Paul Luckraft, 14 September 2016

**Paul Luckraft:** In this exhibition you've brought together recent videos previously shown in different venues around the UK alongside a new video and sculptural elements. Can you talk about how you see this show in relation to the development of your work?

**Luke McCreadie:** In the past year I have been using a structure based on the layout of the human face on which to hang various collections of material I gather. This started with a thought about how we make distinctions between different types of material, like text and image, and as a place to order my sculptures, videos, performances and writing. I have an archive of video footage which I am constantly adding to, without any thought for meaning at the time I film it. I have been placing this footage among more purposefully shot footage and clips downloaded from the internet to form works which masquerade as a series of lectures. I write these imagining I am in the audience making notes, so I am both the viewer and the speaker. There have been three so far: *A lecture to a letter*, *A lecture to an egg* and *A lecture to an archive*. This exhibition includes these and a new one called *Can these words reach into that darkness? (A lecture to myself)*. The metal sculpture is informed by the new film, and is the physical side to my thoughts. I see this exhibition as an opportunity to bring all these works together. They are quite conversational, chatty, maybe even quite loud and difficult. I imagined the show being like entering a noisy room where you don't quite know what everyone is talking about.

**PL:** The title of the show is *Time Team*. Where does the title come from and what associations are you suggesting with it? I assume the Channel 4 TV series is one?

**LM:** I am fascinated that an object can mean completely different things in the hands of different people or systems of understanding. Archaeology is particularly interesting as

it represents the human urge towards understanding the past, interpretation and even the creation of myth in the absence of objectivity. It is very rare to find this moment of objectivity, so in a way everything is interpretation, which I find worrying politically and exciting in terms of making art. I think the ultimate place for the object is buried deep in the soil with no words. This makes for two types of object: those coming up from the ground awaiting new scaffolds of meaning, or those going down into the ground and losing their scaffolds. Sculpture is a bit like the latter; it often comes into the world with a scaffold already attached, but this is still buried eventually. I am really interested in this verbal scaffold for material things. Maybe I can approach my own objects and films as though they have just been discovered. I am interested in what happens when these structures of navigation are consumed and regurgitated by the work itself, for example via an artist's talk, or a lecture, an 'in conversation', a press release or wall descriptions. In this way both the structure for understanding and the physical work itself are trying to become one.

**PL:** A fascination with written language is a consistent feature of your practice. This has ranged from scripting a feature film to working with individual letters or punctuation as sculptural forms. What attracts you to this manipulation of language?

**LM:** Language is inescapable, there is no more dominant system for relating to other people. But it is a closed, self-referential system. There are many incredible things we do with language, but I am interested in when language can no longer function properly or is under threat. For example, when an object is buried underground, forgotten, it exists but does not need language. I think that looking at art should be like this in some way, but often we are told how we should look and

think, which I find a real let down. *In Hinterland* was a film I scripted and made which tried to imagine what starting afresh would be like, how a group of isolated people might begin again with no notion of the past, or of language. The written word plays a big part in my practice, but I want it to be part of the things I make and not the reason. I want the work to feel like it is thinking for itself, to get some distance from a human, verbal mind.

**PL:** The anecdote of the MDF letters and the tip attendant you recount in *A lecture to a letter* is wonderful. I assume this really happened and is not a fiction? I ask because your experiences appear frequently in your work, but are often masked or reworked in some way, creating a degree of uncertainty as to whether it is your voice that is speaking.

**LM:** I prefer uncertainty. If I am in there it is because I could be several different voices in the work, not because my authority is that important. The experiences I put into the work are just another material, to be altered as I like. The shape of the work overall is the most essential thing, so if I need to make a story up then I do. The MDF letters anecdote is true, however. It was one of those moments where real life produces something you never could have imagined. The whole thing was very Kafkaesque. I took twenty of these large MDF letters to a household waste centre off Holloway Road. When the attendants saw them they asked if they spelled anything, and then proceeded to line them up in an attempt to find a word. This huge, authoritative industrial building was trying to make sense of these letters, it was like a meaning machine. If the letters had spelled out a word that would have constituted commercial waste, and I'd have been turned away.

**PL:** In the new video you reference the late Austrian artist Franz West, who has work in the Zabludowicz Collection. In other projects you've also

incorporated works by Lucian Freud and Henry Moore from other archives. What is it about borrowing things in this way that excites you?

**LM:** It is interesting to think of the flow of artworks and objects around the world getting wider and wider over the centuries. They constantly end up in collections many miles away from their 'home'. Often this involves deeply questionable political circumstances, such as imperialism. The idea of a collection and even of ownership is quite strange to me. The fact that potentially 95% of all artworks globally are stored in huge facilities, and rarely seen, makes collections curious things. It's a storing of knowledge and a certain selection process. I wonder what these collections would be like to a new civilisation digging them up for the first time. My new film selects a work from the Zabludowicz Collection almost at random, as though it were a search tool, and it chose a Franz West chair. Curating is another method for making sense of a group of things, or being their guardian, and who plays this role is important. I often think I am curating my own work, and my favourite part is editing video or placing objects in a space. When I have used other well-known artists and artefacts as part of my work in the past, I have attempted to relate to them as people as well as known presences in the communal psyche. I want to feel almost like I am communicating with them somehow. I think I like Henry Moore, but I am not at all sure about Lucian Freud.

**PL:** The videos are collages made using the computer design programme SketchUp. What has drawn you to this technique?

**LM:** It is almost the opposite of how I have developed my studio practice, which involves almost no planning and an acceptance that the process informs the outcome, whereas software like SketchUp is made for a type of

planning which is more suited to design. It allows for a certain brand of making only, where you iron out all the problems and potential issues in a virtual environment first, leaving the making a sterile process of fabrication. This is absolutely contrary to how I want my studio practice to be, where the mistakes, changing one's mind and the not-knowing are an essential part of arriving at things. So I am using SketchUp as a way to mess up that system, often modelling things I have already made, a bit like making music in a studio and then working out later how it will work live. I am attracted to the way this type of software makes an object look. SketchUp Marketplace is also amazing, an open source archive of things people make in the software. There is a Henry Moore, the 'Gherkin' building and lots of other stuff. I like imagining the whole world modelled in SketchUp, every single thing in an archive, like the 1:1 map of the world Borges talked about, which would turn the Earth off its axis.

**PL:** You've included music written and performed by you in the new video. What draws you to working across a wide range of media?

**LM:** I have always made music but it is only recently that I have found a way to situate it in my practice. Part of the reason is that I have been thinking about working in a way which is maximal, which makes use of all my abilities, at all levels, even if I am not a virtuoso. I can just about make a song, however they come out weirdly formed, almost under-educated. I really like a process which is done out of necessity or an urge rather than because it has taken years of practice. It's not that I don't practice and improve on other aspects of making shows or individual works, but I quite like doing things by touch, and guessing and feeling my way.

Reverse: *Can these words reach into that darkness? (A lecture to myself)*, 2016. Single Channel HD Video (still)

#### Artist's presentation

Sunday 6 November, 3pm. A live performance by three people that extends and translates gestures and motifs present in the exhibition.

**Luke McCreadie** (b. 1985, Bath) is based in Newcastle Upon Tyne and graduated from The Slade School of Fine Art in 2008 (BA) and 2011 (MA). Recent solo shows include *Be in the air, but not be air, be in the no air*, Jerwood Project Space, London; *REF*, IMT Gallery, London; *In Hinterland*, Gallery North, Newcastle Upon Tyne; and *Little Puppet Made of Pine*, Supplement Gallery, London. Recent group shows include *Feeling Safer*, IMT Gallery, London; *A Bad Policeman is Always Busy*, Gallery North, Newcastle Upon Tyne; *Figure Three*, Baltic 39, Newcastle Upon Tyne; and *The Casual Gesture*, Standpoint Gallery, London.

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