

Talks and Events Calendar

Exhibition Catalogue

This exhibition is accompanied by a new publication designed by Irma Boom. ISBN 9781900470636 400 pages, colour illustrations Available from the bookshop priced £15



On Television: Ian White

Wednesday 30 May, 6.30–7.30pm.

Tickets £4/£3 concession. Booking essential.

This talk explores the relationship between film and video artists such as Mik's use of the documentary in their filmmaking, and television. Through British video art of the 1980s and Aernout Mik's current exhibition – the talk illuminates the adequacy and inadequacy of television as an exhibition format, its formal influence on the medium and the transference from the small screen to the gallery space.

Dan Graham's Art as Design/Design as Art: John Marshall and Dr. Troels Degn Johansson

Monday 19 June, 6.30–7.30pm. Free. Booking essential.

This talk marks the 20th anniversary of the publication by Dan Graham and The Fruitmarket Gallery of the text 'Art as Design/Design as Art' which explored the sources of Graham's work *Interior Design for Space Showing Videotapes*, 1986. This talk will look at contemporary art practice in the context of this important text.

Ways of Seeing Gallery Tour

Thursday 5 July, 11.30am–1.30pm. Free.

A guided tour of the Aernout Mik exhibition for over 60s led by freelance educator Mary Keegan.

To book for all talks and events, contact **the bookshop**
P 0131 226 8181 **E** bookshop@fruitmarket.co.uk

The exhibition DVD is available from the bookshop priced £15.

This guide is available in large print, on tape and by email.

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The
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Aernout Mik Shifting Shifting

Exhibition 19 May – 11 July 2007

Opening Hours Mon–Sat 11 am–6pm, Sun 12–5pm
Admission free

Shifting Shifting is organised by Camden Arts Centre with The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Bergen Kunsthall and Kunstverein Hanover. The exhibition is supported by the Mondriaan Foundation. Additional support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

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I trained as a sculptor, and when I started out, I worked as a sculptor.

At some point in the early 90s, the sculptures started to develop into installations or situations. Then I found myself working with live elements, either animals or people, who came to inhabit these situations and

consequently I became more interested in the sculptural presence of action and with live elements in a space. From there it was a short step towards

video. But what I really wanted to do was bring video back into space as a physical element(...) When I started working with video, I focused on small

groups of people and the work was relationship-based. It came out of a sculptural attitude – simple gestures or very simple situations that held a

certain kind of tension. Then my work became more about public spaces and started to develop on a larger scale, moving towards things that have

a socio-political meaning. But in place of a scenario, I focus on relationships, the balance between different elements or between incidents. For me the most

important thing is the tone and that comes about through the relationship between a crisis and its resolution, or action and non-action.

It's a much more static thing than a narrative or scenario.

Aernout Milk, interviewed in *Art Monthly*, April 2007

Preferring not to present his videos in the dark neutrality of a cinema or gallery

projection space, Aernout Milk is known for work which engages the viewer in physical

as well as filmic space. He builds his videos into the viewing experience so that he

may, in his words, 'interfere with your own sense of body in space'.

Bodies in space are Milk's primary subject. In all the films in this exhibition, people

move or will about, in patterns both purposeful and random. The films focus on people

at moments of crisis, their actions and reactions in situations of anxiety and uncertainty.

The low screens on which they are shown, touching the floor or hovering just above it,

set up a curiously intimate relationship between these people and ourselves as viewers.

Set into walls as in *Vacuum Room* and *Training Ground*, the screens seem to invite

us to step through the walls into the new space opening up beyond, to join the action

in the films. Rising up out of the floor in *Scapogods* the screen solidifies space, bringing

the events and non-events of the film right into the space in which we stand to view it.

Three of the works in this exhibition are the fictions, and as such exemplify Milk's usual

working methods. Employing people used to working as extras, he gives them minimal

instruction before beginning to shoot, preferring that they do not 'act', but read

naturally to the unfolding situations. Rather than rehearsing the actors, he directs them

as he films, working in long takes which allow incidents to develop. Before starting, Milk

has an idea of where a film will go, but he does not plan it in detail, aiming to blur the

boundary between fiction and reality by allowing real events to impose themselves on

his vision. The resulting films do not have a narrative structure, but progress as

accumulations of events, seeming perpetually on the verge of reaching some kind of

conclusion, which is indefinitely deferred.

Members of the assembly go about their business, interrupted by a group of protestors.

The work is presented on six screens, each screen relaying the footage taken by one of

six security cameras on which the work was shot. Filming in the round, Milk was absent

from the shoot, controlling all six cameras via remote control, looking through a one-way

mirror and directing the actors through a microphone. The presentation mimics the

multiple viewpoints of the shooting, putting the viewer right in the centre of the action.

The choice of formal or informal seating further implicates the viewer – by choosing a

seat, you chose a position in relation to one or other group of people on the screens.

Scapogods (2006) is a single screen video, the screen rising up like a hallucination,

imposing a hellish vision. People, some guards, some captives, are herded together in

an empty stadium, the context evoking memories of the aftermath of hurricane Katrina

in New Orleans, the action and inaction full of suspended menace. The echo of New

Orleans is inevitable, but the work is not about this – in all his films Milk enlists a vague

sense of recognition to heighten ambiguity, so that the work is always at the crossroads

of situations that we feel familiar with, but never presents familiarly itself.

Training Ground (2006) is the most recent film in the exhibition. A tense, ambiguous

and unsettling work, it pits a group of border control guards against a group of

seemingly displaced people, in a non-specific no man's land. As the action of the film

goes without resolution, the film makes reference to Jean Rouch's anthropological film

'Vlad Masters' (1954), showing the annual ceremony of an African religious sect. Milk's

actors seem to enter a trance-like state similar to the African tribesmen, and the

wooden guns they carry are a direct quotation from the film. Milk sees the Rouch film as

a touchstone for his work, linking into his interest in the behaviours assumed by

individuals to help them deal with particular situations.

Raw Footage (2006) is made from television film of the war in the former Yugoslavia,

not broadcast at the time, apparently because of its lack of dramatic action. Together

the two works bring home the enormity of war fought on civilian ground – soldiers

staking out cake shops, children carrying real guns or striking disturbingly convincing

poses with toy ones. Imagery that was deemed not shocking enough to represent war

on television becomes horrifying in a gallery – its reinvention as art forcing us to look

properly at it, and to try to assimilate what we are looking at. The fiction all around it

points up how much of this kind of imagery, played out nightly on our television screens,

is in fact unassimilable. We can deal with it in our living rooms only if we manage not to

let it affect us. In the gallery, we seem not to have that choice.

Mick Jouswig, writing in the catalogue to this exhibition, describes Milk's work in terms of

'the routinisation of the fantastic, and the strangeness of the familiar'. He finds in it a

powerful banality which leads to a calm that is not really calm but a calm that disturbs,

a calm out of place; Milk himself talks of seeking to render the normal abnormal. That

the imagery in *Raw Footage* is normal is shocking. That it is less shocking than Milk's

constructed fictions (in fact, nothing very shocking actually happens at all, it is

just that we are kept in an agony of suspense that it is about to, any minute) says much

about the power of art to tell the truth about how we live.