

Invited to push the red button that sits next to a sinister assemblage of dentist's chair, pink fun fur, and sharp instruments, we are compelled to press it, despite the installation's air of menace. Inspired partly by the artists' dislike of the US system of capital punishment, and partly by Franz Kafka's short story *In The Penal Colony*, *The Killing Machine* forces us to take an active part in the operation of the machine that then performs for us. And this time the sound it makes does not transport us elsewhere – made in the room, by a guitar hit by a robotic wand, it forces us to stay in the room with it. Although no one is being slowly tortured to death – the drills are not inscribing broken law into the flesh of a human body – we are implicated by the execution of the performance.

All of Cardiff and Miller's installations involve us in their mysterious characters and unresolved stories, eliciting delight,

sadness or fear. Whether animated by our actions or automatically looping, the works draw us into strange new worlds, places of escape that are ultimately inside our own heads.

'I've always loved to escape, whether it was through walks, books, films or dreams, and it's only now that I realise what I've been doing this past decade. I've been creating portholes into my other worlds'

A major new publication has been produced on the occasion of this exhibition. In two volumes, it is both a catalogue to the exhibition and a compendium of notes and drawings for as yet unrealised works.

Available from the bookshop priced £16.95.

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

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Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

The House of Books Has No Windows

Edinburgh Art Festival Exhibition

31 July – 28 September 2008

Extended Art Festival hours 31 Jul–31 Aug 2008, 10am–7pm daily
Mon–Sat 11am–6pm, Sun 12–5pm

Always free

The Canadian artists Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller are internationally renowned for making installations that take us into imagined worlds. After establishing solo careers, Cardiff (b. 1957) and Miller (b. 1960) began collaborating in 1995. Their work has been included in several major international exhibitions, including Skulptur Projekte, Munster in 1997, and the 49th Venice Biennale, where they represented Canada with *The Paradise Institute* in 2001. Major survey exhibitions of their work have been shown around the world, but this is their first showing in Scotland.

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Cardiff and Miller use objects, images and, most importantly, sound, to produce experiences coloured by our own memories and personal perceptions of recent history. At the same time, references to high and popular culture make their works exist in a time and rhythm all their own. The works are time-based, in that most of them run for a particular length of time, but they are also open-ended and ambiguous, leaving space for our own practical and imaginative reactions and interactions.

Cardiff first came to prominence in the early 1990s with her walks: heard through headphones, they invite the viewer to press play and follow in Cardiff's footsteps, retracing one of her journeys, and entering a strange new time and place as the sights and sounds of the real world merge with the recordings and imaginings of the piece. Much of the power of Cardiff's walks is shared by the installations made with Miller, most particularly in the way that sound – from whispered words to falling rain – is made to structure our experience. In many of the works, sound dominates and directs us through a story or conversation, while the visual elements support it; in others, sound confuses or is part of a puzzle within which we find order. Cardiff and Miller's installations talk to us – literally and metaphorically – and help us to escape into other worlds.

Only one work does not speak, and yet it too is all about escape: on the ground floor, the new commission and title work of this exhibition, *The House Of Books Has No Windows* (2008). The drawing that inspired it was one of

Cardiff's and Miller's unrealised projects selected for the exhibition catalogue, an image of a library as a repository of other worlds – a subject that Cardiff and Miller return to again and again, inspired by *The Library of Babel*, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. The books remain closed to us – a domestic library turned inside out: from the exterior of the house, by looking at the titles on their spines, we can imagine the worlds of the books; from inside, isolated from the real world, we might hear the voice in our head that talks to us when we read.

Other voices speak to us in the other two works on the ground floor, and tell us intimate things about characters' personal lives. In *Opera for a Small Room* (2005), the male speaker's identity is reconstructed through his passion for music. Inside a simple plywood structure is a huge collection of records, several record players and a number of antique speakers. The installation is a stage set for this mysterious invisible character as represented through his choice of records and specific recollections about his relationship with a woman and with his record collection. Recorded in a large concert hall, this collage of opera, rock music, a recording of a stage hypnotist, the sound of rain and a train, and the words of the main character put us conceptually into a performance space without a stage, drawing us into the world of this lonely man in his room.

The 'inhabited' space and sounds in *Opera...* encourage us to imagine who the inhabitant might be. The identity of another male character is pursued in *Road Trip* (2004), an installation that

takes the form of an automated slide talk. The piece runs continuously, a carousel of slides clicking through, accompanied by a loop of audio in which Cardiff and Miller discuss first the slides, then the possibility of making a work with the slides – the work we are watching. In the course of the piece, we hear that the slides are from a collection taken by Miller's grandfather during a trip from Calgary to New York City. Miller's grandfather died before he was born, and Miller and Cardiff's conversation is interspersed with speculation as to how it is that photographs taken by someone can tell you something about them, and what kind of man he was. The piece dips in and out of reality – you hear Cardiff and Miller walking around the space, being distracted by extraneous sounds, re-ordering the slides.

The voices and objects in *Road Trip* and *Opera...* all reveal intimate details about the lives of the speakers and their collections. Likewise, *The Dark Pool* (1995), with its books, record players, speakers, models, notes, drawings and peculiar mechanical devices, also drives us to imagine its inhabitants' interior worlds. As we open an old door, we feel we are trespassing on the workspace of an obsessive.

In making *The Dark Pool* Cardiff and Miller have said that they wanted the space to be inhabited by 'an invisible presence'. The work taps into that sense we have that historically or otherwise resonant spaces have their past somehow close to the surface. This is not a theatrical space, but rather a cross between an abandoned film set and a secret laboratory, a place where action either may have happened or may be

about to happen, where we can eavesdrop on the future or the past.

Like *The Dark Pool*, *The Muriel Lake Incident* (1999) also mixes up past and present, time and space, but our interaction with the work is controlled, our movement restricted to standing still. We wear headphones and look into a plywood box that contains a miniature cinema, seen in hyper perspective, with seats and a tiny screen showing a five-minute film. Many of film noir's classic elements are there: a car driving, a threatening stranger, suspenseful music. Several of the actions, however, happen not in the film, but in the cinema itself – fellow audience members talk to us in a manner reserved for friends rather than strangers.

The Muriel Lake Incident is made using the 19th-century technique of sound recording known as binaural recording. This involves recording on two microphones at once, situated in the ears of a dummy head. The result, when played through headphones, mimics the way we actually hear sound, and is so authentic that the recorded sound and the actual present sound become confused. When the woman in the audience whispers to us, we think someone is actually whispering into our ear. The persistent foregrounding of background noise confuses recorded sounds with real sounds, and actors' voices with the voices of close friends. We give up control over our experience and become engulfed by the audience.

If in *Muriel Lake* we relinquish control over our experience in return for the illusion of inclusion, in *The Killing Machine* (2007) we appear to have too much power.