

Exhibition Guide

Ryan Gander *Heralded as the new black*

29 January – 24 March 2008

Second Floor Galleries

This exhibition is Ryan Gander's first major museum show in the UK and his first since taking 2007 as a 'year out' in which to travel and develop new work. The time has been used to take his practice into fresh, ambitious territory whilst returning to ongoing concerns surrounding the connections between the diversity of things, and authorship, originality, collaboration and documentation. Here interventions, films and sculptural pieces operate as evidence of an exploration that all derive meaning from their location within dedicated art space.

Man on a bridge (A study of David Lange) (2008), a 16mm film transferred to HD video, comprises 50 different ten-second takes of an actor walking across a bridge, peering over a railing, the scene then cutting, thwarting the action before it really starts. Each version is fractionally different, presenting the spectator with choice yet frustrating any attempts to construct a narrative for the piece. In this work, Gander playfully weaves together various fictions, skilfully demonstrating how meaning might be derived from combinations of disparate material, at different times, in different places, by different people with individual experiences.

Gander frequently makes use of historical and cultural references, drawing on iconic design, architecture and other artists' work, reminding us that everything new borrows from the past. He has been described as having 'magpie tendencies', collecting and storing snippets of information that are later remembered, reprocessed and reassembled into new works. In *The New New Alphabet* (2008), a series of wooden blocks placed on the floor as a sculptural form, realised in collaboration with Rasmus Spanggaard Troelsen, he amends Wim Crouwel's 1967 radically reductive and illegible typeface. Painted directly onto the wall, *Oh no not again* (2008), shows a cartoon figure, scratching his head, taken from the Allan Pease book, *How to Read Others' Thoughts by Their Gestures*. A framed watercolour commissioned from acclaimed illustrator Mark Beesley, showing the artist's studio at night, sits atop the figure like an ID tag, an insight into the place of thought

and process. *I took my hands off your eyes too soon* (2007) presents a documentary photograph of the work *Kiev MC Arsat PCS 4.5/55mm Shift Lens* by Christopher Williams alongside Williams' original work from Gander's own collection. By appropriating existing art and design imagery as material, Gander creates an alternative, fictional history for art, traced and imagined from real historical narratives.

In *A sheet of paper on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and fell to the floor* (2008), 100 15cm crystal balls, into which a suspended image of a sheet of paper has been laser etched, are dispersed throughout the gallery. The escape of this sheet of paper says something of the fugitive, unpredictable nature of ideas; the image disappearing and reappearing as one moves through the space, the untapped potential of that blank sheet of paper suggesting an as yet unknown idea and the spherical crystals themselves alluding to an unknown future.

Gander's objects don't reveal the stories behind them, explaining how or why they came into being. Instead, as the audience encounters the unexpected or alien, they are both invited to and implicated in the creation of meaning. For example, visitors might be surprised to see Ikon's Visitor Assistants dressed in limited edition, white Adidas tracksuits as opposed to their usual, institutional black. An intervention by Gander, the tracksuits, entitled *This Consequence* (2005) are embroidered with two small red marks, that could be perhaps read as blood stains suggesting an ambiguous incident. The work is further complicated by one assistant wearing *Didactease Necklace* (2006), a sterling silver Tiffany pendant, the size and shape of a pound coin, its surface engraved with a mathematical equation. Gander has devised the equation from the language of mathematical symbols to read 'there exists only one definition for everything, everywhere at any one time', a notion that he patently believes to be false.

Playing with the staged and the unstaged, truth and fiction, every aspect of Gander's practice can be prised apart and examined. His tongue-in-cheek obscuring of truth goes unabated, requiring the viewer to decode the work to attain something that isn't even the answer but instead, a chain of possibilities that stand in for some form of understanding. As the artist himself recently observed,

If you let the spectator discover something on their own terms it holds a lot more significance than it being handed on a plate.