

David Osbaldeston

COLLECTIVE

The Measure of All Things

15.03.14 – 28.04.14

Collective is pleased to present *The Measure of All Things*, an exhibition of new work by David Osbaldeston.

In response to imperfect relations between personal judgement, commonly held beliefs and universal values, the artist has made a series of photographs, sculptural works, drawings, and stop-frame animation to produce an ambitious new installation for Collective's City Dome.

The Measure of All Things places objects and the language used to describe them in collision or direct confrontation. This effect offers a dryly humorous discrepancy between systems of description and their relationship to the world at large (weight, distance, time etc).

A large table-like object is central to the installation and appears as if the product of an amateur philosopher. Based upon the logic of a Cartesian diagram, the object assumes the role of a functional device devoted to image recognition, yet implies alternative understandings, where the representative power of language breaks down.

Placed on the table-like object is an arrangement that includes familiar everyday items which have been 3D printed. This arrangement could be read as a still life; its elements alluding to the status of an art object as something human, ultimately speculative or immeasurable.

David Osbaldeston is a UK based artist whose work takes a sideways glance into established forms of authoritative communication and human behaviour, where 'familiar' public instruction mechanisms are de-constructed and subverted.

The Table is A Measure of All Things Jonathan P Watts

In *The Measure of All Things* David Osbaldeston has trimmed down the legs of Ikea 'LACK' tables. They support display boards and a number of modernist plinths upon which stands an imaginary device for image recognition. This trimming down, this lack, we could say is a kind of 'table-turning', a perversion and repurposing of the ubiquitous table with its exploded diagram — a post-industrial score for performing your own docked domestic Fordist assembly line. Commenting on the LACK table designer Theo Deutinger writes:

LACK is the ultimate global compromise... If the United Nations had an assembly to decide what a world table – representing all the cultures and nations on earth – should look like, Lack would be the outcome. It's square – avoiding the discussions of which culture invented the wheel; it's average in height – right between the Asian and Western dimensions; it's endlessly extendable – seating anywhere from one person to all the people in the world.

For Deutinger, LACK is unavoidable; it's neither good nor bad, neither ugly nor beautiful and most important of all, it's cheap. It's a commodity par exemple, the most empathetic encountered, ready to nestle into any hand and house. In *The Measure of All Things* it's an altered readymade — the ultimate neo-liberal non-object — divested of use, deranged by its own grotesque

ideas gleaned from the economy of art. It's a memory of a certain empirical truism, that thought and being mutualistically inhabit a single space; it's a symbol, too, for the dynamic transformations the commodity has undergone, and undergoes, in this shared space.

Artisans, to paraphrase the philosopher Vilém Flusser, are people who stuff material into forms. The artisan sees the form of the table and tries as well as he can to stuff it with wood. He does not completely succeed in this, however, writes Flusser, because 'the material defends itself from being informed'. The artisan Flusser describes belongs to the Medieval period.

Today nobody makes tables.

How does the Ikea LACK defend itself from being informed? Configured on Osbaldeston's image recognition device are a number of 3D printed objects, designs for which were downloaded from open source user-created files for hardware available online. Does a printed object defend itself from being informed? The shift described here is one from soft to hard, from an engagement with resistant materials to distributed immaterial objects which, nevertheless, can be actuated theoretically anywhere.

'Technogenesis' is what the philosopher N. Katharine Hayles calls the complex and unfolding changes in

human attitudes, assumptions, and cognitive modes associated with technology, specifically digital media. Technogenesis accounts for new kinds of encounters with the commodity. For some time now economic change, knowledge and the nature of the commodity has been based on and in the continuous interactivity and co-creation with new forms of digital media and the image. Today the commodity is 'intelligent', anticipating, accommodating and speculating our every need, oh so benignly.

At the centre of the *The Measure of All Things* Osbaldeston's image recognition device is also an exploded view — a technogogic score for post-Snowden worlds. It's only the most cutting-edge technology in an exhibition that nestles a range of obsolete imaging technologies into the present. These 'enfoldings' as Hayles calls them — past nestling inside the present, present carrying the embryo of the future — constitute the complex temporalities that inhabit technogenesis. And history for that matter.

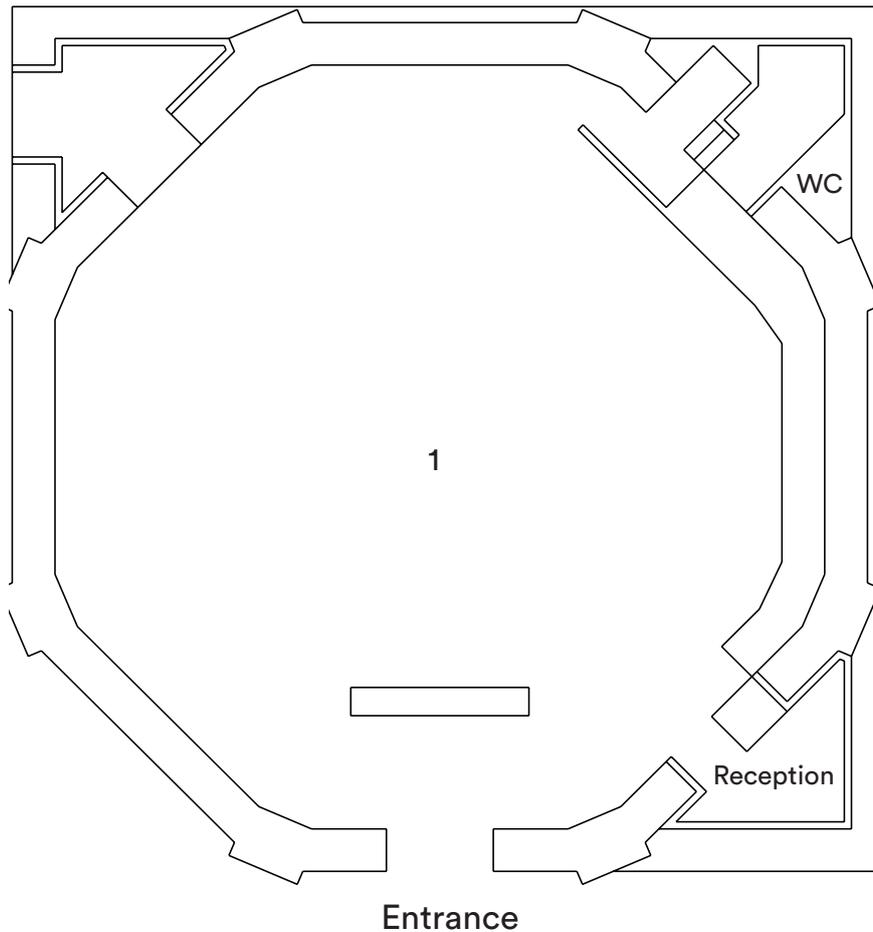
Recently the curator and author of *Neo-Materialism* (Sternberg, 2013) Joshua Simon claimed that 'the commodity is only really true to itself as art, and thus the exhibition becomes a format that enables us to see the commodity as it is'. *The Measure of All Things*, true enough, might accede to this banal claim, but it goes further in exploring how and why the commodity

is, to paraphrase Marx, metaphysically subtler and theologically nicer than it's ever been.

Jonathan P Watts is a writer, critic and editor based in London. He is a regular contributor to *Frieze* magazine, and has written for *Art Monthly* and *Cura*. Recently he contributed to a monograph on Ryan Gander to accompany his exhibition 'Culturefield', which will travel from Derry/Londonderry to Banff, Canada in 2014/15. He was writer in residence at the inaugural LUX/ICA Biennial of Moving Images in 2012. Last year he coordinated the exhibition 'Inherent Vice' as part of Peckham Artists' Moving Image. Jonathan teaches critical and historical practice at Nottingham Trent School of Art & Design.

An extended version of this essay can be downloaded from Collective's website: www.collectivegallery.net.

Floor Plan



1. The Measure of All Things

Birch ply, LACK Ikea tables, framed photo works, 3D printed objects, stop-frame animation, brass, zinc, map pins, graphite, aluminium tape.

The artist would like to thank:
Robin Klassnik, Matilda Strang, Judith Carlton, Endless Supply, Matthew Noel-Todd, Glasgow Sculpture Studios, Maria Fusco and all at Collective

Collective is a contemporary visual arts organisation that delivers an exciting and ambitious programme of new exhibitions, commissions and projects.

Collective was established in 1984 to support new and emergent artists and exhibit their work in Edinburgh. Now Collective commissions new work by artists who are at a pivotal stage in their development.

Over the next two years, Collective will be making the City Observatory complex its new home, opening the whole site to the public for the first time, placing contemporary art in the heart of Edinburgh.