

Text by Nicola Celia Wright

I can see for miles and miles: Mining the Horizon

The second exhibition of the 12th NWSP collects together works by Oliver Braid, Florrie James and Joey Villemont. Under the rubric of 'mining the horizon', works are parenthesised by reiterations, recessions and re-imaginings of time and practice.

Pursuing moments of traction between subaltern narratives, namely the druidical prehistoric and 1980s acid club and rave culture, **Villemont's** video work *Hard Times* brings seemingly incongruous histories into proximity. A perfectly carved slab of granite in the form of a smiley face, usually associated with stoner and dance cultures serves as the artist's protagonist; as his foil, an aging raver. Their scripted conversation makes uncertain suggestions as to the stone's history: a stone-aged rave, in which a winter solstice's primal, ecclesiastical ecstatic is conflated with a techno-fuelled gathering of antediluvian shepherds. Villemont has placed the featured 'smiley' stone permanently in a rural location along the east coast of Scotland, attaching it to the mythical, 'transcendent' experience of standing stones. Yet the universal ciphers the artist locates in emoticons and 'dancing language' deal with recognition and recurrence. The looped video becomes a Sisyphean encounter, a self-reflexive gesture that reprises both the stone's predictive words and post-modern conditions of forgetting: "Basically, you don't remember anything so you come back the next day or the next week".

Visual motifs leak onto the gallery's grey walls, which are covered with an almost scatological pattern of squiggled, caulky

reliefs. Floor carpets and shirts hanging from the walls are similarly painted in the speckled, faux-stone granito of kitchen countertops, inadequate office partitions and public transport floors. Villemont fashions an uncertain environment for the viewer, which falters between model and installation. Drawing on classic designs – the monitor stand is a doubtful, expedient nod to Ettore Sottsass's Carlton cabinet – pop music videos and faded clubs, the space is rendered with an outmoded patina, a kitschy, flattening monochrome. Within *Hard Times* and its surrounding, theatrical environment, Villemont creates narratives and objects which (literally) converse across time. Tracking the epistemologies of the 'stone', wordplays and semantic games give way to a vernacular that proposes interruptions, folds and repeats in how we read history.

Oliver Braid's exhibition at first appears to make similarly kitschy assertions in its pastel walls and chintzy flowering plinths. The saccharine surroundings, although designed by Camille Le Houezec, one of over thirty collaborators invited into the project, indicate the consenting, prodigiously positive and inclusive nature of the work. Braid's project searches for pleasure in failure, appraises optimism and happiness and, as its title *I'll Look Forward To It* suggests, utilizes open-ended modes of production. Existing as constant transformation of material, the exhibition in its current form was preceded by a 'Salon des Refusés' of sorts, an open-call to unsuccessful applicants of NWSP 2011. However, whether this was an act of generosity or a more misanthropic turn is left up to the viewer. This seems indicative of the ambivalent position of authorship given by the artist. Throughout the work, Braid enacts a series of appearances and withdrawals. The artist mitigates his position, with each layer of the

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project supplemented by auxiliary collaborators: a panel of art and psychology professionals reviewed the (re)applications, with the materials provided to the subsequently selected five artists footnoted by additional 'experts'. Yet Braid's presence is stamped on every element of the presentation, with works made both in response to the essay authored by him during his residency at Studio Voltaire and in mock-homage. Artist James Stephen Wright's surprise toast to the artist was delivered via a policeman at the private view, while Katie McCain's installation of books 'relevant to the essay' perhaps offers a portrait of the artist as much as of the text: Alain de Botton *'Architecture of Happiness'*, Derek Acorah *'Extreme Psychic'*, *'Caravaggio and his followers in Rome'*. An 'essay' on potentiality as much as expectation, *I'll Look Forward To It* broadly considers the parameters of artistic labour and authorship. By acknowledging both precarity and failure, Braid advises us on the urgency for alternative strategies of production, be they networks; dispersed, horizontal structures of collaboration; or positive psychology.

✕⊠i⌚HH⏮⏪□ is the film presented by **Florrie James and Ross Little** in another NWSP collaboration. Framed around four stanzas, their film is often contemplative of emptied spaces which seem situated somewhere between exhaustion and activation. The sparse theatre of David Lynch's *Inland Empire* is recoded into the interstitial space of a Glasgow car park: Fellini in Havana, Paradjanov in an explosives testing ground. Yet the intent here is not to checklist multiple referents with the viewer – recognition of the source materials seems almost incidental. Rather, the work investigates the logic of its structure. Drawing on these existing filmic sequences and cinematography, visual content is traded, transposed and fractured. Audio tracks are allowed to dislocate from the image on screen, to agitate and re-designate the visual. Filmed in Castlemilk, images of sedentary bowl players in a bleached, municipal venue begin to react and pace themselves to the raucous, skidding soundtrack of *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*. These interplays and juxtapositions are seductive while eliding easy narrative readings.

Iterated throughout the work is a sense of distance or absence, both in the distance of the image from its source material, but also of the image from the viewer. The voices which appear in the film are un-translated by subtitles and disembodied from speakers. In one of the few moments that the viewer is addressed directly, an extract from TS Eliot's *The Wastelands* appears on screen: "you cannot say, or guess, for you know only a heap of broken images". The accompanying essay 'When we *know* that we *know* that something *isn't* what it *is*' indirectly makes strong claims for the latency within her film. While we are presented with these 'broken images', it is within the unsaid, the untranslatable, the withheld and missing information that sequences find agency. James and Little's interpellations of sounds and visuals creates gaps in which we might begin to speculate on and rebuild these ruins or 'broken images'.

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