

Boys may come and
boys may go
And that's all right
you see
Experience has
made me rich
And now they're
after me,
'cause everybody's
living in a new
material world

New Material
Living in a new material world

Curated by Tyler Mallison

Exhibition
9 March – 2 April 2017

A.P.T Gallery
Art in Perpetuity Trust
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new-material.net

Supported by Arts Council England
Grants for the Arts

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Nika Neelova (RU)
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Michaela Zimmer (DE)
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Deborah Coughlin
Mike Harvey
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Jacob O'Connell
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Foreword

Some boys kiss me
Some boys hug me
I think they're ok
If they don't give me proper credit
I just walk away
They can beg and they can plead
But they can't see the light (that's right)
'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash
Is always Mister Right
'Cause we are living in a material world
And I am a material girl
You know that we are living in a material world
And I am a material girl
Some boys romance
Some boys slow dance
That's all right with me
If they can't raise my interest then I
Have to let them be
Some boys try and some boys lie but
I don't let them play (no way)
Only boys who save their pennies
Make my rainy day
'Cause we're living in a material world
And I am a material girl
You know that we are living in a material world
And I am a material girl
Living in...

a New Material world.

Introduction

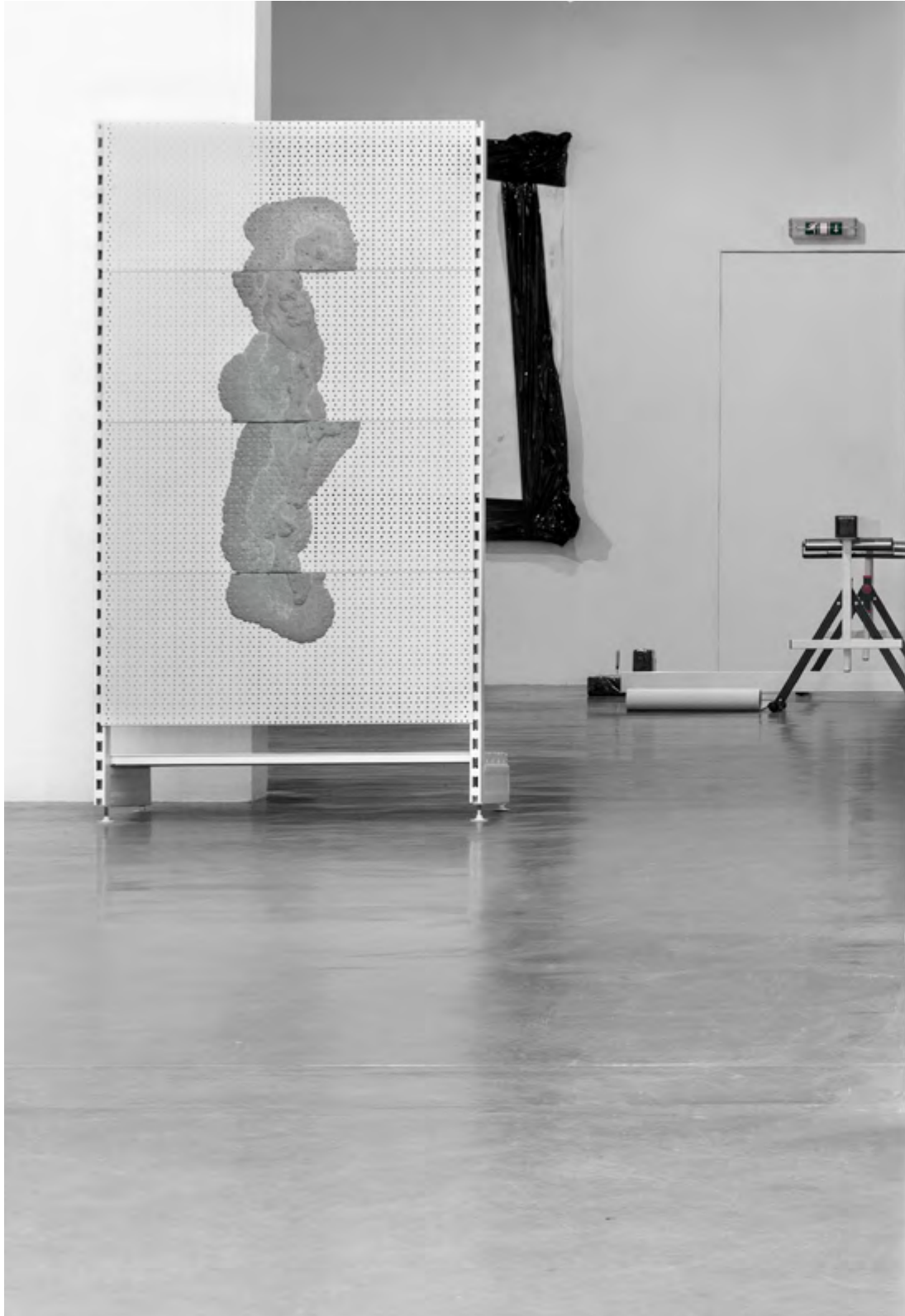
New Material: living in a new material world is an exhibition of work by 8 international artists, which seeks to address the shift in the 'material world' from the Gen-X perspective of the mid 1980s — a time of pensive self-awareness and anxiety — to our current new material world: one of 21st century post-truth Trumpist politics and Brexit Britain. Work spans sculpture, installation, performance, photography, video and the expanded field of painting.

The title of the exhibition references the 1984 song *Material Girl* by Madonna. The hit was written at a time when living in a 'material world' meant aligning with the collective shift towards aspirational image, status brands and global corporations. Fast-forward 30+ years and now, what defines the 'new material world'? The Internet is a given, the virtual seems real, and geographic borders have eroded in the exchange of artistic capital. Tensions suspended by millennial optimism are beginning to resurface in the face of post-truth Trumpist politics, Brexit Britain and recognition of the Anthropocene and its environmental impact. Moreover, around the artist has emerged a sophisticated international art market with an estimated worth of 50 billion Euros.

New Material presents a platform for investigating the conditions of this unstable, shifting and often contradictory 'space' through pluralist concerns (body/mind, public/private, virtual/real, authentic/fake) that give form and insight into materiality today. The work of the artists brings to the surface strategies used to navigate their experience against the backdrop of an increasingly challenging climate for expression and artistic production. They themselves are the product of the new normal in contemporary art: relationships organically forged via precarious channels of alternative education, artist-led initiatives, open formats, studio disruption and social media.



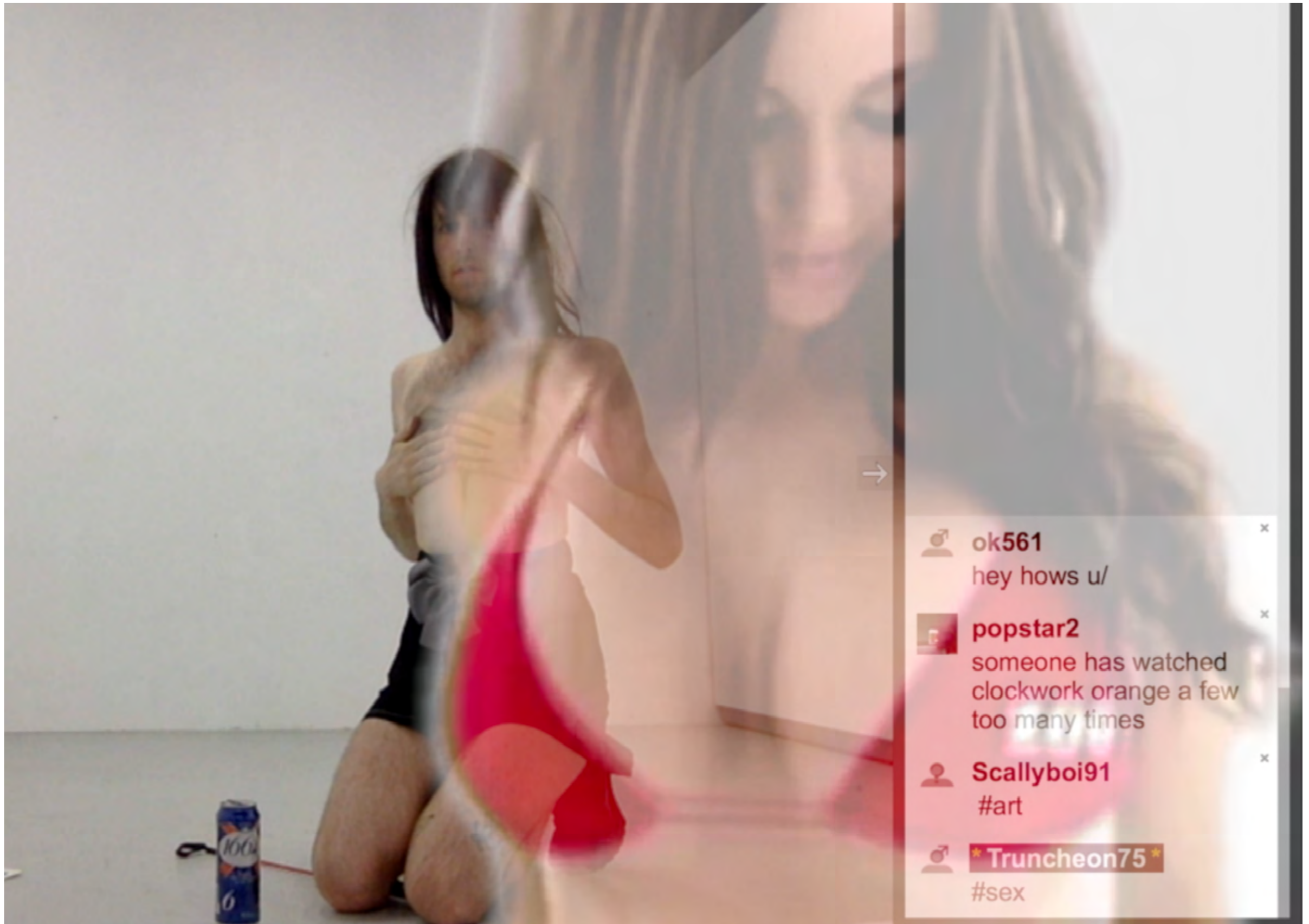














“As an artist you have to make work with what’s around you and, you know, money was all around me. And I thought, what can I do with this money which is here that I wouldn’t be able to do?”

Damien Hirst, BBC Interview

“Teddy told me the most important idea in advertising is ‘new’. It creates an itch. You simply put your product in there as a kind of Calamine lotion.”

Don Draper, *Madmen*

Madonna's 1984 single *Material Girl* captured the spirit of an age, when young urban professionals embraced the opportunities afforded to some by the free market economic policies of Thatcher and Reagan. "The boy with the cold hard cash," sings the 26-year old star, "Is always Mister Right". But *Material Girl* would be long forgotten if it failed to serve as a social document and resonate across subsequent decades. Its iconic video is a reboot of a scene from the 1953 film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*; it pays dues to Marilyn Monroe, a permanent fixture in 20th century art history thanks to Andy Warhol. And though the turn towards materialism with hopes for financial security has cultural roots as old as Pop itself, the spirit of the 1980s connects with the apogee of the 21st century art market and age of plutocracy. Perhaps this is most embodied by *For the Love of God* by Damien Hirst, a £50 million diamond encrusted skull that, as artist Jayson Musson has pointed out, uses money as its medium. It surely goes beyond the wildest dreams of the young Madonna Louise Ciccone and Monroe's character Lorelei Lee. But there was more happening in the 80s, which ran deeper than the nightclubs and the trading floors. It was the final decade of the Cold War. The AIDS epidemic was identified. Chernobyl happened. In the UK we went to war with Argentina. So in short there was a lot more anxiety for those coming of age than would have been suggested by an hour or two watching MTV. Generation X, the children of the Baby Boomers, has been characterised by introspection and unease. Perhaps materials, be those Sony Walkmen or Rubik Cubes, came to appear to Gen Xers as solid anchors in the flux of time.

In the 21st century artists of all ages are still hung up on materials. You could say that introspection has always been part of the job. Art might disturb, as Georges Braque said it should, but materials, be they paint, clay, or even skulls also have the power to comfort. Once considered immutable, the material world is shifting beneath our keyboards in 2017. "Digital technology

disappears real world objects by dematerialising them,” writes artist Mark Leckey in the catalogue of his techno-animistic touring charabanc of an exhibition, *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things*. Artists who still wish to work with things, may well feel anxious about this pantheistic proposition. Fears about AI, and the Internet of Things, not to mention Brexit, Trump and the Anthropocene era, compound this. Anxiety, awakening from its millennial slumber, is surely at its highest point for 30 years.

It is into this context that New Material collects work by eight artists who, given their attitudes and social history, are given to closely looking into things. It is a show in which the itemised specs on the list of works are somehow more critical than the names of the artists or the dates of each piece. It is a show which, along with canvas and several found or carefully sourced objects, conjures with vinyl, rivets, concrete, acrylic and cast acrylic, UV ink, extruded aluminium, lacquer, spray paint, PE film, acetate, powder coated steel, 3D printed plastic, jump rope cable, eco-rubber, foam, stone, brass, cast Jesmonite and looped video. These are collated and presented with a cumulative density that is right up in the viewer’s face. Curator Tyler Mallison is also a chief protagonist of this material uprising. Just as Hirst notoriously found himself surrounded by money, Mallison looks at his corporate diurnal work and makes new assemblages that evoke by turns a design studio and a lifestyle gym. Desks, sourced from China, gleam with newness. As if live, cast acrylic screens display a glitchy range of hues that belie their random origins and give the scene a veneer of taste at odds with the veneer or faux wood and heavy industrial aluminium profiling, these violently sheared off as if the studio ran out of cash. Steel balance beams, fabricated in the UK glisten with white coating. The first of these installations is called, *Untitled (Word fails me)*, the second ‘Working prototype: A proposition for a better way of working’; perhaps the materials speak for themselves as yoga blocks become power sockets, cables become jump ropes and both displays invite you to begin work or become active, in an as yet unspecified way. Even though

one suspects the cables could trip you up and the corrupt files would burn out your hard drive. It’s the shape of things to come, as conversations with Tyler have suggested:

Perhaps these new materials—and I’m speaking in the broadest sense: virtual, real, products, services—hold the key to a better future provided we can collectively evolve. I believe there’s something to be learned, discovered, reinterpreted or better utilised in the material that’s already around us. After all, we have turned our backs on the rainforests for answers, so why not turn to the drones which are already hovering? If Mallison suggests standing desks and balance beams for his proposed working environments, it might fall to sculptor Nika Neelova to bring the seating arrangements. If her five foot stack of folded Jesmonite forms suggests anything, it is the tightly stacked chairs of an assembly hall. But her dark colours and ragged edges dispel the utopian mood of Mallison’s gymnasium cum studio, even as they bring their own brooding energy to the show. We have seen that materials don’t always do what they should. It is a short step to the work of Robert Cervera and his wayward use of concrete. Like Mallison, he repurposes workaday fixtures and fittings, even in this case street furniture. And so outside APT Gallery a bollard crumples like a quit cigarette. But although concrete is one of the least refined art materials going, it is certainly to hand for any artist living in a built environment. It is ubiquitous and given its liquid origins, it also represents the flux of materiality that Leckey and others have commented on with regard to the digital age.

How old is this flux? We may note that the art world’s very first objet trouvé was a kinetic sculpture which had the potential to shift before our eyes from a collection of radial spokes to a whirring blur. This was of course Duchamp’s bicycle wheel, a work more than a century old. Marieke Gelissen is another artist who likes to set her works in motion and provides two videos in which found objects gain a kinetic lease of life. One of these is a round gallery table, which gyrates in a white-walled space; the other is a 1€ coin which spins on a dining plate. While the artist is largely

unseen, she told me she thinks of both works as performative, and predictably both temporary sculptures run out of steam.

So are materials alive or are they not? It is a commonplace act of praise to say that an artist has breathed life into stone, canvas or cave wall. And so is it truly an artist's role to bring life to dumb materials? The work produced by painter Michaela Zimmer has a life beyond her brush. In fact it appears to strain at the leash; she has tightly bound it in place with black packaging plastic. The paint itself is as stratified as an archaeological dig and the many layers surface here and there in patches of subtle colour. This is perhaps a reanimation of an earlier stage of the painting.

It is geology, rather than archaeology which characterises the work of Edith Kollath. Foundling I & II are a pair of football sized rocks which the artist has split, only to pin them back together with brass hinges. It takes a degree of poetry to give life to a rock, but the addition of manmade technology, no wonder how old or how simple, gives Kollath's work some of the prosthetic potential of a laptop computer. These stones speak.

Russell Chater works with found painting. *I Was* (2015) is a wall-mounted lightbox which cuts away the corner of a window which has been white washed to allow for a shop refurbishment. Given that paint has otherwise been used to sanctify chapels, to glorify monarchs, and to reveal the beauty of the natural world, the only purpose of the smeared brush strokes here is to conceal the labour of the refit team. It's a commercial prop, but at the same time it heralds the new, which has always been the business of art. Material girls might queue here for the grand opening.

In all this talk of Jesmonite and PV film, it would be easy to lose sight of the primary material of any artist, which is his or her body. Mallison's hi-tech apparatus offers viewers an imaginative workout. The hand of the artist boldly signs Russell Chater's work, Marieke Gelissen spins her own coins and tables, that being something of a physical feat, while Michaela Zimmer trained in dance and relishes the physicality of painting. Edith Kollath's baby rocks cry out for hands on interaction. At the entrance to

the gallery Robert Cervera's bollard implies a real world collision. And the dimensions of Nika Neelova's stack of chairs suggests a human figure and perhaps even a self-portrait.

Nobody, however, uses their body quite as much as Paul Kindersley. His film *Goodwill Ambassador* finds the artist in a turquoise leotard and pink wig, on a visit to Geneva, where he auditions for a role at the United Nations. The venture is as quixotic as can be, and yet the viewer can't help reflect that this other-worldly figure has enough peaceable weirdness and benign camp to bring good humour where it's needed most. Kindersley hopes to follow in the footsteps of the likes of Geri Halliwell, Claudia Schiffer and Robbie Williams. But as something of a celebrity on Twitter and Instagram, his voluntary offer looks more reasonable than might at first appear. This self-conscious cross-dressing Internet star is the Immaterial Girl.

Celebrity is the art form of using one's own person to perpetuate one's own fame. There may only be a handful of true celebrity artists, but Kindersley is one of the many less well known colleagues who remain fascinated by the 20th century invention of mass media fame. He reinvents himself on a near daily basis, in staged photos for his online followers. (Not even mercurial Madonna could keep up with that pace of change.) But as we age, transform, evolve and project ourselves online, we are all working with new materials. Artists or artistes (Kindersley is both) have no monopoly on self-actualisation, self-improvement, self-reinvention.

"Everything is new until it's not," says Mallison. "There's power in new. You might say that 'new' is equated to blatant consumption, status dealing and ultimately waste. But new-ness has potential to transcend this viewpoint if it's recognised for what it is. And this is exciting. The world can be reinvented. It just needs a new kick-starter campaign. And I'm starting to think that my material investigation, as well as those of other artists, can help pave the way to a better way of living: A new future."

At the very least this investigation could pave your way to a new

product or a new idea, to bringing something new into the world. There is an itch right now for an art that can guide us away from the dread march of history, from the 1980s to the present day, and into an unprogrammable future in which the apparent sentience of materials and their networks govern our thinking. A future where Jesmonite has more to say than Fox News and concrete can finally tell us more than MTV. This is a hypothesis, but one that is likely to resonate with Generation X and be of material concern to us all.

Mark Sheerin

Colophon

This publication has been produced to coincide with the exhibition *New Material. Living in a new material world* (9 March – 2 April 2017), curated by London-based artist Tyler Mallison (UK/US) at A.P.T. Gallery.

Curator & Editor

Tyler Mallison

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