



## MIRRORCITY: London Artists on Fiction and Reality

Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre

14th October 2014 to 4th January 2015

<http://mirrorcity.southbankcentre.co.uk/>

Curated by Stephanie Rosenthal, Chief Curator, Hayward Gallery

Including work from artists such as Mohammed Qasim Ashfaq, Anne Hardy, Ursula Mayer, Katrina Palmer, Laure Prouvost, Hannah Sawtell, Lindsay Seers, John Stezaker, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Emma McNally, Helen Marten, Daniel Sinzel, Susan Hiller, Michael Dean, LuckyPDF, Karen Mirza and Brad Butler, Tim Etchells, Lloyd Corporation, Pil and Galia Kollektiv, Aura Satz, Tai Shani and Volumes Project.

Science fiction writer J.G. Ballard, famous for his dystopic visions of cities warped by rampant consumerism, mechanised human beings and exotic technologies, frames the diverse array of artistic productions encapsulated by *MIRRORCITY*, an exhibition currently showing at the Hayward Gallery on the Southbank. But the exhibition is introduced as being not so much concerned with the future, noting that Ballard himself had remarked 'that reality had already exceeded the visions of science fiction by the end of the twentieth century'. Rather, it sets out to capture those elements of the present that are futuristic, emphasising that we have already arrived in, and are continually arriving at, the technological city that was once the subject of sci-fi's imagined worlds.

Invoking both the concept of mimesis ('mirror') and the ever-increasing urbanisation of the planet ('city'), the works collected here reflect on the cultural, social and political ramifications of the digital era on the lives of those who inhabit its transient, intangible spaces. This is not to say they merely reflect reality; indeed, they warp and twist it, they ground it in a set of distorted physical shapes. The Pil and Galia Kollektiv's *Concrete Gown for Immaterial Flows* is comprised of a set of massive concrete blocks shaped into the arrows, piecharts and graphs of the stock market. It drags the intangible flows of London's financial centres back into the materials of the city's physical architecture. The eery soundscapes of Tai Shani's *Dark Continent* capture and regurgitate what she describes as London's drone-like background noise, its mundanity somehow still pregnant with violent references to the technologies of modern warfare. And Emma McNally's large cartographic landscapes, their black and white fields comprised of lines of longitude and latitude, random coordinates, and criss-crossed with nodes and networks, seem to map the abstractions of mindscapes as well as the city's physical contours.

A highlight, especially for the concerns of the Leverhulme-funded 'Planned Violence' Network, are the twenty inkjet prints that comprise Tim Etchell's *City Changes*. These pieces literally embody, or demonstrate, the capacity of text to change, alter, and build the city. Each print has a four paragraph description of a city; the next alters some details, the changes marked in a different colour ink; the next makes more changes, and the next more. As the city being described metamorphoses before your eyes, the words on the page themselves take on a more vibrant, multi-layered, three-dimensional inscription. It is a multimedia exhibition indeed, and all of your senses are absorbed into, if not attacked by, the aggressive use of space—itsself an artistic achievement testament to the specific layout of the Hayward and the excellent eye of the exhibition's curator, Stephanie Rosenthal.

As though in an overt rejection of the digitalisation of print media, Tom McCarthy has edited a special newspaper to accompany the exhibition, including an introductory essay by Rosenthal and a collation of images and other artistic and textual interventions. These are situated beneath headlines that at first recall the speedy politics of newspaper publication, whilst subverting these associations with their alternative content. Indeed, McCarthy may have taken inspiration from another of Tim Etchell's contributions to the exhibition, in which he changed the words of around fifty newspaper placards so that they instead declare hilarious, and sometimes alarming headlines: 'Van Gogh's Ear Museum Closed Due to Further Cutbacks'; 'Kids in the Hijab do mental gymnastics on the topic of freedom'; 'Climate Change Sceptics Heated 'til They Boil'. These have been printed onto newsagent-placard style posters and dominate the wall opposite the Hayward's three flights of stairs, making the ascension between the exhibition spaces an amusing, if not overwhelming journey.

The exhibition thus catches artists looking both forward and backward: some works seem infused with the creative potential that the technological city opens up to them; others exhibit a kind of nostalgia for the materiality of walking through London's physical terrain, a resentment of the standardisation of gentrified high streets and the proliferation of shopping malls and divided spaces. But most are snapshots of a city in flux, warped blurs of something recognisable but not quite, shapes you think you know but haven't seen before, objects you feel to be city-like but can't be entirely sure why. They build alternative urban imaginaries out of the architectural materials that define our day-to-day lives.

You can hear four contributing artists talk about the exhibition here (<http://mirrorcity.southbankcentre.co.uk/mirrorcity-trailer>). *MIRRORCITY* is showing at the Hayward Gallery in the Southbank Centre until 4th January 2015.