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The Economy of the Gift

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Brass Art



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Brass Art is the collective name for the long standing collaborative practice of artists Chara Lewis, Kristin Mojsiewicz and Anneké Pettican. Based across three UK cities, Manchester, Huddersfield and Glasgow they make striking, delicate, ethereal work using image making techniques as varied as animated shadow play, large scale monochromatic watercolour drawing and cutting edge body scanning and 3D printing technology.

Through their practice they explore real space and virtual space by positioning themselves as drawings, shadows, digital sprites, ghosted forms, reflections and miniature carved models often creating transcendent and haunting installations. For The Economy of The Gift they will be exhibiting a 3 screen video projection accompanied by 3 large-scale framed watercolour works.

In 2008 Brass Art worked with The University of Huddersfield's 3D Design Workshop, RapidformRCA and Ogle Models to produce miniature replicas of themselves using a 3-D body scanning process. The 3 screen video projection examines a by-product of this process: a wire-frame line drawing of the scanned figure. This wire-frame describes the path of lasers encountering the surface of the body, redefined as geometric data. This data re-imagines the body as a grid-like carapace – navigable as both an external and internal landscape.

The passage through and around the scanned body is traversed by a virtual camera that moves through the bodyscape, circling each figure in turn. In this liminal space, torso and limbs become giant architectural forms as scale and perspective shift. Occasionally the illusion of containment is broken as the camera passes through the digital membrane defining cloth and skin.

Each projection will be accompanied by a specially commissioned soundtrack produced by world renowned sound artist Monty Adkins from the Centre for Research in New Music, University of Huddersfield.

Exhibited alongside these complex projections will be three large scale watercolour paintings from the Myth of Origins series.

In these images the shadow forms of the artists encounter the manifestation of their collective psyche. Made as collaborative drawings, the artists are collectively engaged in their production, which includes performance and shadow play. The notion of play is integral to the practice of Brass Art, slipping between guises of real and virtual counterparts.

These distorted monochromatic images suggest power struggles, sinister threats and absurd relationships enacted by the artists' shadow-selves. The drawings articulate the intimacy of the long-standing collaborative relationship – transformed into a series of theatrical masquerades, they reveal the tension between 'the idea of the act and the act itself'.

Brass Art would like to thank Jason Payne and Alison Mealey.

Geta Bratescu & Brass Art

GB: You are based in Glasgow/Manchester/Huddersfield, not in London, the epicenter of the art world in UK; how does this affect your art, in any way? (the artists that I work with most of them are based in Cluj, in North-West of Transylvania, not in Bucharest – Geta B. is the only one from Bucharest).

BA: In some senses it is easier to function as an artist in a city where the cost of living and availability of spaces for studios and site specific projects is better for us. Artists have had to build links to the centre and Internationally from the outside. It is possible to be connected, but retain the advantages of living and working in different cities.

GB: I know couples in the art world/artists doing works together, in different mediums. You're a group of three since 1998, and you continue your projects as a group; why?

BA: Our collaborative relationship and practice sprang from a series of curatorial projects and evolved because of shared interests and fascinations. We continue to work together because a collaborative identity has been formed which is both creatively playful and productive.

GB: How important is your relation as an artistic group with a commercial gallery, like International3?

BA: The International3 takes our work to the Art Market on our behalf, and increases exposure and awareness of our practice. We consider this advocacy an important part of our strategy to build links from our position outside the centre.

GB: Inspiration is usually the main drive for the artistic creation; how do you decide when you start a project together which direction to go, how to develop it (considering that you are 3 artists actually involved in this)?

BA: There are many deciding factors involved: a project could be initiated by an invitation or commission, but we have several research strands which we have pursued in different ways since we began our collaborative practice. Of key importance is the possibility of 'many outcomes' – this permission for uncertainty, instability, complexity and phenomena to enter the research process is vital to us. A situation is set up with an idea in mind and through engagement with specific techniques, technologies, actions and processes new considerations are revealed and new outcomes or trajectories may be realised. It is also possible that the process of being away from each other and coming together to work on a piece, or a project means that we continue to be reflective anew each time we come together.

GB: Can you name some of the artists that you like /consider influential in your artistic process?

BA: The direct influences on our artistic process are multifarious – often literary or theoretical in origin and depending on the particular project. We have recently looked at Odilon Redon's drawings and prints, James Ensor's macabre carnival imagery and Francis Alÿs's MoMA procession project as well as continuing our interest in contemporary and cutting edge digital practice.

Brass Art questions to Geta Bratescu

1. We have read that Geta rented a studio in 1970s that became the focus of her practice and that her work aimed to "dissipate the boundaries between the spaces of Art and everyday life" could Geta say something about why the studio as a site was important compared to using domestic or urban space as a site of production? i.e. how does she see the studio as an extension of the everyday?
2. How did you contextualise your performative work alongside other artists male or female?
3. Which female artists do /did you consider to be significant?
4. Is there a piece of work you wish you had made when you were younger?
5. As a collaboration we give ourselves permission to step outside our normal roles to make the work – how do you view the process? Does it shift as you get older?
6. Which of your self-portraits do you consider to be most self-revelatory and why?
7. How do you contextualise the collage work of the 1980s in relation to other aspects of your practice?

Geta Bratescu answers

1. The studio is the space that has for Art the same meaning the Church has for religion. In the studio you are free and complete, true to yourself, which means that all the information that you carry with you can be translated into a language of communication, because you feel free and liberated from everything that comes from the outside world.
2. It was a time when performance was very popular as an artistic form of expression and it interested me a lot and captivated me because I always loved a theatrical gesture, a gesture that says something. This form of expression responded perfectly to my need for theater.
3. Louise Bourgeois.
4. No, because if there is something left in my imagination yet not said or expressed, it should come out at any time, immediately. Time is not an issue for me. My ability to express what I feel or think, this can be an issue. Not time.
5. When I refer to the studio I do not necessarily think of a built space, a room with four walls (or a number of rooms used by someone for his work). The studio is not only this. The studio is a virtual space that the artist takes with him virtually everywhere. Everything in this space is structured in a way that represents the artist.
6. *Towards White* – Can't explain why.
7. I have discovered the circle, its force expressed as a widening space of reality. When I was doing sketches in a furnace factory of the state railway company there were these huge iron circles that 'swallowed' the people, machines in that factory. What I noticed then is that everything that penetrates the surface of this circle becomes a composition. Visual art (with all its fields) is in a direct dialogue with the space within. A drawing, a painting, a fresco or a tapestry irradiates throughout its surface in the space where we see it. Any artistic expression is in dialogue with the space and when I say this we do not necessarily have to think of a sculpture. This dialogue reaches maximum intensity when the artistic expression takes place on a stage, where the human body 'writes' through movements: Choreography. Sometimes the single presence of the body or an attitude, a gesture, transforms the space from immobility, creating a stage.