

Mind & Materials

A group show curated by Michael Roberts.

Works by Peter Abrahams, David Connearn, Andrea Gregson, Lee Maelzer, Roman Opalka, Michael Roberts, Mathew Weir, John Wigley and Marc Vaux.

“You can lead a horse to water, but a pencil must be lead.” Stan Laurel

The blank, the void, the uncertainty, the sheer heft required by the artist to get the show on the road can be herculean at times, or a creative act, like falling off a log, easy-peasy, whose done that anyway? It requires dogged hard work, the nursing of worry, a deftness of touch and a clear vision.

In these uncertain times where fiction becomes fact, lies become truth and history is being rewritten, the artist has to be on their guard and not be drawn into black holes. They must navigate choppy waters, believe in, yet question themselves.

Mind & Materials is a group show of nine artists who have kept to their singular paths. These artists have delved deep and their commonalities are amply demonstrated in this intriguing and illuminating exhibition. Whilst occupying different areas of the universe, what pulls them together in this orbit is their dedication to their chosen methods and materials.

Mathew Weir, painter, drawer and occasional sculptor resides in the recesses of our collective conscience. He travels from light to dark and back again. His choice of subject matter often involves an element of the pathetic. Sourced from medical text books, medieval engravings and woodcuts or cheap porcelain figures this high wire act is accomplished with great delicacy. He mines the harsh realities of our past and present.

His paintings are a feat of endurance where the image is painstakingly bought into being by a slow nuanced build-up of paint. To underscore his credentials his recent set of drawings are literally rendered in his own blood.

Lee Maelzer's paintings run deep, they offer no gentle respite. This hard-hitting series depicts the interiors of advertised rooms/bedsits taken from the classifieds, the corporal at its most functional. She builds upon her forebears from the School of London or the Euston Road by a thorough understanding of her material. She's been there, she slept there and she's moved on.

She paints choice or the lack of choice, what is construed by others as safety and comfort. Whilst her stance on the appalling housing shortage may be ambiguous the paintings are handled with great verve and panache. There's no slippage here, you're in them whether you like it or not. 'You pays your money and you takes your chances.' These are important paintings of the here and now.

Peter Abrahams forensically photographs objects that inhabit the domestic domain. Formally a painter, he sets up still lifes as a Dutch 17th century master would have done. The objects are often mundane, coiled extension leads, rolls of bin bags, cheap glass flower vases, used washing up paraphernalia they all bear their histories, complete with dings and dents. At his disposal is total control of image representation via the camera with placement,

lighting and post production. It's in their relationship to each other where Abrahams mines the magic, he's very keen to play with ambiguity of the mise-en-scène. These are sensitive and thought-provoking images.

John Wigley chooses his props with great care. He deftly manipulates found objects and cojoins the unexpected as seen in *Fixture*. He delicately quarries the gossamer thin line between success or failure with profound humour. The lineage of his sculptural still lifes can be traced back to the slapstick films of Chaplin and Keaton, whilst also being highly attuned to the surrealist oeuvre of Magritte and Max Ernst. His 'arrangements' are playful and disquieting. They are also intimate, intuitive and made with care, assemblages of lost objects bound together, for the moment.

Andrea Gregson balances her interest with the detritus of our post-industrial consumerist world and her gleeful fascination with the twilight world. Light into darkness and back again. *Flagrant Matter* uses the Italian lost wax method of bronze casting, building from a core made up of domestic and industrial waste, which leave their imprint on both the outer and internal surfaces. The sculpture resembles a forlorn otherworldly creature. We are invited to peer into the internal chamber, to enter both a physical and metaphysical space. The work is deeply rooted in the history of alchemy.

David Connearn speaks of the 'controlled loss of control'. He's neither a scribbler, nor a line walker, he's firmly a drawer, but of what? The process of escorting a line or number from 1 to infinity is fundamental in his practise. Mathematics are forefront in his work, with all it boundless, concise and structured possibilities.

To quote him, "Physical states change and so changes the work." He repudiates a spiritual experience, he invites us to experience beauty and boredom, he finally balances possibility.

Marc Vaux resides in an altogether different orbit. His space-age constructions explore the age-old preoccupations of colour and light in a profoundly original way. Randomness, order and intuition all play their role in creating objects of deceptive simplicity. His mastery of materials is legendary – a man for all seasons.

And finally, we alight at **Roman Opalka**. I can't improve on his own statement:

"The fundamental basis of my work, to which I have dedicated my life, manifests itself in a process of recording a progression that both documents time and also defines it. It began on a single date in 1965, the one on which I undertook my first *Detail*.

"Each *Detail* is a part of a greater idea conceived on that date. My work records the progression to infinity, through the first and the last number painted on the canvas. I inscribe the progression of numbers beginning with one, proceeding

to infinity, on canvases of the same size, 77.17 x 53.15 in (196 x 135 cm), in white by hand with a paintbrush. Since 1972 I have been making each canvas' background about 1% whiter each time. Thus the moment will arrive when I will paint white on white. Since 2008, I have painted in white on a white background, which I call 'blanc mérité' (white well earned).

"After each work session in my studio, I take a photograph of my face in front of the *Detail* that I have been working on. Each *Detail* is accompanied by a tape recording of my voice saying the numbers out loud as I write them."

Opalka at the end reached 5,607,249.

Mind & Materials highlights the complexity of being with humanity, dark humour, social awareness and fastidious insistence with truth to materials in these most 'unprecedented times'.

Michael Roberts is a painter and print-maker working in both France and London. This will be his third curatorial adventure at the gallery.

As we bring the curtain down its only right and fitting that we leave the last line to Stan Laurel:

"If any of you cry at my funeral, I'll never speak to you again."

Living In an Immaterial World

By Tom Hall

[Sung in the voice of Madonna]

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

All I have going through my head is the chorus of Madonna's 1984 pop classic *Material Girl* conjuring up the carefree world of my youth. Today we talk much less of material wants.

The video of Madonna in that pink dress, channelling her inner Marilyn, draped in men and diamonds was iconic. The Urban Dictionary describes a 'material person' as someone who likes expensive and luxurious things and tends to show confidence and egotistical behaviours. Material had value in the 80's and material worth was understood. I shared in the

The scars are still there, but things are healing.

longing, especially for Barry Lulu Briggs's Walkman. It was the first anyone had seen at our school.

Madonna's pink dress seems to take on all the attitude of material desire; its over saturated colour, its rich sheen projects the material girl's dreams. The dress is a story in itself.

Everything carries its own social and cultural history from its general material, down to the specific life of that individual object. Our family histories are carried through the passing on of familiar objects through generations. They play their part in the handing on of family stories: and objects are invested with singular power as they become part our retold story.

We share those object's qualities and find meaning in their marks and dents.

and I'm a material girl

Immateriality. As we limp out of Covid, watch the war in Ukraine and deal with runaway inflation, reflections of the late 20th century have returned. Not all the signs are there though. Madonna's 'material girl' has been replaced with yoga and an invitation from Marie Condo to declut-

ter our lives. We are invited to recentre the mind as the most important tool of the body and mindfulness exercises are reproduced endlessly in YouTube clips and Instagram stories #livingyourbestlife.

in a material world

There is something missing though. Where has our relationship to the material world gone? What happened to all the stuff? Take the Walkman, it has long been replaced by the iPhone. This singular machine has enabled us to possess so much. It has given us access to so many things and ideas; connectivity, a camera, and endless storage, the Swiss army pen knife of the digital age, and yes, sadly it has replaced the personal portable cassette player. Having reduced our possessions down to one ubiquitous object, we no longer need to covet things of others. Nothing to pin up on our childhood walls of desire. We need for nothing, material obsolescence, the rest is nostalgia.

[material]

Has this created a deficiency in our appreciation of materials and material language?

Perhaps it has. The end of the 80's we witnessed the removal of the Berlin Wall. It was the material embodiment of the Cold War, and in its removal heralded the post-material world to come. But what actually happened? That night people created thousands of 'Walls'. They smashed it into pieces and put those pieces on mantle pieces around the world. They are now being taken down and talked about, remembered, in time handed on, passing the story forwards. And the scar, the gap left by the Wall's absence, which started as an empty space has slowly filled with glass and steel. The scars are still there, but things are healing.

Madonna's song ends abruptly on a point of material context; it is like the last gasp of pure material thought. She leaves us living inside the actual matter, becoming the material, and embodying its history, but we and the stories we tell don't have to be frozen in an outmoded materialistic past.

Living in a material world

Living in a material world (material)

Living in a material

Tom Hall is an artist working and living in the New Forest.

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