

WHAT IS REAL & WHO DECIDES?

OCCUPIED REALISM

Nathan Eastwood, Alexander Mclean,
Jonathan Trayner

Opening

Thursday 15 March, 4 - 8pm

Continues

Friday 16 March, 4 - 7pm

Thursday 22 March, 4 - 7pm

Friday 23 March, 4 - 7pm

Portman Gallery

Morpeth School, Portman Place,
(off Globe Road), E2 OPX

www.portman-gallery.com



Do I see what you see?

What is real and who decides?

What is realism? In art it is often described as a picture, image, film or text that is as close to reality as possible. But what is reality? Is reality what a camera records, in a photograph for example, or what we actually see, experience and feel? It is clear the picture or image of something is different from the thing itself.

When people think of realism there is often an unquestioned view which sees only one reality. This reality is seen as being outside of you and people may think it can be shown in a way that everyone agrees with¹. But is this always true for everything? Our view of reality changes according to our position in life. Think of the different realities of a slave and master, would they have, necessarily, the same versions of what is real and important?

What is considered to be real and true is important to question, it is often not neutral or unbiased. Think of a newspaper for example, sometimes the truth is distorted or exaggerated. Also some news stories are mentioned more than others, who decides what's more important?

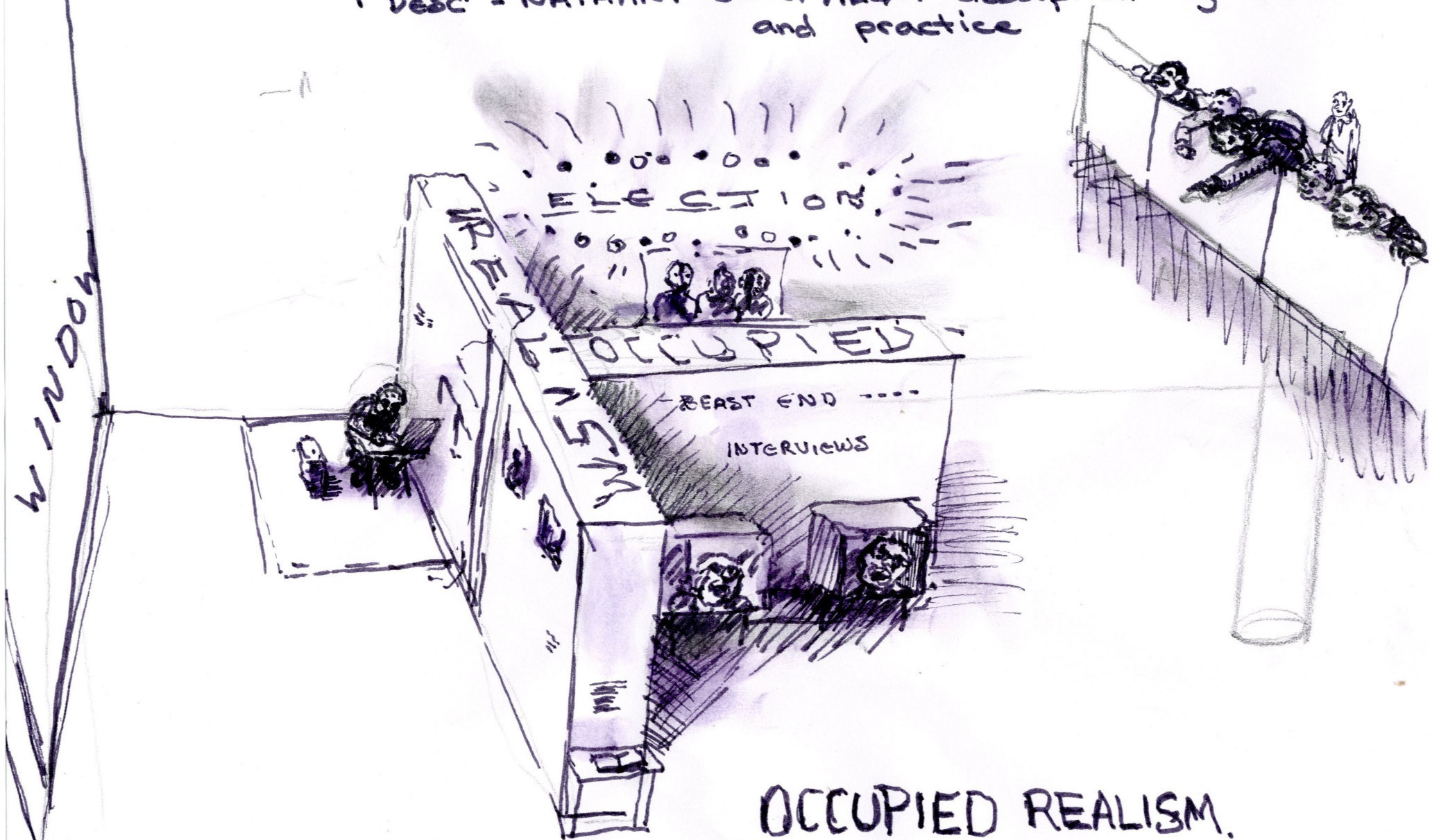
Occupied Realism brings together three artists who use different media; film, painting and documented action, to question what we see as real or accept as part of life. By bringing them together this exhibition asks questions about the reality of using art as a social voice - who is able to do this in society?

Andrew Cooper

¹ This would be the objective world which we agree exists outside of us. Subjective experience would be what you think and feel. For example 'The chair is on the floor in the middle of the room'. Objective if we all agree. "I don't like that chair because it reminds me of my old school" Subjective as it relates only to you. But it is important to question these things. Some things have a real effect because everybody believes they are real, for example the value of money.

- Booklet - 1 Essay. - Realism

1 Desc: - NATHAN. JON. ALEX. description of work
and practice



Nathan Eastwood

About:

I was brought up in a Christian (evangelical) home where one had to accept the teachings of the bible as gospel; questioning the faith was prohibited. This negativity did it violence, they tore the teachings out of context and in doing so delimited philosophical dialectics. I am now consistently self-reflexive on what I think about these things and life in general. It was this delimiting, destructive, un-questioning attitude that encourages me to question my own ontological position in relation with certain life-truth procedures. It is this self-reflexivity and criticality that has navigated me into the reading of philosophy, politics and the practice of making art.

Social Realism as creative repetition:

The paintings focus on observations of daily life, my surroundings. For me at certain moments: when making my bed, walking around in public spaces, noticing rubbish scattered around, picking up the kids from school, surfing the internet, and watching Question Time, that I think, yes, this is life; the banal existence within the every day. This is what I know, and so this is what I want to paint, to focus directly with life and my quotidian surroundings. Using my mobile phone with a built in camera I am able to take hundreds of instant photographs of my surroundings as documentation, which become possible source material for my paintings. I don't make photorealist paintings as this is not my concern, but by using the digital photographic image I am able to get to reality, my everyday reality, realism as a truth procedure - the photograph gives me an objective account of social truths (in terms of visibility) as an image.



A Man (After Ilya Repin's Own Heart)

How does one make social realist art?

How do I paint social reality?

What is my role as an artist within my community?

Is it possible for me to make social realist painting in today's political and economic climate?

Why social realism as creative repetition?

It could be argued that in today's political and economical climate, where governments are imposing draconian fiscal austerity on the working classes, is a good time to make art that is reflexive of the ordinary, everyday citizen. I would argue that this hypothesis is made possible today because of the current description given to this by Mark Fisher as 'capitalist realism.'

I work into the early hours of the morning; lost within my solitary self, within the shadows of my domestic space making paintings or watching 'kitchen sink' films or reading politics and philosophy books. It is from this corner of the world that I consider the questions and issues that affect me (us) as a thinking, political and social being. It's my relationship with both the public spaces and domestic space that interests me, the vulnerability of being in public and then the safety of being back home (the shell - my corner of the world) and it's back in this space that I make art and read. The idea of a separation between work, spare time and freedom has become blur, a paradox, where a slippage has developed within my practice.

Jonathan Trayner

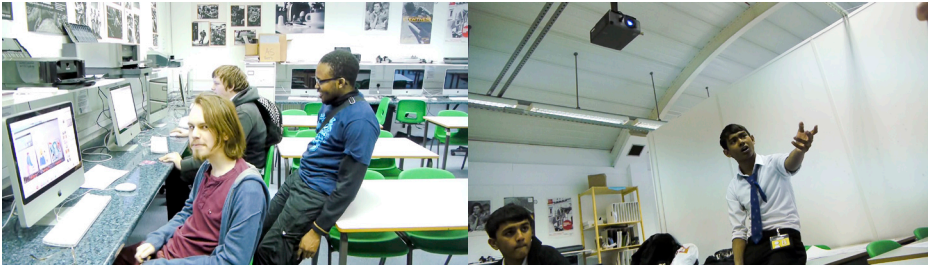
About:

I am interested in the performance of everyday life, the way in which individuals act out their selected/given roles. The notion of absurdity as a political act is important here, in the sense that the greatest mechanism for disarming power is ridicule; authority cannot stand to be made fun of. This idea relates to the ambiguous position of the artist in relation to power; when they do have power, they have the power to be 'the one who speaks' and the ability to tell the truth to power. In an attempt to take on this role that is beyond them the artist is like the medieval fool, who traditionally had the right to speak frankly to the king and would be 'king for a day, and who but a fool would do that?'

Like the fool in his relations with the king the artist also has an ambiguous relation to his/her labour, they work but do not work – their labour is squandered, pot-latched. They commit the ultimate sin of classical capital labour value by failing to work usefully. However the work of the artist, no matter how radical it appears, is always subsumed by the institutions of art, hence capital. Can the master's tools ever be used to dismantle the master's house?

The theatre of democracy and the service economy paradigm:





The protocol for electing the Doge of Venice was used as the basis for a series of workshops with 16-18 year olds within Morpeth School; the students used this voting system to select one of their number to receive a cash prize of £200.

From 1268 until the fall of the republic in 1797 the Venetian head of state was elected by a highly complex mechanism allowing the Serene Republic to remain politically stable throughout this turbulent period of Italian history. Although absolute in its seriousness this process was in many ways a theatre or game whose length and complexity reinforced the collective intent of the ruling merchant class, it was the affirmation of the narrative not the end result that was important.

One of the key points about complex political mechanisms requiring direct participation or multiple votes is they are time consuming and therefore effectively leisure pursuits amongst a politically engaged class: In a complex multi-levered political system agitation becomes either a job or a lifestyle choice, the other side of this becomes the popular voting mechanisms of reality television. The two steadily become merged with the same personality based narrative model used to create a story; the viewer/voter becomes (actually and symbolically) involved in this story through their choices and emotional involvement with the spectacle.

What does realism mean?

Realism and reality are multiple locations; they overlap so that what is real in one context is not in another. This is readily understandable within the multiple realities of digital existence but is present throughout human history and existential experience. The Aborigines of Australia experience two overlapping realities – an everyday life that exists in objective linear time, and a non-ordinary reality that is often referred to as Dreamtime, this is a timeless virtual place in which an individual exists concurrently with their ancestors and descendents – where space is fixed but time is arbitrary.

Realism is therefore perhaps an aesthetic experience rather than an objective or scientific one. A work of science fiction or fantasy can therefore be more realistic than a soap opera; although it might involve alien beings or magical forces that are not 'real' it might have a greater grounding in the psychic existence of humanity than the physically possible but psychologically unfeasible interactions of a bunch of improbably beautiful people. I think anyone who is an artist went through a stage – generally in their teens – when they wanted to produce work that was 'realistic', in the sense that it represented, as far as was possible within the chosen medium, the physical characteristics of an object in external reality. The formal realism of representation however only takes us so far and we begin to think about how we can make something that is real rather than merely representing reality. In this circumstance the aesthetic experience of the image/object becomes a real thing in and of itself.

Therefore when someone suggests that your aspiration is not realistic what does that mean? Does it mean that it is not possible? or that it requires a new form to take shape within external reality before it is realised? A social aim – for example votes for women – might be considered unrealistic right up until the point that it becomes realised, at which point it becomes obvious in its realism and those that oppose it go from being the voice of realism to that of absurdity.

Alexander Mclean



Alexander Mclean is a freelance journalist working in areas of music and design. Alexander describes his practice as a crossover between these two fields encompassed as one: Creativity.

For *Occupied Realism* Alexander interviewed people from around the East End as well as the other artists in the exhibition.

You can see more of Alexander's films at:
www.youtube.com/user/underyourkindvd



(This page) Still from interview with Barry

(Next page) Still from interview with Nathan Eastwood and Jonathan Trayner

Glossary

Quotidian	Down to earth
Ontological	Being, how we exist
Draconian	Being told what to do or think without choice
Fiscal Austerity	Money being cut from important public services
Capitalist Realism	X Factor
Self-Reflexive	Thinking about your own thoughts and ideas
Arbitrary	Random, meaningless
Kitchen sink films	Friday night Saturday morning films about everyday life , Brick Lane
Pot-latch	The practice of destructive gift giving - where material wealth is deliberately wasted or consumed
Existential	A philosophy relating to existence and being. People would do things like stand in a queue just to experience the boredom and question and experience what life really is