

Coalesce: Happenstance  
installation view



## ■ Coalesce: Happenstance

Smart Project Space Amsterdam

January 10 to February 22

'Coalesce: Happenstance' is the fourth instalment of an exhibition project initiated in 2003 by curator Paul O'Neill. After its first outing at London Print Studio Gallery the exhibition has evolved and expanded through a process of intervention and co-production into the kaleidoscopic environment of overlapping artworks and exhibition design that is currently being hosted at Amsterdam's SMART Project Space. Three artists have been involved in the project from the outset – Kathrin Böhm with a selection of her semi-organic posters *Millions and millions*, 2001-09, Jaime Gili with his spiky, geometric *Coalesce background* posters, 2003-09, and Eduardo Padilha with his sleeping bags made from recycled mattress fabric and embroidered newspaper headlines, which also serve as seating. The Belgian artist Richard Venlet was specially invited to take part and he has provided three of the spaces at SMART with wooden floor units consisting of hexagonal carpeted tiles. These serve in turn as supports for several video monitors showing works by other artists and for a scattering of publications. The idea of an exhibition as a multifaceted environment involving collaborations between artists, designers and architects can be traced back to the 1956 show 'This is Tomorrow' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, but 'Coalesce: Happenstance' is less ideological, more anarchic and light-footed.

The central premise of O'Neill's curatorial strategy is to dissolve and mutate conventional exhibition design by activating three planes of interaction: the background, the middle ground and the foreground. The white background walls of each of SMART's six galleries are painted over

(Lothar Götz's floor to ceiling black lozenges on a yellow and a salmon pink background), plastered with Jaime Gili's posters, spray painted in black by Garrett Phelan, adorned with two huge billboards by Free Art Collective (one depicting two men standing in front of a rockface holding a banner proclaiming 'Protest Drives History', the other featuring the words 'Protest is Beautiful' made up of yellow chrysanthemums). Other sections of wall are covered by Tod Hanson's curvilinear drawings reminiscent of peeling tape or wood shavings, while Jem Noble uses packing tape dispensers to trace a linear structure (under which one can just about discern Eduardo Padilha's stencilled spots of white varnish). Another wall is occupied by Lawrence Weiner's text in silver vinyl lettering, *Happenstance: With all due intent*, 2009, which provides the show's subtitle, a portmanteau of 'happening' and 'circumstance'.

All these 'background' elements, some of them overlapping one another, could easily constitute a show in itself, but there's much, much more. The middle ground comprises the exhibition's display structures, the furniture and seating. These include the aforementioned hexagonal floor units and Padilha's sleeping bags, as well as Clare Goodwin's flattened cardboard boxes bound with coloured tape, which serve as seating for viewing artists' videos, and her cardboard and acrylic *Unplugged TV's*, 2009. While the background and the middle ground represent semi-autonomous design elements, intended to promote visitor interactivity, the foreground posits a subject-to-object relationship: the viewing of discrete works. Savage's *All that is not mine*, 2009, which seems to be a lengthy list of somebody else's possessions, is presented as a framed print, but the majority of the works are shown on monitors or as projections. Jonathan Mosley & Sophie Warren's Fluxus-like *ROGUE GAME, First Play*, 2008, shown on three small monitors, documents the frantic playing of three games simultaneously in an indoor sports hall



**film and video umbrella**

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with markings of at least three different game courts. Elsewhere we can view the filmed results of temporarycontemporary's *Poker Redux*, 2005, a series of poker games with curators as dealers and artists as gamblers and conceived for Coalesce's previous incarnation 'Coalesce: The Remix'.

One of the most entertaining videos in the present exhibition, and clearly an audience favourite (especially as one doesn't have to don headphones to hear the soundtrack), is Finnish artists Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen's *Complaint Choir Singapore*, 2008. A nearly 100-strong choir of Singaporeans were filmed in an auditorium exuberantly singing their pet peeves such as 'I can't access playboy.com' and 'People blow their noses into the swimming pool' to a swinging piano backing. Professionally arranged and shot, this 10-minute film has already been viewed nearly 20,000 times on YouTube (the Birmingham version, it's perhaps worth noting, has scored more than half a million views).

Showing in another gallery is General Idea's *Shut the Fuck Up*, their 1985 sarcastic riposte to mainstream media's view of the art world, which has lost little of its bite over the years. In addition, and in keeping with Paul O'Neill's idea of inviting guest curators to take part in the Coalesce project, there is 'Coalesce Cinema', selected by B+B (Sophie Hope & Sarah Carrington), a sequential series of seven video projections by artists mostly working in the context of former Eastern Europe. Focusing on social issues such as cultural identity, migration and prostitution, the films add a documentary layer that places greater demands on the visitors' attention than the more flamboyant nature of the adjacent galleries. Some of the other videos, however, shown on small monitors with headphone access, are less engaging. Manuel Salt's *Public Display of Affection*, 2008, is simply a feel-good study of people kissing, while Oriana Fox's *Consciousness, Understanding 'N' Trust (CUNT)*, 2004, is over-staged and too much indebted to Valie Export.

It is impossible to discern any particular theme in 'Coalesce: Happenstance'. There are constants and there are repetitions, there are surprising facets everywhere you look, there are booklets to pore over (by Dave Beech, David Blandy and others), videos and audioworks to become engaged with, walls to ponder, artworks to sit on. Serious politics merges with playful abstraction, the aesthetic coalesces with downbeat ethics, the popular with the private. All these qualities are also evident in another exhibition within the exhibition – a corridor devoted to the *Tipos Moviles* poster project, which was originally developed by the Venezuelan artist and curator Luis Romero and expanded by Gili in 2004. It has since been carried out in Colombia and the UK. Old letterpress machines using wooden type give the posters an antiquated look, but their messages (in either Spanish or English, the latter including contributions by Simon Faithfull and Inventory), are often poetic and disarmingly contemporary.

Happenstance here is not so much something that happens by chance, but a curatorial statement of intent, a

deliberate stance aimed at accumulating new experiences and new connections. More a devolved conspiracy than a collaboration, it is a layered, open-ended structure that can be added to at will, perhaps never to coalesce into a single, definable entity. ■

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## ■ Nathan Coley

46 Brooklands Gardens Jaywick

November 11 to February 1

'I want the moment of looking to place you in the centre of the world.' To realise this intention, which Nathan Coley described in a 2004 conversation with Claire Doherty of the Situations programme in Bristol, it is required that 'you forget that you are an artist'. Instead of making work about the specifics of a location, which can often replace the viewer's experience with the artwork's documentation, Coley's approach is to allow ideas for a work to develop over time concurrent with the relationship with a place. In this way, the located artwork resonates with its surroundings most poignantly when the viewer is actually in place with, and implicated in, the work. These concerns are made tangible in Coley's *46 Brooklands Gardens*, a painted plywood and steel box-section construction which, from viewing documentation, appears simply to reflect in its form the style of neighbouring chalets in the Essex seaside town of Jaywick. However, Coley's concerns are made critically urgent when visiting the place as the work effects an uncanny total reflection of its surroundings, not only in the material terms of architectural style but also the 'genius loci', the spirit of the place.

Temporarily occupying a vacant building plot in the Brooklands estate, the sculpture mirrors different aspects of the area. On the one hand it quotes the holiday chalets, cosily squeezed together like tents at a festival, which have become a realisation of the dream of an idyllic simple life of the retired Londoner, a place to tend succulents and go for evening walks on the beach. On the other hand, the temporary nature and simple materials speak of the area suffering from neglect and a fluvial population which has created an atmosphere of anxiety and uncertainty that grasps at your stomach as you negotiate its litter-strewn alleys and lanes. In microcosm it is a vision of the dystopia of underprivileged communities, which is the cause for such concern in contemporary Britain.

In the work, Coley translates his appropriated Second World War 'dazzle' camouflage – previously applied to hardboard models of places of worship that in 2006 were shown on a very different estate, Mount Stuart on the Isle of Bute in Scotland – onto a more permeable structure. Externally, the white-striped pattern of *46 Brooklands Gardens* acts as a form of defensive camouflage for the structure

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