



1 Ghazaleh Abassalian, *Masks*, dimensions variable, mixed media, 2009-11.

Change the World or Go Home

Down Stairs Gallery, Herefordshire

10 September – 30 December

You would not particularly think of Hereford as a place for the contemporary, especially when it comes to art. Hereford, for example, has its own 'Black and White Village Trail' for those interested in timber framed buildings dating from the sixteenth century. Hereford also has a large estate belonging to famous antiques dealer Martin Miller, who lives in a stately home called Great Brampton House. This mansion, however, is not typical in terms of heritage. When making your way up the long driveway, past outhouses and stables, you see, on your right, a very large home, whose basement is covered in neon fly-postered sheets, glaringly obvious against the rest of the house's cream hue.

The basement at Great Brampton House is home to Down Stairs Gallery, which covers the entire 6,000 square foot floor area. Here, Martin Miller has set up a typical white cube space in untypical surroundings. The gallery's third and current show, 'Change The World or Go Home', explores the idea of an artist's place within the world and their role in contemporary society. It also seems an ideal statement for such an unusual gallery space to explore.

Some of the thoughts surrounding the statement 'change the world or go home' are louder than others. For example, Craig Barnes, the show's curator, was the one responsible for fly-postering the outside of the gallery with the large neon sheets – which depict IKEA's best selling range of free floating shelves. Also, inside the gallery, Ghazaleh Abassalian's film *Art Hero* and series of brightly coloured and garish masks make for images that are loud and brash; they feel typically revolutionary. While Steven Allbutt's subtle yet beautiful *100 years of artists manifestos (abridged)* folds down into a little book that fits into your wallet.

Although the idea of seeking out artists who question their place in society is interesting, this exhibition also questions contemporary society as a whole. For example, Sean Dower's *Witness Appeal Signs 2008-09* brings you right into the current by re-presenting a series of banal police posters that ask 'can you help us?' Sadly these appeal posters are very familiar. Even though Dower's copies are painted in watercolours, his replica poster is a thing of the now. The viewer thinks more about the shooting, murder or scene of animal cruelty rather than the works' beautiful painterly presentation, questioning, therefore, their own place and responsibilities to the wider society.

Put these alongside Mark Titchner's *The World Isn't Working* banner and his film, *The Last Ten Years*, and we begin to see and understand the impact of media, press and poster campaigns as strong contemporary methods of communicating to the masses. Especially in terms of messages of revolt, uprising and shock. In particular, this is seen in *The Last Ten Years*, which documents in sequence every *New York Times* headline over a period of ten years.

The film works in 'Change The World or Go Home', for me, highlight the themes of revolution more than the posters, card or masks, and were my favourite pieces in the show. As is the case particularly with the three films taken from YouTube, which are by Mark McGowan, Charlotte Young and Hennessy Youngman (alter ego of American artist Jayson Musson). Their subject matter is all about the artist and how to make art. YouTube is a reference to the 'Super Now,' making the show clearly not about revolutions past, but rather of revolutions happening today. With McGowan, Young and Youngman making light-hearted humour of a modern revolution of sorts, of pushing artists forward to make change, are they actually just mocking the inability of artists and audience to be modern revolutionaries?

When thinking of the contemporary Western world and its potential for change and development, we must also recognise our possible lack of control in terms of making change occur. A simple example: the Conservative Government was not voted in with a majority, however we



2 Craig Barnes, *Lack*, dimensions variable, flourescent paper, ink, wood, metal, glue, 2011.



3 Dominic Samworth, *Unstuck from the screen*, 30x8x1.5' approx, strip lights and Perspex, 2011.

are still effectively governed by them. Our ability as civilians to change or influence, to revolutionise, appears futile.

But this show explores how this is not always the case. Tom Crawford's pieces in particular explore how small interventions made by the artist aims to improve the lives of those encountering them. Crawford in *Concrete Action* fixes public benches, while in *Cul-de-sac* he hangs fresh flowered baskets outside people's homes. These subtle improvements to the everyday are seen as his miniature revolution.

The film *The English Tourist and the Oslo Agreement* by Jeremy Hutchison also deserves a particular mention, especially in terms of subtle intervention. This piece is inspired by the 1993 Oslo Accord where "Israeli products can be sold in Palestine, but Palestinian products cannot be sold in Israel". Hutchinson buys ordinary items in Palestine, such as cartons of milk, and smuggles them into shops in Israel, to then try and 'buy' them again at the till. The fuss that follows is astounding: a simple and eloquent intervention and mini act of revolution.

'Change the World or Go Home' has a very exciting air about it; it mixes established UK artists with recent graduates and creates, in places, a manic and loud feeling exhibition. Something indeed of protest and revolution, this show feels current, new and important. This is, however, occasionally juxtaposed with a silent protest, as exemplified by local born Hereford artist Dominic Samworth's light and perspex installation and Alexander Krone's drawings. Overall this exhibition is saying something. It explores artists, their place and use in society today, as well as moving the viewer to question theirs. This group exhibition brings a certain anarchy to rural Hereford; it aims to wake people up, and I believe it will do just that.

Charlie Levine is an independent curator and Director of TROVE, Birmingham. As part of Hereford Photography Festival she will be curating an exhibition as part of 'Change the World or Go Home' at Down Stairs Gallery, opening Saturday 29 October, 3-8pm.

Soon all your neighbours will be artists

Published by Eastside Projects with Aid & Abet, Extra Special People, Spike Associates, WARP

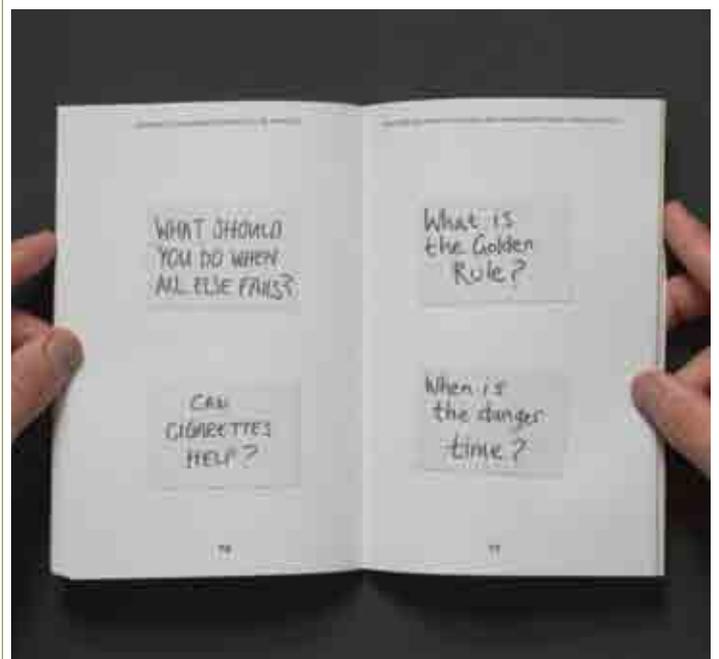
Soon all your neighbours will be artists is a curious title for a publication whose focus is the very difficulty of sustaining a creative practice in today's economic climate. I've been wondering if it implies that the hand-to-mouth existence of many artists may soon be shared by the entire population and that everyone will need to be creative if we are to get through the difficult times ahead...

A collaboration by members of four artist-led organisations – Aid & Abet, Extra Special People, Spike Associates and Wales Artist Resource Programme – this publication is concerned with ideas of survival. At times this is the day-to-day reality of professional life – S Mark Gubb logs the 5455 miles he traveled within 106 days in order to pursue his art-related activities – whilst at others the vision is post-apocalyptic: Heather and Ivan Morison's text *Frost King* presents a Ballardian tale in which residents endure life in a once gleaming high-rise now consumed by recession, fire, decay and desert.

For *2020: A Performance Time-Machine*, the company random people prophesy alternately utopian or dystopian visions in which performance art goes underground or mainstream. (In one mordantly funny prognostication, "Performance art will replace fire-walking and yoga as popular self-discovery activities.") There are no such binary oppositions, however, in the discussion around *Rogue Game*, in which three sports (football, volleyball and basketball) are played simultaneously on the same court: here, cohabitation and negotiation operate together with fracture and interruption.

Determinedly not a manual on how artists might survive, nevertheless this publication resonates with suggestive strategies. Carwyn Evans' bilingual English/Welsh Verb List Compilation: '*Of Shit and Sunshine*', for instance, gives thirty-one agriculture tasks (to combine; to cultivate; to diversify, etc.) most of which offer useful metaphors for a creative existence. And when contemplating one's straitened future finally gets too depressing, the book's dry humour is enough to raise a much-needed smile.

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1 *Soon all your neighbours will be artists*, published by Extra Special People at Eastside Projects with Aid & Abet, Spike Associates and WARP, 2011. Courtesy: An Endless Supply.