

designer and collector Martin Hinchcliffe and, in the spirit of the original enterprise, he wanted everyone to see them. *S.M.S.* was a project that hovered between Mail Art proper (which was ideally free of charge and involved an integral element of exchange or reciprocation) and artists' multiples. Here, each object has been neatly framed or carefully displayed in a vitrine. A little contextualisation might not have gone amiss – perhaps by exhibiting a copy of *Aspen*, another US boxed arts magazine, which set a precedent for *S.M.S.* and shared some contributors.

An essential element is inevitably missing: the unrepeatability of receiving an *S.M.S.* portfolio via the postman at the front door, and the tactile and suspenseful experience of opening it and removing its contents. The consequent urge to open up, unfold, turn over and examine these multiples cannot be satisfied. The small scale and flimsiness of these objects, prints and facsimiles amplifies their desirability. Perhaps we should just give in and want them. Marcel Duchamp's cover for *S.M.S.* No.2 has a 7-inch vinyl disc with a spiralling text in white affixed to it, and for someone who is a Duchampian completist and a vinyl record fetishist, it would be a deeply covetable acquisition. ■

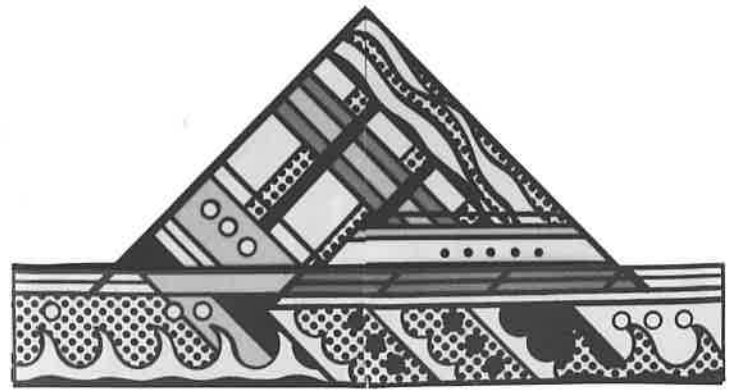
David Briers is an independent writer based in West Yorkshire.

Jennet Thomas: Animal Condensed>>Animal Expanded

Tintype London 14 June to 14 July

Tintype's shopfront window displays half a dozen black-and-white, totem-like poles and white kerchief banners bearing crudely drawn facial markings. From the street, they look like weird designer objects. Up close, the DIY nature of the expanded foam and plaster totemic 'heads' atop cheaply wrapped wooden poles suggest a kids' art class which is apropos given that much of Jennet Thomas's recent work could be said to evince an alternative pedagogy in terms of using sci-fi and absurdist theatrical modes to think differently about societal issues. This is not to say that her work is not sophisticated (it is), it reiterates the importance of a childlike mischievousness in a way that is utterly knowing and sardonic in its combining of often garishly coloured materials with and within fast-paced, highly sonic, narrative film works.

'Animal Condensed>>Animal Expanded' continues Thomas's exploration of possibilities for artistic resistance to the corporatisation of forms of life, here to a seemingly bizarre kind of pharmacological animal husbandry that advances species-being by crossing humans, animals and technical wizardry. The outing at Tintype gives centre stage to *Animal Condensed>>Animal Expanded #2*, 2018, Thomas's second film in a planned trilogy, while *Animal Condensed>Animal Expanded #1*, 2016, which I originally saw projected large-scale at Block 336 in Brixton, here shows on a small floor monitor in a corner of the installation



Roy Lichtenstein
Hot 1968

space. The new work bellows loudly, while one has to don headphones to hear the, in this instance, subdued soundtrack to *#1*. The surrounding gallery walls are covered with black-and-white streamers, the floor with black-and-white felt tiles, a colour scheme that echoes the black-and-white optical screen inserts that in *#2* generate expansive virtual environments or appear contracted on character's hands, referencing perhaps the scanning technologies that encode and monetise identity in the contemporary world.

Migrants sometimes cut the skin off their fingertips to avoid detection. Thomas's film is not about such subject matter but nonetheless can be seen as an allegory of the curtailment of human freedom by data recognition technology, as well as a bizarre take on human-animal evolution. One of her two main characters is a guerrilla artist dressed in camouflage gear who, hiding out in a forest or in her studio, has 'divided herself', a survival strategy that relates to the black-and-white stripes painted on her face and on the totems she makes to ward off capture by governing groups whose goal is that everyone ingest a smart substance called 'Animal Condensed'. For the suburbanite male entrepreneur who represents this societal ethos of enhanced productivity, his inner 'Animal Expanded' leads to his robotic mimicking of the movements of his Newton's Cradle executive toy while piglets multiply on screen. The film cross-cuts between him and his blonde-wigged daughter who interacts with a virtual Peppa Pig on her laptop, but rather than the child as a figure of innocence, and thence resistance, she is also complicit. Receiving a visitation from the Authenticity Fetish character, a kind of totemic avatar who features in *#1*, she rejects its offer of a totemic doll weapon. Later her father reports: 'Look how her fibres are improving, she is her own accelerated portfolio.'

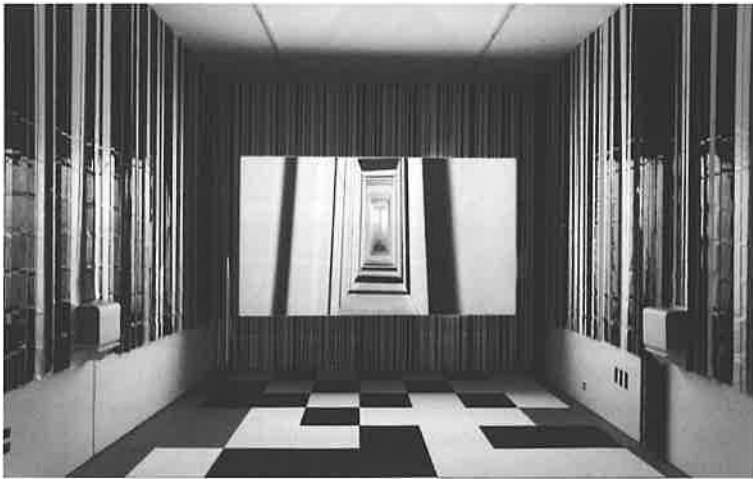
This might sound like a mere parody of the futuristic desire to exit the human in favour of animal-machine hybrids, but there is more to it than that. Although I think that *#2* needed more than its short 15-minute duration for its allegorical associations to unfold, as it is more narratively driven than the MTV temporality of *#1* and its snappy textual intertitles, nonetheless, using the weird and the fantastical, the films think through contemporary issues of survival, ie the food we eat, the ecologies we inhabit, and our futuristic aspirations as techno-pharmacological beings. For me, the 'we' here is an



Lubaina Himid
CJ Mahony
Lindsay Seers
Emily Speed
Alice May Williams
Melanie Wilson

17 May - 4 November 2018

Six contemporary art commissions at Knole



Jennet Thomas
Animal
Condensed->Animal
Expanded
 installation view

urban western subject whose governance involves colonising its own embodiment, invading it with genetically modified substances that secure its place in a market economy.

Within the frame, resistance lies with the guerrilla artist, played by actress Alison Edmundston, who also starred as the resistant character 'Glenda' in Thomas's *The Unspeakable Freedom Device*, 2015, and who I see as Thomas's stand-in in these films. From Edmundston's character's desire to be undetectable via a materialist détournement of barcodes to the machinic voice-over interrogators who query her strategies, #2 also suggests an oblique parody of Hito Steyerl's *How Not to be Seen. A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*, 2013. It is as if Thomas is subjecting the high-end avatar invisibility that Steyerl muses on to a cyberpunk DIY material version.

Jarring bursts of shots of multiplying piglets and landfill full of discarded soft toys allude to the disregard for the totem animal in contemporary society, yet the film is not nostalgic. The transitional world of the imagination might be on the scrapheap, but nonetheless the artist can allegorise modes of resistance whose bizarre logic protects them from detection – unless one has the code, of course. ■

Maria Walsh is reader of Artists' Moving Image at Chelsea College of Arts.

Günther Förg: A Fragile Beauty

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam
 26 May to 14 October

Walls and windows, past and present. The window of an image, of the building it represents. The walls of a building, of the gallery in which its image appears. The past of a photograph, the present of a painting. These – in any number of recombinations – are the terms of Günther Förg's art. Aren't they also the fundamentals of visual art itself – do we look at a surface or through it? – and so as essential as it gets? Although Förg was always drawing on art of times and places that are not his own, it is notable that his work has not travelled as well as that of many of his German contemporaries; perhaps because its viewpoint is so personal, so of its moment and context; invoking landmarks of Modernism – a Melnikov

window, a Clifford Still chasm – he leaves them behind by re-embodiment them, now, in mainland Europe.

Or rather then: Förg died in 2013, so his presenting of the past, and his presentations of that presenting, are now in the past. Or a series of pasts. This retrospective can feel like a complicated relativity puzzle: you looking back on him looking back, or finding himself unable to. Modernism is a line his hand cannot quite stay true to, a facade thrown askew by a camera; but it is also postures, styles, myths of sophisticated modern living, all of which exclude him and us, in our messy present tenses, by showing how the past is an artifice, an impermeable screen. His allusions stand in for what postwar German culture could not bring itself to look back on, except 'periscopically', as WG Sebald put it, a writer who came from the same part of southern Germany, the Allgäu, as Förg. Hence Förg's penchant for photographing buildings associated with 20th-century fascism, not only in Germany, as if we could only bear to recall it from behind the walls it erected. In this sense, his is the most tactful art.

Nine, 2m-high 1991 photographs of the Bauhaus complex in Dessau are hung over a grey monochrome wall painting from a 2002 exhibition in Hamburg. The slight blur – a sign of both a hand-held camera and over-enlargement – is tremulous, an emotional register, like seeing something static through tears or agitation. Up close, you see scratches on the negative, the fizz of aggregate. I know of no other photography so prepared to use one kind of realism to subvert another, in order to show the limitation of both. Zooming in, windows become cage structures, holding us at bay, disowning their referents.

Given that Förg's wall paintings were made for particular galleries, and many of his paintings and photographs for particular installations, the curators are forced to avow the second-handness of the presentation of media for which this would not usually be an issue. The Dessau room is an installation time-specific in qualifying itself as unable to be site-specific, pitching a shaky synonymy between Förg's retrospection and late 20th-century European culture's concept of its past. These are also pictures of pictures, alluding for example to Aleksandr Rodchenko's 1920s photographs of the looming balconies of Russian social housing. We are in limbo between points on a temporal axis drawn into directionality by Förg's decision to paint the walls of a certain institution in a certain city a certain colour. One room, empty but for three walls painted beige, green and dark blue respectively, can only carry over its colours from a 1986 Cologne installation, not their relation to the original interior. His gouache studies for the wall paintings probably do the job better by leaving more to conjecture.

Förg's art is diaristic, measuring itself against a past it can only speculate about, a future it anticipates through the past's projections, like outdated science fictions. Compare Gerhard Richter's evidential take on history via the images it has left; his confidence, despite the rhetoric of doubt, that the past can be traced by a photograph's record. Four large photographs from 1986 of the interior of Mies van der Rohe's Haus Lange in Krefeld are taken by a hired professional, hence the steady focus. That they are presented in a row, leaning on blocks, not hung, emphasises their blocky objecthood, countering the *trompe l'oeil* illusionism by which the Stedelijk's wooden floors appear extended by the parquet of Haus Lange, 30 years ago, one contemporary museum to another.