

*The Critical Image*  
World Trade Center and VOUS ETES ICI Gallery  
Amsterdam — June to September 2013

Curated by Angus Pryor

**Plastic Propaganda**

...one ethos

[www.plasticpropaganda.com](http://www.plasticpropaganda.com)

## World Trade Center

Strawinskylaan 1  
Amsterdam (Adjacent to Station Zuid)

**June 24 to Sept 6**

Opening hours Daily 08.00 — 1800 hours

## VOUS ETES ICI

Ms. van Riemsdijkweg 41 A  
NL-1033 RC Amsterdam-Noord  
(use the NDSM Ferry from Central Station)

**June 26 to July 27**

The gallery is located at the NDSM-wharf, next to the free ferry to NDSM from Amsterdam Central Station.

Wednesday — Sunday 12.00 — 18.00 hours

## Preface

*The Critical Image* foregrounds work by members of a UK-based collective of contemporary artists. Co-curated by Angus Pryor and William Henry, both exhibitions explore the cultural and critical resonance of media and genre – including examples of abstract painting, sculpture, printmaking, installations and the photographic in part response to characterisations of contemporary art’s “post-medium condition”. A significant strand within both exhibitions engages with ideas around the post-Duchampian readymade and the aesthetics and contexts of post-conceptual painting.

Categories of sculpture and installation are variously represented at both venues through a range of work which fuse and combine the personal and the biographical with a broader compass of association, iconography and meaning. William Henry’s surreal, morphed objects explore the readymade and the estranging effects of otherwise familiar objects when subjected to artistic re-imagination and re-invention. Henry subverts the everyday; fusing, flexing, melting and melding domestic objects, musical instruments and personal possessions, a metamorphosis suggestive of the contingent and transient.

The genre of sculpture is given a different inflexion in Georgia Wright’s enigmatic and playfully suggestive aesthetic. These untitled, composite pieces are both discrete yet symbolically loaded; highly finished and carefully crafted objects which invite a ‘reading in’ of concealed narrative and association. The mixed-media installations by Heidi Ysennagger and work by Emma Moody-Smith also reference identity and human pathologies in less oblique ways while Anjula Crocker’s discrete works of silk or thread on canvas explore alcohol addiction and the possibilities for therapeutic recovery and re-birth.

The durability of painting and printmaking for a generation born in the 1960s and 1970s is one of the implicit concerns of the practice – both figurative and more abstract – showcased here. Rather than locating “all serious painting as merely a footnote to the endgame of abstraction” as one curator has memorably noted, the examples of work exhibited here employ and hybridise a range of aesthetic and conceptual forms which seek to extend the genre’s contemporary cultural resonance and affiliations.<sup>(1)</sup> A point of departure from the tradition the curator notes is explored by John Butterworth’s process-driven and seemingly instinctual canvases. Although the highly textured and sometimes luminous expanses of pigment indeed recall a hinterland of colour field abstraction, his motifs derive from intense deliberations on the experience of a specific locale and place.

A topographical focus is continued in a series of mixed-media images by Jez Giddings inspired by the distinctive vistas and low horizon lines of Romney Marsh, an area of windswept, isolated wetlands extending across part of the Kent and East Sussex borders in the South East of England. Mark Howland’s Dutch landscapes and motifs explore attachments to place, time and location conveyed through a painting style which recalls a romanticised mid-century British modernism, whilst Jon Law’s abstract canvases fuse the experimental with the accidental and the existential, making explicit connections to the neo-avant-garde rule breaking of the 1950s and 1960s. Angus Pryor’s expansive canvases present narratives of the imagination – permutational images of excess, violence and dysfunction which underline a critical re-invention and re-engagement with the language of painting understood through ideas associated with the readymade.

By contrast, the graphic flatness and stark simplicity of Mavernie Cunningham's lino and woodcut prints return to figurative traditions of mark-making seen in work by Franz Masereel and Lynd Ward. Observational experiences are developed in a different way by Mandakini Devi and by Amanda Thesiger with the later working directly from nature and its organic forms in order to distill new ideas and motifs.

Tim Meacham's site-responsive work evocatively plays with the registers of place, location and nostalgia at a time of global interconnection and cultural displacement. His hybrid pedal-powered plywood carriage offers the prospect of a quirky, artistic *détournement* or navigation through the topography of urban and rural spaces.

The exhibitors taking part in *The Critical Image* are members of *Plastic Propaganda*, a contemporary art collective established in 2009 by Angus Pryor, Reader & Head of the School of Art & Design, University of Gloucestershire and by William Henry, a UK-based installation artist and sculptor. The collective has previously exhibited and showcased work at a range of venues throughout the UK and internationally, including London's Canary Wharf, Tower Bridge, and more recently, New Delhi and Taiwan.

Although *Plastic Propaganda* aims to be open and inclusive in ethos, it recognises in particular the cultural contribution of what has been described as a "post-conceptual generation" – those typically born in the 1960s and 1970s, for whom the legacies of both the Duchampian readymade and late modern responses to the art criticism of Clement Greenberg are cultural givens – long since internalised and accepted as part of an "expanded field" of cultural production. Both these strands underpin a range of critical and aesthetic concerns, including, for example, the durability of figurative and abstract painting, approaches to printmaking and engraving; the re-definition of sculpture and other object-based art forms such as installation.

As a peer informed and supported platform, the *Plastic Propaganda* collective reflects a belief in learning and engaging by practice; offering both contemporary artists and students of art history, opportunities to exhibit and to publish work as part of their onward professional and personal development. In doing so, it recognises some of the particular challenges and gains arising from what has been termed a 'post-Fordist' environment in which formally collaborative and shared approaches to art practice and cultural production more broadly can provide new possibilities and directions for critical and creative practice.

Dr Grant Pooke FRSA  
School of Arts  
University of Kent UK

1. Jaime Stapleton, text commentary on Juan Bolivar from *New British Painting*, John Hansard Gallery, 2004, p15.



## JEZ GIDDINGS



Jez Giddings uses photographs of the isolated landscapes of Romney Marsh as a stage on which this series of mixed-media artworks occur. Following his *Ancestor Series*, Giddings explores an existential approach to art making using the application of enamel paint to add dark and sinister dimensions to the work. The farmers are dead and the monsters are coming.

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Heidi Yssennagger

# 'STOMA!'

*"Heidi Yssennagger's art concerns itself directly with issues relating to body image, identity, and health".*



**'Bound', 2009**

Soft sculpture, stoma appliances,  
surgical sutures, tumble dryer fluff

dansac 

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## Jon Law

Jon Law's practice is predicated on the Cageian definition of the experimental: "...an act the outcome of which is unknown."<sup>(1)</sup> This is not adhered to in order to deny or preclude any sense of artistic agency, but acts as a tool through which to interrogate the limitations, assumptions and prejudices of his practice: the regularities (habits) and irregularities (accidents) of painting. The application of indeterminacy is regulated through 'play'~ a system of rules. These rules are developed into a variety of 'expressive systems' or 'games' in which the chance element involves a limited amount of possibilities or permutations. Although firmly situated within the abstract field of painting, the visual language remain polymorphic, shifting through a variety of approaches and methodologies. This results in densely layered surfaces which reveal the various stages of the painting process as if the works act as archaeologies of themselves.

(1) John Cage (1968), *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Marion Boyars Publishing, London, 1968) p. 13.

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## MARK HOWLAND

**“Paintings about intimacy rather than the look of a place, about  
how familiarity breeds not contempt but an emotional resonance.”**

*Mike Walker PhD Cand. History of Art, University of Kent*

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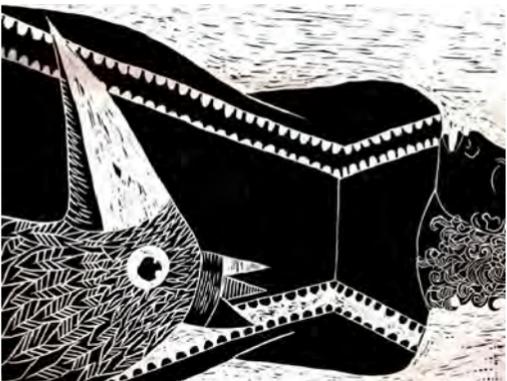
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# Mavermie Cunninghamham

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The work focuses on narrative and I draw my influences from the genre of the wordless novel artists such as Lynd Ward (*God's Man*) and Franz Masereel (*The Sun*). I appreciate the Expressionist era and its 'roots' inward and the psychology of emotion. My work is to be read as narrative and fable and I attempt to challenge the fabular tradition of temptation, resistance and reconciliation by mirroring and reflection. There is a continual fascination with 'the black' in my work as a quality of ink, as shadow land, as identity and as antithesis to light.



## Amanda Thesiger



“I work intuitively through different processes and responses in an effort to find the subject of each work. A distillation of elements from landscape, the sea and natural forms directs the scenes and structures that develop. A mind’s-eye image comes slowly into focus – each work revealing itself gradually – the time invested in the making allows for discovery and change, leaving traces of this in the work. In some cases, there are suggestions of traditional methods of recording or observing the natural world; forms observed through a microscope or botanical illustration, for example. Subjects are often captured in mid-flight, receding or spinning, closely bound together or arching upwards. These arrested movements possibly communicate the emotional core of the work”.

[www.amandathesiger.com](http://www.amandathesiger.com)

Overleaf: *Elopers* (2008)



## **Georgia Wright**

I am interested in making sculptural objects that suggest an ambiguous purpose or use and in doing so may touch upon subjects such as domesticity, medicine, aggression or sexuality. The scale I am currently working with relates to objects that are hand-held and therefore within the realm of possible personal experience.

I like to use combinations of materials such as carved wood, machined metal, and rubber and cast concrete, in a way that perhaps reinforces the idea of function but at the same time could render the object functionless.

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**[www.plasticpropaganda.com](http://www.plasticpropaganda.com)**

Front photograph courtesy of Peter Blackburn



Middle class  
Middle aged  
Pisshead



Anything but the  
Truth



so very  
respectable



## **Anjula Crocker**

“Through my work I express my responses to a personal experience of alcoholism and recovery. I aim to highlight issues and prejudice surrounding addiction and explore the potential journey towards a new life” .

[www.anjula-crocker.co.uk](http://www.anjula-crocker.co.uk)

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## **Tim Meacham**

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"My practice ranges from site-specific installations working with the inherent qualities of particular sites; to drawing machines and sculptural objects which manipulate scale. The work often uses movement, sound and light embodying the viewer through physical engagement and the use of interactive devices which render each viewing unique so engendering an element of self-discovery.

*The Norwood Carriage* originally made for a cemetery in South London, invites the visitor to engage with the space on a pedal powered vehicle, which is equipped with drawing apparatus allowing the journey and topography to be recorded and kept as a memento".



## Angus Pryor FRSA



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## John Butterworth

Butterworth's paintings are process driven; he develops images through the process of making the painting. Instinct, knowledge and collective memories drive his painting practice. There may be a narrative starting point for the work such as an image from a personal memory or experience, but equally it may arise solely from an instinct to paint.

A painting often starts simply with sensations from which he decides colours and gestures. The mechanics of the painting process then takes over; creating an intensity and a sense of being present in the process. Butterworth admits that, although this can feel like disorder, starting a new painting is also an exhilarating experience where both a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty prevail. However the process often leads to a unified surface and a simplified and structured image, a wish for order, perhaps.

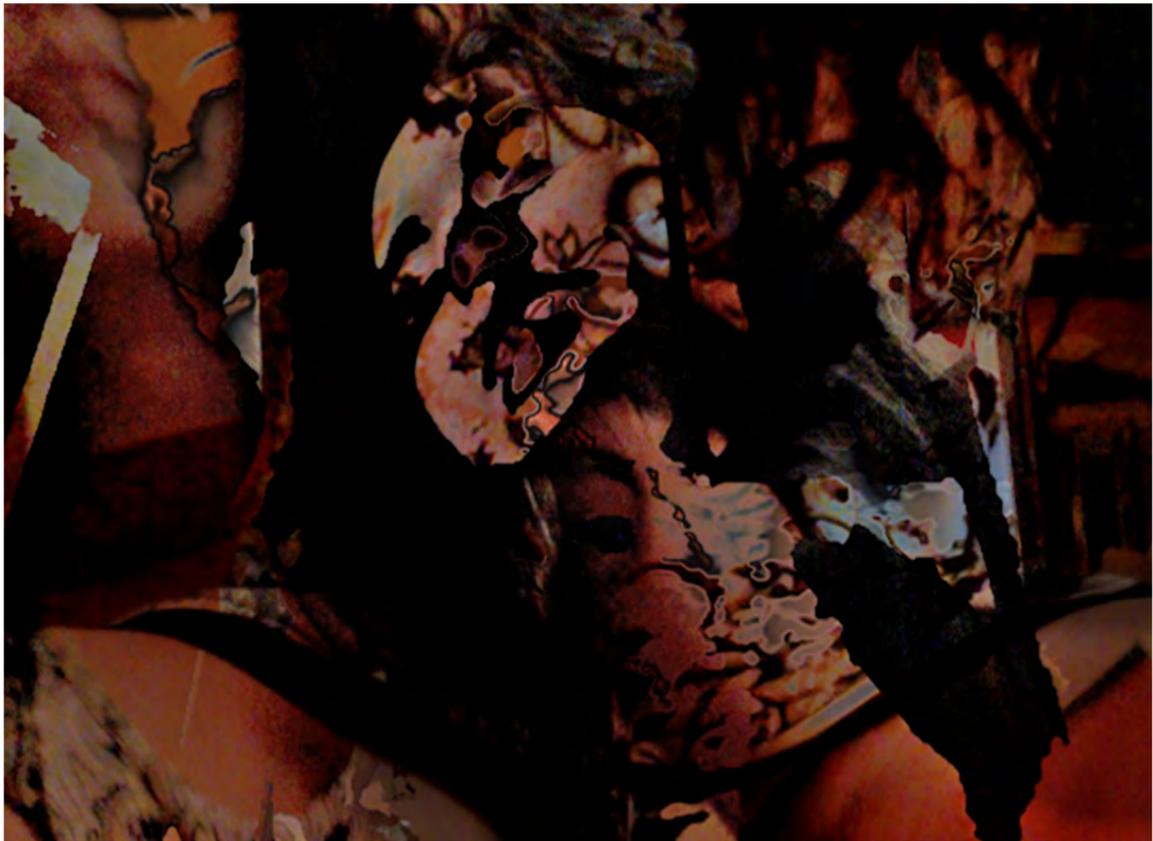
Butterworth's paintings are about discovering something new, either about painting itself or more broadly about ideas, feelings and external experiences. They reflect a desire to create harmony and unity.

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Overleaf - *Ripple* (detail) Oil on Canvas 2009



## Mandakini Devi

The narrative of my work is presented through a series of self portraits in which the body has been both a *leitmotif* and a source of deep personal engagement. Initially, whilst studying to be a painter, I wove stories about my own existence, but as I started experimenting with different materials and studied photography in a more structured way, the idea of 'self' was interrogated through the lens.

Genealogies and the autobiographical seem to unconsciously emerge from my visual presentations, be they paintings, lens-based or multi-media works. Since the association with the collective, *Plastic Propaganda*, my work has developed initially from self portraits to the application of layering. Working with the notion of the 'glitch' I started applying layer upon layer of work over my own photographs.

A significant influence has been the practice of feminist protagonists including Diane Arbus, Nan Goldin, Lee Miller and Susan Sontag. While I have consciously denied their presence in my work, I feel somehow in the very distant recesses of my memory that their collective influence seems to have in some way 'floated' in.

Whilst I am deeply committed to analogue, the purity of digital photography and its software additions fascinates me. I enjoy the process of layering achieved through digital. Somehow the complexity of my inner thoughts are simplified or perhaps made clearer as I use layer upon layer of image – like making a collage.

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