

Art

The background of the cover is a photograph of a person in silhouette, holding a large, glowing, spherical object. The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the orb, which casts a soft glow on the person's face and hands. There are other similar glowing spheres visible in the background, suggesting a gallery or performance space.

MONTHLY

DECEMBER-JANUARY 2018-19 | No 422 | £5.50 €8 \$9

Dara Birnbaum

Interviewed by Maria Walsh

Dematerialised and Dark

Francis Frascina

Deep Time

Rob La Frenais

Bow Gamelan

Morgan Quaintance

their walls and among their constituencies? One way to start is to animate exhibitions with a multiplicity of voices and to foster spaces for listening. As part of 'Still I Rise', Nottingham Contemporary will hold 'Who Would Be Free Themselves Must Strike the Blow', a two-day gathering in January at which themes of resistance, gender abolition and feminism will be explored through workshops, performances and listening sessions. The museum will provide food and childcare. This gathering will no doubt be a central element of 'Still I Rise', enabling participants to find new words and create new methods, and moving the project from the realm of aesthetics into the arena of ethics.

A new iteration of 'Still I Rise' travels to De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, 9 February to 2 June.

Ellen Mara De Wachter is based in London and author of *CoArt: Artists on Creative Collaboration*, 2017.

Bow Gamelan Ensemble: Great Noises that Fill the Air

Cooper Gallery Dundee

27 October to 15 December

From free festivals to informal commerce, diverse social interactions and the colourful behaviour of what Jane Jacobs called 'public characters', the health of a city is measured in the variance and dynamism of its streetlife. Distinct from the sanitised civic ideal espoused by the likes of US conservative politician Rudy Giuliani, it is the fertile and very public chaos of the metropolis that produces vitality, fosters creativity and gives rise to neighbourhoods that police themselves. But as urban development for the wealthy transforms cities worldwide, the variance of life's rich pageant is being replaced with a bland existential uniformity facilitating one thing only: consumption.

It is the same with contemporary art. The sector is almost entirely captured by private finance, while the production, display and evaluation of art is awash with conservative conformity or outmoded 'transgression'. But it wasn't always so. 'Great Noises that Fill the Air', the arresting retrospective of artist and experimental music collective Bow Gamelan Ensemble (BGE), arrives like a rousing dispatch from another time. There was a period in which the city and the sector were rough and ready places, locations where three artists could erect, play and set off vast constructions of scrap metal, glass and pyrotechnics, and audiences were willing to stand in the wind, rain and cold to see it.

Displayed across the stairwells, galleries and transitional spaces of Dundee's Cooper Gallery, the exhibition eschews the trappings of a document-heavy, traditional retrospective. Though a conventional chronological hang could easily begin with profiles of BGE's well-known members – performance artist Anne Bean (Interview AM398), sculptor Richard Wilson and musician Paul Burwell – 'Great Noises' opts for an immersive mix of video, kinetic sculpture and *More Bang for Your Buck*, 2018, an installation of the group's self-made instruments left over from their opening night performance. I arrived that evening just as

the final peals of *Nalemag 2*, 2018 – a newly composed and choreographed piece played by Bean, Wilson and six students enlisted from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design – were ringing out. I spoke to two students afterwards, Calum Ingram and Conor Gray, who described participating in the work as 'the best thing [they'd] ever done'. Their wide-eyed wonder and enthusiasm was mirrored in the faces of audience members left dazed and praising BGE's 'thrilling' mix of sound and light. 'Did you hear the sound they got by firing those blow torches through the tubes?' a man exclaimed to a friend, 'it sounded like the beginning of the world.'

Between Cooper Gallery's first and second level is a large floor-to-ceiling video projection of past BGE performances. Clips of Bean, Wilson and Burwell emerging from billows of smoke, setting off fireworks, banging metal drums filled with fire and navigating huge modular structures of their instruments fill the unlit stairwell with flashes of light. They create a strobing effect reminiscent of the darkened BGE performances that are usually punctuated by luminous eruptions of cascading sparks, flying rockets or naked flames. Amidst a dispersed array of monitors on the second floor is an emotive video by Bean, an affecting meditation on collaboration and collectivity that had its debut at Cooper in 2010. Also shown as part of a three-day exhibition that year at Matt's Gallery commemorating the death of Paul Burwell (1949-2007 – Obituary AM304), *Self Portrait. Who Of?*, 2010, is a montage of archival and recent footage of Burwell and Bean, edited together so that the two are engaged in a kind of dialogue across time.

In interpretative and critical texts written on BGE, the search for art-historical antecedents usually reaches back to Russian composer Arseny Avraamov's 'Symphony of Sirens' or to Luigi Russolo – in-house musicologist for the proto-fascist Italian Futurists and author of *The Art of Noises*. BGE's use of unpitched non-traditional instruments and performances in civic open air spaces like Rainham in east London naturally lend themselves to comparisons with the aforementioned pair. In their newly commissioned kinetic sound and light installation *Bow Lines*, 2018, one of the many music-stand-like constructions featuring archival photographs, documents and cassette tapes collected since the group's inception in 1983 carries images of Avraamov's performance and Russolo among his 'Intonarumori' noise instruments. However, a more apt precursor would be the work and instrument construction of Harry Partch, an American composer with a distinctly progressive, anti-establishment approach to music, tuning, performance and collaboration. It is, after all, the countercultural possibilities of BGE's work that offer a vital alternative to our standardised present.

Commentators generally assign music a distinctly democratic participatory status apart from all other art forms, crediting the existence of some innate prelinguistic understanding of it with the supposed ease of its reception. Appreciation and critical appraisal of sound is said to be 'natural', automatic and instinctually enacted by everyone. The reality is this pseudo universality has developed over time as a result of the sheer uniformity of popular music. For at least the past hundred years human beings have largely been listening to the same lyrical themes, the same melodic and harmonic structures and the exact same time signature of 4/4 rhythm, over and over again. The work of



Anne Bean and Richard Wilson during the performance of *Nalemag 2* by WOB and student performers from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art of Design, at the preview of 'Great Noises that Fill the Air' at Cooper Gallery

BGE, in all its atemporal, arhythmic, atonal glory exists as a challenge to such compositional standardisation, and to the regulation of bodies in urban spaces soundtracked and animated by the chrononormativity of 4/4 music. 'Great Noises that Fill the Air', then, is a comprehensive and engrossing retrospective of not only a unique artist collective, but of a city and a set of attitudes that have virtually disappeared. How did we let that transformation happen? The question rang like a struck bell in my mind as I walked slowly through Cooper's interior. It echoed out and into the streets of Dundee, lined with the same chain stores homogenising every regional city in the UK. It echoed through the streets of central London when I returned to a West End of tourists, floating Yodas and cold-shouldered street homeless. And it continues to echo through the deathly galleries and institutions shamelessly presenting hierarchy, exclusivity and conservatism as culture in the UK's capital. 'Great Noises' reminds that an alternative is always within reach. All we have to do is seize it. ■

Morgan Quaintance is an artist and writer.

Judson Dance Theatre: The Work Is Never Done

MoMA New York 16 September to 3 February

In 2016 the Museum of Modern Art in New York acquired Simone Forti's 'Dance Constructions', 1960-61, a set of works that require the performers to form bodily architectural support structures. Forti choreographed the 'Dance Constructions' during her time living in New York, where she took part in Robert Ellis Dunn's improvisation classes alongside Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer (Interview AM379). Premiered at Yoko Ono's loft in 1961, Paxton and Rainer have frequently cited the 'Dance Constructions' as the impetus for their formation of the Judson Dance Theatre. The Judson eventually defined itself as a collection of avant-garde dancers, composers, choreographers and visual artists who rejected the tropes and styles of modernist performance and through their experimentation set the precedent for postmodern dance. Their work with the body and performance was a physical imagining and enaction of difference.

At the Dancespace Project events held to commemorate MoMA's purchase of Forti's work, questions from the

audience about the legitimacy and practicalities of the acquisitions were met by MoMA curators Thomas Lax, Ana Janevski and Stuart Comer with a strong assertion that MoMA's purchases signalled a rethinking of how to care for and display dance and performance within institutions. The 'Judson Dance Theatre: The Work Is Never Done' exhibition is the product of this labour.

'The Work Is Never Done' is divided into two main formats, three modest galleries of archival and documentary work and a performance programme in MoMA's main atrium. The atrium performances happen almost daily and the 'Dance Constructions' are performed several times a week on the second floor. It is a generous work of programming. Rainer, Deborah Hay, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Paxton, the Trisha Brown Company and Movement Research all have over a week each to rehearse and perform in public, admission priced at \$25.

As a local hero, Rainer's premiere week was packed, and it charmed, particularly as she joined in and failed to keep up with her dancers. Gordon's inclusion of himself as an orator and director in *The Matter*, his work choreographed from the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, was confrontational and beautiful. The programming maintains its pace until the close of the exhibition and in doing so eschews the commonplace centre/periphery relationship to exhibition and event. Because of the number of dancers it is also an extremely expensive exhibition to put on. Anecdotally, it has been said that it is the most expensive show, of its relatively modest size, that MoMA has recently undertaken and is unable to travel for lack of a partner institution willing to pay for a show with a comparatively low footfall but high overheads. The New York character of this exhibition may be justification for the expense as well as MoMA's ability to take cultural ownership of the dance culture of the 1960s as its participants reach their 80s and 90s.

The earliest, most complete history of the Judson is Sally Bane's book *Democracy's Body* from 1983. Bane's tastes and preferences for certain performers and styles of movement had come to overwrite much of the subsequent scholarship on the Judson. In the past decade this has started to change but Bane's history, coupled with the proliferation of specific images – largely of Rainer, Paxton and Brown – has meant that the Judson was largely presented and received as a homogeneous scene dominated by white dancers making work that utilised quotidian movement. For many, the Warner Jepson



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ISSN 0142 6702
Art Monthly is published
10 times a year

Subscriptions

subs@artmonthly.co.uk
Current rates online – digital
subscriptions start at £8.
Call or email with payment
details, or buy online.
www.artmonthly.co.uk/buy

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