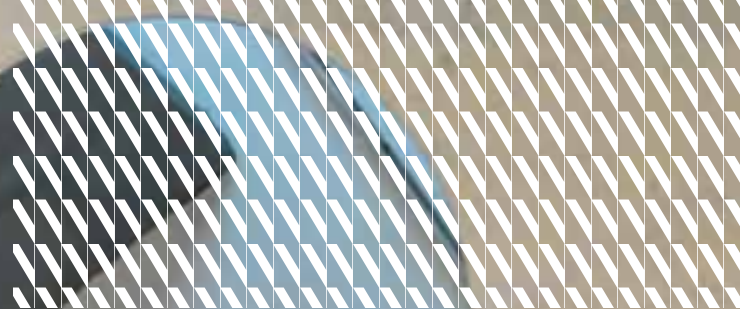


# KINO

AUTUMN 2011



KINOKINO CENTRE FOR ART AND FILM

03.09 - 06.11 2011

# THE EDGE OF REASON



**PUBLISHER**  
KINOKINO Centre for Art and Film

**LAYOUT**  
KINOKINO Centre for Art and Film

**PRINTING**  
Kai Hansen Trykkeri AS

**FRONT PAGE PHOTO**  
Karen Russo, *Meditations on a Triangle*, 2010. Detail - Jeremy Millar  
*Meccamputechture*.

**THANKS**  
We would like to thank all the artists for contributing their work for this exhibition, and also extend our gratitude to The Hilma af Klint Foundation.

We thank the Arts Council Norway and The Fritt Ord Foundation for their financial support towards the exhibition and seminar.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the curators Sidsel Christensen and Ben Judd for doing an excellent job on the exhibition and catalogue.

Thanks also to Susanne Christensen and Pandora Syperek for valuable assistance, and Outset for supporting Karen Russo's *Meditations on a Triangle*.

## CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	P. 4
HEARING VOICES, SEEING VISIONS, curators' text	P. 6
THE OPPOSITE OF CERTAINTY by Dan Smith	P. 12
I'M A BELIEVER by Ronald Jones and Liv Stoltz	P. 16
A VIEW FROM WITHIN by Ingunn Sira Myhre	P. 24
NEPTUNE'S EPISTEMIC SHIFT by Jennifer Fisher	P. 28
<b>EXHIBITION ARTISTS</b>	P. 33
Sidsel Christensen	P. 34
Susan Hiller	P. 36
Ben Judd	P. 37
Hilma af Klint	P. 38
Susan MacWilliam	P. 40
Oscar Muñoz	P. 43
Karen Russo (with Jeremy Millar, Shezad Dawood, Mark Titchner)	P. 44
	P. 45
<b>SCREENING ARTISTS</b>	P. 49
Marcus Coates	P. 50
Maya Deren	P. 51
George Gurdjieff	P. 52
Jane and Louise Wilson	P. 53

The Edge of Reason, curated by Norwegian and London-based artists Sidsel Christensen and Ben Judd, explores notions of authenticity and belief, by inviting the viewer to have a first-hand experience of a world beyond the senses.

# THE EDGE OF REASON

Characteristic of modern occultism is its dependence on natural science: the conviction that new knowledge is generated primarily through the results achieved in experiments and tests – in short, scientific procedures. Here occultism reveals itself to be a founding of a rationalist modernity fervently believing in progress. This self-understanding as a ‘secret science’ explains the numerous [...] fascinating attempts to lend aesthetic expression to the intangible. (1)

BY SIDSEL CHRISTENSEN AND BEN JUDD  
SEPTEMBER 2011

Christensen and Judd have invited artists whose work helps to trace a historical overlapping in the development of the empirical and scientific with the irrational and mystical. The artists in *The Edge of Reason* present a duality of experience, by moving in-between a sceptical enquiry and a more internalised visionary engagement to explore the unknown.

*The Edge of Reason*, then, is an attempt to describe the invisible. Via a supposedly rational system of understanding, the viewer is allowed to have an experience with the authority of authenticity; however the nature of this experience isn’t quantified or defined. It is still up to the viewer to decide, or allow, it to happen.

The historical and contemporary artworks included draw on traditions of expressing the immaterial through abstraction, symbolism and other forms of representation. But the works also still exist in an open space that is yet to be fully explored or described, holding the potential of becoming more than illustration, but a space of direct experience and transformation. Perhaps in a state of doubt, the viewer is left hovering between different positions, of scepticism and belief, comprehension and confusion, both immersed in a new experience, and also cautious about its validity.

1) Claudia Dichter et al., eds., *The Message: Art and Occultism* (Cologne, Walter König, 2007), pp. 164-165



Susan MacWilliam, *After Image* (2002)

# HEARING VOICES, SEEING VISIONS

*The Edge of Reason* has provided a fruitful opportunity for us as curators and artists to consider different approaches to exploring doubt and curiosity when engaged in both conscious and unconscious ways of looking.

BY SIDSEL CHRISTENSEN AND BEN JUDD  
SEPTEMBER 2011

The works in the exhibition, both contemporary and from the early twentieth century, address how we might respond to that which is just outside our field of vision or understanding.

One example of this tendency is Susan Hiller's *Magic Lantern* (1987). The work requires the viewer to sit in a darkened room where circles of overlapping coloured light are projected onto the wall. At the same time we listen to examples of electronic voice phenomena (voices of the dead) recorded by the Latvian parapsychologist Konstantin Raudive in empty, silent rooms. The quasi-scientific associations of the visuals, which suggest Venn diagrams and induce retinal afterimages, seem to mirror the aural shape shifting that we hear. We are

asked to be rational and systematic, and at the same time we cannot help but respond intuitively to the simple beauty of the projection and the mesmerising quality of the voices. Carefully orchestrated in its interplay between language, sound and visual spectacle, the work enacts a subtle play with our various faculties of perception. As Hiller states in an invitation to engage with her work:

I hope that you will all join the visionaries and enjoy your innate capacities to imagine, project, hallucinate and dream while fully awake, and at the same time, retain all your self awareness, your consciousness and your critical ability. (1)

The artists in *The Edge of Reason* take their cues, with varying degrees of purposefulness, from this conflation of the empirical with the unseen or abstract. Like the model of participant-observation regularly deployed by anthropolo-

gists since the first half of the twentieth century, here we see approaches that combine direct first-hand experience with a more objective, rational stance. As an audience, we can slip in and out of both states, from the immersive to a more critical distance, or simply hover on the threshold, in a state of flux.

In a related exploration of the invisible through scientific method, Susan MacWilliam's video *After Image* (2002) examines the myth that the last image seen by a person before death is retained on the retina. Called an optogram, the art of photographing such an image through optography was developed out of experiments in scientific imaging carried out in Germany during the 1870s.

## EXPLORING THE UNKNOWN

Oscar Muñoz's *Aliento* (Breath) (1996-2002) invites the viewer to experience a

Oscar Muñoz,  
*Aliento* (Breath)  
(1996-2002). The  
work invites the  
viewer to breathe  
onto polished  
steel mirrors.



similar duality of the transience of vision and its attempted capture via mechanical representation, by breathing onto polished steel mirrors. As the condensation of the viewer's breath obliterates their own reflection, photographic portraits appear in their place. These images, taken from newspaper obituaries of the deceased, in turn disappear as the condensation evaporates, and so on in a potentially endless cycle of the rational, the ephemeral and the hallucinatory.

In these cases, the artist, and perhaps in turn the viewer, adopts the role of the mystic or the seer: a romantic position that allows him or her to occupy grey areas, to raise doubt, to see visions that are normally unseen. This process requires the viewer to enter a realm stretching beyond common understanding, and to engage in a systematic mapping of the unknown. Historical

examples, from the Catholic ritual of transubstantiation to medieval alchemy or the rationalisation of the supernatural with new technologies in the nineteenth century, (2) point less to a division between the logical and the intuitive, and more to an overlapping of our methods of understanding. Investigation of the unknown, after all, is not necessarily a reaction against reason, but is integral to scientific methodology and the notion of progress. In this exhibition, we are interested in the playful exploration of experiences beyond the known and rational, and how an expanded sense of perception through various methods may allow us to see the invisible.

## TRUTH AND BELIEF

A useful illustration of these ideas lies in the parallel between the process of making and viewing art and that of

various occult practices, as famously examined by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (3), and more recently by writers such as Boris Groys (4). Art and the process of exploring the inexplicable (as in certain occult practices such as Spiritualism) are similarly bound in seemingly never-ending quests to uncover 'truths', both operating in an intriguingly murky place, a grey area where nothing can ever be fully resolved or proven. Correspondingly, the making and viewing of art could be seen as a magical one, in which objects, images and ideas become transformed in some way, largely through the mutual belief of the artist and viewer.

Both processes require a level of immersion, a dualistic state of mind that necessitates a leap of faith. Within this mindset, the properties of objects and images shift before our eyes, and we are required to enter a world that, from an

IN THIS EXHIBITION WE ARE INTERESTED IN A PLAYFUL EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES BEYOND REASON, AND HOW AN EXPANDED SENSE OF PERCEPTION MAY ALLOW US TO SEE THE INVISIBLE.



Sidsel Christensen and Ben Judd, *Conversation with the other side. Session 09*, (2009).

objective stance, does not exist. In both art and religious or occult belief systems, the participator is required, in order to benefit from the experience, to authentically believe in this transformative process. In relation to this transformation, Groys suggests,

*[T]he threshold between art and reality is given a purely spiritual interpretation: it is defined by the individual's inner, purely mental decision to see things differently: it acquires mythical dimensions. Crossing it begins to resemble a religious conversion, an inner enlightenment that allows us to see the familiar from a new angle and to contemplate what is hidden below surfaces. (5)*

We believe, yet with one foot still firmly on the ground. The description of the other world that we are required to enter ultimately requires a comparison with this world; it can only make sense when described using a familiar language. Thoughts and feelings have to be represented by using the symbols of the here and now.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The artworks in *The Edge of Reason* address an inherent paradox, by using systematic, empirical methods to explore what cannot be seen, weighed or measured. A way to understand this fusion, and potential confusion, of ideas, is to see the work in its historical context. In this light, the work appears to be a product of modernism, a project that is normally associated with the ideal of rational progress as driving the currents of formal innovation through the avant-garde. But a deeper understanding reveals a cultural field infused with paradox, where irrationality is interwoven with Enlightenment thought, against a

backdrop of 'visions, phantasy, passion, child's play, ecstasy, language beside itself'. (6)

The secularisation and breakdown of traditional institutions (that emerged with the radical transformation brought about by the industrial revolution and scientific innovations) coincided with art's increasingly prevalent role in society within late-nineteenth-century modernity. Reacting against such perceived crises in society, some artists looked back to a pre-modern way of experiencing the world and explored immaterial experiences. Beginning with the Symbolist movement in the later nineteenth century, and followed by early-twentieth-century abstraction and Surrealism, with varying formal and stylistic methods, certain artist groups prioritised the invisible, the unconscious, the irrational and the visionary.

As established religions declined, new interests in alternative independent spiritual movements arose among artists in the early twentieth century: Theosophical and Anthroposophical societies and various Spiritualist movements, all drawing from a mixture of ancient mysticism, Gnostic and eastern religious texts and occult beliefs relating to Hebrew and Christian scriptures. There was also much interest around the mystical or visionary writings of Jakob Böhme, Emanuel Swedenborg, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Charles Baudelaire and P.D. Ouspensky.

The notion of correspondences, in which everything on earth mirrors the heavens and the two worlds consequently collapse into one, which emerged via the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and mystic Swedenborg and sub-

sequently Baudelaire (7), was furthered by the latter's fellow Symbolists. The loose international group of writers and artists suggested that everything had a symbolic value, which did not function in the mere form of metaphors but instead had the potential to alter states of mind. Their work was not so much intended to be *read as* to be *experienced*, using a more fundamental, primary system of understanding.

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE ARTWORK

Ben Judd's video of the performance *Concerning the Difference Between the Delights of Pleasure and True Happiness* (2010) enacts the coming together of the visionary or hallucinatory and a physical reality. Taking place in the Swedenborg Society in London, performers, embedded in the audience in a séance-like arrangement, use text from the mystic's prose in an increasingly ecstatic cycle of spoken and sung phrases. Swedenborg's (often outlandish) descriptions of his encounters with the spirit world are mediated through his earlier incarnation as a scientist. Otherworldly experiences, for example of a spirit existing in his foot, are therefore brought back down to the here and now, and are in turn physically relayed by the performers.

Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky are historical artists who drew heavily on related spiritual movements and writers (Mondrian was a member of the Theosophical Society) and the artists' study aided their move from representation to abstraction, from depicting the physical world to describing an invisible world of vibrations, movements and sounds. The painters believed that the abstract colours and forms, more



Karen Russo, stills from *Meditations on a Triangle* (2010). The work explores the application of remote viewing - the apparent psychic ability to see and describe remote geographical locations, or 'targets'.

than simply triggering an interpretive or emotional response in the viewer, would provide a portal for the artist to reach a higher level of consciousness. By transferring this experience onto canvas, artists such as Mondrian and Kandinsky hoped that viewers of their work would also experience a similar transcendence. As fantastical as they seem, these ideas are laid out clearly and methodically in Kandinsky's writing in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1914), and in numerous letters that Mondrian wrote around the time of his move to abstraction. (8)

Sidsel Christensen's dual video installation *The Curvature Singularity of Erin Hunter* (2010) investigates the immersive possibilities of sound, light and colour, within contemporary nightclub spaces. The work is part of a series of video portraits of young women in the East London club scene, revealing the latent desires or dreams of female characters as they move through and experience the space, interacting with the lights and music. Christensen employs documen-

tary film devices to frame her narratives in order to embody an affect somewhere between the journalistic and the shamanistic. As the women internalise the experience of the space, the club lights become colours and shapes that flatten the images in composition. This effect works in subtle relation to the concerns of abstract painters such as Kandinsky, who spoke of an 'inner necessity' of the spiritual experience expressed through an outer semblance.

A historical artist in *The Edge of Reason* who exemplifies an expanded investigation of the spiritual through abstraction is Hilma af Klint (1862-1944). A Swedish painter also working as a medium, af Klint claimed she received guidance from spirits to produce paintings 'on an astral level'. Her extraordinary geometric compositions were in many ways a precursor to the abstract paintings of Mondrian, Kandinsky, Frantisek Kupka and Kazimir Malevich, all of whom similarly believed, via the tenets of Symbolism and Theosophy, that

they not only received instruction from elsewhere, but that their art 'could provide a transition to the finer regions ... the spiritual realm'. An intriguing aspect of af Klint's production is its methodical organisation: her entire project was pre-planned in a systematic series. At times she worked more like a researcher than a painter, positioning herself as a 'receiver', and noting down as accurately as possible what was transmitted, supposedly for the benefit of future generations.

Karen Russo's contribution to the exhibition, *Meditations on a Triangle* (2010) expands on this approach by exploring the application of remote viewing - the apparent psychic ability to see and describe remote geographical locations, or 'targets', including outer space. The video work centres around an attempt by a remote viewer to psychically access an undisclosed target using only a set of coordinates as a reference. These coordinates are given to him by a monitor presiding over the viewing session, and a printed image of the target - the

painting *Variation in the Triangle* (1927) by Kandinsky - remains hidden in a sealed envelope nearby, to be revealed at the session's end. During the event, the remote viewer's impressions were documented and then delivered to three artists whose different practices address questions of religion and spirituality, parapsychology and mysticism and their relation to modernism. Russo asked these artists to create new works based on the visual descriptions provided or respond to the process.

*The Edge of Reason* in part explores this question of an artwork's origin. We may experience a voice that comes from a source other than the artist; indeed the origin of the work appears to lie elsewhere. This idea of displaced voice does not necessarily remove the authorship from the work in a direct extension of

Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author*. Instead a network of voices, connections and correspondences seem to emerge. Perhaps we can look as far back as the Ancient Greeks and their notion that the idea for an artwork came from somewhere separate from the artist, who functioned as a medium for divine messages. Correspondingly, the Surrealists used dream diaries, automatic writing, found poetry and Ouija boards to explore alternative and perhaps more authentic sources of inspiration.

The authors' collaborative contribution to the exhibition, the ongoing performance *Conversations with the Other Side*, likewise sets up a dialogue between different positions in space and between various and unknown subjects. Staged in front of a live audience, the event begins with an attempt to forge a link between

two spaces, the gallery where the performance takes place and a space on the 'other side', experienced by one of us who has been put into a hypnotic trance. As this other world and its inhabitants are being described, we attempt to convey what is being seen, as well as spatial experiences, to the audience. A chain of consciousness runs between us, the 'other side' and the audience; our role can be seen as facilitators and mediums for the conversations, raising questions of authorship and authenticity.

*The Edge of Reason* weaves together different voices, inviting the audience to negotiate experiences often just beyond the rational. Ultimately, the work can be seen to exist in the imaginary space in between all involved, including the audience.

1) Susan Hiller, *The Provisional Texture of Reality: Selected Talks and Texts, 1977-2007* (Zürich, JRP Ringier, 2008), p. 29.

2) See John Harvey, *Photography and Spirit* (London, Reaktion, 2007). Harvey writes: 'Radio waves in 1864 and the phonograph had respectively conveyed and recorded a disembodied human voice [...] in 1877, and proved that voices could be heard after our death. Furthermore, in 1893 telephony, radio broadcast and wireless communication demonstrated that sound could cross great distances upon the air (like spirit voices through the ether). [...Telegraphy] became a popular analogy for telepathy'. Harvey, pp. 70-71.

3) 'In only a single field of our civilisation has the omnipotence of thought been retained, and that is the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects - thanks to artistic illusion - just as though it were something real. People speak with justice of the "magic of art" and compare artists to magicians. But the comparison is perhaps more significant than it claims to be. There can be no doubt that art did not begin for art's sake'. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*

(London, Routledge, 1975), p. 90.

4) Boris Groys, 'Simulated Readymades', in *Fischli Weiss: Flowers and Questions*, ed. Bice Curiger (London, Tate, 2007).

5) *Ibid.*, p. 15.

6) Jean Fisher, 'Truth's Shadows', in *Dream Machines*, ed. Susan Hiller (London, Hayward Gallery, 2000), p. 5. Fisher suggests, 'Among the paradoxical legacies of the Enlightenment rationality has been the failure of its grand narratives [...] [T]he rationalist and pragmatic ordering of the world devalued "other" knowledge and experiences, including the status of phantasy - dream and reverie - and occult practices as a form of knowledge. Thus, for almost 300 years we have been conditioned to discard as "shameful" a significant part of what constitutes human experience...'

7) See Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* (1758) for an elaborate explanation of his notion of correspondences, in which, for example, he suggests that heaven is physically formed into the shape of a man. 'The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, not only the natural world in general but also in every particular. Therefore, whatever in the natural world comes into existence from the spiritual world is said to be in correspondence with. It

must be known that the natural world comes into existence and continues in existence from the spiritual world, precisely like an effect from its effecting cause'. *Heaven and Hell* (London, The Swedenborg Society, 1958), no. 89. Also see Baudelaire's poem 'Correspondences' (1857), directly influenced by Swedenborg, and which developed his theory of synaesthesia, in *The Flowers of Evil* (Oxford, OUP, 1993).

8) See Carel Blotkamp, 'Annunciation Of The New Mysticism: Dutch Symbolism and Early Abstraction', in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman (New York, Abbeville, 1995), Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York, Dover Publications, 1977) and Katinka Hesselink, *The Web of Creation: Theosophy and Art, from Louwriks to Mondrian* (Amsterdam, SUN, 2006).

9) Claudia Dichter et al., eds., *The Message: Art and Occultism* (Cologne, Walter König, 2007), p. 156.

10) Piet Mondrian, quoted by Hesselink, *Art and Theosophy* (www.katinkahesselink.net).

11) Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London, Fontana, 1993).

# THE OPPOSITE OF CERTAINTY

The artists in *The Edge of Reason* are connected in their attraction to the realms of the esoteric as spaces of fascination and curiosity. It is perhaps of more importance that they approach these liminal territories, situated between certainty and the unknowable, from paths that owe much to anthropological methods of observation and interpretation.

BY DAN SMITH

The idea of witnessing is explored but destabilised. In particular there is a recognition that such processes are not purely neutral, rational and objective, but are bound to histories of the occult, the spiritual, invisible forces and the paranormal. It is clear that what is framed here by curatorial process is a combination of curiosity and a sustained, critical engagement with the objects of curiosity. At stake is the qualitative understanding of modernity as both historical form and present moment. These artists evince that there is more to modernity than the supposedly rational forces that neoliberal ideologues would have us depend upon, or even believe in. The very idea of belief is itself a prevalent yet generally

unexamined assumption, contradictory yet hard to avoid, even amongst those arch rationalists who chose to take the very concept of belief as evidence of incorrect thought.

In contrast, it seems as if there is a tendency in recent art to be drawn towards the appeal of counter narratives and uncertainty. Here can be found a resonant dissatisfaction with the dominant, albeit conflicting, ideologies of modernity. These artists, some of whom are brought together in *The Edge of Reason*, recognise conflict and tension, those things that ideologies seek to eradicate. When properly illuminated by perceptive scrutiny, structures of technology, knowledge and aesthetics are all revealed as imbued with forces that are irrational. Science is haunted by magic.

Institutional frameworks of modernity contain obscure histories, forgotten figures and knowledges. Lurking here is an inherent suspicion of modernity, its configurations and representations. However, there is another layer of doubt uncovered by the interest in this terrain, concerning belief itself. The interest in belief demonstrated by contemporary artists is generally approached from positions of atheism and materialist scepticism. Artists may be interested in the visionary, but unlike Hilma af Klint, they have to make do with the gap between interest and being. Contemporary practitioners cannot situate themselves in the tradition of Samuel Palmer, or his hero, William Blake, artists who were driven by radical faith, by a belief that the everyday was the creation of the Christian God

and was saturated by the presence of heaven. Yet how much of being a visionary is performative? If you pretend hard enough, does it not become who you are? Ben Judd and Sidsel Christensen seem to be particularly engaged with this idea in their work and the curatorial outline of *The Edge of Reason*.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF EXPERIENCE

The visionary may be extinct, but need not be viewed with nostalgia or longing. It is a figure that can be thought about within the context of a specific critique of modernity. For the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, modernity is synonymous with the destruction of experience. Agamben views modernity in terms of crisis. It is a perpetual, ongoing and accelerating crisis, beset with hysteria and panic. His view of the present can be thought of as placed within an established and ongoing tradition of reflecting upon the transformation of subjectivity. This particular quality of modernity is addressed in Agamben's book *Infancy and History*, in which he is seeking to describe the groundlessness of everyday life, which he puts to the reader in the following way. Making their way home from work, the individual living in a Western, postindustrial society, has been 'wearied by a jumble of events but however entertaining or tedious, unusual or commonplace, harrowing or pleasurable they are, none of them will have become experience'. (1) Agamben is exceedingly prescient, writing in the late 1970s about conditions that seem to proliferate and multiply today. He writes that when visiting the museum or place of touristic pilgrimage, the great majority of people have no wish to experience it, but prefer the camera to document on their behalf. Yet this is not purely a

negative description of a troubling set of conditions. Agamben suggests that we take note of this, rather than deplore it, as it may demonstrate forms of future experience. The apparent emptiness of language, and the groundlessness described, presents not only a question, but an expectation from the reader or viewer, a demand that both representation and social/political forms must be reimagined.

Yet this loss is not a straightforward issue of technology, mediation and alienation. Nor is it new. He tells us the last European work to be based upon integrated experience is by Michel de Montaigne. Agamben refers to Montaigne's *Essays*, a work that first saw print in 1580. In Montaigne's critique of the stability or verifiability of certainty, experience and certainty are rendered as incompatible. When scientific law dictates, there is no room for stories. Montaigne himself provides an eloquent summary of this emerging crisis. His essay 'On the Cannibals' opens with a beautiful reflection on changing landscape and geology on a local scale, observable over a short period of time, in relation to the effort to understand the separation of lands, such as that of the New World from Europe. He then says:

*- I wish everyone would only write about what he knows - not in this matter only but in all others. A man may well have detailed knowledge or experience of the nature of one river or stream, yet about all the others he knows only what everyone else does; but in order to trot out this little scrap of knowledge he will write a book on the whole of physics! From this vice many great inconveniences arise.* (2)

Instead of trusting in lived wisdom, abstract principles of knowledge displace experience. There is no constancy in subjects or objects for Montaigne.

We cannot know them or ourselves for certain. This lack of certainty, and the questioning of the value of the witness, illuminates the territory identified by Christensen and Judd.

## EXPERIENCE AND MODERN SCIENCE

The historical movement here is the intersecting of the death of experience with the birth of modern science. Modern science originates in an unprecedented mistrust of experience. The experiment displaces experiences as far as possible from the individual. Observations are transformed as quantitative and exact. Traditional experience is devalued. This separation of science from experience is, according to Agamben, invisible to us. Prior to the birth of modern science, he argues that knowledge and experience were distinct, each connected to different fields. Experience was connected to a feeling of judgement and common sense, whereas science could be found in the active intellect. This was actually separated into categories of human knowledge (experience) and divine knowledge (science). Modern science is distinct from this. Experience becomes verified through science in a search for absolute certainty. The great revolution in modern science was the destruction of experience as separate, making experience and knowledge the same. The place they come together is in the cogito, Descartes' model of consciousness itself. While for Montaigne, on the other hand, traditional experience is that which is separated from divine knowledge.

Experience is separated from science, human knowledge from divine knowledge. Traditional experience is the boundary between them. Agamben's reading of Montaigne is that true experience is closeness to death. Death



Jane and Louise Wilson, Stills from *Routes 1&9 North*, (1994)



is the limit of experience; maturity is the awareness of the closeness to this boundary and the anticipation of death. Science and death, those forms of absolute certainty, are, I would like to suggest, reconfigured in this line of thinking, as historically contingent, and as spaces of as yet unrealised possibilities for alternatives. If science and experience are essentially incompatible, then what does art that addresses this kind of liminal uncertainty offer? It is an engagement with the irrational that does not negate science or verification, but complicates it, and returns it to some form of what we might call an experiential encounter. It may not be a return to lost experience, but might suggest how artworks, particularly in certain configurations, offer forms that are distinct from the non-experience of the everyday or the normative. It might be that artists offer a reconfiguration of experience as opposed to Agamben's account of its destruction at the hands of certainty.

#### RATIONALITY AS MYTH

It is important to acknowledge that these artists share with Agamben an interest in uncertainty that goes beyond either nostalgia or exoticism. But it is equally important to recognise that these impulses, like the desire for escape, should not be dismissed. Rather they need to be embraced and recovered as substantial and critical forces in disrupting normative assumptions and behaviour. Rationality is a myth. It is presented as both autonomous and the guarantor of truth. But this is always a position that is ultimately determined by ideology. When there is so little variety of ideology, exploring what might lie outside of the rational and certain is invested with political agency and possibility.

For Agamben it is the shift towards the everyday, not the unusual, that

determines and defines the destruction of experience. It makes all else, like the tales of travellers in distant lands, seem unreliable. The true sense of the fantastic, by the nineteenth century, had been neutralised. Instead of retaining a sense of wonder, a medieval bestiary could only demonstrate that the unusual cannot be translated into lived experience. Experience is not correlated by knowledge but by authority, by words and narration. In our modernity there is an absence of those who wield this authority, who would be able to guarantee experience. Authority in our time is, for Agamben, founded on what cannot be experienced. Authority cannot be granted based purely on experience. The maxim and the proverb thus are displaced and lose their status, replaced by the slogan. If the maxim and proverb were the forms that experience took as authority, then the slogan is the proverb for a population to whom experience has been lost. So where are experiences now? Can we ask where they have gone? Agamben suggests that they have migrated outside of individuals, to be enacted outside of any subject or person. They are observed, as in his example of the museum and the place of touristic pilgrimage, where the majority of visitors have no wish to experience it, preferring that the camera does instead. Yet this should not be the cause of despair or lamentation. The remains of experience are imprinted into technological media, and found in embodied practices. Agamben encourages us to look for grains of reason here, to identify seeds that might germinate into what is to come.

1) Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (Verso, London, 2007), p. 16.

2) Michel de Montaigne, *Four Essays* (Penguin, London, 1993), p. 7.

#### DAN SMITH

Dan Smith is a writer, and currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art Theory at Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London. He is the author of *Traces of Modernity*, soon to be published by Zero Books, and is currently working on a book exploring relationships between contemporary art and theoretical re-readings of utopian thought. He is the editor of the online publication *Altertopian.com*, and posts writing on the blog *utopianimpulse.blogspot.com*.



# I'm a Believer

## What happens when an artist is invited to speak from the other side?

Refusal to believe until proof is given is a rational position; denial of all outside of our own limited experience is absurd. 1)  
Annie Besant

BY RONALD JONES AND LIV STOLTZ

On 15 July 2011 Liv Stoltz and Ronald Jones participated in a séance led by the spiritualist medium Vendela Cederholm with the hope of contacting Hilma af Klint. After a few moments of quiet meditation, af Klint came forward to Cederholm from the spirit world, and the séance began. Lasting nearly three hours, Stoltz and Jones addressed direct questions to af Klint as the medium channelled her answers.

Setting aside whatever skepticism they might have held, Stoltz and Jones earnestly opened the door to the spirit world af Klint so passionately believed in, and invited her to speak for herself. They were naturally curious to see what might happen, but were certain that calling on af Klint directly was demonstrably the most meaningful way to contribute to *The Edge of Reason*.

Writing in *frieze* magazine Stoltz and Jones summarised af Klint's life as a clairvoyant and her relationship to spirituality:

*Af Klint was an old-school spiritualist who believed that she channelled psychic and esoteric messages from the so-called High Masters – who existed in another dimension – into abstract paintings. Between 1906 and 1915 she completed Paintings for the Temple (182 paintings divided into a number of different series) in which she sought to represent the path*

*towards the reconciliation of spirituality with the material world, along with other dualities: faith and science, men and women, good and evil. She used séances to make contact with 'the other side', and saw her paintings and drawings as symbolizing, if not inspiring, the cosmic equilibrium the High Masters told her to seek. 2)*

For the greater part of her career af Klint worked in secret, unless she was meeting with a group of friends, all women, who called themselves The Five or The Friday Group. In séances The Five communicated directly with the High Masters. Although af Klint was raised a Christian, as a young adult she was influenced by H.P. Blavatsky, the founder of The Theosophical Society, and later in life, Rudolf Steiner who led his own spiritualist movement known as Anthroposophy. Between these influences af Klint created a completely unique visual language that traces her own experiences within the occult. When she died in 1944, af Klint left behind more than a thousand paintings, along with numerous journals documenting her séances and mystical interpretations of her work.

What follows is an abridged transcription of the 15 July séance. What was not obvious during the séance, but became evident as Stoltz and Jones edited its transcript, was that af Klint's own voice occasionally emerged as the medium spoke. When this happened, the



Hilma af Klint

medium's voice and eyes shifted in character slightly, but distinctly. Therefore, Stoltz and Jones have interpreted certain passages in the following transcript, as belonging to Hilma af Klint herself.

**Medium Vendela Cederholm:** We hope that you have an open heart and that you will welcome both near and dear. Making contact with the spirit world is outside the time and space we inhabit. It does not take place in this room. It is somewhere else. We are here to welcome anyone who wishes to come, but we know that you have a particular wish that Hilma af Klint will come. I will not go into a trance, but I will close my eyes for a while, and then I will tell you everything I can. It could be that I see with the inner eye, or hear from within, or it could be that a telepathic feeling will take over. I will not withhold anything and you are welcome to ask questions. We will now 'step out of time'.

[Pause].

**M:** I will describe this lady, who wants to communicate with us. I do not know who she is, but maybe you will recognize her. [Pause.] She is quite small, she is lively, has alert eyes, and greying hair. She does not seem to care much about her appearance; she seems rather ordinary. She is a talented person, and an intellectual who inspires others. People are compelled to follow her. She is not interested in acquiring power or authority. She simply has ideas which others find inspiring.

**Ronald Jones:** Who are these people?

[Pause].

**M:** She tells me there is a close circle of friends who make her feel at ease. Between them there is no social intrigue.

**Liv Stoltz:** Are her friends women or men?

**M:** Her friends are women and they come together to discuss significant things.

**LS:** What is close to her heart? What do they talk about?

**M:** Honesty.

**LS:** said that there was only an open honesty between her friends. But she does feel that...

**M:** There were many instances in her previous life

where she recognised the nefarious use of power, she says.

LS: Does that mean in her private life?

M: No, it doesn't. She's was a painter.

LS: Did she feel close to other artists of her time?

M: Not really. She had her friends; they did as they wished. She asks: 'Please don't think what we did was frivolous. There were many profound discussions and they repeatedly made contact with the spiritual world.'

LS: Based on a written description of Hilma's character by her nephew Erik af Klint, and from what we have heard thus far, it seems to be her

RJ: Her friends, are they The Five, and do they still meet?

M: That's an exciting question, she answers. Yes, they still come together, but it is completely different now. They do not need to meet in secret anymore.

RJ: Can she paint in the life she has now?

M: Yes, she paints large canvases with fantastic colours. She prefers abstraction to the figurative style. [Pause.] Now she thinks we should discuss the exhibition you are apparently working on.

RJ: OK, *The Edge of Reason*?

M: This is something she feels strongly about. There seems to be other artists in the exhibition, not just her work. Is that correct?

LS: Yes, it is. What does she think about those artists?

M: She has mixed feelings. Yes. They should belong to... [Pause.] Difficult. [Pause.] She does not want her paintings mixed with other artists. She prefers to have her own wall, or at least clear divisions. It is important for her paintings to be exhibited separately. Yes. She is particular; not just about the size of her pictures, the colors, or how they are hung; it is about the feeling or the mes-

sage. [Pause.] I think we will have to let her speak.

**Hilma af Klint via Medium:** It is not about decorating a wall. I want to make that clear. I want to touch people's hearts. I want to communicate. People change a little when they see my paintings. It is a subtle change, a change that should remain within your heart. The change is not superficial, it happens at a deeper level. That is the significance of my art.

[Pause]

M: There is something that reminds me of a DNA spiral. Is there a large painting with that image?

LS: Yes, there are several, but the painting that immediately comes to mind is *The Dove, No 1. Group IX, series UW* from 1915.

M: This painting is central. I think you have guessed that. This painting expresses a common wisdom, or common insights.

LS: Our common human insights?

M: Yes, that is good. That is very good she says! [Laughs.]

**HaK/M:** It is not just up to the governing authorities to shape our common insights, rather the opposite; every individual possesses genuine insight, and therefore should take greater responsibility in the world.

M: She is not political, she says, but sometimes she sounds political. For her, it is about the capability of every individual to create difference. Not for the sake of money or power, but to become a whole human being, which includes their spiritual life.

LS: She often wrote about the notion of 'duality', that the universe is governed by dual forces such as faith and science, good and evil, male and female; a resistance always intertwined between two opposite poles. I'm wondering...

**HaK/M:** That's right. That is a really good point, she says. The dualities should never be merged, otherwise the world would stand still. You mustn't analyse my work too much; it is meant to speak directly to the heart. But there will never be complete harmony; it always has to be this way. When humanity's insight expands, people's hearts naturally open... These large canvases depicting dualities could be seen as beautiful waves, as if expressed by music.

LS: Did music influence her paintings?

M: She says, that when she painted, she heard music.

RJ: Can she describe the music?

M: Yes, but now she tells me, it's not music exactly. Rather sounds from the natural world. Birds, water, the kind of sounds you would have heard outside her studio. She wants those sounds to be heard alongside her paintings in the exhibition.

LS: Oh, you mean the sounds of nature that surrounded her studio in her previous life?

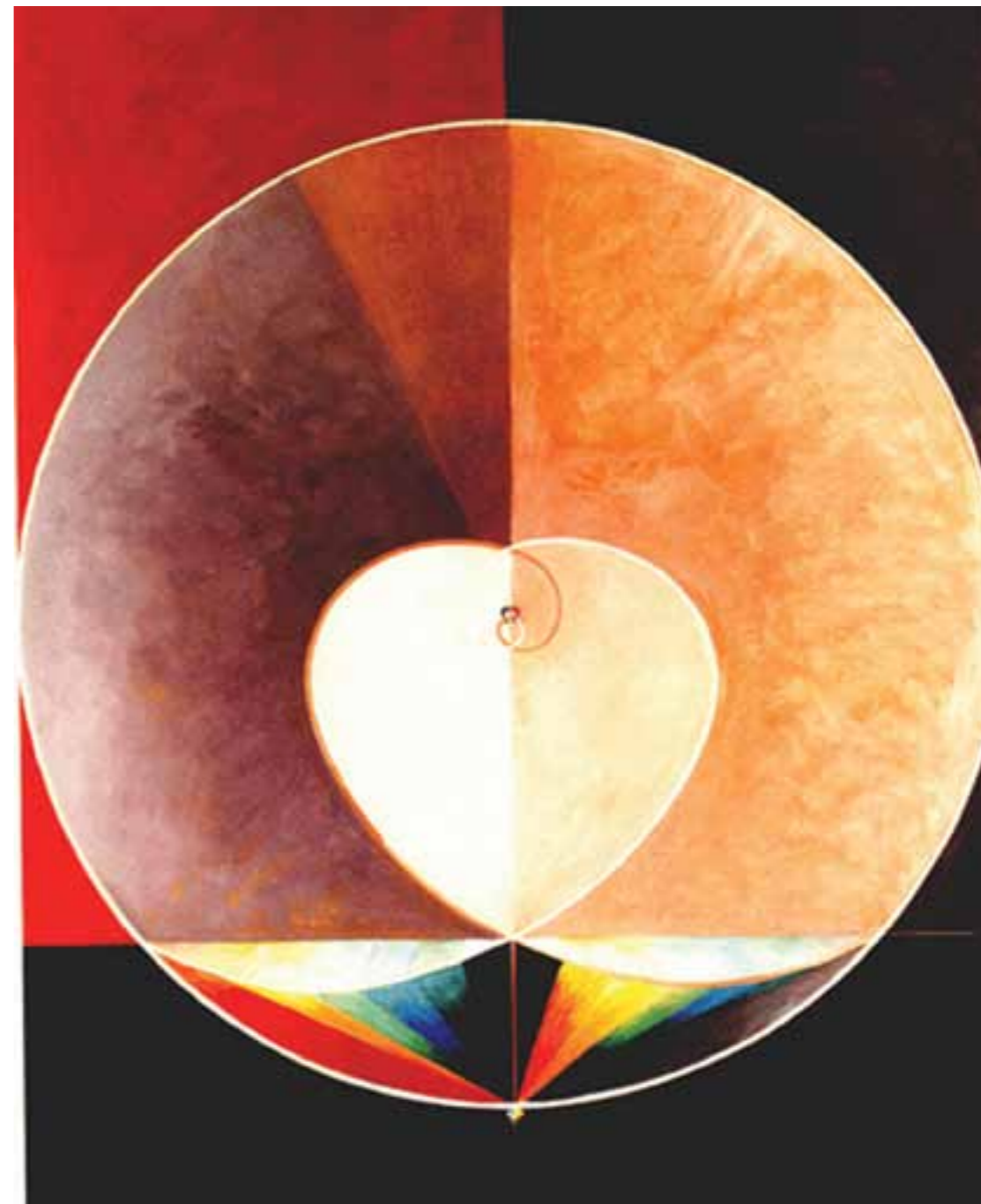
M: Yes, it could be different sounds in different parts of the exhibition; spring birds in one room, winter birds in another. [Pause]. Hmm... I think she had a difficult time in her previous life.

RJ: In what way?

M: Because people couldn't keep up with her creative pace. I think she sometimes... I don't know, perhaps she had a temper, perhaps she was annoyed, but she kept that inside. Things did not happen fast enough.

RJ: For her? Did her irritation stem from the fact that although she pioneered styles – automatic drawing for example – crucial to European modernism, they were later accredited to men, as she was written out of history?

M: No one could understand what she was doing. It was not possible, and it



Hilma af Klint, *The Dove, Nr 1. Group IX, series UW* (1915). Hilma Af Klint Foundation.

was a source of her irritation, but she couldn't do anything about it. She was annoyed then and she is still annoyed.

LS: Did she know celebrated painters in her lifetime?

M: Not really. They did not interest her. She had her friends and when they met they provided her with a place where she could be herself. They did not fully understand her either, but they were kindhearted, encouraging and they felt a mutual respect for one another. They not only liked one another, but shared something on a deeper level, a sense of sisterhood. And that feeling remains.

RJ: Is she gratified by the attention that surrounds her work today?

HaK/M: Yes. It's about time!

[Laughter].

M: I can feel that she has a wonderful sense of humor, even though her demeanor seems serious.

LS: Did she feel early on...

M: Wait a moment... there is something she wishes to talk about. (Pause). Yes. After your questions, she wants to talk about something else.

LS: I understand from one of her many diary entries, that in order to follow the guidance from the High Masters, she sacrificed her heart's desire to paint, as she said herself, 'the outer form' in strong colours. How did she feel about that?

M: That was a difficult struggle that was hard to come to terms with.

LS: Why did she choose abstraction to deliver the messages she received from the High Masters?

M: There was no other way. Abstraction is a universal language.

LS: About the abstract form... does it have a natural connection or relationship to...

M: To humankind?

LS: To humankind.

M: Yes, you could say to the soul of humankind.

LS: What was the mission handed down to her by the High Masters?

M: She had a spiritual life, that much I understand. This spiritualism... it seems to have been... so... [Pause.] The mission was about revealing something that would transform people's lives through another language other than books or words... [Pause.] Oh, she is talking about the Holy Scripture here! She sees it as her task to express a spiritual message outside the Word. She says she lived in the era of the Word. It has not always been like that. We must return to antiquity to rediscover our lost spiritual dimensions.

LS: She was raised in a Christian family; has she always believed in God?

M: No, she hasn't. She had many doubts when she was here on Earth.

RJ: What were the séances like, the ones she held with *The Five*?

M: They were a bit different from this one. They were very secretive about it.

RJ: Is she pleased that we contacted her?

M: Yes. That was part of the plan.

LS: A part of her plan or a much larger plan between this life and the next?

M: The larger plan. She alone doesn't decide. If that were the case, the paintings would never have been made. She had to let go of her own plan when she accepted the mission, and tried to complete it. She received abiding support from the women in her group; they helped each other. They were very committed to their séances, and felt that they achieved something significant, even though it wasn't something that others could understand.

RJ: Would she like for all of her work to be collected in one institution?

M: She says it isn't important. What is

essential is that her message is spread universally. Now it seems like she wants to... Are there any more practical questions? If not, she wants to move on to the subject of colours. She wants to start with the colours green and blue. Look at the blue colour of the sky outside the window behind you. Can you think of a painting of hers that uses this particular colour?

LS: Yes. I have in mind two of her earliest paintings, both seminal works; *Ur-Chaos, No. 3* and *Ur-Chaos, No. 4*, both from 1906. But these paintings have green and yellow in them too.

HaK/M: Yes, they do. The colours are of equal importance to the subject matter. The blue has special significance. It represents both the Earth and Humanity. It is the sky above us all... wherever you are on the planet, we all share the same sky. Look up and you are connected to everyone who has ever lived, or will ever live. It is about the blue sky, the yellow sun and the atmosphere. That is how green is created, as you know; yellow and blue make green. The green is what we see when we look down on Earth. The green that grows is what we live from, what we need to survive.

[Pause].

M: I can tell you, she is simplifying her intensely complex theories expressed in her paintings, and her use of colour in order that I can understand. So I am able to carry her message to you. She very much wants you to understand.

LS: The same shade of blue can be found in *Human Chastity*, the 1915 painting which concluded 'The Paintings from the Temple'. We find an ascetic young woman kneeling with a heart clasped between her hands, as if she were in prayer. What can she tell us about the meaning of 'chastity' in the title of the painting?

M: *Human Chastity* has nothing to do with sexuality. Chastity in this context is about not over reaching but rather achieving a balance within our lives.

LS: You mean to conquer greed?

M: Yes, to be able to wash away greed in order to attain purity. It should not be a struggle. She is showing me an image of ten lilies growing in a field... This is yet another simplifying metaphor, designed to help me understand. She uses these kinds of metaphors because her creative rhythm often outpaces our ability to understand. So she continues... even if you would want all ten lilies, pick only two. That is human chastity.

LS: We understand. Speaking of restraint, as she has just explained it, I would like to raise the subject of Tibetan spirituality. According to her nephew Erik, she revealed to him that her artistic vision originated from Tibet. Can she tell us if this was true?

M: Yes. She was interested in Eastern philosophy. Taking a broader view, the East is on a different developmental path, whether that means spiritual, cultural or even political. It represents an enormous difference from the West, but a path she believes in. The idea of restraint is nothing new; it is something which has been talked about for thousands of years. And yet, it will take more time for humankind to change, embracing self-restraint.

LS: I have a personal question, is that okay?

M: Yes, that's okay. She likes you, she says. You are a bit similar...there is a sense of sisterhood between you!

LS: I can feel that too. My question is about a dream I had about Hilma. We were in the ocean together, but Hilma, surrounded by water lilies, was drowning. As she slowly slipped into the darkened depths, I tried to save her. But as she



Hilma af Klint, *The Swan nr 1, Group IX, Series UW (1914-15)*, Hilma af Klint Foundation.

sank out of reach, I realised we were the same person. I was the one drowning. What does it mean?

M: She says it is about finding balance, happiness, love and friendship. You already have the insight, which is all you need.

[Pause].

M: Now, she is restraining herself, but she is really eager to talk about architecture. Did you know she had an interest in architecture?

RJ: Yes, shortly before her death,

the last series of paintings she completed were partly concerned with Rudolf Steiner's second *Goetheanum* building in Dornach, Switzerland. But perhaps of more importance are the drawings she made of her temple building. She described it in one of her journals as a circular building, comprised of separate vault-like rooms, in which her paintings would be hung in such a way as to provide a visual account of her artistic development and the principle message conveyed by the High Masters. To experience her temple would have been to

experience the individual's path towards knowledge and insight. The journey through her temple would have culminated in a room at its centre where the visitor would meet the future.

**M:** Architecture remains important to her today, she says. Were she on Earth, she would completely devote herself to architecture. She would fundamentally change the way we think about buildings. They would be beautiful and speak to people's hearts. They would contribute to reversing the pollution of the natural world, making the world ever purer. There would be gardens for growing vegetables that people could freely take. Yes. This is Utopia or at least in part. She says she has envisioned this in a letter or a painting. She says, find the letters or papers where she mentions her buildings of the future. Do that. There may be people who will be inspired by them, and make them a reality.

**RJ:** We want her to know that we are writing an opera about her. What does she feel about that?

**HaK/M:** So exciting!

**RJ:** What important moments in her life would she like to see portrayed?

**M:** The struggle in her heart. [Pause.] And how inspiration came to her, as her mission. But most importantly her artistic achievements. She doesn't find her life interesting as a subject, but rather her paintings. She would like to see a nuanced presentation of herself. Spots of light in darkness, some darkness in the light.

**LS:** The duality between light and dark, you mention, brings to mind her swan paintings, as well as details from *The Atom Series*, represented in the exhibition *The Edge of Reason*.

**RJ:** Would she help us design the opera sets?

**M:** Yes, she will. She wants them to be so beautiful that they will make every-one

in the audience feel as one when the performance concludes, as if they all shared the same heart. You will find inspiration, maybe from her, maybe from others who will help.

[Pause].

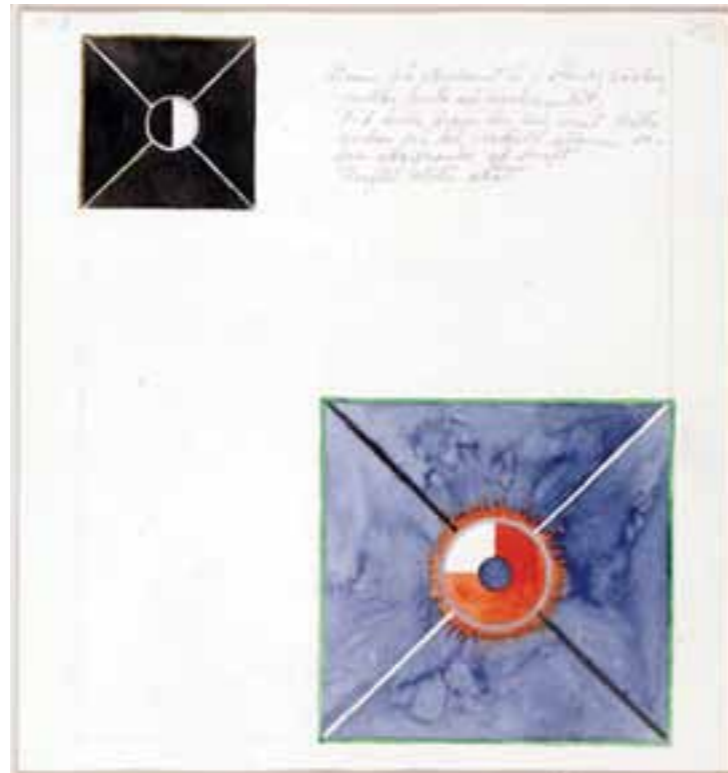
**RJ:** What is the future of spirituality?

**M:** She says it is very important that humankind embrace the spiritual side of existence. A séance, like this one, is a continuation of those she used to conduct. This continuation is, in part, the

future of spirituality. She never understood why she had to wait so long for her spiritual message to be understood, but now she does.

**LS:** She stipulated in her will that her paintings should be withheld from view for 20 years after her death. Why wait so long?

**M:** Because the message of her art is needed more now than it was then. Humankind has changed and has a greater capacity to appreciate her message. But it is not only the message. Beauty is



Hilma af Klint, *Atom Series, No. 8 (1917)*, Hilma af Klint Foundation.

very important to her too, more than you may think when you see her paintings. You may not realise it when you look at them, how much she values beauty. But beauty, in and of itself, was not the purpose of her paintings. And that was one of her struggles: between the necessity of the message and the power of beauty.

**RJ:** Does she visit exhibitions of her work?

**M:** Yes, she does! She is often surprised by the opinions people form about her art; often she wonders, 'Where did *that* come from?' But she empathises with them; she did not always understand the meaning of her paintings, for after all, she was following the instructions she had been handed.

**LS:** Is she happier now than she was in her life on Earth? Whereas before it was always a struggle, now she paints beautifully.

**M:** Yes. Well, partly, but as you know from my earlier answers it is not only that.

**LS:** In reference to *The Atom Series*, her watercolours depicting the movement of atomic life, she once said: '[...] I am an atom in the universe that has access to infinite possibilities of development. These possibilities I want gradually to reveal' (3). From what she has learned within her present existence, would she paint the series the same way again?

**HaK/M:** It was as accurate as it possibly could have been. It was really an impossible task I was given. It is a bit like trying to describe music in words. Or it is like the difference between watching a dancer perform and reading the choreographer's notes. It is impossible, but one can only try.

**RJ:** From the spiritual side, you see the dance while we, on this side, can only read the choreographer's notes?

**M:** Yes, you could say that.

[Pause].

**RJ:** While in this life you often talked about finding a balance between dualities, for example male and female, exemplified by your 1907 painting entitled *Love*. But you also wrote about hoping to find balance in your afterlife. Have you found it?

**M:** Yes. She has. In that sense she has achieved balance. Some of her most significant paintings have to do with attaining that balance, and you just mentioned one of them. She says, these large figure paintings are very important for you, in your here and now, especially in your society. People have a greater appreciation of their meaning today, than when she painted them.

[Pause].

**M:** She has to go now.

**RJ:** Wait, I have one last crazy question.

**M:** Okay, go ahead.

**RJ:** Does she know she has a Facebook page?

[Laughter].

**M:** Yes, she has seen it. But don't ask me to write on my page, she says. However it is okay, if you want to post a 'like'.

**M:** Now it is time to end. We thank her so much for communicating with us, and thank you for letting me meet her. It was very pleasant, and she is pleased.

1) Annie Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography*, 3. impr. (London, Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 237

2) Ronald Jones, Liv Stoltz, *Spirited Away*, frieze (November-December, 2010), p. 108

3) Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher (eds), *3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing: Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and Agnes Martin* (Yale University Press, 2005), p. 26.

**VENDELA CEDERHOLM** is a spiritualist medium and founder of the Spiritual Academy in Stockholm, Sweden. She has been an established medium since 1995, and has made many public appearances. Her academic background includes studies in theology.

**LIV STOLTZ** is a freelance curator currently working with the Experience Design Group at Konstfack, University College of Arts Crafts and Design. She has worked as curator and director of the Centre for Photography in Stockholm. She has organised several exhibitions including *Auto Memorized - Photography in the Expanded Field*, *Small Parts of the World*, *LA Trash and Treasure and Ordinary Fantastic*. She has also curated exhibitions at the Liljevalchs Konsthalle, the Hasselblad Center, and Kristinehamns Museum.

**RONALD JONES**, an artist and critic, is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm, Sweden. At Konstfack he leads The Experience Design Group. He contributes regularly to *Art Forum* and *frieze* and writes frequently on contemporary art and design for various international publications. He is a guest professor in Experience Design at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, India.

# A VIEW FROM WITHIN

BY INGUNN SIRA MYHRE

*The Edge of Reason* challenges us to partake in and reflect on experiences that transcend our normal use of our rational faculties. Presenting such works as those of Hilma af Klint, who believed herself to be channeling psychic messages from another dimension through her paintings (from a dimension 'shrouded from the rational') and of Ben Judd and Sidsel Christensen, who engage in a communication with a mystical and spiritual dimension, *The Edge of Reason* could be seen to challenge rationality itself, manifesting experiences apparently beyond its scope. However, as I will suggest, these manifestations of occult and mystical experiences in fact foster rational enquiry when understood within the realm of phenomenology.

## A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ATTITUDE

What is more, the exhibition seems to share with phenomenology a certain attitude to reality: by exposing, but not judging or qualifying the phenomena underlying their artwork, Judd and Christensen take up a perspective embodying the very essence of a phenomenological view, what the French phenomenolo-

gist Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls a third sight, a sight that recognizes its origin in the world and takes this situatedness as its starting point and therefore truly is a perspective from within the world.(2) When seeing the world from within, the artist as well as the philosopher is able to reveal levels of being hidden by our day-to-day engagement with the world.(3)

When *The Edge of Reason* articulates the occult and mystical phenomena which the artworks draw on and lays them in front of us to experience and make sense of ourselves, instead of validating or qualifying them, it becomes possible for us to partake in the making of such phenomena. This, according to Merleau-Ponty, is an uprooting from daily life, with our habitual ways of perceiving and thinking, and at the same time it makes it possible for us to complete and conceive what is left unfinished or open by the artworks.

In refraining from judging or qualifying the phenomena in question, *The Edge of Reason* echoes the phenomenological slogan 'To the things themselves!'(4) This imperative signifies the phenomenological movement away from a scientific, objectifying perspective on the world that attempts to exhaust the phenomena in

an all-embracing view from nowhere, thus reducing being to formulas and concepts. Instead, phenomenology wants to uncover the world of phenomena and our primordial, ambiguous co-existence with it, by a scrutinising but tolerant view from within experience itself. Thus, engagement with the phenomena and with experiencing subjectivity itself is the true starting point for any investigation of 'reality'.

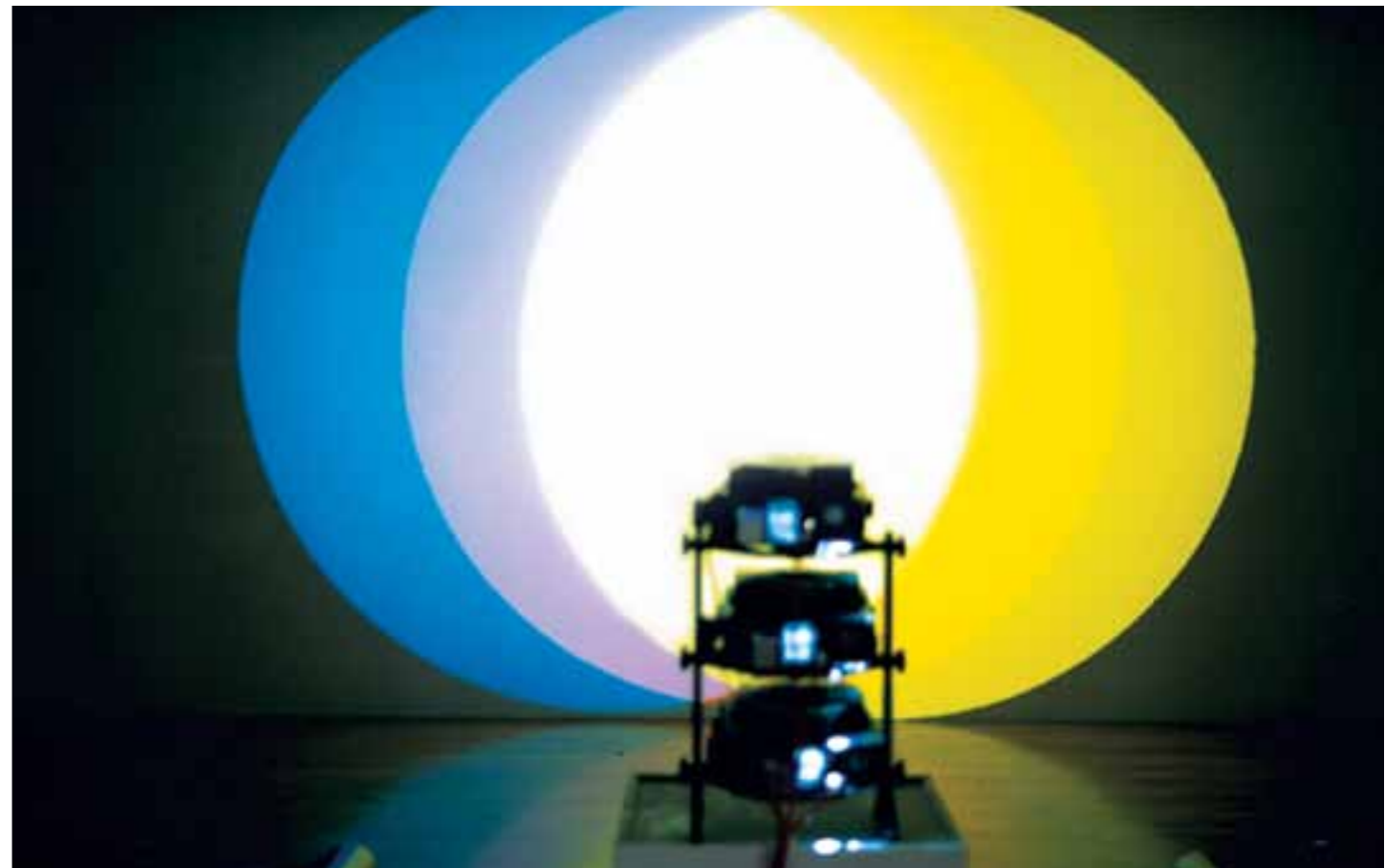
## THE PARADOXICAL NATURE OF THE WORLD

In our daily life we think and act in the world with presumptions about its being, in a way that covers it up or even distorts it. We are not aware of the world as a becoming we partake in as constituting subjects, and our daily handling and interpretations of the world hide its origin in constituting intersubjectivity. By putting our habitual, daily life modes of thinking as well as the objectifying look of science into brackets (refraining from making use of these assumptions), we discover the world and our primordial engagement with it. Phenomenology, then,

*steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens*

IN OUR DAILY LIFE WE THINK AND ACT IN THE WORLD WITH PRESUMPTIONS ABOUT ITS BEING, IN A WAY THAT COVERS IT UP OR EVEN DISTORTS IT.

Susan Hiller, *Magic Lantern* (1978).



*the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical.* (5)

The world is paradoxical, inexhaustible and multidimensional, and it can never be exhaustively characterised in scientific concepts, formulas or judgements. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the world in which we are already engaged on a prereflective, perceptual and affective level eludes this kind of judgement: 'The real is a closely woven fabric. It does not await our judgement before incorporating the most surprising phenomenon, or before rejecting the most plausible figments of our imagination'. (6) When acknowledging living reality, there is no attempt to dispel any unexamined experiences as unreal by naming them irrational, mystical or occult. The world is mystical, and reality has its own pre-existing order to which rationality can only respond: the world and its method are not problematic. We may say, if we wish, that they are mysterious, but their mystery defines them: there can be no question of dispelling it by some 'solution'. (7) We cannot, therefore, 'resolve' the paradoxical, mysterious nature of experience. The world as experienced is of a different order from the one enforced on it by an objectivistic, detached perspective. Instead, we can be scientific in the sense of taking upon ourselves our primordial relationship with reality, and thus perhaps reach deeper levels of being.

#### THE ARTWORKS' TRANSCENDENCE OF SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

So, inviting us to share in the experience and articulation of mystical or occult

phenomena without judging or validating them, *The Edge of Reason* seems to take up a phenomenological perspective. By claiming this, however, we may seem to reduce the exhibition to an investigation of aspects of experiencing subjectivity as such, leaving outside its scope the question of the existence or reality of such mystical or spiritual dimensions as the ones expressed by the artworks. Furthermore, this limiting of the theme of the exhibition to that of experiencing subjectivity wouldn't seem to serve the intentions of the exhibition, at least not the intention of its artists, such as af Klint, who clearly perceived her work as responding to a deeper, spiritual reality. In order to respond to the intentions of the exhibition more fully, then, we are led to ask questions of the reality or 'objective' existence of a mystical and spiritual world. And this might seem to imply that the phenomenological perspective is of limited value in this context, and that doing justice to the exhibition requires that we move beyond such a perspective.

Interestingly, though, phenomenology does seek to make claims about reality: what is distinctive is that it seeks to make reality visible from within the depths of experience itself. In this, the philosopher imitates the artist, who stands in contact with 'the realm of the visible in such a way, that s/he is able to experience the world in a more original manner than in daily life'. (8) We could say that art makes visible what is normally hidden beneath our profane or scientific view of the world. By doing so, art opens up the 'polymorphous Being' (9) that hides behind the surface of things and opens up a paradoxical existence. Art

holds, in the words of another phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger, the openness of the world open. (10)

#### ART AS AN OPENING UP OF REALITY

Art opens up reality to us in a very particular manner: 'In the art work, the truth of what is has set itself to work'. (11) Art places itself in the core of reality, at its very origin, and opens it up for us to unfold our thinking by following its lines and curves. Like art, phenomenology celebrates the unpredictable, creative and intimate relationship we have with the world, as physical, intellectual, sensual and mystical beings. The world is, namely, 'not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world. I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible.' (12) *The Edge of Reason* invites us to think along the lines of this inexhaustible reality, that always eludes and resists us. This act of opening up a multidimensional world for us to partake in and make sense of, actualises our rationality in its fullest sense. Since art is the bringing 'into visible existence (what is) actual or real [...] and no explanatory hypothesis is clearer than the act whereby we take up this unfinished world in an effort to complete and conceive it', (13) art makes rational enquiry into hidden aspects of reality possible.

Why does art provide such an opening? True art, according to Heidegger, is not a representation of something, but 'a coming-into-being-of truth'. (14) It does not point to a subjective experience evoked by the artist's meeting with a phenomenon: it brings being into the open for us to share. Art is reality in the sense that it is at the same time something given

to us, and something that exceeds us; in that it transcends us and is familiar, and in that it always surpasses and resists us. (15) According to Merleau-Ponty, we get to know this reality as we 'complete and conceive' it, or, put differently, when we join in the creation of it: 'Being is what *requires creation* of us for us to experience it'. (16) The comprehension of reality demands of us that we take on this engagement: 'Only through this act of creation can our thought and action reach and comprehend reality itself; only by creation of reality do we get to know reality.' (17)

This can be so only because reality is not fixed, but is in a state of flux. (18) And as with any other reality, the reality that art opens up is a strange, mysterious and inexhaustible reality that requires us to 'apprehend and comprehend it in a sort of thoughtful surrender,

in active thought, in *re-creation*'. (19)

Art, therefore, sets an example for the philosopher: it introduces a mode of thinking that takes on reality rather than subordinating it to concepts and systems of thoughts. Art enjoys a phenomenologically privileged position since it engages us and re-establishes our communication with an elusive reality, by putting us at the heart of it, at the originating opening of the world. The kind of truth with which we are thus presented, is, however, one that can never be validated. (20)

#### THE EXHIBITION'S HIDDEN INVITATION

Inviting us to share in an opening up of a paradoxical and mysterious world, beyond validation, those visiting *The Edge of Reason* might be left with confused or ambiguous feelings. This, however, could be a sign of the artworks'

success at manifesting a reality usually hidden to us in our daily life, since ambiguity is the very signature of reality and '...it seems that there cannot be any consciousness of ambiguity without ambiguity of consciousness'. (21)

Eventually these feelings might be the exhibition's real invitation to us and what makes us engage in rational discourse, in order to 'complete and conceive' what the artworks manifest, and to share in the living sense of a multidimensional world from a view within:

*Rationality is precisely proportioned to the experience in which it is disclosed. To say that there exists rationality is to say that perspectives blend, perceptions confirm each other, a meaning emerges. [...] The phenomenological world is not pure being, but the sense which is revealed where the paths of my various experiences intersect, and also where my own and other people's intersect and engage each other like gears.* (22)

#### INGUNN SIRA MYHRE

Ingunn Sira Myhre is a philosopher specialized in phenomenology and existentialism. She is currently employed at the University of Tromsø, on a PhD project investigating the meaning of presence in pedagogical contexts. She has been engaged in several art-related projects, such as storytelling and philosophy for children and KINOKINO's programme committee.

1) Ronald Jones and Liv Stoltz, 'Spirited Away', *frieze* (November-December, 2010), p. 109.

2) M.P. Tin, 'Etterord', in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Øyet og ånden*, trans. M.P.Tin (Oslo, Pax Forlag A/S, 2000), p. 88.

3) *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

4) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (Paris, Gallimard, 2000), p. viii.

5) *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

6) *Ibid.*, p. x.

7) *Ibid.*, p. xx.

8) M.T. Ramirez, 'Creativity', in *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, ed. L. Embree and H. R. Sepp, (Springer, 2010), p. 60.

9) M.P. Tin, op cit., p. 110.

10) Martin Heidegger, *Kunstverkets opprinnelse*, trans. Einar Øverenget og Steinar Mathisen (Oslo, Pax Forlag A/S), p. 48.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 94.

12) Merleau-Ponty, op cit., p. xvii.

13) *Ibid.*, p. xx.

14) Heidegger, op cit., p. 94.

15) M. T. Ramirez, op cit., p. 58.

16) Merleau-Ponty, *Le Invisible et invisible* (Paris, Gallimard, 1968), p. 197.

17) M. T. Ramirez, op cit., p. 57.

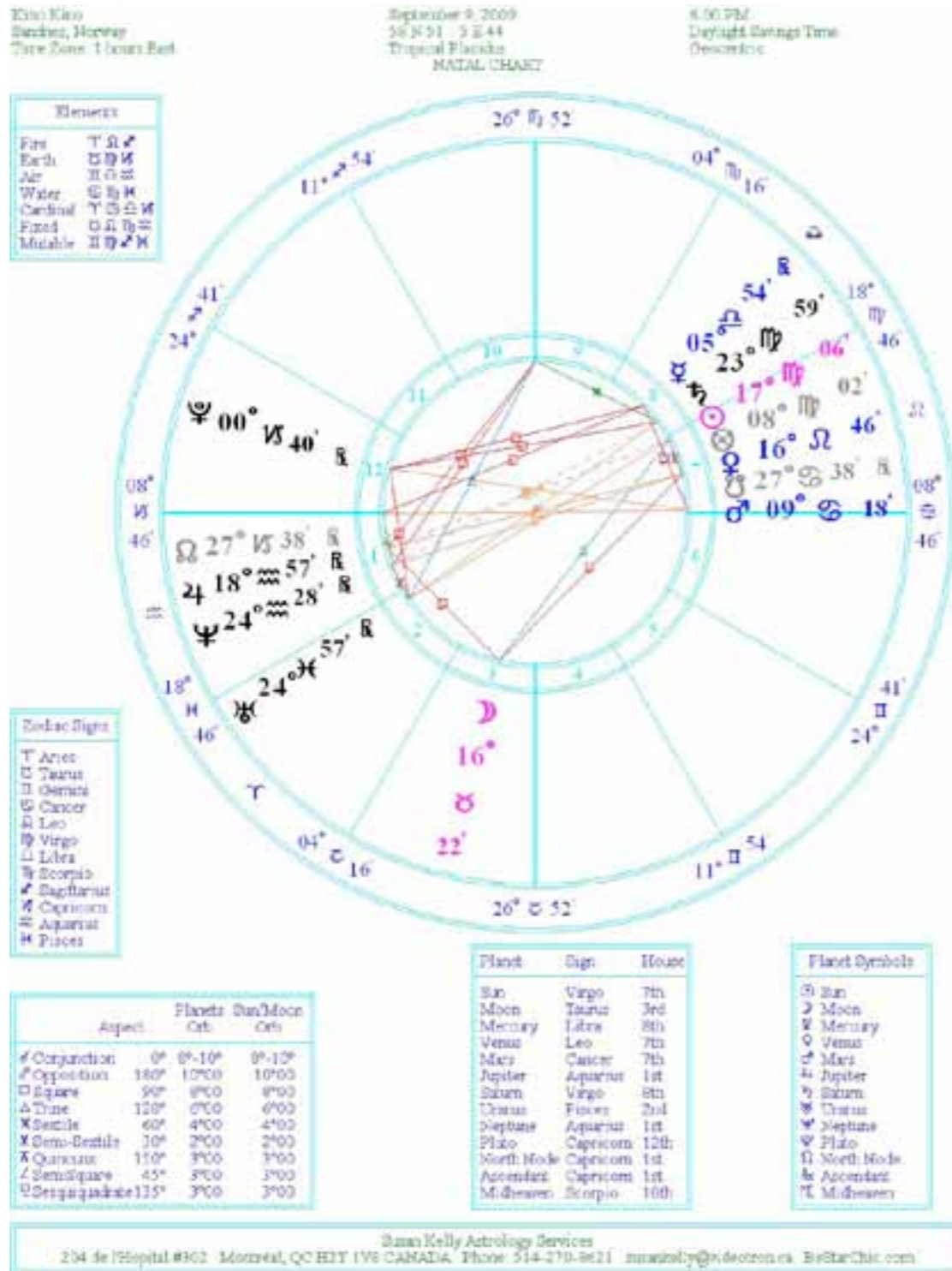
18) *Ibid.*, p. 58.

19) *Ibid.*, p. 60.

20) Heidegger, op cit., p. 91.

21) M. Langer, 'Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity', in *Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. C. Card (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2003), p. 90.

22) Merleau-Ponty, op cit., p. xx.



Astrological chart of KINOKINO by Susan Kelly

# Neptune's Epistemic Shift

*The Edge of Reason* presents artworks that evidence an extraordinary range of intuitive technologies: conjuring ghosts, remote viewing, past-life regression, possession, channelling and performative mediumship.

BY JENNIFER FISHER

Such paranormal methods access types of knowledge that exceed logical thought and the boundaries of visual aesthetics. In keeping with the spirit of the exhibition, my approach here will be to engage in a variant of institutional critique from within the spectrum of intuitive hermeneutics: that of astrology. Specifically, how might the context of an exhibition be elucidated using astrological analysis? As an interpretative art, the temporality of astrology is cyclical, mapping space and time relative to the resonating energies of the constellations and planets. While there are many populist and totalising modes of sun-sign prognostication, (1) what I find more interesting is the precision of an actual horoscope in

discerning trends within this cyclic form of history. As it is with many cultural variations both ancient and contemporary, an astrological reading can indicate incipient forces at work at a particular space and time, in this case, the invisible energies encompassing this exhibition at KINOKINO. The analysis that follows is necessarily partial, and focuses on Neptune - the planet governing emotional attunement and spirituality - which was identified by astrologer Susan Kelly as strongly placed in the gallery's chart at the moment of this exhibition. (2) Significantly, the opening of the gallery on 9 September 2009 coincided with Neptune's first complete orbit to the exact position at the time of the planet's discovery in 1846. Soon after, Neptune entered the

constellation of Pisces, as it did 168 years later. This constellatory shift, both during the nineteenth century and now, indicates cultural and affective change marked by enhanced feeling and emotion. Symbolised by water in mythology, Neptune evokes the realms of imagination and the depths of the subconscious. The aqueous nature of Neptune signals more porous boundaries, where forms flow, merge, dissolve, and feelings open into mystical and empathetic identification. In the cultural sphere, Neptune signals collective yearning, dreams and longing. (3) Historically, Neptune in Pisces has coincided with social upheaval characterised by global movements premised on utopic thought and new styles of living. The transit of Neptune through Pisces

from 1847 to 1862, for example, witnessed revolutions throughout Europe, the abolition of slavery in the United States, as well as the rise of socialism, feminism, spiritualism, transcendentalism and the avant-garde more generally in the West. The return of Neptune to Pisces 168 years later in January 2011 corresponded with the emancipatory political movement of the Arab Spring, greater polarisation between left and right ideologies, as well as expanded plays of collective and imaginative identity through social networking technologies, advances in neuroscience, and a revived interest in psychic phenomena. In astrological terms, the cultural climate of Neptune in Pisces is associated with the feeling of 'losing oneself' in another state of consciousness. This can indicate, on the one hand, the increased use of mind-altering substances, and on the other, new forms of technological addiction, such as compulsive identification with fantasy Second Life avatars, or Facebook personae. At the same time, the altruistic tone of Neptune denotes social obligation, even to the point of feelings of collective guilt, as well as the extreme idealism typified by all forms of fundamentalism.

*The Edge of Reason* coincides with Neptune's amplification in Pisces, (4) which during the next fourteen years, will witness numinous forms of art that are imaginative, idealistic, psychic and intuitive. Just as the birth of the avant-garde during the nineteenth century worked to push the boundaries of art and introduce new aesthetic techniques, so too this period will likely give rise to nascent forms of creativity and beauty in art stemming from a yearning to experience the subconscious and superconscious mind. In this way, the curators' intention to navigate 'the other side' of spirit as evidenced in this exhibition falls within

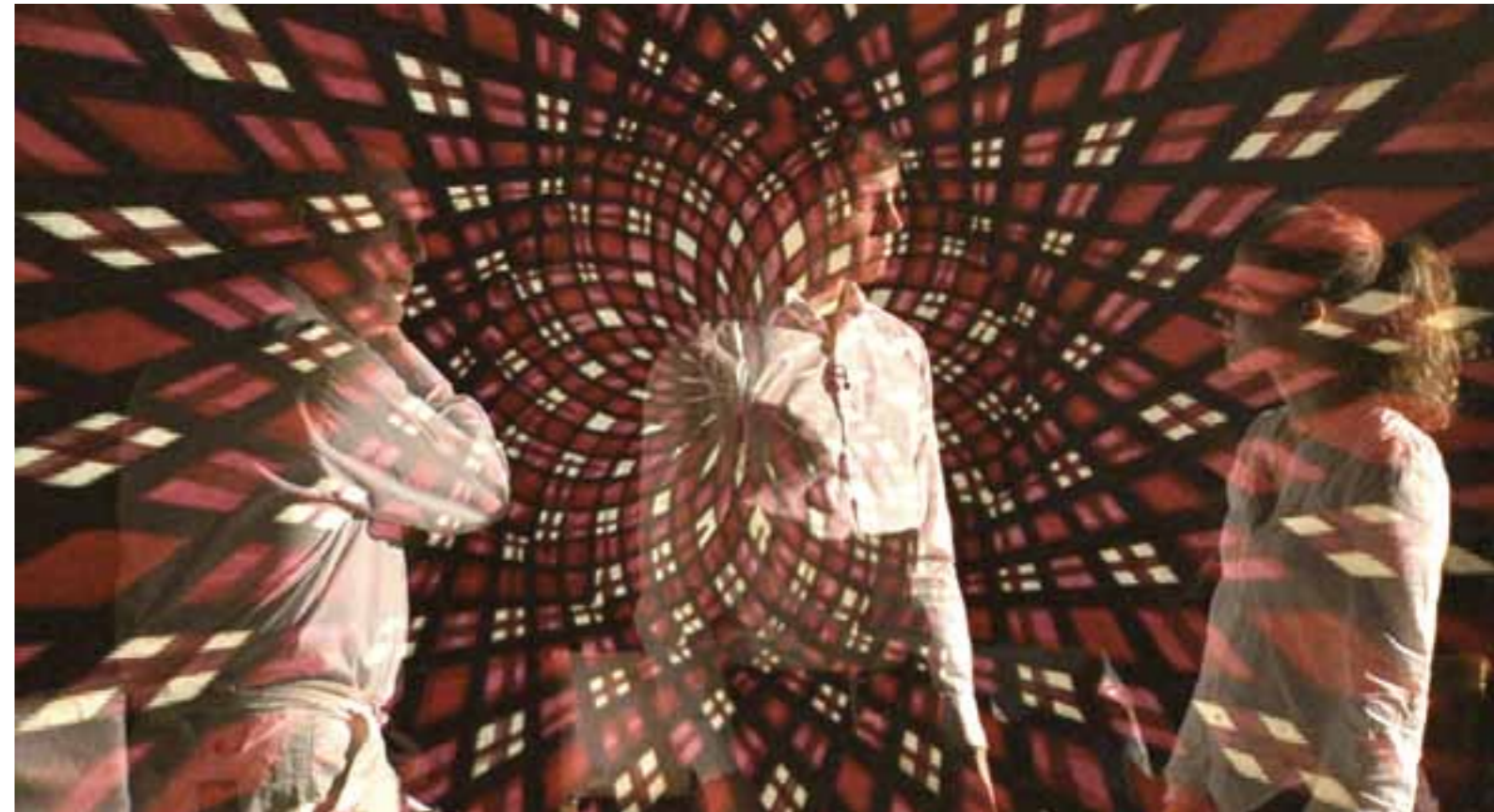
the current Neptune-return by presenting forms of art that engage mystical traditions, empathic experiences, and more permeable psychic, shamanic and mediumistic identities. Where in the mid to late nineteenth century, the aqueous and shimmering quality of Neptune light can be linked to Impressionism, mood painting as well as the development of photographic and later filmic technology, in the current era 3D and digital media will configure increasingly more immersive illusions in the form of phantasmagoric art that dramatically shifts consciousness. Even psychotropic pharmaceuticals, ruled by Neptune, may be mobilised as 'art drugs' that induce altered states through tailoring precise psycho-sensorial experiences.

To engage astrology as a *method* is to engage it a premodern epistemology. As Patrick Curry elucidates, astrology does not make sense within the desanctified, demythologised nature of modernism (5) Rather, in contrast to the modernist sense that stars and planets are purely material, lifeless bodies moving in space, astrology presents an existential and experiential order of enchantment, one Max Weber recognized as a form of 'concrete magic'. (6) For Curry, the horoscope as a map of space and the planets relative to a place on Earth at a particular time is but a ritual prerequisite to the practice of divination. (7) An artful astrological reading insightfully qualifies affects of vibration, light and velocity contingent to precise historical moments. This unfolding of earthly experience relative to space and time suggests a method of history that identifies the impact of resonant planetary forces known in the past as they are again released in the present. Significantly, astrological methodology involves a cyclical temporality that is distinct from the linear timelines

of art historical progression. Examining the affective atmosphere of Neptune and aligning it to the moment of this exhibition gives a cosmological perspective on the exhibition, a sense of the atmospheres at work beyond vision and beyond reason. To deploy astrology to 'read' *The Edge of Reason* in the context of Neptune's passage into Pisces, then, is to adopt an astrological hermeneutic, an intuitive method governed by Neptune's epistemic shift now underway.

#### JENNIFER FISHER

Jennifer Fisher's research examines contemporary art, curatorial practice, display culture, the affective turn in art and criticism, and the aesthetics of the non-visual senses. She is a founding member of the curatorial collaborative *DisplayCult*, the commissioned curators of *NIGHTSENSE* in Toronto's Financial District, for Scotiabank Nuit Blanche (2009). *DisplayCult* exhibitions include for instance *MetroSonics* (2009), *Odor Limits* (2008), *Listening Awry* (2007), *Do Me!* (2006), *Aural Cultures* (2005), *Linda M. Montano: 14 Years of Living Art* (2003), *reminiSCENT* (2003).



Ben Judd, *Concerning The Difference Between The Delights of Pleasure and True Happiness* (2010).

1) The term 'irrational' is not used pejoratively by the curators of *The Edge of Reason*. This contrasts with Theodor Adorno who vilified astrology as 'irrational'. His analysis of Carroll Righter's populist astrology column for the *Los Angeles Times* reduced astrological rhetoric to 'authoritarian irrationalism'. See, Theodor Adorno, 'The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column', in *Telos* 19 (1974), pp. 13-90. For Denis Dutton, Adorno's conflation of late capitalism, irrationalism, and personalities in need of authoritarian pronouncements, ignores that the appeal of astrology is of a more mystical order. Denis Dutton, 'Theodor Adorno on Astrology', in *Philosophy and Literature* 19 (1995), pp. 424-30.  
2) Susan Kelly's astrological reading of Kino Kino was given during an interview with the author on 11 July 2011. I am grateful to Susan for identifying the significance of Neptune's transit into Pisces. While I do not have space to include it here in its entirety, KINOKINO's horoscope signalled that the Jupiter-Neptune rising creates a

hospitable context for film, new aesthetic technology and experimental media at the gallery. At the same time, its Taurus Moon square Venus supports a creative dialogue of old and new media forms as evidenced in *The Edge of Reason's* curatorial dialogue between historical painting and film in relationship to contemporary work. Aspects to Jupiter and Neptune indicate not only an exhibition mandate that transforms ways of seeing and perceiving art, but that the public's perception of the institution would confirm this role. Mars on the descendent in Cancer also indicates feisty energy, strong leadership and tremendous creativity in an emotional climate of dynamic change. On the institutional level, Pluto's transit back and forth across KINOKINO's ascendant over the past few years shows great transformation. During autumn 2011 and winter 2012, high ideals may encounter challenges contingent to larger economic, corporate and governmental issues as Europe tightens its belt under the revolutionary aspect of Uranus square Pluto in Capricorn. This aspect

signals challenges of sudden regulation that will be felt both locally and globally.  
3) Liz Greene, *The Outer Planets and Their Cycles: The Astrology of the Collective* (Reno, Nevada, CRCS, 1983), p. 20.  
4) In astrological terms, Neptune will be in its exaltation (or rulership) in the sign of Pisces until 2025. When in the sign of its exaltation, a planet is most powerfully positioned to amplify its intensity of energy. Frances Sakoian and Louis Acker, *The Astrologer's Handbook* (New York, Harper and Row, 1973), p. 242.  
5) Patrick Curry, 'Grounding the Stars: Towards an Ecological Astrology', in *Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 1:2 (2007), pp. 210-219.  
6) Weber cited in Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology, Science and Culture: Pulling Down the Moon*, (Oxford and New York, Berg, 2004), p. 60.  
7) *Ibid.*, pp. 109-117.



# EXHIBITION ARTISTS

in alphabetical order

## SIDSEL CHRISTENSEN

### THE CURVATURE SINGULARITY OF ERIN HUNTER (2010)

Two-channel video installation, 20:00 min.

Played out through conversation, live presentations and video portraits, Sidsel Christensen's work explores the subjectivity unfolding between authenticity and fictional constructs of the self. Using the camera as a social tool, Christensen engages with an intimacy that revolves around body language and narratives of subjectivity, specifically looking at different possibilities for the imagination to transform perceived reality for an individual or group.

*The Curvature Singularity of Erin Hunter* is a dual video installation investigating the immersive possibilities of the nightclub – seen as a space for contemporary ritualism – and how inner, emotive visions can be linked to the visual language of abstraction in art.

The work is part of a series of video portraits of young women in the East London night club scene. The club, as a place of communal activity, is a setting that reveals the latent desires or dreams of female characters as they move through and experience the space, interacting with the lights and music.

The work is presented in the style of a documentary, interrogating the structures present whilst attempting to assemble the immediacy of the club and the visceral troped state entered by the women. The narrative remains ambiguous as to the role of the artist being wholly truthful rather than embellishing

or fictionalising the experience of these women. Christensen employs these documentary film devices to frame her narratives seeking to embody an affect somewhere between the journalistic and the shamanistic; what is captured through her process of documentation is neither relic nor document.

The night club is an architectural entity, its ectoplasm, its immediacy and the social ephemera of its construction is channelled and directed by Christensen's lens creating a blurring of the fictionalised inner space with the architectural reality. The club lights become colours and shapes concerned with flattening the image in composition which seems to be in subtle relation to the concerns of abstract painters such as Kandinsky who spoke of an 'inner necessity' desiring of the inner spiritual experience through an outer semblance. The work seems to be in a similar state of necessity, moving towards and expanding the desire for a rhapsodic harmony even through such formal investigation.

The work follows one of the women Christensen met through her investigations within East London night clubs, the main protagonist being Erin Hunter. Observing the night clubs facilitation for the emotive, ecstatic or sexual experience she provokes an engendering of the visual and sonic environment via the narrative form of personal monologue. Erin

Hunter's interaction with the night club lights goes further, engaging with the artist's own methodology via hypnosis, realising an altered or heightened state beyond the realities of the night club approaching a baptismal event horizon, an almost photonic ecstasy.

The light is a source and a subject to Erin as she is enveloped by the transcendental experience her physical presence acting as a vessel for her own semi-conscious hypnagogic visions to alter her external surroundings. The visual language of the dance floor, in its abstraction of form, colour and light, begins to draw semiotic links to the physical histories of other forms of cultural transgression, merging the contemporary vernacular of the night club with the spiritual or mystical. These modern parallels' own currency in comparison, the female transverberation in the *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* or the communal ritualism of 'the shakers', Christensen adopts these dialects of ritualistic immersion reflecting their nature as personal and communal properties of belief. Her narratives seek to invite the viewer to question the value and knowledge of these experiences in contemporary imagination and their importance to society, is their still sanctity in these states?

*Text: Francis Patrick Brady*



Stills from *The Curvature Singularity of Erin Hunter* (2010)

Stills from *About the Light surface of Josephine Ditlev* (2010)



Stills from *The Curvature Singularity of Erin Hunter* (2010)



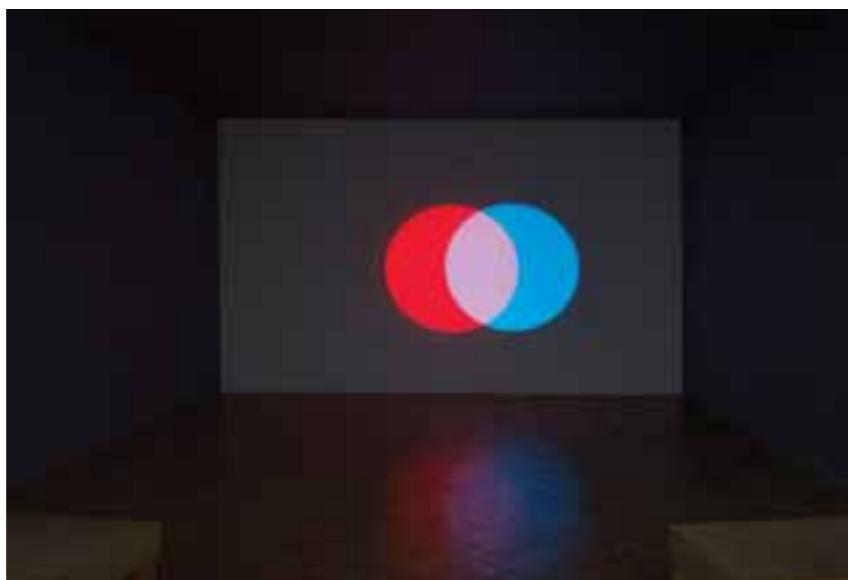
## SUSAN HILLER

### MAGIC LANTERN (1987)

Audio-visual installation: slide projections with synchronised soundtrack; three carousels each with 12 35 mm slides, driven by electronic pulses. 12:00 min.

Born in Tallahassee, Florida in 1940, and emerging as an artist in the early 1970s, Hiller is one of the most influential practitioners of her generation. Her output has taken many different forms and frequently derives from a process of collecting, cataloguing and restaging cultural artefacts and experiences as a means of exploring the subconscious and unconscious mind.

In *Magic Lantern*, 1987, a signature work originally commissioned for the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Hiller blurs the boundaries between scientific enquiry and the unruly and irrational, as ghost stories, optics, technology and aesthetics collide. The changing colour field of projected circles in *Magic Lantern* is accompanied by a series of sound recordings of 'ghost' voices derived from the experiments of the Latvian scientist Konstantin Raudive. Between 1965 and 1974 Raudive claimed to have recorded the voices of the dead by leaving a tape recorder running in an empty silent room. Hiller's use of these recordings, which she has combined with her own improvised vocals, is an early example of her interest in voices from 'the other side'.



Courtesy of Timothy Taylor Gallery

## BEN JUDD

### CONCERNING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE DELIGHTS OF PLEASURE AND TRUE HAPPINESS (2010)

HDV 38:00 min.



Courtesy of the artist.

Ben Judd uses performance and video to explore notions of scepticism and belief, freedom and immersion, by positioning himself, and the audience, as both participant and observer. Previous work has explored his relationship to particular occult and esoteric belief systems, such as witchcraft, shamanism and spiritualism; as a sceptic he attempts to test the extent and nature of his own beliefs and preconceptions.

Recent performance work explores how the ritualistic activities of these groups and individuals can be extended into an action realised by actors (one that itself hovers on the border between immersion and a more self-conscious, knowing state), and how, in turn, this action can be interpreted in a moving

image work.

*Concerning the Difference Between the Delights of Pleasure and True Happiness* (2010) at the Swedenborg Society, London, further explores notions of belief and immersion by looking at the crossover between ritual and performance. The performance examines the individual in relation to the group, and the ambiguity of whether the group offers freedom or conformity.

The work responds to the writing of Emanuel Swedenborg, a nineteenth-century scientist who claimed he had an epiphany and became a visionary. His subsequent writings, such as *Heaven and Hell*, have inspired a range of artists and writers such as William Blake and WB Yeats. His writing is seen as the precu-

rior to the spiritualist movement, and is read and interpreted in a variety of ways, from Swedenborgian fundamentalists, who interpret every word as the truth, to a more objective academic perspective.

*Concerning the Difference* took place in Swedenborg Hall, and used actors and musicians positioned amongst the seated audience. Text taken from Swedenborg's writing was developed into dialogue and music by actors and musicians, offering the potential of a group of individuals who came together over the course of the performance through a cycle of repeated phrases and movements. Projected magic lantern images act as metaphors for the visions described by Swedenborg.

## BEN JUDD AND SIDSEL CHRISTENSEN

### CONVERSATIONS WITH THE OTHER SIDE (2009 - 2011)

Live performance, drawing and video.



*Conversations With the Other Side, Session B, 2011*

*Conversations With the Other Side* is a collaborative performance by artists Ben Judd and Sidsel Christensen exploring the borderline experiences of the human mind and what it might mean to encounter something 'on the other side'. From their study of traditional forms of mediumship, hypnosis and religious rituals, the artists have developed a new, playful and open ritual.

The artists attempt to bridge the gap between the actual room where the ritual is performed and the space that exists in another dimension, as a method of contacting 'the other side' and working collaboratively with them. A wall and

the gallery floor are covered with white paper, and the audience is invited to sit on the paper. One of the artists puts the other into a trance-like state in a separate room, and a live video of the artist is projected into the main gallery space.

This attempt at describing the experiences of the person in the trance and the virtual space happens in a number of ways: A conversation takes place between the two artists in which the artist in the gallery attempts to understand the experiences of the other artist; the artist in the gallery might move the projection around the room in response to descriptions of differing spatial

experiences; the projected image might become larger or smaller; he or she could also attempt to describe the experiences by drawing onto the paper around the projected image and into the audience.

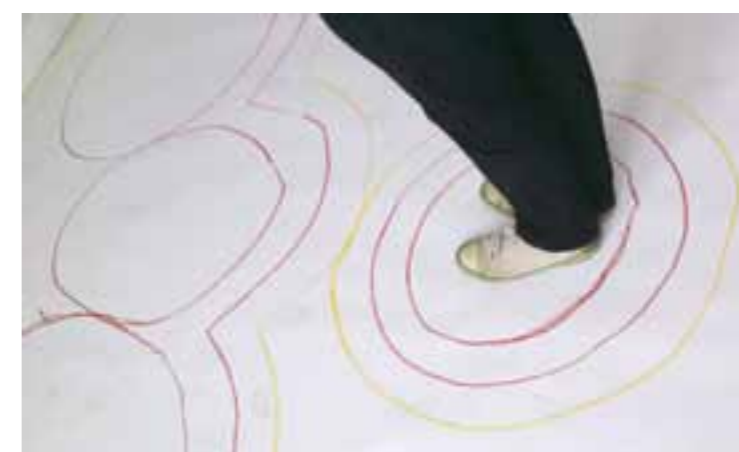
*Conversations With the Other Side* creates a portal for the audience and gives them a chance to participate directly. Mirroring spirit séances and occult salons at the turn of the nineteenth century, this event opens up to the possibility of the impossible or fantastical as well as maintaining an interest in the rational and critical faculties and how we use these in our engagement with the unknown.



*Session 11 (2009)*



*Session 11 (2009)*



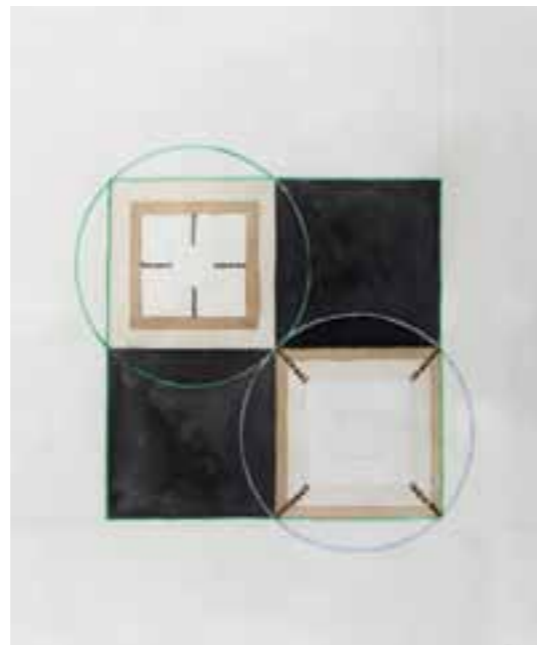
*Session 07 (2009)*

## HILMA AF KLINT

**ATOMEN NR. 9, 10, 11, 12 (1917)**  
Watercolor, 73 x 67 cm

**ATOMEN NR. 13, 14, 15, 16 (1917)**  
Watercolor, 73 x 67 cm

**ATOMEN NR. 17, 18, 19, 20 (1917)**  
Watercolor, 73 x 67 cm



Detail from *Atomen nr. 20* (1917), Hilma af Klint Foundation.

# SEEING, HEARING, AND FINDING ONE'S VOICE

Hilma af Klint's debut exhibition was *The Spiritual in Art – Abstract Painting* (1890-1985), held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1986. This exhibition presented the first major inventory of the philosophical background of abstract art. It had been generally accepted for many decades that this art had had four powerful pioneers, or forefathers: Wassily Kandinsky, Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian and František Kupka. The exhibition led to a sensational international breakthrough for the Swedish artist, and for the first time gave modernism a powerful female leader. The mother of abstract art had finally arrived.

Hilma af Klint's interest in spiritism was shared by other pioneers in abstract art. They all experienced a longing to pass beyond the limitations of the physical world. Abstract, non-figurative art offered such a radical possibility. Rather than reproducing an impression received by the senses, they attempted to reach a new launching point, a way of deepening their relationship with the world. It is, therefore, not surprising that they were all drawn to Theosophy, which offered just such an attractive alternative to the static approach of academic art. So let us then approach her work and try to determine the extent to which Hilma af

Klint's painting is abstract. It may be, for example, that her work in reality is decidedly concrete descriptions of very special inner experiences.

All of these male pioneers fit into the art context of their time and were members of the abstract avant-garde. They engaged with the art of their time, and showed that it had untapped possibilities. All had a capacity for self-reflection and appreciating the wider view. They were able to describe the intellectual and philosophical aspects of their pathway into abstraction, and they made a fully conscious choice. By deepening and purifying their points of contact with a given



Illustration photo: *The key to the Existing Work until now, NO. 5, Group 3. From the UV Series (Rose)* (1917), Hilma af Klint Foundation.

material, they developed individual and readily recognisable forms of expression and idioms.

It seems that Hilma af Klint was not aware of her abstract colleagues, and there is no evidence that she knew about or participated in the development of early modernism. Further, her pathway into abstraction differs markedly from those of her male colleagues: she arrived at the content of the paintings in conversation with spiritual beings, or through distinct inner images that were granted to her. For her, it was a case of educating, and thus focusing, her inner eye. It appears that the message was as palpable and as apparent as any message given through sight or hearing. These radical experiences were not new to her. She had met them previously in her interest in Theosophy and, eventually, Anthroposophy.

Although her artistic expression is supremely individual, she arrived in many of the paintings at an idiom that was similar to those of the others. But she came from a completely different starting point. She never attempted herself to exhibit her paintings, since she had received strict orders from The High Guides, in particular from three spiritual guides, Gregor, Clemens and Amaliel, not to show the paintings to outsiders. Despite this, she appears to have been aware, through her special ability, of the uniqueness of her work and may have seen it primarily as a tool that would eventually be used for a higher purpose. There are often figurative elements interacting with non-figurative ones in some paintings. This was never the case for her colleagues. Another aspect that distinguishes her from the others is a continuous variation in both technique and expression – naturalistic studies that alternate with totally geometrical

compositions, for example. This makes it difficult to place her into one particular movement, to place her into a single category. Furthermore, she often worked in long series that described variations and metamorphoses of a particular theme. The production of other abstract painters was almost exclusively individual pieces.

It seems that Hilma af Klint had far more first-hand knowledge of spiritual encounters than her male colleagues. She describes the method in detail in her notes: it is as if she enters a creative primeval condition in which everything becomes clear to her. Maybe the best description of her method of working is 'spiritual graffiti'. No corrections or changes are permitted: everything arises from an existential flow. Even the composition itself is present right from the beginning. It is not a process of seeking: she describes without sentimentality and with as much credibility and solidity as she can the inner images that arise from complete mindfulness.

It was important for Hilma af Klint, in order to avoid monotony, to divide her time between the requirements of external life and internal work as a medium. As early as the 1880s, she took part together with some female friends in séances, which were fairly common at this period, not least among the artistic community. It is Hilma af Klint who gradually comes to the forefront in this circle, and the other members of the group withdraw. It appears that the exercises carried out during the séances were intended to make the participants open to receive contact with a supernatural world through an increased mindfulness. It was a goal that the women should be able in the long term to visualise the messages they received, even when fully conscious. The women create drawings during the

séances, while in a state of trance. These drawings can be seen as precursors of what is to come.

Hilma af Klint had shown that she was up to the task of making contact with her commissioners. Her goal was to describe soberly and objectively a real inner experience. From this point of view, her paintings can be said to be concrete expressions of well-defined and precise experiences on the inner plane, independently of whether they contain figurative or non-figurative elements. By visualising inner processes and experiences, by describing them as exactly and as precisely as possible, she arrived at a characteristic and personal idiom. It may be interesting to note that also Kandinsky started to describe his painting as 'concrete' after around 1930. The outer world was not identical with full reality for Hilma af Klint. There is a real inner world in parallel with the natural world, and its contents are just as real and solid as those of the physical world. It is clear that she was faced with the task of developing an artistic approach to her esoteric material through an inner maturity of the soul, and allowing this to be manifested in the paintings. Hilma af Klint found herself in the borderland between balancing her inner impulses and dealing with them through her art. The knowledge she had gained during her training as an artist was fundamental to this: it gave her the tool she needed to make her intention clear. Through an intense process of working with herself, an intense process of self-development, she achieved ever-deeper understanding of the creative process of which she was a part.

*Text: The Hilma af Klint Foundation*



## SUSAN MACWILLIAM

**AFTER IMAGE (2002)**  
Video, DV 4:30 min.

*After Image* delves into the bizarre and the extraordinary, exploring the myth that the last image seen before death is retained on the retina of the eye. *After Image* uses film footage from Dario Argento's obscure 1971 film 'Four Flies on Grey Velvet' (Italy) and 'Los Muertos Hablan' (Gabriel Soria, 1935, Mexico) alongside footage shot by the artist. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was believed that the last image seen before death remained imprinted on the retina of the eye. This image was called an optogram and the art of photographing such an image, optography. The 'belief' was vali-

dated by advancements in photography and scientific experiments carried out in Germany during the 1870s.

Through anecdote, reconstruction and detailed editing MacWilliam's video works and installations consider the world of the paranormal, the tradition of psychical research, the supersensory and ideas about perceptual phenomenon. Her works look at the obscure and the historical and that which is on the periphery of the mainstream. They reflect on, and question how we understand, perceive and relate events, images and ideas. MacWilliam has made works based on historical cases of materialisa-

tion mediums, x-ray vision, optograms, table tilting and dermo optical perception. Her works visualise and mediate narratives from the past in to the space of the present and from the laboratory to the space of the gallery. MacWilliam's position shifts between that of observer and participant and since 2005 she has worked closely with prominent parapsychologists and psychical research institutions, including the Dermo Optical Laboratory of Madame Yvonne Duplessis, Paris, poltergeist investigator Dr William G Roll and the Parapsychology Foundation, New York.

## OSCAR MUÑOZ

### ALIENTO (1996-2002)

Grease photoserigraph on steel disks  
Diameter: 20.2 cm each

In the series *Aliento*, Oscar Muñoz has appropriated photographs of the deceased from newspaper obituaries. For many years he cut them out and kept them for no particular reason; images that are printed every day, as a way to announce a loss or to make public the grief of the family or friends. Muñoz printed these images invisibly with a transparent grease on discs of steel, which had been polished so that they were as reflective as a mirror.

The prints, then, are invisible at first sight; the viewer just sees his or her own image when approaching the mirror. However, they have the option to activate and see the image of the deceased if they mist up the mirror with their breath. When this happens, the image appears for a moment, momentarily obliterating the viewer's reflection. In this action a dialogue is set up between the two images, as well as a duality that mirrors the dual act of respiration: the viewer exhales onto the mirror to see the image of the other, but he also needs to breathe in again, and in this moment the image of the other starts to disappear and his reflection reappears. These experiences of instantaneousness, time, and permanency could be the moment when, as Walter Benjamin describes,

*the true image of the past occurs suddenly ... only as the image flashes, once and for all, in the instant of its cognoscibility, can the past be fixed.*



Credit: Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich



Stills from *Meditations on a Triangle* (2010).

## KAREN RUSSO

### MEDITATIONS ON A TRIANGLE (2010)

HDV video, 14 min./mixed media

Karen Russo's works are primarily concerned with the unconscious, the unknown and the invisible. The imagery she works with focuses on the landscapes and characters that Western society assigns to the realms of the irrational, unwanted or hidden. Russo is interested in the dividing line between what is accepted as the legitimate expression of culture and civilised existence, and what falls outside of it, is excluded, expelled or repressed. Her intention is to expose what is habitually occluded and put out of sight, to reveal the dynamic continuously at work in the human world, where certain kinds of life, society and culture take shape, and in so doing always leaves an excess, or a remainder which it cannot incorporate.

*Meditations on a Triangle* (2010), is comprised of a video and a three art objects. It explores the application of the technique of 'remote viewing' – the psychic ability to see and describe remote geographical locations, or 'targets' – to the exploration of outer space.

The video work centres on an attempt by a Remote Viewer to psychically access an undisclosed target, using only a set coordinates as a reference. These coordinates were given to him by a monitor presiding over the Viewing session. A printed image of the target – the painting *Variation in the Triangle* (1927) by Wassily Kandinsky – remained hidden in a sealed envelope nearby, to be revealed at the session's end. During the Viewing, the Remote Viewer's impressions were documented and these notes were then delivered to three artists, Mark Titchner, Shezad Dawood and Jeremy Millar. In different ways, each artist's work



Installation view, Shezad Dawood (left) and Jeremy Millar.

## KAREN RUSSO

**SHEZAD DAWOOD**  
ALAMUT VERSION 1 (2010)  
Mixed media, 63x122x56 cm

**JEREMY MILLAR**  
MECCAMPUTECHTURE (2010)  
Painted wood, acrylic sheet, seven acrylic mirrors, steel wire, display fittings, jasper, quartz, dimensions variable

**MARK TITCHNER**  
090313 412 (2010)  
Transparency in lightbox, 150x100 cm  
Production video, 14:23 min



Installation view, Mark Titchner (left/back) and Shezad Dawood



Detail, Jeremy Millar *Meccamputechture*.

addresses questions of religion and spirituality, para-psychology and mysticism and their relation to ideas of modernism. Russo asked these artists to create new works based on the visual descriptions provided or respond to the process.

In their responses, each artist freely projects his own preoccupations and interests: Dawood thinks the description suggests a sort of temple, atop a mountain from which issues a waterfall.

Mark Titchner's response to the reading involves putting himself into a trance, using a 'dream machine', the meditation device first designed by the beat poet Brian Gysin. Jeremy Millar's sculptural structure makes reference to the Kabbalah myth of the 'Metatron', a configuration of circular forms organised to produce the schema of an immaterial cube, in which geometric and 'minimalist' forms converge.

Remote Viewing was originally developed during the Cold War as part of the Stargate Project, a CIA sponsored research programme into potential military applications of paranormal phenomena. In a series of experiments conducted by the physicists Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff, human subjects of a range of psychic ability were asked to follow a protocol during which they had to view and then give information about

remote geographical targets such as roads, buildings, and laboratory apparatus. The accuracy of the descriptions was astonishing, and far beyond what might be accounted for by coincidence. Targ and Puthoff's results suggested that Remote Viewing is a latent and widely found perceptual ability which can be taught and practiced by anyone.

*Meditations on a Triangle* seeks to examine new ways of making art which

are not based on normal perception and raises a number of questions about the nature and definition of the artwork, such as:

Can Kandinsky's spirit be communicated unconsciously by his contemporary successors? And if so, does it affirm his mystical and spiritual ideas?

Is there an essence or a core to an artwork which can be accessed by people and can be communicated? Can that

energy in time and space be captured and be articulated?

What is left of the original representation made by Kandinsky? What's lost between the inspiration, interpretation and then the re-expression of the piece?

Karen Russo's *Meditations on a Triangle* is supported by **OUTset**.



# SCREENING ARTISTS

in alphabetical order

## MARCUS COATES

**JOURNEY TO THE LOWER WORLD (2004)**  
28:30 min, DV



Courtesy of the artist, Workplace Gallery and Kate MacGarry, London

Much of Coates's artwork involves community. More specifically he examines small or marginal communities through disrupting social conventions with animal worlds.

*Journey to the Lower World* was Coates's first attempt to engage the mystical and transformative power of shamanic ritual. Here he assists the tenants of Liverpool's Linosa Close, a 24-storey council tower block scheduled for demolition. With their homes condemned, Coates asked a group of residents to participate with him in a recreation of a Siberian Shaman ritual, so that animal spirits, via the medium of the artist, might offer them guidance for the uncertain times to come.

In *Journey to the Lower World*, Coates plays the role of the shaman. He dons a deer pelt complete with head, gleaming eyes, and prominent antlers. When a Sheil Park building in Liverpool is set to be destroyed, he offers to talk with the animal spirits of the lower world on behalf of the residents. Coates is not looking to save the building; newer homes will be built. Instead, he seeks

a communal cohesion amid the turmoil by consulting the wisdom of the animal spirits of the Lower World. He creates an event which helps the displaced citizens think outside of the known status of their fate and consider a larger economy of relationships between humans and the non-human world.

Wrapped in his shaman's deerskin, Coates roams the streets and park near the housing complex and cleanses one of the building's apartments as a sacred site by vacuuming it with a Hoover and spitting water from a Safeway bottle. He dances with jingling car keys tied to his shoes while a cassette tape of drums plays in the background. His antennae-like antlers knock against a lamp and almost get caught in a curtain. He stumbles in a trance state from spinning in circles. To the 'sensible everyone', to the Western everyman, he looks like an idiot. he subsumes the role of the non-expert outsider 'the artist who insists on the fidelity of their amateursim'. (1)

Coates bravely places himself in these fool hearted positions. The audience feels this same tension caught between

the seriousness—the authenticity of the endeavour—and the sheer absurdity of a postmodern, new age, weekend shaman. The performance suggests that there is another world parallel to ours but out of our reach, veiled but very much alive with creatures. The shaman translates between these worlds and brings to our awareness the possibility of a future other than the one contained 'in a block of flats in Liverpool.' It is not that Coates looks to solve the residents' problems. Instead, he points to the future's future. That is, he points to a future that is impossible (to imagine) within the circumstances of the life we've assembled.

Excerpts from *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art (Posthumanities)* by Ron Broglio published by the University of Minnesota Press 2011

1) Alec Finlay, *Chthonic Perjink, Journey to the Lower World* ed. Marcus Coates and Alec Finlay (Newcastle upon Tyne: Platform Projects, Distributed By Trans-Atlantic Publications), unpaginated.

## MAYA DEREN

**DIVINE HORSEMEN, THE LIVING GODS OF HAITI (1947-55)**  
Documentary film, 16 mm transferred to DV, 52 min.



© TAVIA ITO/REVOIR

**The most enduring works of art create a mystical reality, which cannot refer to one's own personal observations. (1)**

Of the 10,000 feet (over four hours) of film shot by Maya Deren in Haiti in 1947, 1949 and 1954, about fifty minutes was culled and edited (images, music and voice-over) between 1973 and 1975 by the filmmaker's last husband, the Japanese musician and composer Teiji Ito. This film, baptised by Ito *The Divine Horsemen, the Living Gods of Haiti* (echoing the eponymous text Maya Deren wrote on her Haitian experiences in 1953) shows several rites of voodoo cult in Haiti based on the major spirits.

Deren's repeated trips to Haiti show her growing interest in capturing divinatory practices on film but also her difficulty in doing so, indicating that this film, as it was designed, was not easy to make. The result is far from her original intended goal. In fact, Deren, fascinated

by the rites she came to film, requested to be initiated herself, which does not go against the filmmaker's principles. However, she was far from able to conciliate the images she filmed with those she imagined when designing her project. Throughout her shots, Deren seeks to account for gestural practices, links between people and objects, rhythms inviting possession, collective dances, and the whole ritual practice uniting voodoo followers during a ceremony. At the time of possession, extraction from the world (that the filmmaker compares to children lost in play, using sticks as rifles) is gradually felt, summoned by a community in solidarity. They prepare themselves for possession, and for some, it occurs. She films the mechanisms of ritual – the geomantic drawings; the dances and invitations; the horsemen-divinities as they are invoked and as they appear; the sacrifices; and the Poteau Mitant, the centrepost, true entry portal of the gods – which correspond to the issues she was dealing with concerning the film poem.

Deren's fundamental meeting with voodoo rites had a listing impact on her life. Undergoing initiation rites herself, she was crowned a voodoo Grand Priestess by a New York Haitian community. During this period, and until her death in 1961, she worked on the images filmed in Haiti, without ever finding a way to edit them.

A film with no end, of which only a fragment survives. *Divine Horsemen, the Living Gods of Haiti* is dispossessed of its abilities, dispossessed of its conceiver. It remains a film impossible to grasp or to possess as a whole. Other ways of putting the material together may suggest themselves. It is a body without a soul, a mind without a body.

*Text: Sébastien Ronceray*

1) Maya Deren in Clark, *VeVe A., Hodson, Millicent, and Neiman, Catrina (eds), The Legend of Maya Deren: A Documentary Biography and Collected Works*, Volume 1, Part 2, (New York, Anthology Film Archives/ Film Culture, 1984), p. 574

## GEORGE GURDJIEFF

**HIDDEN SYMMETRY 2** (date unknown)  
DV, 4:31 min.

*Hidden Symmetry 2* is one of several recordings of ritualistic dances by followers of the mystic George Gurdjieff (1886-1949). These 'Movements' are attempts to act out the followers' belief in the teachings of Gurdjieff, in a series of highly choreographed, synchronised actions, or sacred dances. The Movements were authored by Gurdjieff and taught to his students for the purpose of self-observation and self-study. The dances are still taught today, and over 250 of them have been preserved. One of the key elements

to their success, for the participants and observers, are the notions of unity and commonality; the bodies of the dancers are 'shaped in powerful geometrical abstractions that suspend any individuality', and it is this collectivity that is said to generate a unique experience for Gurdjieff's followers. The dances are not only exercises in concentration and coordination; each gesture and movement also contains deep significance for followers, for whom the Movements are a kind of language.

Copyright Samasati Sacred Dancers



## JANE AND LOUISE WILSON

**ROUTES 1&9 NORTH** (1994)  
VHS 10:00 min.

This video, recorded in a seedy American motel room, documents the process of Jane and Louise Wilson being put into a trance by an anonymous hypnotist. The artists obligingly follow every instruction directed at them, seemingly genuinely under the hypnotist's control. The viewer's position may also become participatory, as they too follow the instructions, and become subsumed by the work.

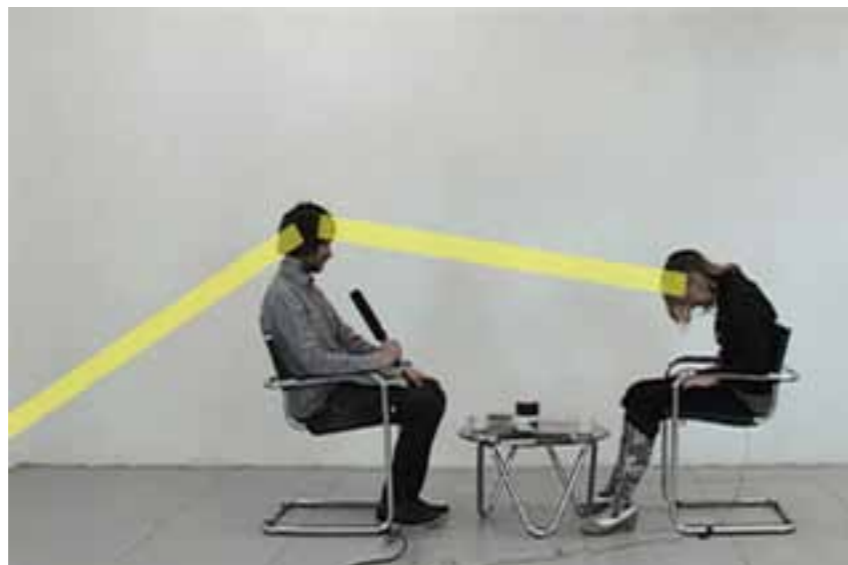


Courtesy of the artists.

## THE CURATORS

Sidsel Christensen and Ben Judd are artists living and working in London. They have collaborated on various projects since 2009.

**SIDSEL CHRISTENSEN** is engaged in moving image, live events and performance-based lectures. She maintains an ongoing working relationship in Norway, where she was brought up, as well as a BA from Goldsmiths College and an MA from the Royal College of Art. Between 2009 and 2011 Sidsel has taken part in group shows and art events in London, including the David Roberts Art Foundation, The South London Cultural Centre, Vilma Gold and The Royal Academy. She also worked with the curatorial group Five Storey Projects, and exhibited in two of their London shows. Sidsel is a founding member of the collective Hal Silver (2009) and has exhibited with them at The Russian Club Gallery, The Hospital Club and Apiary Gallery in London.



Sidsel Christensen and Ben Judd, *Conversation With the Other Side. Session 06*, (2009).

**BEN JUDD** uses performance and video, and has an MA from Goldsmiths College. Judd has exhibited widely including group exhibitions JAM: Tokyo London, Tokyo Opera City Gallery, Tokyo and The Barbican Centre, London; The Galleries Show, Royal Academy, London; Strangers: The First ICP Triennial of Photography and Video, International Center of Photography, New York; Impakt Festival, Utrecht, The Netherlands; Social Creatures, Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany; Seeing is Believing, The Photographers' Gallery, London. His solo exhibitions include Vilma Gold, London; Michael Janssen, Cologne; Kunstbunker, Nuremberg.

The exhibition with seminar is supported by:



**NORSK KULTURRÅD**  
*Arts Council Norway*



**FRITT ORD**  
*The Fritt Ord Foundation*



**SANDNES KOMMUNE**  
*Sandnes Municipality*

