

Syncopes

Mimosa House, London, 19 May to 10 July

A lacuna, a loss of consciousness, an unstressed beat – for all its different linguistic, medical and sonic definitions, a syncope is a liminal space, a connecting juncture, a tender interval or the end of an exhale before the next breath rushes in. ‘Syncopes’ at Mimosa House explores this notion of pause and interruption, making space for syncopated counternarratives through a conglomeration of multimedia artworks that together create a richly textured exhibition, unpredictable in its rhythms.

In an apt nod to Mimosa House’s rebirth at its new space in Holborn after a year of postponements and uncertainty, the first work we encounter is a video of a foetal ultrasound scan projected onto the wall. In this work, *16 weeks*, 2018, Mira Calix uses sonification to translate the undulating movements of a foetus in the womb into a sound piece, melodious and classical in its tone. We see the image of the foetus warp and distort with the movement of the ultrasound wand. At times its form is recognisably human, at others it is more akin to the joining and dividing of the wax in a lava lamp. The sound piece, although played by a six-part orchestra and presented as a score next to the work, has no definitive climax or ending. It is a fluid shadowing of this alien movement, tracking the syncope of gestation; that liminal space between the downbeats of conception and birth.

The practice of transcribing image into sound is also explored in Himali Singh Soin’s work *The Particle and the Wave*, 2015, in which the artist scrolls through a digital version of Virginia Woolf’s experimental novel *The Waves* and highlights the abundant semicolons used by the author, marking out the rhythm of the text. The work is a gradual process of erasure, the text slowly fading to leave only the semicolons behind. As Singh Soin picks out a rhythm with her cursor, our eyes follow the pattern, dancing between certain words and blind to others, creating a new text from Woolf’s original. On first viewing, my eyes focused on the phrase ‘now I pretend again to read’; a fair summation of the work’s effect. Using a computer algorithm, chimes can be heard that measure the space between Woolf’s semicolons, the difference in pitch representing the length of space between each usage. This sonic manifestation of Woolf’s punctuation subverts the notion of a syncope as a pause; the reverberation of the chimes overlap rather than separate, marking



Chooe Ly Tan, *On The Offbeat*, 2020, video

the syncopation of the text as the lens through which the narrative might be understood.

Sound is platformed through media other than video in Qian Qian’s interactive installation *People should listen to the birds’ flight*, 2018; Ruth Beraha’s *A long long time ago in a galaxy far away*, 2019; and Lala Rukh’s sound piece *Subh-e-Umeed*, 2008, presented alongside the artist’s series of drawings *Mirror Images*, 2011. In Qian’s work, concerned with the artist’s experience of linguistic untranslatability, braille-coded slabs are presented along the walls of one room, and connected by wires and copper-coloured lines that guide the viewer round the installation. We are invited to touch the work, an act that feels transgressive both in terms of the usual codes of conduct in art spaces and in terms of the nervousness around touch after more than a year of Covid-19. Each touch activates a recorded sound encrypted by the artist into the work, referencing mythology: a recording of the artist’s child’s heartbeat in the womb references Kalaviṅka, an immortal creature in Buddhism; a recording of the sound of writing references Thoth, the Egyptian god who created words and writing; a recording of an unexplained underwater sound recorded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in 1977 references the Siren song in Greek mythology and so on. In this work, the viewer becomes an agent in its syncopation, choosing how the sound piece will play out.

The curation of the exhibition is particularly strong. For example, the placement of Rukh’s *Mirror Images* series opposite her sound piece *Subh-e-Umeed* (presented in headphones) allows the viewer to contemplate the drawings while listening to the sound, the works

Jeffery Camp RA Some People Dream A Lot

Paintings of Beachy Head
and late flower paintings

19 June - 5 September

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Image: Jeffery Camp, *Ullac*, 2014
Oil on board 20cm x 21cm,
courtesy Art Space Gallery

informing one another. The stillness of *Mirror Images*, a series of minimalistic pencil drawings on carbon paper which depict reverberations on water, is contextualised by Rukh's sound piece that combines field recordings from a day in the artist's life, beginning with birdsong during her morning walks and ending with impassioned protests on the streets of Lahore.

The standout work in the exhibition is arguably Chooc Ly Tan's newly commissioned film *On the Offbeat*, 2020, in which the artist, DJ and filmmaker interviews interdisciplinary practitioners about syncopation. The work opens with a discussion of voguing and the rhythms and syncopations within the ballroom scene. Femme vogue dancer Omar Jordan Phillips discusses the importance of the beat in voguing and the pivotal moment in which the dancer decides to go with the beat or 'move through it'; Tan uses the collision of movement and music to tell personal stories about gender identity and bodily transformation. Hannah Katharine Jones also talks about the significance of the beat, alluding to decolonisation as a kind of syncopation that pushes back against the status quo, against the 'downbeat' of 'Eurocentric monoculture'. Linking and separating these various interviews is footage of participants voguing in anonymous outdoor spaces in London, and black screens with neon graphics of sound waves. There are deliberate pauses in the editing of the footage, bringing the viewer back to the notion of syncope, of interrupted rhythm.

After watching Tan's reflective film, the viewer emerges through thick curtains into a narrow, high-ceilinged space, confronted with the theatricality of Ruth Beraha's motion-activated sound piece *A long long time ago in a galaxy far away* in which the artist has adapted the *Star Trek* soundtrack by playing it in a minor key, transforming it into something both familiar and unfamiliar. The 'Syncopes' experience ends with the same disorienting sensation as that of leaving a dark cinema in the middle of the afternoon, blinking at the black, rectangular speaker hung where you might expect a painting, looking for the image within the sound.

Tess Charnley is a writer based in London.

Manfred Pernice: >accrochage<

Galerie Neu, Berlin, 29 April to 5 June

Manfred Pernice installed a satellite work for this exhibition in a plant pot outside the House of Statistics, a former GDR bureaucratic centre in Berlin-Mitte. I went by on the way in and found it had vanished, perhaps removed by some well-meaning local, who took it for junk. A photo shows it to have been a few bits of fencing and other metal oddments, which might have been discarded trash crammed into the pot - taking the pot for a bin - or the sides of a taller bin into which it had been converted. If it had looked more like art it might have been more likely to seem worth stealing than cleaning up.

Grey areas like this, between being assimilated into a setting and distinguished from it, are what Pernice's art is all about (he lives just around the corner from the HoS). In the sculpture's absence, the civic, pebble-aggregate pot was left looking as Pernicean as the gaunt, communist shell of the building looming over it, with its faded, modular facade. To coerce this default

from object to context might have been the point of the whole exercise. Twenty years ago, when he was starting out, Pernice's chipboard and ply arrangements, dressed with faded print-outs and found material, looked like a sculptural analogue of the still-provisional textures of a post-unification Berlin. Now, the improvised has been codified, a live response become a layered memory. At Neu, he seems to be engaged in recognising that this dating of the work's original mode and model might require an adjusted stance, to guard against its appearing dated itself. The past is easier to reduce to illustration because it has already hardened into a memory image.

The essential abstraction of Pernice's art was always its buffer against succumbing to a too-literal representational interdependency with its environment. His found objects are never more than a dressing, a garnish of information, a series of pointers, rather than props; and when one of the gallery assistants showed me a picture taken on her phone of a local removal's spill into the street, having noticed its resemblance to a Pernice installation, it seemed a good sign of his art's perspicacity. His is a sculptural language founded on a deceptively amateurish carpentry, tending towards basic units of construction and containment - the can, the block, the platform - with a functional air about them. His trademark, multi-faceted cylinder form is both slick and cloddish; his ragged rolling on of colour gestural (as of abstract painting) as well as artisanal (no need to overstep the practical covering of the thing and get too aesthetic about it). The elements can double as modules to be adapted or reconfigured for subsequent occasions, or added to others to form new wholes.

This exhibition takes account of a tension between his sculptures working as signs for the autonomy of their abstraction (the cylinder forms are like self-protectively shaped cells) and as counters in an evolving process - historical, personal - to which they are forced to submit. It has a brooding air of taking stock, leave-taking, as if acknowledging one's ties to the past inevitably implies loss. Gallery neons are off, openings to the reception provisionally sealed. Works produced over the past decade and a half for other occasions have been arranged in the dim space so it is difficult to tell where one ends and another begins. Under the gallery's high ceiling, its protruding pipes recalling the building's industrial roots, the exhibition cultivates the scattered look of an inventory, left abandoned in a dark storage site. Where there are lights, they are weak bulbs embedded in the sculptures. It all manages to appear precise in its flagrant fuzziness. Modules are stranded as fragments, wholes separated into disconsolate parts. The aura of neglect is self-reflexive, a corollary of an aesthetic of the slipping hand, the second-hand.



Manfred Pernice, '>accrochage<', installation view