

# EVENTS

29 Feb, 3–5.30pm PERFORMANCE

*AS IF*

As If is a series of performances that expand on the exhibition *Transparent Things*' premise of fiction as methodology. Organised by MFA Curating students from Goldsmiths, University of London, the event includes the artists Verity Birt, Rebecca Jagoe, Reba Maybury and Korallia Stergides.

8 Mar, 11am–3pm FAMILY WORKSHOP

*#OOHO TALK AND DISTORT*

Join artist Lucy Steggals to play with materials that magnify, reflect and distort. Create objects that talk and go on a unique journey around CCA's exhibition 'Transparent Things'. This event is suitable for families with children age 5 and upwards. 11am-12pm and 2-3pm.

18 Mar – 19 Mar, 6–9pm WRITING WORKSHOP

*TENSION FILM*

Taking place over two evenings, this workshop responds to Nabokov's notion of the tension film of "the now", an idea which evokes the fragility of the present moment and our susceptibility to the seductive past, and brings it into conversation with Elizabeth Freeman's work on queer temporalities. The workshop will be led by the writer Rosie Haward

25 Mar, 7–8.30pm TALK

*EXPERIMENTS WITH TIME*

Extending the investigations of *Transparent Things*, we have invited Ele Carpenter, Professor Margaret Iversen and Dr Amy Tooth Murphy, to present insights into subjective time, as expressed and understood in the fields of art, psychoanalysis, science and literature. The event is co-curated and moderated by Professor Josh Cohen.

29 Apr, 1.30–2.30pm TOUR

*MICHELLE WILLIAMS GAMAKER*

Join artist Michelle Williams Gamaker for a tour of the exhibition in which she will consider the works in light of her own practice, which deploys 'fictional activism' as a methodology where marginalised characters return as brown protagonists to challenge the fictional injustices to which they have been historically consigned.

30 Apr, 7–8.30pm PERFORMANCE

*MUSARC X TRANSPARENT THINGS*

Choral collective Musarc have based their term's activities around the exhibition *Transparent Things*, responding to the artworks in the exhibition. Their project will culminate in an evening of performances across Goldsmiths CCA.

For more information on upcoming events visit [goldsmithscca.art](http://goldsmithscca.art)

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# EXHIBITION GUIDE

## TRANSPARENT THINGS

21 Feb – 3 May 2020

This exhibition is scripted using Chapter 1 of Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Transparent Things* (1972). The text has formed the basis of an exploration of contemporary art that has a relationship to literary fiction, objects, their histories, time and materiality. Artists have been invited to respond as co-readers of this 'script' with both existing and new works.

The narrator of Nabokov's novel warns against the power of objects to catalyse radical perceptual shifts that pull us back from a 'perceived present', into a 'pictured past', so that we might find ourselves 'no longer walking on water, but descending upright among staring fish'. Nabokov describes how objects seductively hold our attention, acting as anchors for our unstable memories, or as items upon which we project fantasies and read material histories. His protagonist is neurotically prone to this effect, so that looking at a mere pencil draws him into a vortex of memory and imagined pasts, each explicitly image-based, and cinematically montaged; 'shot after shot'. The question is left hovering; is the affect of objects pathological, or does the text suggest an agency of 'things' to shape our world?

Our ability to read objects is problematised in the exhibition. Imperceptible and difficult to categorise 'objects' such as coagulated air and electromagnetic waves are introduced in the work of Nina Canell. Some objects seductively anthropomorphise; in Nairy Baghramian's work, rubber tubing folds like intestines and glistens behind glass, whilst Renee So morphs ceramic pre-Columbian vessels into female bodies.

The narrative of time as personal or social history is central to many of the works in the exhibition. Found objects are incorporated as totems of cultural narratives, such as in works by Theaster Gates and David Hammons. Or, in the case of Virginia Overton and Marie Lund, they are exploited for their potential formal qualities, becoming part of new charged assemblages that are responsive to the architecture in which they are displayed. Other works mark time's passage, or bend its measurements and definitions; such as the time spent making a coffee, for mastic gum to slide off a shelf, or for the sun to bleach a curtain. For Nabokov, the eruption of the past into the present was part of his belief in different times running concurrently. He was keenly interested in Serialism; an obscure theory of dreams predicting the future, and time running in multiple dimensions observable by higher levels of consciousness.

For many of the works reading as an act, and language as a material, are central. Their surfaces can be read

like sentences; impenetrable or seductive, transparent or opaque. How art articulates itself visually, alongside literature, and sometimes through text, is a central question. Some works are made directly in response to novels, such as Becky Beasley's engagement with Herman Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener* and Thomas Bernhard's *The Loser*. Other's become lingual, such as Michael Dean's abject concrete assemblages that stutter and lisp abstracted letters and words, enraged by their inability to communicate.

Nabokov was an obsessive entomologist, and collected butterfly specimens throughout his life, drawn to their deceptive camouflage. Reproductions of his drawings of wing structures are included in the exhibition, and wings and their pigmentation appear directly in works by Kerry Tribe and Michael Dean. The exhibition has been organised much like a butterfly's wing, with repeated motifs and visual connections linking works across different floors of the building.

In reflection of the exhibition situating itself in the interstices of fiction, art and exhibition making, writers have been commissioned to respond to the text and art works. The publication includes contributions by writers Rosie Haward, Jesper List Thomsen, and Kashif Sharma-Patel.

Artists: Nairy Baghramian, Carlotta Bailly-Borg, Becky Beasley, Gareth Cadwallader, Nina Canell, Michael Dean, Theaster Gates, David Hammons, Marie Lund, Vladimir Nabokov, Virginia Overton, Lucy Skaer, Renee So, Kerry Tribe.

# LIST OF WORKS

Work numbers below correspond to wall labels.

## GROUND FLOOR

### GARCIA FAMILY FOUNDATION GALLERY

1. Through the collision of form and text, Becky Beasley's *Astray (D.A.M.)* powerfully conjures a character and narrative. Overhead a brass cast of sticks that Beasley's father gathered after a storm spins like a compass at a loss. Titled *Bearings V*, the form is made up of interconnecting parts, like a snooker cue. It delicately rotates, roving for meaning, testing the air.

2. Two newly commissioned benches by Renee So bear machine-knitted staring eyes, playing on the exhibition's anthropomorphic theme. Visitors are invited to sit on them to read Chapter 1 of *Transparent Things*.

3. Gareth Cadwallader's painting *Coffee* distils a moment in time, and an interaction between man and object. It offers a subjective temporality; that of the stilled minutes in which coffee percolates. Behind, seen through a window, trees abstract into shapes, a slippage in the realism of the painting, hinting at another realm of consciousness.

4. Alongside being a novelist and poet, Vladimir Nabokov was also an obsessive lepidopterist, studying and collecting butterflies throughout his life. The patterns of their wings was a subject of special study and can be read as the model for his mode of fiction, which deploys repeated motifs and images across the narrative; in *Transparent Things* the protagonist Hugh Persons' eventual death in a hotel fire is predestined by his dreaming of a burning dollhouse.

5. In this work by Michael Dean a repeated letter 'f', painted to the height of the artist, modulates across the gallery windows in a struggle between paint and gesture, catching the light and laughing at its own ineptness. The work is painted using a paperback book that sags, paint-logged, on the floor.

6. In Dean's work (*Unfucking Titled*) *fucked dove / pigeon*, cheaply available materials are tied and welded together suggesting a landed bird with stained and ragged feathers. Lashed with cartilage-like cable ties, the books bear repeated AK47 motifs that spell out 'pollen' with dumbed down violence across every page. Such symbols are found on drug paraphernalia, and are common in 'emoji' lexicons. Ribbons of scene-tape add to the sense of an index of the street, a 'for fucksake' keepsake of poverty, as much tattered and wind-shaped as made by human hand.

7. *Further Consumption/Blue Window* and *Blue Window* stages various encounters with an intricately inlaid sash window, removed from Lucy Skaer's childhood bedroom. The transformed object is the focus of a photograph, and also occurs in the exhibition as a sculpture. The absurdly high level of craft and ornate lapis lazuli elevates the object, its preciousness equating with the memories it holds, and transforming it from transparent to opaque.

8. Positioned throughout the gallery, Marie Lund's series of copper sculptures take the form of door hinges, scaled-up to parts of the human body. The change in size and context of these familiar and banal objects make them seem unfamiliar and strange. Positioned in interstitial spaces of the gallery, the hinges articulate parts of the building's architecture, as a second skin and linking device, bringing attention to spaces that one might otherwise take no notice of.

## FIRST FLOOR

### CANDIDA & ZAK GERTLER GALLERY

9. David Hammon's basketball drawings are made by repeatedly bouncing a charcoal-covered basketball against a sheet of paper. The resulting image traces an absent object. The basketball attests to the position of black male bodies in white US culture, performing a sanctioned visibility in the arenas of entertainment and sports. The 'rock' that the drawing precariously balances on refers to the slang term for the basketball itself.

10. In *Background* (2019) by Nina Canell, a shortwave radio receiver is surrounded by glasses containing coagulated air; the lowest density material in the world. The receiver acts like a duct between the electromagnetic activity in our atmosphere and the gallery environs, giving form to the world's background mass, and foregrounding the limits of our perceptual abilities. The material properties of coagulated air trouble the stable categorisation of what constitutes an 'object'.

11. See 7.

12. Beasley's practice is shot through with a literary imaginary. Her work *Literary Green* depicts a tall folding partition – built by the artist – derived from a short story by American novelist Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853). Bartleby, a copyist who refuses to work is eventually blocked out from his fellow workers with a 'high green folding screen'. This withholding and obstruction plays on our ability to read, or know, objects and images, privileging what is incommensurable. The work brings forth an imagined space of fiction into real space, playing on doubled images, obstructions, two and three dimensions, reflections and formal echoes.

# LIST OF WORKS

## DASKALOPOULOS GALLERY

**13.** This looping 16mm film by Kerry Tribe, features an animated image of a Parnassius Mnemosyne butterfly wing as seen under a microscope. 'Mnemosyne' refers to the personification of memory in Greek mythology. Nabokov, also a renowned lepidopterist, included his drawing of Parnassius mnemosyne in his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*. The memoir was published in a string of revised iterations, reflecting the instability of subjectivity and recall. In the installation, a strip of 16mm film is twisted once and its head is spliced to its tail, forming a Möbius strip—a surface with only one side and only one boundary. Whenever the splice—where the head and tail are joined—passes through the projector's gate, the image flips along a vertical axis almost imperceptibly, so that each viewer may have a different memory of the piece.

## RODEN COURTYARD GALLERY

**14.** This new commission by Virginia Overton made in response to the courtyard gallery, refashions lettering from old commercial signage. Deconstructed and stacked, they become conduits for a cascade of water, alluding to the building's former social use as a bathhouse. The liquid connection between abstracted letters suggests the flow of a sentence or poetry.

## BRIDGET RILEY GALLERY

**15.** Made in direct response to chapter 1 of *Transparent Things*, Michael Dean's sculptures are conceived of as transparent pages supporting barely intelligible sentences written in poured concrete. The palette of coloured concrete is an afterimage of tiger moth wings. Concrete is central in Dean's work as a democratic ceramic, cheaply available and quick to render. The liquidity of the concrete pour is palpable despite its solidification. As forms they shuttle between human figure, tongues, lava flow, and pupae.

**16.** *Stills* by Marie Lund is a series of works made by stretching found curtains taut. Exposure to sunlight has partially bleached the fabric, leaving an indexical mark of the passage of time.

**17.** Mastic gum, used as a chewing gum, harvested from the pistachio tree, slides gradually off two shelves. Nina Canell's artworks are unstable, flesh-like, animated and transforming almost imperceptibly over time. *Gum Shelves* propose a materiality that is anything but passive.

## BASEMENT WESTON GALLERY

**18.** Having the original form of an amphora, Carlotta Bailly-Borg's series of sculptures titled *Mammals* (2019),

have been dropped, fired, and had faces etched into their surface. Grimacing like medieval grotesques they have lost their use function, and tread a line between body and object.

**19.** Nairy Baghramian's *Gorge* is an assemblage of biomorphic forms made in foam, silicone, and epoxy resin. Folded and squashed into a cold glass vitrine, the materials summon the impression of a medicalised examination of an intestinal tract, the interior made exterior. A minimal display technique is brought to bear on the body.

**20.** Renee So makes use of imagery and techniques found within histories of craft to communicate commentaries on contemporary social codes and power structures. Here she responds to pre-Columbian funerary vessels, morphing these into women's bodies. The female form is explored as an object for holding; hopes, dreams, a child, a domestic space, or as a sexual body.

## BASEMENT 1

**21.** Becky Beasley's photograph *Gloss* spectrally depicts a skeletal model of an upright piano (or is it an empty bookshelf?), drawn from Thomas Bernhard's *The Loser* (1983). The novel fictionalises the real figure of pianist Glenn Gould to describe three musicians' obsessive pursuit of musical perfection that ends in suicide and death. In the novel and in life Gould rejects live performance for recorded ones; an echo of Beasley's mechanical reproduction of the sculpture through photography.

**22.** Theaster Gates' work engages with the life of objects. His *Sound Cube* (2019) consists of azobe wood, a Hammond B3 organ, and a Leslie speaker. The Hammond is an electric organ first manufactured in Chicago in 1935, and marketed to churches as a low-cost alternative to the wind-driven pipe organ. It became a common sonic feature of black congregational gatherings. Its wavering sound, disliked by purists, was adopted by African American soul and jazz musicians during the 1960s, most notably Jimmy Smith and Booker T Jones. The cube structure creates an intense focus on the organ, opening out its canonical role in forming a black aesthetic and as a counter narrative to 'White Western sameness'. The organ plays out the last note performed by a member of The Black Monks, a blues and gospel band whose experiments in Black sound give life to the everyday objects that Gates collects.