

Press Release June 2009

## con\_fig\_u\_ra\_tion **at Collyer Bristow Gallery**

20 May - 2 September 2009

**Susan Aldworth, Heather Allen, Kate Davis, Romily Hay, Alyson Helyer, Trish Morrissey, Geraldine Swayne, Flora Whiteley & Vicky Wright**

For the latest Collyer Bristow Gallery exhibition Day + Gluckman bring together a group of artists whose work touches upon the figure, both objectively and subjectively. This much appropriated subject matter is given a new lease of life through the selection of artists and work. These artists take the human condition and lay it open for scrutiny. In some instances the subject matter is simply an opportunistic opening for an exploration of paint and surface - for others it is a self reflective process. This exhibition is about observation - of people, of media, of subjective standpoints and objective analysis.

The metaphysical world is a key point of departure for many of these artists. Geraldine Swayne's darkly seductive paintings depict imagined characters, including eccentric ancestors and hollywood starlets. There is an illusory beauty that draws us into their worlds, belying their shadowy histories. Flora Whiteley's work is similarly imbued with a sense of other worldliness. Taking on the language of painting in the first instance her source material includes snapshots of friends, obituary pictures taken from the newspaper, stills from films and gallery postcards. Yet these characters take on a new presence through Whiteley's intuitive ability with paint, rendering a new perspective through the process of discovery. Romilly Hay likewise teases the figure from the medium of ink, or paint or pencil and from the lumpen architecture from which they emerge in her pictures. Her new works move towards a curious anthropomorphism that is also present in Alyson Helyer's darkly comic images. Using motifs familiar to 17th and 18th Century portrait painters Helyer reinterprets the notion of portrait. In her own words she is interested in "primordial images built up from ancestral and shared cultural experiences that surface by night in our dreams". Following on from these Vicky Wright's extraordinary paintings critique society by reminding us of our visceral connection to the world.

Kate Davis' recent body of work considers the relationship between the artist and the muse as manifested in the sculptural works of Michelangelo, Bernini and other great masters. These detailed studies are created by piercing the drawing paper

from the back giving them an illusive, delicate quality. Similar explorations of subject and object are explored by Trish Morrissey whose 'family snap' photographs are from a series titled 'Seven Years' *"in which my sister and I play all the parts in a part fact ,part fictional family album, playing with the tropes of family photography."* Berlin-based Heather Allen also plays with the idea of reversal - her sculpey figures, based on herself, lovers and friends reproduce the idea of the alter ego and the part Freud's notion of "the gaze" plays within this framework.

Susan Aldworth takes the idea of the ego in another direction. Aldworth's interest in the brain lead her to work closely with a surgeon and gain incredible access into the visual language of the brain. Present during brain operations and associated scans Aldworth extrapolates these neurological patterns through the media of ink drawings and printmaking. This overt connection between art and body through the physical act of observing and drawing can also be seen as referencing the actual transmission of messages to and from the brain, a deliberate synchronicity that asks as many questions as it reveals.

Whilst putting together ideas and artworks for this exhibition the curators soon discovered that their choices kept tending towards work by women. Whilst not setting out to make this a deliberate ambition it is important to recognise that the figure as subject, and often the female figure, has been consistently appropriated and explored by women artists in recent decades whilst many male artists in the mainstream contemporary art arena appear to be retreating from its art historical associations. *con\_fig\_u\_ra\_tion* reflects this dialectic.

Notes to Editors:

Kate Davis is represented in the UK by Fred Mann at Fred (London)

The Collyer Bristow Gallery is a bespoke gallery space with a dynamic exhibition programme.

Collyer Bristow LLP is a UK firm of solicitors with offices in London and Geneva.

The firm provides business and personal legal advice to a wide range of clients both in the UK and internationally. Within the legal world Collyer Bristow has been championing emerging talent in contemporary art for the past fifteen years.

Viewing is by appointment Monday to Friday during office hours

For enquiries please contact the gallery administrator on +44(0)20 7466 7215  
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