

The Griffin Gallery
The Studio Building
21 Evesham Street
London W11 4AJ

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www.griffingallery.co.uk

CHARLIE SMITH london
336 Old Street
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young
gods



CHARLIE SMITH london



CURATED BY ZAVIER ELLIS

2012 LONDON GRADUATES

ARTISTS

STEVEN ALLAN
EYAL EDELMAN
PETER GEORGALLOU
SALOME GHAZANFARI
ANDREW LEVENTIS
ADELE MORSE
SIKELELA OWEN
GEORGE RAE
JESSICA RAYNER
CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN THOMAS
SHEILA WALLIS

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

PRIVATE VIEW
Wednesday 9 Jan 2013
6.30-8.30pm

EXHIBITION DATES
Thursday 10 Jan –
Friday 15 Feb 2013

GALLERY HOURS
Monday – Friday
2pm – 5pm or by appointment

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Saturday 16 Feb 2013

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FOREWORDS

JANE BEESTON, THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

The *Studio Programme* provides a great opportunity for championing and supporting the work of emerging artists. The Griffin Gallery, at the heart of this programme, is an open, contemporary space providing local, national and international artists with an exciting platform to showcase their work.

Supported by fine art materials brands Winsor & Newton, Liquitex and Conté à Paris, the *Studio Programme* includes International and domestic residencies in two fully equipped studios (selected through the *Griffin Art Prize*); on hand access to expertise in fine art materials and techniques; and opportunities to attend workshops and seminars put on by artists and technical experts.

Over a number of years Xavier Ellis has developed the careers of artists who have contemporary ideas in art whilst retaining a strong engagement with traditional techniques and materials. As part of our drive to support this emerging talent we are delighted to collaborate with Xavier Ellis on presenting *Young Gods* at the Griffin Gallery in association with CHARLIE SMITH london.

ZAVIER ELLIS

I am delighted to have been invited to curate an edition of *Young Gods* at the Griffin Gallery. Partnered with a simultaneous version at my own gallery in Shoreditch, CHARLIE SMITH london, the exercise has enabled me to consider two exhibitions with different character but which fall under the same umbrella, and I hope relate to each other. In some ways it is a small experiment in psycho-geographical curating. It is the first time since I launched the *Young Gods* programme in 2003 that I have been able to work with two sites, and I just wonder if the audience can imagine stepping out of the Griffin Gallery in west London and directly into my space in east London.

Following the remit at Griffin of focusing on traditional artists' materials, you will find four very strong painters; a sculptor who challenges the characteristics of clay; an artist who reconfigures acquired contemporary art from Sri Lanka; and in Eyal Edelman an artist-producer who will employ interactive performance, sound, and projection in order to draw a bridge between the two shows. And once you step from Griffin into CHARLIE SMITH london you will be confronted by intriguing, absurd and overwhelming installation, video, and mixed media.

Young Gods is a project that is close to my heart. Every year I visit all of the main BA and MA shows in London with the specific intent of looking for artists who, working in any medium and at any scale, engage me in a profound way. Eventually I will reduce my long list down to a select few who I curate into this showcase. For a gallerist / curator who can call on a huge pool of artists, it is still essential to me to always continue feeding new artists into my projects. And there is a real sense of satisfaction when those I have selected go on to do great things. Over the years I have been thrilled to see my *Young Gods* go on to forge great careers in the art world. I am convinced that within this group there are some important artists who you will be hearing about for years to come, and indeed some of them are already making significant progress.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank some key individuals: Mathew Gibson and Jane Beeston for having the drive and commitment to make the show happen; Paul Carey-Kent for his insatiable appetite for contemporary art; Northbound for their design savvy; Anton Llewelyn at Tiger of Sweden for his foresight; and all of the artists for their ongoing dedication and ambition.

ELEVEN HERMENEUTS GO FORTH

PAUL CAREY-KENT

What if this show had been held a hundred years ago? Plenty would have looked instantly different: the healthy evidence of sexual and racial equality would have been missing; there wouldn't have been videos and installations etc. The way the art was made would have been different too: three changes in particular seem apposite to what we see in these two spaces. First, the artists' relationship to art history would have placed the Renaissance where current artists are more likely to place modernism. Second, the amounts of information readily available to artists would have been radically less. And third, there is a quite different interaction with religion.

We can see those three factors playing out if the gallery is characterised as a place in which the world outside meets the history of art. The difference between the two may not have seemed so great when the heroic painter sought inspiration from his inner resources in the isolation of the studio and then delivered the result for public display. That's a caricature, of course, but it's typical of young artists today that their exploration of the world is more explicitly externally focused than that heroic model would imply. Yet it's still the **history of art** which provides a grounding context for those more widely sourced external influences. That's one of the reasons painting remains a relevant practice, for it naturally enters into a dialogue with that past - just as it did in the formation of modernism a century back. Consistent with which, not only this show but also the similarly sourced and

simultaneous Bloomberg New Contemporaries feature a healthy proportion of painters.

It may be - will presumably always have been - that because emerging artists are less fully formed from an internal aspect, the history of art and the outside world will impinge more immediately on their output. That effect is surely exaggerated, though, by the current generation's having the means to be aware of so much - through travel to anywhere and having everything on the internet. The sheer **amount of information** may overwhelm, but can also provide fascinating jumping off points.

Third, it's often said that the arts have taken the place of religion as the **source of the spiritual** in people's lives. Perhaps it's more natural than might first appear, then, to make a comparison with Paul Ricoeur's 'hermeneut', whose task is to interpret theological tradition in such a way that it speaks meaningfully to our current existential situation and concerns. Just so, we find that there are spiritual aspects to several of the artists here. Moreover, Ricoeur expects the hermeneuts to reach those interpretations by paying due attention to the analysis of the mythical and symbolic discourses of the past, through which they will also discover aspects of themselves. That, too, feels close to what several of these artists do.

Let's look at some examples of how this meeting of historical backdrop and forward-looking exploration feeds into the work.

Peter Georgallou has taken jobs in a coal mine, a cattle farm and in cataloguing antiques, and is also an exponent of extreme cycling. He consciously seeks out such experiences in order to have interesting stories to tell, but he also mediates them by looking at cultural accounts of how the self relates to the world. The romantic conceptualism of Bas Jan Ader, and the tale of his loss at sea in the course of an ocean crossing project, is not surprisingly a touchstone for Georgallou. What all that leads to are rather ridiculous self-imposed tasks, here linked to what might be described as an exploration of the phenomenology of the loom, and of the prospects for using merino wool to replace carbon fibre as the primary material for making 3D prints. Georgallou looks from the past to the future - one in which the ready availability of 3-D printing might bring to sculpture a revolution parallel to that faced by painting on the advent of photography. *Hark yonder the third horseman cometh over the horizon!* is a harbinger which yokes the perceived purities of a traditional and natural material together with the allure of the unknown to form a proposal for a high tech, yet homely, future.

Jessica Rayner is another intrepid traveller, currently hoping to explore the brand new island of Surtsey. Her light box, *Prohibition of Death in Response to Environmental Conditions* features a cemetery in the Arctic Circle high enough to be treeless and dark for all 24 hours during three months of the year. Seven miners were buried there following a shipwreck, but in another twist to the normal course of time, the bodies did not

decompose. Picking up that theme, Rayner also explores the different types of Arctic night. One senses not just the travel, not just reference to the environmental conundrums we have posed ourselves, but also a reaching for the ineffable and a dialogue with other artists from Robert Smithson to Olafur Eliasson to Katie Paterson.

Adele Morse's video installation *oh Brother, where art thou* represents an even more explicit way to bring an improbable aspect of the real world back into the gallery. Rather like a police artist making the likeness of a wanted man, she has used thousands of witness statements to construct sculptures of a legendary - or perhaps non-existent - Sumatran variation on known primates, the Orang Pendek. In that way she not only allegorises the search for artistic meaning and invites speculation on cultural relativism in the context of our somewhat equivalent Loch Ness monster, she also enters a conversation with other artists who have used the quest as a structuring device: recent examples might include Matthew Barney and Simon Starling. With charming confidence, she now plans to go to Sumatra and 'look for the Orang Pendek to see if it does or does not exist'. Perhaps she could go on to do the same for God.

Improbable economics; impenetrable jargon; the sense of a separate world with its own unwritten processes and rules, baffling to outsiders... No, not the art world but the preconceptions one might bring to the drug business. **Salome Ghazanfari**'s installation, based on texts received from a drug dealer, fits into a practice which is typically of the

street. It might remind us of both another means of seeking to go beyond ourselves and of the history of drug use for artistic inspiration. Ghazanfari is the only cross-over here with Bloomberg Contemporaries, where her film *Boxer (Young Marble Giants)* presents boxing in a stylised manner which leaves the audience hovering between its homo-erotic allure and awareness that the whole business may be unethical and implicate them. Either way, she brings another world into the gallery and sets it up to be interpreted as art.

The art market directly enters the work of **Christopher Kulendran Thomas**. He has a Sri Lankan background and his assemblages respectfully appropriate pieces which he buys from galleries there and then combines with contrasting elements from the West, setting up a contrast between the (post) modernist expectations of one market and the differently grounded religious and figurative approaches still prevalent in the other. As a play on the readymade, this comes across as a high tech update on Asger Jorn's painted interventions on top of amateur canvases (themselves lampooning abstract expressionism). Thomas' work might be seen as a perversion of colonial trading patterns which also relates to how disparate cultures run into each other on the internet. The resulting combinations are oddly powerful.

Those five are not painters, but we can see something of the same spirit in those who are. Indeed, **Andrew Leventis'** project could quite easily be set in the context of Cindy Sherman's photography or David Claerbout's

films. His explorations of time and artifice have their seed in media proliferation rather than travel, but to comparably wide-ranging effect: he makes realist paintings from photographs of televised period dramas. Which past, Leventis asks, are we in? The televised recreation or the original event? Given that we are actually in neither, could we equally well be in either? And how do our relations with those distant in time compare with our relations to those distant in geography and cultural values? The spiritual element is less in evidence here, but I was prompted to another question: how would the status of the bible, as second hand accounts well after the events, fit in to Leventis' schema?

Sikelela Owen is perhaps the most traditionally painterly of the artists here, with evident brushwork and luminously dark depth to the fore. It's no surprise, then, to hear that she gives Manet, Kerry James Marshall, Alex Katz and Alice Neel as inspirations – for the ways in which they produce an impression of broader significance out of personal material – and it would be easy to add Lynette Yiadom-Boakye as a current kindred spirit. Yet, though Owen does begin with her family and friends, she vests them with an exotic air and reaches out to the wider world by collecting imagery from the glut of sources so readily available to all these artists, bringing a certain distance and unpredictability to chafe at the intimacy.

The Northern Irish painter **Sheila Wallace** also has a strong relationship to history, both public and personal – it was her restrictive

Catholic upbringing which gave the driving frisson to her decision to depict herself nakedly vulnerable in previous prize-winning work. The small paintings she shows here explore the past through a wide variety of photographic registers on a small scale which draws us in close to their intensity. Science and art collide, and trigger new ways of viewing how identities are formed. Viewers are left to bring their own experiences to bear, knowing perhaps that Wallis herself is straightforward in admitting how she's been affected by growing up during The Troubles.

Wallace's Catholicism connects naturally with **George Rae's** citation of transubstantiation as 'a large factor' in his work. Perhaps the firing of clay to form ceramics, and the traditions surrounding that, can be seen in such quasi-mystical terms, but Rae puts that transformation into something of a reverse by using clay to make a sculpture of a tree which was designed to be shown outside. Result: beautiful, yes, but fatally fragile. This makes for an evocative marriage between the auto destructive tendencies of Gustav Metzger and the lyrical repurposing of trees effected by Giuseppe Penoni. *Quercus Robur* comes into the gallery here, but still brings the implication of its vulnerability in the world outside.

Steven Allan's paintings may set out with transubstantiation in mind, through the animation of inanimate objects, but end up more as a ludic take on the history of the artist in his studio. He's seen in a pratfall mode which speaks of failure without letting

it get in the way of a good time. Or, as Gabor Gyory has put it 'Human or otherwise, these objects and containers relate to consumption and the detritus of a debauched existence'. Arcimboldo, Guston and McCarthy are among those summoned by the sickly comedies of his banana men, though Max Ernst's self-portrayal as the bird Loplop may be the most immediate art historical presence.

Eyal Edelman introduces – or rounds off – all this rather neatly with his meta-show contribution *Everyone's a Critic*. He aims to tap into the viewing public's 'positive energy' that emerges from engaging with the creative process' by interviewing visitors about what they think of the show, and transcribing it as a project within it. That rather literally brings the outside population into the work, giving a direct spin on 'relational aesthetics', the art label by which means of inducing participation beyond mere observation tends to be known. Edelman's aim is rather more than to entertain the audience into education of self and others – he takes the idealistic view that participation in art is the most valid means of generating the kind of positive community spirit which goes beyond the mere sharing of economic goals.

That's an ambitious task, and perhaps the most explicit acknowledgement here of art's spiritual potential. Will it prove achievable? Looking at the range of ways in which these eleven hermeneuts have engaged positively with the ever-wider world through the context of the gallery and its histories, there ought to be a reasonable chance.

STEVEN ALLAN

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

BORN
1984, Aberdeen, Scotland

EDUCATION
2010-2012 Royal College of Art / MA Painting
2005-2010 Slade School of Fine Art / BA Fine Art

Steven Allan's vision is truly unique. Making paintings that reveal a passion for the materiality of paint, his subjects are humanised renditions of inanimate objects such as teapots, clocks, paint tubes and bananas. These characters are often forlorn and retain a strong sense of the absurd, but are also strangely believable. Their melancholy expressions appear to communicate all of the woes of humanity, as they engage in seemingly futile behaviour. But whilst we observe it also appears that Allan's characters are aware of our gaze. They are part of a bizarre charade where paired down landscapes and interiors become a stage upon which they are duty bound to perform.



We're all in this Together, 2012
Oil on canvas
190 x 250cm
The Saatchi Gallery Collection

EYAL EDELMAN

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY
CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

BORN
1978, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Israel

EDUCATION
2011-2012 Camberwell College of Arts / MA Fine Art

Eyal Edelman's practice is a combination of performance, production and manufacture. His interactive performance *Everyone's A Critic* is a participatory piece where the audience is invited to interact critically with exhibited work made by other artists. As Edelman states, 'This experiment aims to engage with people through thought provoking questions about their personal experience and interpretation of the art presented.' By interviewing selected audience members, Edelman produces a manuscript that is edited and interpreted to then create a text based video sound piece. In documenting the audience response to work at the Griffin Gallery site, which will then be edited to be shown at both sites, Edelman will create a link between both exhibitions that relies on the imagination and / or memory of one audience that is directed and defined by another, displaced audience.



Everyone's a Critic, 2012
Interactive performance

PETER GEORGALLOU

CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

BORN
1987, London, England

EDUCATION
2010-2012 The Royal College of Art / MA Sculpture
2006-2009 Kingston University / BA Fine Art

Peter Georgallou's practice is inextricably and wholly interwoven into the fabric of his life. His primary motivation is to engage in a form of storytelling, and as a consequence his work is diverse, being realised across disciplines in performance, video and installation. As such Georgallou challenges us to consider whether life or work is primary, which is informing the other, and how. Often beginning with a journey, the artist sets himself impossible and often absurd tasks: paddle a sealed piano along the river; build and navigate a bicycle powered boat; ride a bicycle laden with 150 kilograms with no gears up a mountain. There is a strong sense of adventure, and a Romantic longing for a pre-technological world where people performed ground breaking heroic feats of endurance and invention. But behind these emphatic drives Georgallou asks complex questions about modernity, human endeavour, the limitations and capabilities of man, and phenomenology.



Brian Sewell Ocean Wave, 2012
Mixed Media
280 x 280 x 140cm

SALOME GHAZANFARI

CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

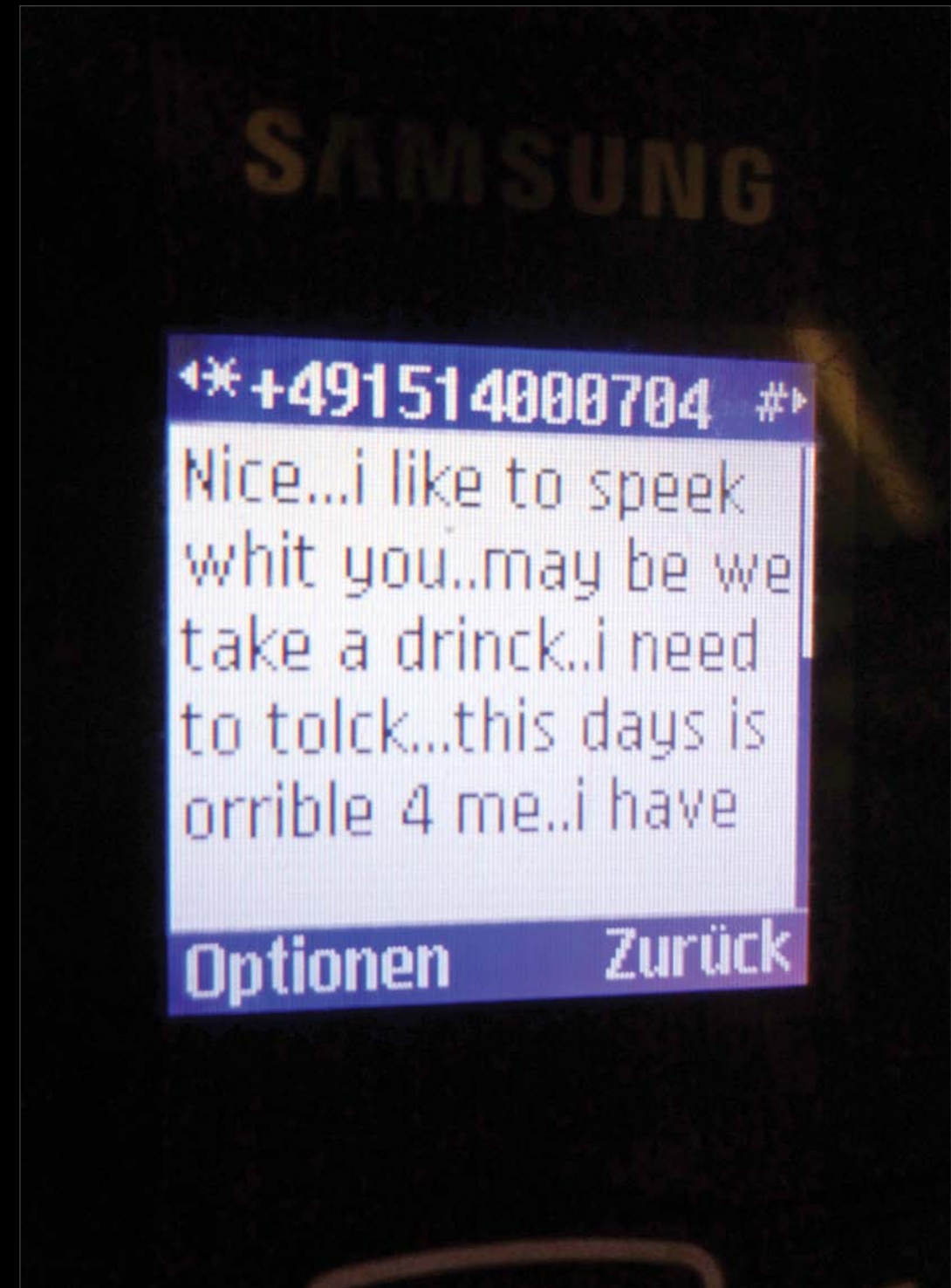
BORN

1982, Berlin, Germany

EDUCATION

2010-2012 Goldsmiths College, University of London / MFA Fine Art
2004-2009 Akademie der Bildenden Kuenste Karlsruhe / MA Sculpture
2003-2006 University Mainz und Heidelbergn / BA Philosophy

Salome Ghazanfari's multi-disciplinary work is an investigation into different social structures and their corresponding tropes. She is concerned with language and rituals, and the way these help to identify different social groups. Much of Ghazanfari's work is carried out in the streets, and is a direct response to her own experience and interactions. Raw materials include texts from drug dealers; photographs of sneakers or brothels; and gay club posters, thus drawing on street cults and nightlife; style and body fetish; class, gender and sexuality. These themes are filtered into video, installation, performance and photographic works that represent a multifaceted, transgressive practice.



ANDREW LEVENTIS

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

BORN
1980, Charlotte, North Carolina, United States

EDUCATION
2010-2012 Goldsmiths College, University of London / MFA Fine Art
2009-2010 Wimbledon College of Art / MA Fine Art
2003-2006 American Academy of Art, Chicago / BA Oil Painting

Andrew Leventis makes small scale, finely rendered paintings that refer to the histories of art, photography and television. Concerned with a tension between the painted and technological image, there is a filtering process that takes place through time and medium where the artist borrows back from cinematic designs of contemporary television that have borrowed themselves from configurations in painting. Leventis’ opulent paintings relay an ambiguous narrative where human subjects engage in an everyday activity, or where interior scenes reveal, despite an absence of a person, their presence through objects. This conveys a sense of loss and of solitude with dramatic and sometime sinister undertones.



The Dreaming, 2012
Oil on linen
22 x 35cm

ADELE MORSE

CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

BORN
1986, Caerphilly, Wales

EDUCATION
2009-2012 Royal Academy Schools / Post Graduate Diploma Fine Art Painting
2006-2008 University of East London / BA Fine Art

Adele Morse undertakes a fascinating research based practice that draws on anthropological issues such as evolution, hierarchical thinking, scientific advances and cryptozoology. It is the latter that has become central to her work, having written her dissertation and made a multi-layered video / sound / installation on the search for the Orang Pendek. Combining primary and secondary documentary footage with her own visualisations of this cryptid (a creature whose existence has been suggested but is scientifically unproven), Morse has carried out a thorough investigation into the possible existence of a species that reportedly inhabits remote, mountainous forests on the island of Sumatra. Appealing to our incessant fascination with the possible existence of unidentified species such as the Yeti or Loch Ness Monster, Morse perceptively engages with our contradictory fear of the monstrous and curiosity of the unknown.



oh Brother, where art thou, 2012
Video (5min 37secs)
Dimensions variable

SIKELELA OWEN

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

BORN
1984, London, England

EDUCATION
2009-2012 Royal Academy Schools / Post Graduate Diploma Fine Art Painting
2003-2006 Chelsea College of Art & Design / BA Fine Art

Sikelela Owen makes loose figure paintings that are based on friends, family and people of interest. Depicted in moments of leisure, there is a prevailing insouciance that harks back to early modern painting of the 19th century, which championed leisurely pursuits of the new middle classes born of industrial capital wealth. And yet there is also an exoticism to Owen's work as predominantly black figures enact everyday rites amongst family and friends. Undefined landscapes hint at foreign climes by means of electric, monochromatic under painting and figures cast long shadows across the picture plane. And so, even though it is not the main drive of the artist, these subtly intimate paintings allude to a complex history of the modern to post-modern age through an intelligent combination of adopted vernaculars.



Untitled (Kilburn Lounge), 2012
Oil on canvas paper
20 x 40.6cm

GEORGE RAE

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

BORN

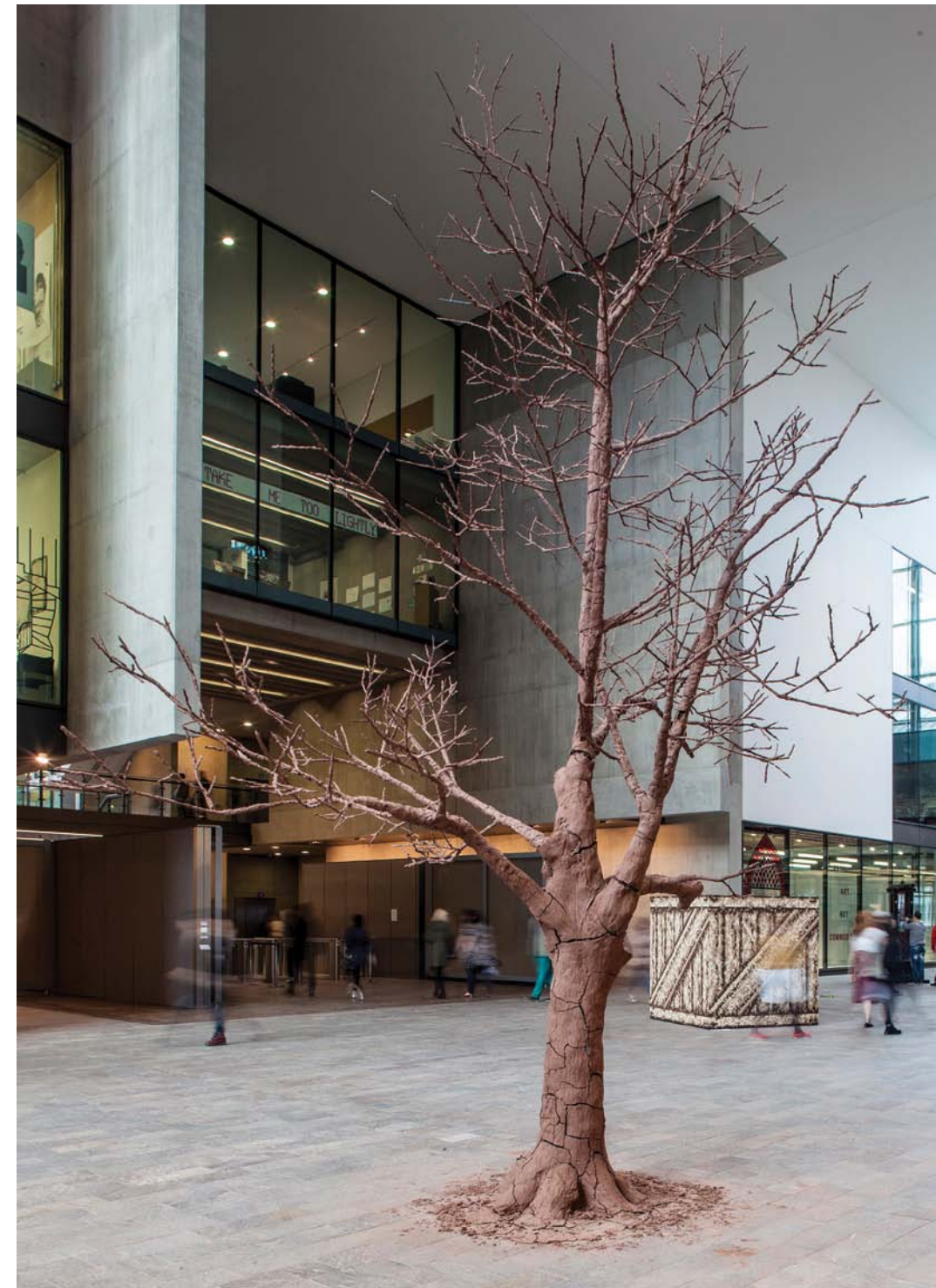
1990, London, England

EDUCATION

2008-2012 Byam Shaw Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design / BA Fine Art

George Rae employs traditional materials to make contemporary works that bemoan the loss of tradition in contemporary art. Rae will recreate his degree show sculpture *Quercus Robur*, which was a life-size oak tree, made of clay. As Rae states, this piece 'was originally intended as a site specific work for the new Granary Building, Kings Cross. *Quercus Robur* was built to contrast the stark modernity of its setting. It stands as a sculptural paean to craft, a statement of my belief that craft still has a place in the contemporary institution'. Made of unfired terracotta, the work has an inherent life span. As time passes fault lines will appear, cracking the piece throughout its structure. This is on one hand a metaphor for the loss of craftsmanship in contemporary art, and on the other a conventional memento mori – a reminder that all organic material has a finite lifespan.

Quercus Robur, 2012
Terracotta clay, steel
Dimensions variable



JESSICA RAYNER

CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

BORN
1985, London, England

EDUCATION
2010-2012 Royal College of Art / MA Printmaking
2004-2007 University of Brighton / BA Fine Art Painting

Jessica Rayner embarks on expeditions in order to make profound works that orbit ecological themes based on the notion of deep time. Realised in video, photographic, sound and sculptural form, Rayner’s work is mysterious and resonant. There is sympathy for the geologically historical, and a sense of incumbent slowness of time. Rayner’s practice exists at the intersection of science and ecology, but is rendered with a Romantic longing and an acknowledgement of awe. Effectively working with landscape, Rayner’s conceptual output is sparse but beautiful, and reminds us of the remoteness of certain frontiers, the abandonment of places over time, and of the unhindered supremacy of nature over man.



Prohibition of Death in Response to Environmental Conditions, 2012
Duratran print, lightbox, black wooden frame, text
18 x 28cm

CHRISTOPHER KULENDRAN THOMAS

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY
CHARLIE SMITH LONDON

BORN
1979, London, England

EDUCATION
2010-2012 Goldsmiths College, University of London / MFA Fine Art
2007-2008 London College of Communication, University of the Arts London / PG Dip Photography
1998-2001 Goldsmiths College, University of London / BA Media & Communication

Christopher Kulendran Thomas is engaged in an ongoing project called *When Platitudes Become Form*. Thomas acquires drawings, paintings and sculptures from Sri Lanka's most prominent new galleries by leading contemporary Sri Lankan artists and recalibrates them into intriguing mixed media pieces that adhere to a Western, rather than Asian, notion of the contemporary. Thomas' work is not only a comment on notions of art market internationalism and the definitions of contemporary, modern, postmodern, historical, Western and Eastern, but also fundamentally addresses how a burgeoning art market can be a response to and symbol of political oppression, state sponsored exploitation and corporate globalization.



From the ongoing work

www.when-platitudes-become-form.lk, 2012

Video, sound, USB flash drive, portable media player, wood, poster print and 'Unknown Woman' (2011) by Ruwan Prasanna (purchased from Saskia Fernando Gallery, Colombo, Sri Lanka)
130 x 95cm

SHEILA WALLIS

THE GRIFFIN GALLERY

BORN
1972, Derry, Northern Ireland

EDUCATION
2011-2013 City & Guilds of London Art School / MA Fine Art
2004-2009 University for the Creative Arts / BA Fine Art

Sheila Wallis works within the tradition of orthodox realist painting. Drawing on her experience of growing up in Derry in Northern Ireland during the height of The Troubles, her work has a knowing political awareness that focuses on conflict, progress and the human condition. In her recent work Wallis has employed seemingly disparate historical images as source material. Paintings made from Hollywood film stills, publicity shots and photojournalism are presented together to form unexpected narratives. Representations of the glamorous positioned against documentation of scientific experiments force a dialogue between public and private; science and art; fiction and reality; legacy and longevity.



Family Resemblance, 2012
Oil on oak panel
10 x 10cm