

ART

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Crime Scenes

Jananne Al-Ani interviewed
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The Art of Denial

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Ailbhe Ní Bhriain

Profile by Chris Clarke

Uddoh's exhibition title, 'Pink Tongue, Brown Cheek', suggests an irreverent attitude, as in 'you've got some cheek' or 'his sharp tongue'. Nonetheless, this humorous stance conveys the force of Frantz Fanon's blistering critique of racism in his 1952 book *Black Skin, White Masks*. If Fanon argues that to be black is to experience a form of social alienation that precipitates a 'third-person consciousness', with 'Pink Tongue, Brown Cheek' Uddoh expertly inhabits Fanon's third person through all dramatic means possible.

A series of video performances play among the library stacks in Iniva. The first of these, *Performing Whiteness 1, 2, and 3*, 2019, is screened in the reception like an institutional promo. Evoking her first exhibition, a tribute to the national treasure Moira Stuart, Uddoh appears in the vestibule of Tate Modern as a Stuart lookalike; her target in *Performing Whiteness* is the museum's #BLM EDI initiative: 'Your diversity gestures only bore me to death ... Your private life drama, baby, leave me out.' It's a tongue-in-cheek parody of a Tory fundraiser, an arts correspondent, and a newsreader rolled into one.

In *Brown Paper Envelope Test*, 2021, Uddoh morphs into a young person anticipating test results; wearing a bright-red top in a white studio, a brown envelope fantastically swallows her before she manages to extricate herself from its gluey clutches. Uddoh then reads an ambiguous letter to her mother that is part diversity monitoring form, part genetics test: 'Scientists have categorised 42 different ethnicities and there's a "mixed-race woman" here. That could be me, but it's not. She's symbolic.' Elsewhere, Uddoh plays TV entertainment host Graham Norton. On a talk show called 'What's Going On?', Norton interviews a youth group, the Art Assassins, about their dramatic response to Northcote Whitridge Thomas, who was appointed 'government anthropologist' by the British Colonial Office in 1909. In the Art Assassins' play, filmed during lockdown, a postage stamp of the Queen steals a paper Scooby-Leopard (Scooby-Doo) from Benin; his captive travels to the UK accompanied by a flute made from a McDonald's bag.

In my favourite work, *Practice Makes Perfect*, 2020, Uddoh directs a group of Year 8 pupils at Chase Secondary School in Southend-on-Sea. The 12-year-old children perform a series of talk shows to protest against the UK school curriculum. In 'Tongue Tied', hosted by Jemimah, pupils battle with Windrush tongue twisters: 'Black Britain' began before that bloody big boat.' The acting is often hilarious, as when, on 'The Patrik Show', Patrik invites Daisy to repeat after him: 'Cannoliest... Canooo-liiestt... Con-oliust...' Rosa, off-camera: 'Colonialist'; or when students, banners aloft, picket Gavin Williamson's office with demands ranging from 'Free School Meals!' to the end of 'useless learning' – a school-teacher off-camera reiterates the need for free meals, to which one pupil sweetly replies, 'Miss, chillll'. A real winner.

Uddoh's brilliant exhibition speaks to the present, producing new critical acts through video performance; from school education to popular culture, 'Pink Tongue, Brown Cheek' draws on the spirit of Stuart Hall to outline genuine possibilities for change.

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Angharad Williams, 'Picture the Others', installation view

Angharad Williams: Picture the Others

Mostyn, Llandudno, 19 February to 12 June

Early on in Ben Wheatley's pandemic-set occult horror film *In the Earth*, 2021, two of the central characters ponder the impact of an unnamed lockdown-triggering virus: 'Things will get back to normal quicker than you think, everyone will forget what happened,' one suggests. Her colleague, on the other hand, isn't so sure: 'No. I don't think anyone will forget.' Nothing has changed, but everything has; things previously considered 'normal' – objects, interactions (with both strangers and friends), the quotidian day-to-day activities – have become unusual, surreal even.

And it seems to me that the exchange above illustrates two poles of opinion – and responses – to our real-world brush with societal weirding in a post- (and yet not post-) Covid world. There are those who seem to have picked up where their lives left off, before anyone had ever heard of coronavirus – eager to shop, socialise, get back to the office and what have you – whilst others are finding the adjustment less smooth, discovering populated city centres to be stranger, more intimidating and less familiar with each visit.

'Picture the Others', her first institutional show, reveals artist and writer Angharad Williams to be in the latter camp. Although not explicitly addressing the effects and fallout of the past two years, we cannot help but read the exhibition in such terms. As we are reminded by the exhibition guide: 'The world has ceased to present itself in the old terms.' Certainly, filtered through my own recent (and belated) falling foul of Covid-19, 'Picture the Others' quietly engages with and contemplates the effects that the pandemic has wrought on our subjective relationship to the outside world – and to each other.

Across film, painting, sculpture and installation, all dated 2022, the exhibition is 'an introspective search and subsequently a process of connecting to the outside'. Further, it asks what do we do now that 'the other' means practically everyone else. The first work encountered, *The Security Dilemma II*, is not by Williams, but its inclusion, setting an ambivalent tone, is apt. The trio of Rhia Davenport's corn dollies – in 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil' poses – mirror now commonplace thoughts and fears about crossing the threshold into the outside world.

In the next space, the unexpected is turned up a few further notches. *The Prism of Your Life* features a pair of reclaimed telegraph poles fashioned as a

pulley-operated clothesline. It has a non-identical twin in the exhibition's final room, fixed to what looks to be an outline of a window frame – firmly putting us in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* territory. One has to wonder, are we on the outside looking in, or vice-versa? Relating to the law and to nature is a vermillion-stained Prince of Wales investiture chair from 1969 procured from eBay. Bearing the legend 'Ich Dien' – 'I serve' in German – it asks pertinent questions about power relations. The juxtaposition with the scruffy telegraph poles cannot help but seem somewhat incongruous, not unlike the Royal Family itself.

The aptly named video work *Joe Public* finds the artist refamiliarising herself with the world outside her own window. Various we see Williams at a car-boot sale, eating a packed lunch, popping to the shops – and learning to shoot. Acts which, through circumstance, we sometimes must dare ourselves to partake in.

In two of the exhibition's four spaces hang Williams's heat signature-style paintings which share the series title 'The Dents'. One of these, *Predator and Prey*, features a small rodent; nearby, ominously, lurks an uncoiled snake. As with other works in this thought-provoking and often gnomic exhibition, we are presented with a dichotomy: just who might be cast as predator in this scenario and who might be on the other side of the equation? And, ultimately, can we – should we – take that which is shown to us at face value?

In a post-truth context, there are many different scenarios for which such questions seem increasingly relevant. Again we turn to the accompanying text: 'We are presented with cleverly orchestrated and excessively violent political fiction under the guise of all kinds of different but very real war.' These could be wars of culture or, as Vladimir Putin would have us believe, of the 'special military operation' variety.

Williams's exhibition proposes that, rather than swallow simplistic interpretations of the world (for such narratives should be viewed with suspicion), we exercise a greater degree of circumspection in our engagements with it, while extending consideration for how we picture those so-called 'others'.

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Galas Porras-Kim: Out of an instance of expiration comes a perennial showing

Gasworks, London, 27 January to 27 March

Imagine being a ghost, hanging out in an afterlife all meticulously planned and set up for your comfort, with dried foods, pets in urns to keep you company, some jewellery and a few model boats. Then things start disappearing from your spectral sitting room, and all of a sudden you find yourself stuck in an anodyne, over-lit hallway somewhere in the middle of the British Museum for the rest of your undead life. Such are the problems explored here by Colombian artist Gala Porras-Kim through a set of drawings and installations which prod at the unthinking out-comes of museum conventions around collection and storage. Ancient Egyptians had many ideas about what happened after death, though anthropological display in far off lands was not one of them. Several of Porras-Kim's works offer solutions of sorts: the large pencil

drawing *Sights beyond the grave*, 2022, depicts a desert landscape, creased in such a way that would enable it to sit propped up around a small funerary statue of a nobleman named Nenkeftka, currently on display at the British Museum. In his spectral disorientation, the drawing is meant to provide the small gesture of comfort of a familiar view. The sculpture *Sunrise for 5th-dynasty Sarcophagus from Giza at the British Museum*, 2022, is a full-size Styrofoam replica of the coffin, with a semi-circle marked out on the ground indicating a roughly 50° rotation. Ancient Egyptians buried their dead facing the rising sun in the East; Porras-Kim's work simply proposes that the museum take this into account in its display – at the very least, as a gesture towards the context from which it was taken, but perhaps even as a matter of access to some kind of afterlife.

The show, titled 'Out of an instance of expiration comes a perennial showing', provides a survey of possible approaches to augment and alter museum practices: spiritual interventions, musical interpretations, alternative storage suggestions and fungal propagations. Porras-Kim's practice offers a form of institutional critique that seeks to widen the spectrum of institutional care beyond simply preserving a physical object. Her works ask that museums begin to consider themselves as spaces that serve a range of purposes: as a patchwork of active mausoleums, as stewards of a panoply of afterworlds, as host to all kinds of other nonhuman lives, as well as the institutions themselves being material remnants of empire. The large colourful ink drawing *A terminal escape from the place that binds us*, 2021, is a marbling of bright oranges and greens, swirled with eddies of black and elliptic pools of brown. A typed letter from the artist to the director of the Gwangju National Museum in Korea describes the drawing as an attempt to divine the desired resting place from a set of human remains kept in the museum: 'The actual place remains illegible to us,' she admits, 'and might not even exist on our planet.' The point, though, is to at least try and ask. A smudged black handprint on a crumpled white tissue sits in the next room; the title of the work is from a line in the accompanying letter, this time to the director of the National Museum of Brazil, *Leaving the institution through cremation is easier than as a result of*



Galas Porras-Kim, 'Out of an instance of expiration comes a perennial showing', installation view