
Janice Wilkins & Caroline Jaine Magazine: 2012

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Directors' Foreword

Not by Julia Peyton-Jones or
Hans Ulrich Obrist

The Serpentine Sackler Gallery is delighted to present Caroline Jaïne and Janice Wilkins: *Magazine: 2012* – an exhibition by two quite different yet equally dynamic politically-engaged artists, who have chosen as a medium, to focus on their shared interest in realities presented in the media and the dissemination of information.

Magazine:2012 marks their first collaborative exhibition and draws together a collection of previously unseen and unrealised works.

The starting point for Jaïne’s practice lies in defacement and the obscuring of images and effigies of icons and political leaders. Staged images drawn from publicity or propaganda shots are painted out, or torn from their bodies, in acts of violence that become a critical reflection of the transience of political power. These acts of “damnatio memoriae” are not carried out by the artist herself - her interest lies in a passive examination of the energy of creativity evoked by destruction. Her eery sound piece presents an abstract of the almost deranged frustration felt by defacers and the revelations of those witnessing the violent act.

Jaïne uses this aftermath of anger in her piece, *Untitled*. As the viewer walks silently around the image we see the marks of the blade used to cut the face of Gaddafi from its body. The hands are also missing. The portrait lies in state. A dead figurehead laid out on a chromakey cloth for us to reflect on and even mourn its passing. In not allowing the work to be photographed, Jaïne suggests the value of being in its presence. We witness the anger and frustration in the defacement, and ultimately, the fragility of the revolutionary moment and the portrait itself - torn and stamped on, ripped from its frame and then carried to another country. Is this a more “genuine” account of the revolution in Libya? Can we appreciate the full power - or even the illusion of power - better by being with the object, as opposed to viewing events or objects on a screen as Jaïne suggests?

Jaïne has written extensively about the truths offered to us in the media – and this is the crux of her work. Jaïne’s extensive use of chromakey - the tool used by photographers and film-makers to fabricate backgrounds, situations and fantasies – allows us to build our own narrative or “truth”. There is wit in her work too - amongst her collection of appropriated images of leaders on cards, stamps, money and even chocolate - is a defaced book coated in thick chromakey paint containing an interview between a Serpentine Gallery Director and Baldessari – who she cites as a main influence.

As the narrative of Jaine's practice evolves, her meticulous work *Playing* emerges. This piece explores the varied ways that she uses photographic materials to investigate representation in contemporary society. Part of a body of work she calls *Iconoclast Two Point Zero* this complex piece relates to the use of playing cards as propaganda in conflicts. And yes this work, contains a defacement or two – The Ace of Spades, a card used by American troops to frighten the enemy in Vietnam and illustrated by Saddam Hussein in the CIA cards of the Iraq conflict, once again contains a chromakey image of Sadam's statue – scaled by a US marine and clad in the American flag.

The work of Janice Wilkins explores the debate surrounding the media image of women. She also raises questions about the modern idea of feminism and its role in society for the working class woman. Wilkins uses Catwoman as her muse – her ever-changing personality, and her shape as an iconic image.

In *A Nice Pear* Wilkins has taken the pear shape of woman literally. The media fascination with an ageless society, and the “covering of the real with the fabricated” is implied - a plastic coat that conceals the reality becomes a negotiation between the aesthetic and the political. In another piece Wilkins takes the average-sized body of the British woman and squashes the form into the size of Catwoman. It is an indictment of a celebrity-focused media and the airbrushed images of young woman with surgically enhanced bodies that are offered as representations of contemporary society.

Just as Jaine's chromakey appears in this exhibition, the vinyl Catwoman-esque suit emerges as a fitting metaphor for Wilkins to express both the freedom and constraint of women. Wilkins asks us to consider the political consequences of a fascination with size and shape. She questions the position of the feminist debate, in relation to size, cosmetic surgery and media manipulation. She implies that media representation is a manufactured process, much like the drawings of Catwoman themselves. Deeply political, yet full of humour, her voluptuous sculptural installations ask how today's woman carries the burden of work and home alongside the debate about size and shape and even feminism.

Like Jaine, Wilkins offers no solutions to contemporary society, instead takes us through the raft of problems that a modern woman faces. Wilkin's *Bag for Life* shows the ultimate struggle that she has with the twin ideas of 'woman' and 'feminism'. The contents try to escape but are constrained by the outer suit of the 'woman' bag. The shopping becomes a weight that is carried by all women, constantly feeling pushed and pulled by cultural and political dialogue. How do women reconcile their own needs and become individuals when society and the media enforce their own agenda?

Wilkin's use of simple, recognisable images of the bag, Catwoman, and the corset, ask if feminism is a middle class pursuit. Does it still reach the working class? Does it affect them? Have they been left out of a debate that has become intellectual rather than instinctive - equality?

Although ardently political, both Jaine and Wilkins offer a soft protest - a gentle and playful commentary on some dark and challenging issues. The issues may appear on the surface to be vastly different – but notions of revolution, oppression, and use of media to bring about change, are a swirling undercurrent in an exhibition that is rich in content, but ultimately the chromakey-green and shiny black-gloss work well together aesthetically.

Not Julia Peyton-Jones
Director, Serpentine Gallery & Co-Director, Exhibitions & Programmes

Not Hans Ulrich Obrist
Co-Director, Exhibitions & Programmes & Director, International Projects

The Artists in Conversation

Without Seth Siegelaub

Janice Wilkins: Seth, thank you for not joining us for a conversation about the curation of our work in a catalogue, *Magazine*, and the idea that art can be about information.

Seth Siegelau: Before...you could have said that art was about information. Except information before had to do with colour, line, composition, and all that bullshit, in which case the art and the presentation of the art were identical. But here you have a situation where the presentation of the art and the art are not the same thing¹. The catalogue can now act as primary information for the exhibition...and in some cases the “exhibition” can be the catalogue²

Caroline Jaine: My interest is in the fact that the presentation of the art and the art are rarely the same thing. And not just the presentation of the art, but it's the presentation of events that I query. The big quandary for us putting together *Magazine*, was whether to create concepts or whether to present our actual work, offer a genuine representation of our physical art-practice.

JW: So we chose a mixture of both – adding to the ambiguity. Challenging the idea that ‘what you see is what you get’. Catwoman and her suit have become my metaphor, for the treatment of women in the media. Her personality, her life and her goals have all changed in relation to the change in society's attitude to women. She was an amnesiac heiress, in the 1960s she changed her suit from purple to black, now she is a latex clad ex-prostitute. Her appearance, physically strong, self-assured and sexy. It's not what it seems; the suit was given to her by men, it's porn, an illusion of power.

CJ: We looked at your work in the late 1960s, Seth – why did you make the curatorial decisions you did with the artists you worked with?

SS: The word curator at the time didn't have the open meaning as today, as curators were basically people who had jobs working in the museums.....I thought of myself in terms of an organizer, a publisher, exhibition maker, and things like that³

JW: Why did you feel the need to take artists out of the gallery?

SS: My interests were very closely allied to working with them to devise exhibitions, structures and conditions that were able to show their work, which would reflect what their work was about. In other words, it became

¹ Seth Siegelau, 1969
(quoted in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*)

² Seth Siegelau, quoted in *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice*

clear to me that the solution to the problems that were posed by the nature of their work and the ideas behind it, that a gallery was not necessarily the most ideal environment to show it. By that I mean not just the physical gallery but also the social idea of a sort of 'semi-religious' sacred space, everyone knew and visited regularly, a sort of 'art space'.³ You don't need a gallery to share ideas⁴

JW: Or even a genuinely transcribed interview!

[laughter]

JW: In the past ten years or so you have revisited this work and held conversations with the artists involved. What do you think they would think of our *Magazine*?

SS: It seems like the same old thing to many of them⁵.

CJ: [Laughs]. But looking at your work, over forty years ago, it perhaps seems more relevant to say it was ahead of its time. Our "catalogue instead of an exhibition" speaks afresh of our ability to access information over our ability or desire to visit galleries.

SS: One should keep in mind that it was the period of Marshall McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' and the idea of the 'global village'. This is something that is, in a way, in the process of being realised today with the internet, and with the same kind of images of a free world with everyone communicating – happy, happy, happy⁶

JW: but it's not all happy, happy, happy is it?

SS: ...in reality it is controlled by very few people, but it is made to seem like some kind of revolutionary possibility. Which, to a certain degree, it is: but in a way that is similar to Brecht's analysis of the radio as a medium of propaganda, as opposed to a medium of communication between people⁶

CJ: I spend a lot of time on the internet [laughter]. I source images online – in fact the 254 people who appear in my playing cards were all found there. Many of them could be considered networked do-gooders and activists – most of the "hearts" are anti-capitalist protestors for example - but there are networked bad guys too – like lone wolf terrorists and online poker addicts. Even Freemasons and sword swallows are there.

³ Seth Siegelau in conversation with Bartomeu Marí November 29th 2010, MACBA Auditorium

⁴ Seth Siegelau, 1973 (quoted in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*)

⁵ A conversation between Seth Siegelau and Hans Ulrich Obrist, 1999

⁶ Seth Siegelau interviewed by John Slyce in *Art Monthly* May-Jun 2009

JW: The internet and the media can do damage. The images of women with weird fake tans, boobs, noses, etc. Would Emmeline Pankhurst think that was worth fighting for? A barrage of information.... what freedom means.... the posters that the suffragettes fly-posted mimicked the posters calling men to join up for the first world war. Was this an early guerilla art form? Seth, do you consider yourself a guerrilla actor in your time?

SS: One can say that I was influenced by "guerrilla" activity, not that my activity was "guerrilla" activity in the military sense, but rather the mobility of changing situations, the possibility of freedom from a fixed location⁵ ...The Specific nature of the art I was involved in led me to more political concerns⁶.

JW: Yeah my work has led me into a political dialogue. Women are political, our whole existence is scrutinised, what we do and how we do it. You can't get away from it when you explore attitudes, perceptions of women, especially in the media.

CJ: True, but how often do we look at ourselves. I mean, really? The perceptions vary depending on the spectator and of course the context – which in many ways is what connects our work.

SS: From a personal point of view, I was describing looking at art as a spectator the way many other people, including critics or artists do, but also from the point of view of having had a gallery⁵

CJ: Like Michal Corris said⁷, the artists should present different conditions of engagement, and the spectator must be prepared to do other sorts of work, whether it's reading text or imaginatively completing a situation. We are asking our spectators not just to imagine our exhibition, but also to decide whether they think it was an event that actually took place. Like Baudrillard's Gulf War – it might make the news, but does that mean it happened?

SS: When I left the US, the first project I tried to develop was some kind of news agency, but it became more hectic and frenetic than the art world. Imagine having to come up with something new every 24 hours?⁶

[Laughter]

CJ: It's the "coming up with things" that interests me. Having worked on the periphery of that world – headlines like "Gaddafi's Son Shown on TV to Prove he is Alive" fascinate me.... the chromakey "truth" behind the news media.

JW: Yeah, but there is another point, here...it's about money. Who can really afford to have an exhibition? We can't make the art we want, because we don't have the funding. Photographs never lie.

SS: There must be a better way of doing exhibitions when you wanted to do it, without having all the continuing overheads, such as rents, lights, telephones, secretary (which I, in fact, never had); all the fixed expenses needed to maintain a permanent space⁵

JW: Who says we need all that? Making a full size piece of work can be prohibitive, cost wise. Make a small one cheaply, photograph it and tell everyone it was much bigger. Who loses out? So much gets thrown in the bin. Prints, photos, images on the internet all cheap and accessible ways to get art seen. Collect the postcards and catalogues - it's cheaper than the original. We all do it. Robert Morgan had the right idea about art-books in *Art into Ideas*⁸.

SS: hmmm....concerns about art as object and as commodity⁶

CJ: Morgan would also have said that the artist's book allowed for a certain degree of intimacy⁸.

JW: He liked his expensive glossy art catalogues. He saw them as crucial for art collectors who needed proof that their investment held some cultural bearing. The Catwoman effect, two dimensional, glossy trophy art. The fantasy for comic book (arty) nerds. A culture you can buy into without really 'buying it'.⁸

CJ: We chose to not have our exhibition in the Serpentine Sackler Gallery because the building was once known as "The Magazine". From before 1968 right up until today, people...erm...learn about art.....

SS: ...from what they saw in magazines?⁶

CJ: Right

JW: And the internet, we have art lecturers who teach from their iPhones. *Notes for an Art School*, is an idea that never manifested, yet is studied on Fine Arts Masters courses.

SS: In other words, more people know art from reading about it, or looking at pictures of it, than they ever do from seeing the physical object⁶

CJ: I think this is why one of my pieces, a defaced portrait of Gaddafi appropriated from a journalist friend in Libya, remains un-photographed – even in the catalogue.

⁷ Michael Corris, *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth and Practice*, Essay: Artist, Object, Spectator).

⁸ Robert C Morgan in *Art into Ideas* 1996

SS: Obviously, seeing the physical object is absolutely critical⁶

CJ: In this instance it is. But I'm not sure that showing the Gaddafi relic in a museum-like context would even work...

SS: But isn't this one of the more important functions of museums, to kill things, to finish them off, to give them the authority and thus distance from people by taking them out of their real everyday context?⁵

CJ: Maybe then, in a way I can say what I want to say clearer by "not photographing" it for a catalogue entry, than by exhibiting it – despite its auratic brilliance.

SS: ... When art does not any longer depend upon its physical presence, when it has become an abstraction, it is not distorted and altered by its representation in books and catalogues. It becomes primary information, while the reproduction of conventional art in books or catalogues is necessary secondary information. For example, a photograph of a painting is different from a painting, but a photograph of a photograph is just a photograph, or the setting of a line of type is just a line of type⁹. When information is primary, the catalogue can become the exhibition...⁶

⁹ Seth Siegelaub quoted by Dave Beech in *Art and Text* p32

JW: Or the comic becomes the person. Or the skin becomes the woman.

More Words

Robert Good

The works of Janice Wilkins and Caroline Jaine are refreshing, slow-burn displays of art-as-political-engagement, as the pages of *Magazine: 2012* testify. Initially enticed by beautifully clean layout along with depictions of aesthetically appealing objects, on closer inspection we find ourselves challenged by defacement and deformity. We are confronted by a heady and compelling mix of latent power, sumptuous forms and ominous tension.

Of course, art that is primarily political is not defined in terms of the somewhat tired capitalism versus socialism versus marxism debate, but rather is an art that grapples head-on with real-world issues. And Wilkins and Jaine are grapplers *par excellence*. Not for them a potentially irrelevant theoretical dialogue with materials and potentiality: here are two artists who are fully engaged with the business end of contemporary feminism and middle-eastern dictatorship respectively.

So the glorious bean bag flesh of Wilkins' *Doris* creates a playful reminder of the vast expanses of a Lucien Freud nude. But whereas Freud refused to go beyond what he saw – his paintings are as much still lives as portraits or nudes – Wilkins ups the ante with the inclusion of an alluring latex corset. This we cannot ignore, we don't want to ignore: but having been drawn in (like the flesh that it constrains) we are forced to confront our own thoughts and opinions on the female form and our expectations for it. We take a view in more ways than one.

Likewise, *I Want To Do More Stabbing* by Jaine does not, so to speak, pull too many punches. Brutal, passive aggression is plainly on display, and it is mesmerizing. Jaine rightly references the work of John Baldessari. Yet whereas Baldessari deliberately hovers on the cusp of ambiguity (see, for example, the wordplay in his *Prima Facie* series), Jaine's appropriation of some of Baldessari's formal constructs is for altogether less ambiguous ends. 'I Want To Do More Stabbing' provides us with one fairly clear response to a well-known political figure: how about us as viewers? Are we for or against? The work generates in us an instinctive compulsion to respond.

Art theorists tell us that the risk of politically-engaged art is that it becomes didactic and overbearing. The success of the work in *Magazine: 2012* is shown by the fact that it does not fall into such traps. Wilkins and Jaine provide an essential lightness of touch and above all a subtle humour that stops their work from becoming overtly polemical. We are being challenged, strongly, but it is open-ended and invites a dialogue. We are given, as it were, a right of reply. And that is refreshing.

Chronology

Janice Wilkins

1975

Attended first political rally (anti-racism) aged 14

1977

Started collecting *Vogue* magazines

1980

Unsubscribed to feminist magazine, *Spare Rib*, because of front page declaration that you had to be a lesbian to be a true feminist

1982

Realised lack of affinity with ephemeral art after conversation in a pub with Andy Goldsworthy in Loughborough

1983

Appeared in Granada Television's "World in Action" debate on arts funding

1984

Abandoned the idea of having an art career due to the hypocrisy of the art world

1986-1988

Lived in an anti-capitalist collective in Brixton

1988

Turned down the opportunity of singing live on BBC Top of The Pops

1991

Acquired first cats – Fatty and Skinny.

2001

Had an epiphany at the Uffizy – felt like it was all a lie

2002

Started a Beaver colony in Steeple Bumpsted

2003

Hired a Winnebago and travelled across Australia

2005

Purchased first chickens

Caroline Jaine

1982

Wrote and illustrated first book, aged 11

1989

Walked out on job at Saatchi & Saatchi and bought a one way ticket to Israel

1991

Lived in a squat in Bath Spa

1994

Abandoned the idea of having an art career and had a baby

1995

Acquired first email account and web access whilst on assignment at Cambridge Science park

1996

Joined the Foreign Service

1999

Volunteered to re-open the British Embassy in Libya – turned down due to family commitments

2005

Auditioned for the X-Factor

2006

Moved to Basra, Iraq, wrote a lot and painted pictures of the Shatt Al Arab

2007

Had an epiphany in a temple in Delhi and changed her name to "Jaine"

2010

Bought a Mini covered in newsprint

2011

Started writing regular articles for a Pakistani newspaper

List of Plates

pp
Anonymising the Magazine
London 2012
Oil on Photograph
Photograph Caroline Jaine

pp
Chromakey
Appropriated from Los Angeles Film Studio 2012
Chromakey Muslin Cloth
Photograph Caroline Jaine

pp
Free Libyan Youth
Internet sourced image painted in chromakey paint
Caroline Jaine

pp - &
Still from "Nightwork"
DVD 12 minutes 2012
Janice Wilkins

pp
Ecdysis,
Cambridge 2012
Chair, vinyl catsuit, nylon chromakey suit, leather boots,
appropriated "pea" shopping bag
Collaborative work by Caroline Jaine & Janice Wilkins

pp
A Nice Pear
Pear, liquid latex, chair
Photograph Janice Wilkins

pp
Average Size
Foam, vinyl, boot laces, eyelets
Photograph Janice Wilkins

pp -
I Want to Do More Stabbing
Push the Bit Right Into Her Eye
Screw it Up
Cambridge 2012
Internet sourced images, scissors, scalpel, red felt, black
marker, plastic advertising hoarding, eyelets
Photograph Caroline Jaine

pp -
Doris
Suffolk 2012
Chair, stockinette, polystyrene beads, vinyl, eyelets, ribbon
Photograph Janice Wilkins

pp -
Clowder
Essex 2012
Appropriated prints, acrylic, frames sourced from rubbish tips
Photograph Janice Wilkins

pp , , &
Playing
Internet sourced images, painted in chromakey paint and
reprinted on 54 plastic coated cards
Photograph Caroline Jaine 2012

pp , , &
Jokers: Playing
Internet sourced image, self portrait, painted in chromakey paint
and reprinted on 54 plastic coated cards
Photograph Caroline Jaine 2012

pp -
Bag for Life
Suffolk 2012
Chair, vinyl, eyelets, bootlaces, paper, expandi-foam, food
containers, tinned food, discarded clothing
Photograph Janice Wilkins

pp
Untitled
Tripoli 2011
Appropriated print on canvas, boot prints
Not photographed by Caroline Jaine

pp
Iconoclast Two Point Zero: The Inquiry
US Army food rations appropriated from Baghdad, Press Pass,
Guide to communicating with Afghan people (UK army), *Playing, I*
CIA most wanted Iraqi playing cards (2003), Royal Playing Cards,
envelope with defaced Hitler stamps, crackers, fake iPad,
counterfeit Iraqi police insignia, Iraq "Operation Freedom" ID
pouch, Iraqi Visual Language Survival Guide (UK army), Green
spray paint, defaced Iraqi currency, Prince Phillip chocolate bar,
German playing cards (1914), postcards, notebook, Libyan
dinnar, portrait of John Humphrys, Hans Ulrich Obrist & John
Baldessari: The Conversation Series Volume 18 (anonymised)
Photograph Caroline Jaine, 2012

Acknowledgements

People from School

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Lorraine Hands
Joel & Jonathan Jackson
Tracey Langdale
Simon Lewis
Matt Lloyd
Hilary Lyons
Ruth Mapes
Eleanor Mauro
Lois Murray
Dave Nunn
Janice Owens
Trevor Simpson
Mark Southgate
Carlton Stewart
Sarah Tuakli
John Wood
Anna Wreford

Ancestors of the Artists

Nell (Janice)
Lucy Baker
Marguerite Clapp
Isaac Cole
Jabez Hirons Cole
Ivy Derby
William Derby
Winifred Holland
Charlotte Nelson
James Carter Nicholls

Olive Nicholls
Ellen Norman
Bernard Archibald Nelson Platford
Bill Potts
Molly Potts
Ellen Quigley
Annie Stevens
John Taylor
Gillian Walker
Florence Wilkins
Glenna Wilkins
Jack Wilkins
David Wiseman
Charles Edward Wood
Lewis Wood

Those who have inspired the Work

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Vincent Botha
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Chris
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Glenna Derby
Lyse Ducet
Muammar Gaddafi
Robert Good
John Humphrys
Iconoclasts
People on the Internet
Ertha Kitt
Kalle Lasn
Ben Leung
Mark Malloch-Brown
Manal Al-Sharif
Ivy Norman
Hans Obrist
Billy Owens

Janice Owens
Michelle Pfeifer
Marguerite Platford
Seth Seigelaub
Clay Shirky
The Suffragettes
Michael Taussig
David Wiseman
Mary Wollstonecraft
Old Women
Paul Wood
Women of the WI in Maldon

Organisations the artists have worked with

ABC News
Anglia Ruskin University
Appolo Despatch
Bassingbourn Village College
The BBC
Cambridge University Press
Cambridge Tourist Office
CNN
Decimal Business Machines
The Employment Service
The Foreign & Commonwealth Office
The Guardian
ILEA
The House of Lords
Kibbutz Kfar Menachem
The Leyes School
London Metropolitan University
Millets
The National Union of Students
The Pitt, Rhodes
The Prince of Wales
Saatchi & Saatchi
Schwarz Bros.
Scootech
SOAS
Trusthouse Forte
The United Nations
Woolworths