

Petra Feriancová: ‘I Asked My Friends To Describe Me An Artwork’

Tomáš Vaněk | Robert Bárta

Petra, I'll describe something to you: I heard about a piece made up of mirrors hanging on a wall. There was this trick: when somebody looked in a mirror, it fell down and broke. I didn't see it, but there probably was a sensor and a mechanism that responded to the look in the mirror. Simply

Tomáš Svoboda has told me...

Tomáš Svoboda | Julian Rosefeldt

Last year, in an underpass in Munich city centre I saw a projection of the last film in Julian Rosefeldt's trilogy. I think the film was called THE PERFECTIONIST. It was a synchronised triple-projection of stories about a man preparing for a parachute jump. The jump never actually takes place because of the man's hesitation, doubts and external realities. The plot is set in three environments. In the first we see a man putting on parachuting kit in a spacious changing room; he keeps checking that the parachute is properly folded. A draft in the room blows up the parachute and the hapless hero is dragged all over the floor. The scene repeats over and over until the hero's plane takes off. The second projection features a man settling in at the joystick in a flight simulator, simulating cockpit drill for the machine. He presses at various random buttons, pushes levers, and so on. He finally leaves the cabin completely exhausted, without having taken off anywhere. The third projection shows the inside of a house in which the hero, with an ironing board and a cloud generator, experiences the feeling of free-falling through clouds. He is lying on the board, his arms and legs raised and the machine is releasing smoke at him. The place is full of models of airplanes and dioramas of their accidents and crash-landings. The man eventually leaves the room in a hurry, and after a large explosion the room is hit by the turbine from the engine of a crashing plane. The whole thing lasts about fifteen minutes. I watched it, totally fascinated, for over an hour...

Robert Bárta | Jeppe Hein

Jeppe Hein's 'DID I MISS SOMETHING' is part of a sculpture park in Graz, Austria, where there are lots of works of art and so that visitors can appreciate all that art there are... benches. When you get to the 'end' of the sculpture park, there's still one art piece on the list that you haven't seen... but you can't see it anywhere and you can't find it... some people refuse to give up and keep searching, others leave... those who keep looking... sit down to rest on one of the many benches... but this one is different somehow... sitting down on it triggers a mechanism and a veeeeeeery high fountain starts up in the little Pond in the Park, squirting water for 15 seconds... and you say to yourself... hmmm, so that was probably it.

Guy Van Di Belle | Paul de Marinis

Actually for me the work of Paul de Marinis is very important in a sense that it was pointing to a kind of work that was completely different than the other things I knew at the time of meeting him in 1992 the first time. You can think of a very intellectual and yet sensitive approach, with technology as material, like magic, because it were inventions. Part of the fascination then was probably because I did not understand how it was made at all, later I found out it is part of the aesthetics of his Works. He showed me an installation done with an Apple Mac-SE, controlling a mechanism with a laser eye. Below you had an old 78rpm record under a glass plate and instead of turning the record you could move the laser eye in all directions over the record beneath, and hear the sound of the music on the record. Of course it was a manipulated sound and in a sense it was mind boggling and much stronger than the old DJ and scratch tricks that had been around at that moment already for a decade... Can you believe how aesthetically conservative DJ's sound nowadays, another 16 years later...

Josef Bolf | Kai Althoff

It looked as if it had been painted by a drugged-out girl. Everything was wrong, awry. I saw the Kai Althoff exhibition in Zurich around Christmas; there were loads of small pictures and crowds of people in them, the carpet on the gallery floor was brown and the walls were painted some yucky colour, brownish, and there were installations of iron fences, some fancy iron work, painted in similarly yucky fashion. Then there was this installation with a giant puppet shaking a sort of a dam filled with water, I didn't get what it was and what it was doing there. There were an awful lot of pictures installed in frames and there were loads and loads of panels covered with the same carpet. The whole thing had a very bizarre atmosphere. In one drawing there was a pedestrian crossing drawn in pretty wrong perspective, with some people walking over it. A smallish girl and her mother. A man in front of her was pushing a wheelchair with another man in it. The canvas undulated strangely, and it looked as if it had been painted without paints, in varnish.

Mark Divo | Iben Hansen

Here's my story. It's kind of sick but every word is true. The artwork was a served head made out of latex hanging from a chain surrounded by dirty

wooden doors and situated in the dark cellar of 'Salon Adesso' in Valdemarsgade 23, Copenhagen-Vesterbro in the summer of 1998. The head was done in a near photo realistic way, with the cut arteries dripping with blood hanging from the neck, and its eyes had an extremely disturbing stare. The whole Installation looked like the film set of a horror movie, and the dampness and smell of mould gave it an extra chilly atmosphere must confess at times I felt scared to go into my own cellar. The name of the artist who created this piece was Iben Hansen (1978–1999), and in fact she was my neighbour during my time in Copenhagen. She lived with a bunch of death metal musicians in the flat next door to the Salon Adesso, the nonprofits art space I was running in Copenhagen from 1997–1998. She spent a lot of time at home and was extremely creative, drawing the covers of the new death metal CDs and making scary sculptures out of latex. I talked her into showing her works to the public, and after hesitating a little she agreed and in the end was very happy with opening and the overall popularity of the show. Sad to say that it was her one and only show, half a year later she committed suicide by jumping under a train, a friend that went to her funeral told me later that she had a blue scarf around her neck, when she was lying in the coffin. The scarf was put on her to hide the ugly stitches on her neck where head had been attached to the torso, after the train wheels had separated the two from each other. 'Hmmm... what do you think, a bit disturbing...' I can also write about something nice I saw, but I think it's a strong story.

Matej Gavula | Andreas Slominski

This work was created by Andreas Slominski in 1998 for his solo exhibition in Kunsthalle in Zurich. I can not remember a name of the work but it was a self-portrait. Form and approach to the work was in the way: 'as complicated as it gets'. On the wall in the corner of a room, under the ceiling, in the height of 8 metres there were next to each other two circular openings cut into the wall. Each of them had cca 25 cm in diameter. When looking at the work from below the holes seemed to be strange perforations through which the light was filtered.

Then I understood it all. A small Polaroid photograph, pasted on the wall at the eye height was a part of the work. On the photograph there was Slominski's face looking through above mentioned hole in the wall. Through the other hole he put through a hand with a camera and, probably standing on a ladder, he, through the wall, took a picture of himself.

Joost Glisenaar | Edward Krasiński

When we opened the door to the studio it smelled a bit musty. It was a long time ago that somebody opened the windows to ventilate the place. On several locations damp-stains disfigure walls and ceilings. In general the level of maintenance was poor, the place needed to be cleaned and painted. Nevertheless we noticed one remarkable element in this penthouse: a blue line made of electric tape placed 130 cm above the floor, travels across walls, windows, curtains, a poster and other accessories spread over the apartment. The 4th of June 2004 we entered the studio of the artist Edward Krasiński, on the top floor of an, in 1962, build apartment block nearby the rebuild historic centre of Warsaw. We didn't know who Edward Krasiński was and what the importance of his work is. This studio with, beside the blue line, numerous interventions of the artist is quite intriguing; is it a work of art or is it a living space, are we allowed to touch it or is it only permitted to look at it, is it a static monument or a vibrant centre for conceptual art?

Pavel Humhal | Damien Hirst

Damien Hirst: CARCINOMA, 2007, seen in the flesh in April 2008, circle with a diameter of 213.4 cm

I've always wondered what emptiness, nothingness, finiteness look like and what their meaning is, in the Universe, in time, in microcosm. A fairy-tale building towers on Danish shores, housing the Arken Museum of Modern Art. It has many chambers and in one of them — 'a revelation'! Nothingness and death, materialisation of finiteness on Earth and in the Universe. Deliberately. It's a black circle framed like a relic, with the function of a lab sample. Sterile, irretrievable. Born of a Sabbath of rationality, touching the borders that even physicists can't cross. A million dead flies means a million inevitable ends. They make up black out of obedience to a principle of a higher order, a black a million times blacker than a Malevic square. A structure that is a million times more complex than a Pollock painting. Reality that is a million times more comprehensive than a Duchamp ready-made. Individual heads with eyes of different colours can only be made out on close inspection. They are glued and fixed together forever. They didn't choose their neighbours in death. They fly here to define what will happen to us, what it will look like when our planet reaches its end. The purpose of a higher order surpassing a momentary death. A temporary death that has its rebirth in an eternal and irrevocable death. When I was ten I used to listen to Black Sabbath who had a number called 'Into The Void': 'Past the stars in fields of ancient void / Through the shields of darkness where they find / Love upon a land a world

unknown / Where the sons of freedom make their home.' Now I know what death looks like. Damien was born in the same year.

Eva Jiříčka | Gregor Schneider

Gregor Schneider: DOUBLINGS, 18 April – 15 June 2008, Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf, Switzerland

A custodian presses a button in the lift and then gets out of it. When the door shuts, the lift starts to descend and you are quickly trying to get your head around the instructions that the custodian has managed to give you. Before you have time to do so, the door opens. The first step you take is very uncertain as the room is completely dark. The light from the lift leaves a beam instantly swallowed by darkness, so it doesn't illuminate the space you've entered. At that moment the door shuts and you are alone in total darkness. Only the sound of the departing lift emphasises that you are also surrounded by complete silence. You realise you can hear yourself breathing. You immediately remember the custodian's instructions. With your right hand you feel for a wall. You are supposed to walk forward. OK, but what with that feeling of uncertainty, this turns into a physical transformation. You can feel your ears growing and your eyes now take up half of your face. Your various fantasies of what is around you (where you can't see) prevent you from moving. You stand on the spot thinking that it is surely impossible that you are really completely alone in this indefinable space. You calm yourself down with the thought that there must be a trick in this. Maybe black glass beyond which other visitors can watch you. So you take the first step and then another; it's possible after all. You can feel by your fingers that the wall is not well built, it's not a solid wall. It's a kind of plasterboard assembly giving you the feeling that you are about to hit something, or that something might hit you, or you hit somebody. The air is very heavy and you are forever expecting an obstacle to hit you. You have to stop. After all, you are walking so stiffly and slowly that there's almost no difference walking and standing still. You want to go back but don't want to give up. So you break through the darkness in front of you with disgust. You don't know exactly how many meters you've walked. It's hard to guess. Wherever you look you see only deep nothing. You want to start walking properly but you feel again that the dark space is threatening you, especially on the left. You press on. It must end somewhere. Soon, shadows will loom to mark approaching deliverance from the darkness. But there's nothing. In addition, a certainty starts to come to you that a little to the left, directly above your temple, something has materialised and is getting closer, in such a way that it's about to swallow you up any second, if you don't suffocate first. It's fear, you say to yourself, or you simply feel things you can't see. It must be an unresolved problem of yours. You try to identify it. There's only you there, so it must be yours. What can be done about it? Such a feeling of anxiety about oneself? Looks like it. If you don't crack it, you won't move. A wonderful opportunity to learn something... Suddenly you can hear, from a distance, the sound of an approaching lift. Now you are even more frightened because you feel embarrassed about fighting there for so long and think that the custodians are probably worried about what you have been doing there for such a long time. They will come looking for you and find you totally freaked out. No, never. And you walk forward fast to catch up. Your heart is in your throat but after a while a dim light indeed emerges around the corner. It traces the right corner of the wall. You walk in that direction. You keep feeling the wall with your right hand, though, because the light is very dim and you're still alone. You are nearly at the source of the light under which you can make out the soft outlines of a figure lying on the floor. It's a small figure, like a child's. It must be a child, it has no shoes and its socks are light blue. It has a tracksuit bottom. It appears very familiar in those casual clothes, but it has a bag over its face. A black plastic bag reaching to the chest. Perhaps normally you would be frightened but after those few minutes of loneliness in complete darkness you feel happy that you're no longer alone, and that what you see is the beginning of an installation...

Jana Kalinová | Martin Horák

Martin Horák: I WRITE TO YOU IN PAIN exhibition, AM180 Gallery. Horák added inverted commas to Václav Stratil's print 'I Write to You in Pain', over twenty years old, turning it into a direct speech and a commentary on current status. The reason for sadness as one of the constants of human life remains, only its bearers change.

Křištof Kintera | Wim Delvoye

Wim Delvoye: CLOACA

An automatic washing machine plugged into the electrical mains. The drum is rotating merrily, the control light flickering red. A strange smell is spreading, and behold: a small brown-green turd is slowly winding out of the anal valve. An explicit example of the marriage between science and art!

Peter Lamb | Dominic Allan

Study for a PORTRAIT OF AN ISOLATED LUTON LONER

I am currently showing in London with the artist Dominic Allan in an exhibition called 'Pier Pressure'. Dominic makes works that recall his childhood in Luton, a town somewhere in the middle of the U.K. The work I want to talk about is not one that made it into our show, but is half

finished, still sitting in his studio in the east end. The work is to be called 'Study for a portrait of an isolated Luton loner'. It's a sculpture, around six feet tall and seems loosely based on the Francis Bacon painting of Van Gogh 'Study for a portrait of Van Gogh V' 1957. It's the one where a man is walking in the countryside with his art materials strapped to his back. Dominic's sculpture is again of a man, but strapped to his back is a hump of red sweets. In fact most of his body is covered in the 'strawberry whip' sweets, a childhood favourite perhaps. The sculpture sits uneasily on a wooden pallet, caught in a walking motion. Not all the figure is finished as lumps of polyurethane act as arms, half made. The figure is disabled. Wedged under one stumpy arm is a white walking stick reminiscent of a hospital walking stick. This is also a reference to the cane carried by the artist in the Van Gogh painting. The load on his back relates to Dominic's old job working for his father's waste paper recycling business. In this job he would have heavy loads to carry on his back. I think Dominic's work is a nostalgic double portrait of himself and his father. I know a little about his relationship with his father which he sees as a little tragic. His father sounds like a proud man but an illness limits his mobility. In all of Dominic's work there seems to be a feeling of struggling to move forward, of being stuck in the past.

Michal Moravčík | Martin Creed

In spring 2006 I got an invitation for a dinner with curator Macha Roesink. Her apartment was situated in the middle of the Amsterdam and looked really old and comfortable. In a living room, where we were spending most of the evening, it captured my attention something golden, standing out from the surface of the wall. It reminded me of a breast. Similarly to this one, furthermore behind the corner, there was placed a silver reverse of the very same shape. Impressed on the wall, it laid just behind the gold plated breast, which was getting out from the behind the corner. During the whole evening, I was turning to the place, which Creed has deepened to the wall (WORK N°. 99, 1994). Two shapes, positive and negative one, were drawing my attention to the corner, as to a place, were something intimate ought to be happening. I would feel how I want to touch it, to grasp it, and at the same time, how I would hesitate to do it, the same as one always resists confessing own perversity. Something's missing; something is standing out there... It may look quite trivial, but it really worked in a privacy of a flat. Something in between design, jewellery or sculpture was constantly disturbing me there. It was something so vain, what I didn't really need there, but was inspiring my tangency and visual joy, telling me about space inhabited... The other work by Martin Creed was placed at the toilet (WORK N°. 100, 1994). The cube was placed in between the toilet and the washbasin and was conglomerated from the same tile-kind as the floor was. It was creating the situation of something very material standing in my way, forcing me to share my secret place with it. Initial protest of mine has slightly turned into the acceptance of the element.

Jan Nálevka | Olafur Eliasson

I saw Olafur Eliasson's THE INSIDE OF OUTSIDE (2008) light installation early this year in the neugerriemschneider gallery, Berlin. At first sight it looked like a video projection. The light, however, didn't come from a projector but from a set of 24 multicoloured spotlights that switched on in a preset rhythm. They produced on the wall a fascinating animation of exactly demarcated geometrical shapes in pastel colours, always related to the basic elliptic shape of the projection and a central point, a steel ball of around 4 cm diameter. The projection took five minutes; the only sound was the ticking of a small metronome.

Roman Ondák | Kris Martin

Kris Martin: Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, April, 2008

I enter a kunsthalle in a German town. I'm in the entrance hall buying a ticket. A ticket to the show, not a train ticket. But I might feel like buying a train ticket, seeing the first object on display. A massive black information board of the kind that you see in railway stations hangs high on the wall, above a small mezzanine where staircases from two opposite sides meet. At railway stations, a quiet clicking sound of metal plates with numbers and letters turning is heard from time to time. The plates rotate until the exact time of departure and destination appear on them. The same board is at the exhibition; the plates occasionally start rotating and then stop again. As you are walking through the entrance hall, the rustling sound typical of railway stations breaks your concentration when you are looking at something else at the show, and you lift your eyes to the board, just as in a station. On this board, however, all the plates are black.

Boris Ondreička | Stano Filko

The work of art I have in mind is Stano Filko's house in Bratislava. It's a house/studio/laboratory, storehouse/archive. It's a dynamic, symbolic, mystical, unique building. It's beyond doubt the most comprehensive and radical work in all Slovak history and one of the world's truly exceptional buildings (it's often compared to, for example, the work of Dieter Roth). It's a dwelling of memory in which one doesn't search linearly but its layout is layered in space, on the basis of a hierarchical system of chakras and dimensions, a specific division of the universe according to the great

Stano Filko. Each part of the space— a table, chair, bench, bed, wardrobe, doors, windows, fences, ladder, axe, etc — is an autonomous piece of art, yet inseparably connected with the constantly changing and spreading context shaped by using the information from science, culture and a mixture of religions. At this point, Filko always adds, taking things to the max: ‘I’m not interested in the third dimension but in the fifth...’

Jorge Peris | Bramante

Half-hidden close to the Duomo of Milan there is the Church of S. Maria presso S. Satiro. After crossing a long porch yard you find yourself in front of a wonderful grey stone facade that seems a renaissance drawing. Suddenly you feel projected into other place and into other time. The Church was constructed at the end of 1400 in order to protect and to honour a miraculous imagine which became site of pilgrimages. The task was given to il Bramante which accepted the challenge and over passed all the limitations of the complicated space. Not being able to conclude the building with a forth arm because of a nearby road he constructed a false space in perspective. The inside is very small although it has a monumental aspect given by the three navate, a hemispheric cupola in centre and the presbytery at the end. When entering the space your head starts to spin, there is a conflict between eye and brain and you are left suspended in to the perfect illusion. It seems that, behind the altar, there is a regular apse with a volta in stucco that in reality is only 97 centimetres deep, even if it seems a kilometre long. The effect it’s incredible and utterly brilliant. Bramante transfers sculpture to the architecture, I do not know what must have been going true his head. How can a lie make a space become magical? It doesn’t seem made by man.

Alessandro Piangiamore | Stanislao Di Giugno

The work of art I’m talking about is by Stanislao Di Giugno. It’s an audio-installation titled PANGEA PROJECT. It’s a sound recording with instrumental versions of national anthems. In the beginning you hear the national anthems of various countries, you recognise them, and then, gradually, all you can hear is a single deafening sound that carries on to the end, and it’s no longer possible to distinguish melodies of specific anthems within it.

Stanislao Di Giugno | Cyprien Gaillard

Cyprien Gaillard: DESNIANSKY RAION

The first part of the video features aerial takes at surprisingly close range, showing modern architecture, probably deserted dwellings that look like ruins and the wreckage of an almost extinct civilisation, giving the impression of emptiness and uprootedness. The buildings resemble enormous towers looming in the middle of a dreary and cold landscape illuminated by a dim, evil light. The camera moves slowly, almost in a circle, scanning the monoliths on their circular ground plan. The second part of the video shows scattered images, taken secretly as it were, with two groups of young people in an unspecified space. The groups move against each other, wellordered, at a steady pace, and suddenly they clash face to face, mercilessly, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Then they separate and scatter, leaving behind bodies wounded in the battle. The music accompanies the scene with a cheerful crescendo, providing it with an epic air. The third part of the video is almost a static take in which a launched firework progressively illuminates various places and, part by part, also an enormous building that looks like a mirage, and then, out of the blue, a large explosion completely destroys the building and the whole scene becomes enveloped in a grey cloud of dust.

Harry Pye | Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon: THREE STUDIES FOR FIGURES AT THE BASE OF A CRUCIFIXION

I first saw this painting when I was about ten years old which means I’ve known about it for 25 years. I looked at it today in Tate Britain where there is a major Francis Bacon retrospective on. I think it’s the best thing he ever did. I like it because it’s so perfect. It does what the artist wanted which is unlock something in us and make us walk away as different people. It’s in a gold frame behind glass. The glass means we see ourselves reflected in the work (as intended). In order to describe what I think this work is about I am now going to reflect on some incidents in my life. Towards the end of my first year at secondary school a boy told me and 5 other boys in our tutor group that his parents were getting divorced. He told us he and his brothers were going to live with his father because his mother had been seeing another man. As he started telling us I felt uneasy. It felt like his Dad had told had unwisely told him to go up to his friends and tell him about the situation so that they heard it from the horse’s mouth rather than from a gossip. The thing was that none of us were really friends in that tutor group. And some of the children – in fact most of them – had problems that meant they just weren’t mature enough to deal with serious issues. So instead of supporting him, three boys in particular began mocking him and they kept at it until he cried. It was when he began to break that I remember the most. They could smell it and see it in his eyes that this vulnerable boy was about to give in and cry and it made them feel wonderful. They each had a really evil grin. They had him on the ropes and they were relishing every second. They were like a pack of vultures. In a way it was mad of

him to think he wouldn’t get treated like that because nobody ever stuck up for anybody and it was obvious that in that place at that time you only had to stumble and you would find yourself trampled to the ground. I remember there was a lot of racism towards black children at my school. I always challenged the kids who made racist remarks. There was one boy who used to always talk about what it would be like if your sister dated a black person. “Can you imagine him being in your house?” He’d say pulling a face. “...If he went in your kitchen and started using the same cups and plates as you!” I’d ask him if he would say these remarks to black people he was “friends” with and I’d maybe mention that a lot of the music and comedy he liked were by black people and so on and so on. But he wouldn’t back down. He acted like I was being dishonest and trying to argue just to wind him up. “We all think it though don’t we?” he’d asked. From his point of view I was causing trouble by doubting that “we” were all the same. But maybe we were all the same in that we were all hurting, we were all insecure, we all needed support. In the early 1980’s when I was at school Rap music and break dancing were all the rage. Every morning a few kids would break dance in our classroom. There was a slightly odd boy called Stephen who got made fun of a lot. For a few weeks each morning would begin with everybody except me and the teacher forcing Stephen to dance. They would gather round him in a circle and chant and cheer and jeer. He would attempt to spin on his back or do the caterpillar but he was awful. After five or ten minutes the crowd would get bored. They would pull his jumper up over his head so he couldn’t move his arms and give him rabbit punches in the kidneys. On other occasions they’d try and remove his trousers or just knock him around a bit. It was a disturbing sight to see and one I’ve found hard to forget. When Bacon made this work he’d been looking at an old painting called The Mocking of Christ, he’d also been looking at photo stills from the film Battleship Potemkin, some Picasso work from the 1920’s and a book on Chimps. All of these influences were thrown into the mix but I’ve read what was really haunted him at the time of making the work was a line of poetry: “the reek of human blood smiles out at me”. I suppose it’s worth pointing out the title reveals that Bacon intended to eventually put a crucifixion in later and that these three panels were just studies (they are not even painted on canvas). A lot of artists and writers will relate to this fact that their best work came about when they set out to do one thing but then somehow the work took over and the end result was more exciting than the original idea. Anyway, back to me as a school boy... Elvis Costello had a song called, Suit of Lights that I used to listen to over and over again. It was about a failed singer or comedian who was dying on stage. When a performer says they are “Dying” it means the crowd’s reaction to their material is so bad it makes them feel like they’d rather be dead. The chorus of the song was about him being pulled out of the cold ground and put into a suit of lights. The middle 8 featured a line, “It’s enough to make you think right now, but you don’t bother”. I used to listen to this song in my parents living room. I would walk round in circles being intense. And I would think about the lyrics and shoe horn them into whatever I wanted them to mean that day. Around the same time on TV there was a series called The Singing Detective about a writer stuck in a hospital bed. Towards the end of the series he remembers an incident where an innocent boy in his class is blamed for an incident at school and punished harshly. Although he is the one who lied about the boy what shocks him is how keen the other children are in agreeing with him and wanting to see someone suffer. So I’m sure by now you get the gist. For me, Bacon’s Studies For Three Figures is a startling image that shocked me when I first saw it as it was unlike any painting I’d seen before. And it has always had a hold on me as it never lost an ability to open me up. It takes two to tango and so obviously there’s a bit of me that wants to open up. At school there was no way for me to do this as there was no one I felt I could talk to. This painting, (like Dennis Potter’s TV series and Elvis Costello’s songs) opened a door for me and showed me there was nothing that can’t be talked about and there was more than one way of expressing what was haunting, disturbing or tormenting you. The background of the painting is a really garish orange, it’s kind of mad and disgusting. The messy grey/white skin of the three figures are unsettling. One figure looks broken and resigned. The figure in the middle is menacing and, like an animal, is probably just being defensive but is actually quite scary. The figure on the right at first glance appears to be screaming in pain but ultimately I think is actively enjoying someone else’s pain. Yes, this painting makes me think of a singer or comedian “dying” on stage. The crowd are happy he is dying. His failure delights them. They see the beads of sweat and the hurt look in his eyes and they know they can break him. And yes, this painting is like being trapped on a stage or in a class room or in a hospital ward or in a prison. And Bacon forces us to admit we’re not paranoid – there is someone out to get us. We’re out numbered and they’ve smelt our blood. And they’re going to enjoy going in for the kill. When those boys in my class used to go in for the kill and bully someone till they cried and mock and humiliate them – it was the only time they exposed themselves. It was the closest they’ll ever get to expressing themselves, revealing their true feelings and making a work of art.

Simon Silberman | Harry Pye, Marcus Cope, Rowland Smith

Harry Pye, Marcus Cope, Rowland Smith :THREE FIGURES STANDING IN FRONT OF THREE FIGURES (AT THE BASE OF CRUCIFIXION)

This artwork consists of three paintings each 91cm wide and 122cm high. The first painting, by Marcus Cope is of an alien wearing an “I love Jim Dine” t-shirt. The alien is faceless and has a radar going through his brain. Harry Pye’s contribution is the middle painting. It features a friendly looking, blue eyed, bald man standing next to a camera on a tripod. His pose is not unlike that of Elvis Costello on his 1978 album, *This Year’s Model*. The final painting of the set is by Rowland Smith. This artist has painted himself smaller than his collaborators. Smith is wearing a red tie and a Prussian blue suit. Somehow his overall look is reminiscent of HRH Prince Charles. As you might expect Cope’s chosen style is not a million miles away from the American Pop Artist Jim Dine (hence the t-shirt). Pye’s style is cartoon like and wouldn’t seem out of place in a children’s book. Smith is the most conventional painter. Because of being placed next to Cope and Pye, he appears to be a realist. But Smith’s painting isn’t really any less mental looking than his friends. Both the mouth of the figure and Smith’s jacket have been painted rather well. Although Cope and Pye are not without their charms, maybe Smith is the more skilled artist of the three. The background of each painting is orange, described by Bacon as being, “the colour of madness”. There is something unsettling about seeing so much orange in front of one’s eyes. Bacon’s original painting of three disturbing characters (based on Ancient Greek myths) sat vulture-like at the base of a crucifixion is one of the most famous paintings in Britain. However unlike iconic images (such as the Mona Lisa, Munch’s scream etc) it’s an image only really familiar to gallery goers. Although 3 figures is possibly amongst Bacon’s best known work and Bacon is one of Britain’s best known artists, it is still too obscure a reference for most of the public. Bacon was partly inspired to make the work by seeing paintings by Pablo Picasso. He also used unusual reference material such as photos of both Chimps and Nazi’s. In a sense, Bacon and Picasso might have approved of the way Pye has enlisted the help of his friends to throw in as many different art styles as possible. By which I mean, they might have liked the devil may care attitude the artists employed. However I’m not sure that was Cope, Pye and Smith’s actual intention. I would suspect the aim of this piece was to experiment with a work that once struck a chord with them. The painting makes me smile possibly because there’s something naughty about it. You can imagine the three artists enjoying themselves as they painted it. “Three Figures In Front of Three Figures...” Serge Gainsberg used to say some girls were “belle laide”. The word describes a woman who is attractive though not conventionally beautiful. Maybe it’s fair to say, Cope, Pye & Smith’s painting is also belle laide?

Sláva Sobotovičová | Denisa Lehocká

(in the early 1990’s in the Medium gallery, Bratislava, at Denisa Lehocká exhibition) In a narrow corridor two candies were attached to the wall; grey, grooved, cheap (‘Furé Slávia?’). The candies were eyes; they had black plastic eyelashes like dolls have. I had never seen anything like that before.

Milan Tittel | Sharon Hayes

About two months ago, Miro Csölle met Sharon Hayes in Warsaw. She was wearing a blue T-shirt and held a pink banner with the slogan ‘Lesbicka na prezydenta’. Miro started to convince her that it had no balls, and could he help her? She agreed, and he sprayed a blue hairy lozenge on the reverse.

Adam Vackář | Chris Burden

Chris Burden: *THE ATOMIC ALPHABET*, 1982, 0’32”, video and sound recording (performance); Seen in Centre Pompidou, April 2, 2007 at 15.40, Paris, France

Aggressive, alarm, alarming, atomic bomb, animated films, immortality, panic, uranium, radiation, halo, mutation, music, silence, John Cage, end of the world, repetition, symmetry, threat to civilisation, Tokyo, war, earthquake, holocaust, intuition, screaming, homeless people, clouds, freedom, oil drought, social problem, society, crisis, killing, electronic music, torture, tragedy, moral values, revolution, politics, personal interest, manipulation, evil triumphs, police state, prison, check, security, demagoguery, economics, globalisation, averaging, normalisation, security cameras, ideology, order, fascism, bourgeois ways, Prague, claustrophobia, Czech Republic, injustice, lethargy, demonstration, victory.

Filip Vančo | Dianne Arbus

Dianne Arbus: *IDENTICAL TWINS*, 1967, 30×30 cm, Americans, 2006, Kunsthalle Wien

The photograph shows monozygotic twins, girls about ten years old, in identical dresses with white collars and the same white tights. They have dark hair and distinctive eyes. They are totally identical save for a single detail that you only notice after a while: one of them is smiling and the other is serious.

Charlie Youle | Tino Sehgal

Tino Sehgal: *THIS PROGRESS*

I went to the ICA to see the second of the three Tino Sehgal shows there, not knowing anything about it beforehand. I paid for my ticket and as I turned around to work out where the show started, a young girl of around eight years old said something like, ‘This is a piece by Tino Sehgal, could you tell me what Progress is for you?’ I told her that Women’s Liberation

in the 20th century is perhaps a true model of progress; all the while we were walking very slowly through the ground floor gallery. She asked me to explain why. I got a bit freaked out as she seemed too clever for her age and I felt like I was put on the spot. I suppose it felt like my answers would be directly relayed to the artist. As I answered I was convinced that the girl was genuinely interested, and made all the right accompanying noises. When we got to the far end of the gallery, a teenage boy was waiting for us — he must have been thirteen, and he had dark fluff on his upper lip and a awkward but smart look on his face. The girl told him what I thought progress was and why, and left me with the boy to walk upstairs. He asked me to talk more about what I thought, and we talked about our respective parents and their divorces. He must have asked me about the negative impact of women’s lib. It felt nice talking to him in a quiet but open way. We had been wandering around the upstairs galleries, and after a while a woman in her forties interrupted our conversation abruptly with a question I can’t remember, but one that I recall as being taxing. I remember saying something awkwardly in response and then she led me up another flight of stairs. We entered another set of galleries on the second floor, and she left me there, running down a different staircase. I was by myself in the empty galleries for only half a minute or so before an elderly gentleman came in and made his way slowly towards me. He must have been over eighty, and wasn’t steady on his feet. I took his arm and we chatted about the building — I told him that it was interesting to be able to see bits of the ICA you don’t normally get access to — the smaller back staircase, the second floor rooms. He pointed out certain features in the building with anecdotes. Then I think he summed up the elements of the artwork — the four ages, and asked me either what I thought about Progress now, or if I thought I’d made any progress, I can’t quite remember. We slowly walked downstairs, through the café and the corridor leading to the foyer as we discussed progress, time, age and other things. I told him about my grandfather who had recently died of a heart attack; we talked about the end of life. He was a very lovely man, and we said goodbye very warmly when we arrived back at the foyer of the ICA. We shook hands and he told me that he had really enjoyed talking to me. I told him that I had enjoyed it too.

Bevis Martin | Tino Sehgal

I was quite wary of the idea of going to see the Tino Sehgal piece at the ICA. Charlie had told me that it was really good but didn’t want to tell me what happened in it because then it wouldn’t work properly. Never really enjoying interactive artworks, I made her reassure me that it was nothing too embarrassing. I paid for my ticket and having been looked up and down by a man whose role was apparently to assess the possible danger I presented, I was taken by the hand by a little girl who looked a bit weary. She led me down into the gallery. ‘What does progress mean to you?’ she asked me in a rather flat voice. As I gave my garbled reply she looked around, not able to feign interest, giving an occasional, ‘hmm?’ When I had finished she led me to a teenage girl at the bottom of a staircase and said, ‘He said that progress has something to do with technology’, and then walked away. I can’t remember how the conversation continued as I was taken through the building by this older girl, the young man she handed me over to or the old lady who led me to the exit. I retain an impression of slightly paranoid anxiety and a dreamlike heightened awareness — a feeling that the exchange was at once ‘deep’ and yet entirely superficial, that the players were going through the motions for the nth time and that any contact with them was more than likely totally illusory.

Sharon Kivland | Tino Sehgal

I think he set up a strategy and that is only way you could experience it. That is the price of a work of art, that you don’t know what it is, but after a moment, you know what Tino Sehgal is doing and it does not work any longer. I actually become very critical. At the ICA there were school children playing games and you walked in, while they just played around you, casually, and they don’t mind you. You knew what was going to happen, because you had read about it already. But in fact the children simply sat down. The children were supposed to come up to you and say ‘Do you think this is the work of art?’. And none of them did! My friend Jonathan and I hung around a bit, waiting for them to do what they were supposed to do. But they were not doing their job! Where were these children with their question? You know, they were useless. They were supposed to be asking that question and I sat wondering why they would not ask me if I thought this was a work of art, because you know, I really needed that question. The same thing happened to me in the German Pavilion at Venice in 2005. I went to that room where the invigilator was supposed to ask about globalism and if you could answer, you got a free ticket ... I went there four times and they didn’t ask me. I was there, alert and ready for a conversation on fucking process.’ Charlie and Bevis: ‘We did that ...’ Sharon: ‘But when I went there, they didn’t care anymore! Tino Sehgal didn’t really care about it either.’