

Studio Visit: Highlights of 2017 transcript

Morgan Quaintance 00:14

You're listening to Resonance 104.4 FM. I'm Morgan Quaintance and this is a studio visit 2017 end of year special recorded in front of a live audience at Wysing Arts Center in Cambridge. *audience applauds* Now 2017 was the year delusional demon headmistress, Theresa May told us:

Theresa May (audio clip) 00:36

Each generation should live the British dream. And that dream is what I believe in.

Morgan Quaintance 00:43

But while she saw Britain through the bizarre Enid Blyton acid trip of her imagination, the realities of austerity, social cleansing, global conflict and domestic division, most of us spent the year living a waking nightmare. Strangely, the three most prominent forms of cultural and political discord were also mirrored in art world intrigue and current affairs. So racism, fiscal crisis and interpersonal abuse came in the forms of crypto fascism of LD50, massive overspends at Documenta, and the resignations of Knight Landesman at Art Forum, and Gavin Delahunty at the Dallas Art Museum, but 2017 wasn't all bad. And to prove it, this is the inaugural year of studio visits immaterial awards, awards given for excellence in the arts in four categories, best exhibition, best criticism, best ethnography and best moment and here to share their 2017 annual highlights and probably a few lowlights our curator and writer, Amanprit Sandhu.

Amanprit Sandhu 01:40

Hi Morgan.

Morgan Quaintance 01:43

Artist Erica Scourti.

Erica Scourti 01:44

Hello.

Morgan Quaintance 01:45

Writer John Douglas Miller.

John Douglas Miller 01:47

Hello.

Morgan Quaintance 01:48

Independent curator, writer and educator Shama Khanna.

Shama Khanna 01:51

Hello.

Morgan Quaintance 01:52

Alright, so thanks, everybody for coming. And thanks studio audience for being so vocal a minute ago, Aman, you just traveled all the way from the other end of the UK this morning. So where were you? What were you doing?

Amanprit Sandhu 02:02

Yeah, so I was in Burnley for the week, I was at a women's gathering, which was called shifting loyalties organized by an organization called Idle Women. And yeah, it was quite an interesting experience because the reason sort of why they had this gathering was to bring sort of women activists, ladies that were part of the women's movement together to really just, I guess, to share sort of stories to excavate histories, but also to see if there's ways of building new relationships and new networks. And just to give you a bit of a background on Idle Women, it was established in 2015, by Rachel Anderson and Cis O'Boyle, Rachel Anderson used to be head of interaction at Art Angel and also before that she was heading up the learning program at South London Gallery. So I was always watching what Rachel was doing, because it was kind of really closely aligned to some of my interests. And what was so interesting was just hearing why they, both of them, had made the shift away from the arts, which they sort of described was, at the end sort of at odds with what they were doing sort of outside of the art world and the women's

movement. So and in some ways, they felt like they were facilitating the violence of the institute. So they really wanted to leave London and think about sort of what they could do outside of that. And also, you know, they were acutely aware that lots of women's resources and centres were closing down everywhere. So they were really interested in thinking about how can you make space for women, and it's not taken away, and what's possible and sustainable. So that was the sort of start of Idle Women.

Morgan Quaintance 03:48

And was it like, it sounds like it was an intergenerational thing?

Amanprit Sandhu 03:51

Yeah, it was. So when I said that they were sort of activists, there are also women there who have taken part in the Greenham.

Morgan Quaintance 04:00

Wow!

Amanprit Sandhu 04:00

Yeah, so, you know, real sort of activists from like, the 70s and 80s. I don't know why I'm saying real. But yeah, so like, you know, so just, it's, you know, so it's different from sometimes the discourse that you have in the art world, and just people who have, you know, embodied that for decades. And then there was, you know, amazing sort of historians, like the American historian, Max Dashu, who does a lot of work around mother rights and female iconography. So she gave some amazing lectures, and just sort of, yeah, female iconography across sort of timelines and cultures as well. So it was just so like, and also it was quite powerful being in an all female space, and I didn't really realize it would be that way.

Morgan Quaintance 04:45

Yeah, I was gonna ask you so you've literally just come, what was the train station that you joined to get here?

Amanprit Sandhu 04:50

Burnley Manchester Road.

Morgan Quaintance 04:51

I didn't even know there was a station called that.

Amanprit Sandhu 04:54

And it was the first time I'd been to Burnley and that was really interesting. And I think the thing what I really like about the model of Idle Women is that they work with other organizations who don't sit within the art world, for example, they're setting up a centre in Blackburn with Humraaz who are a refuge centre for South Asian women who are facing or in recovery from domestic violence. So this is really sort of important work that they're doing. And they're also aware that sort of pooling their resources is a way that, you know, some of what they had in mind can be achieved, their long term aim is to own land. So there was a lot of conversation around, you know, having access to land, because when you think about what was happening in Greenham, you know, that was about sort of reclaiming public space. Yeah, so just really rich conversations, a lot of processes, as well. But definitely, in terms of building new friendships and networks, I think, as an independent curator, it's really important to always go outside of your work and sort of, you know, put yourself in different situations.

Morgan Quaintance 06:01

Yeah, don't just go to galleries or like, but one of the things that sounds really encouraging about that was that there were some specific outcomes that the the the gathering was convened to work towards.

Amanprit Sandhu 06:12

Yeah, so just so the key things that we were looking at was sort of domestic violence, and, you know, just violence, sort of thinking about that sort of broadly in terms of institutional violence, and then sort of domestic violence, also reproductive rights. And then also thinking about, you know, I guess, sort of parity across sort of pay. So those, you know, there was sort of maybe three or four strands, but really, it was up to us to really take things where we wanted to. And, you know, and follow up on conversations with people that we want to build relationships up with. And that's really rare. I think

that you I don't know, you have that in a conference, and it's all very didactic, you know, just in terms of how knowledge is passed between people. So it was such a great space to, yeah, just carry on having conversations.

Morgan Quaintance 07:04

What I like about this, one of your other picks this year was, I guess, the obverse or not the obverse, it's the companion, really, to your experience, at Pendel. That's, that's right?

Amanprit Sandhu 07:15

Yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 07:16

And this was, so your second highlight of the year was a documentary called 'The Work: Four Days to Redemption'. I'm really glad you picked this. It was phenomenal. One of the best things I've ever seen so. So basically, just to give people an idea, like, it was a story of a documentary that looked at an interesting form of like reparative therapy, in Folsom Prison. So is that right?

Amanprit Sandhu 07:38

Yep, that's correct.

Morgan Quaintance 07:39

And like so the the documentary follows three men from outside as they participate in a four day group therapy retreat with level four convicts. I think, level four means probably the most extreme, hitherto violent individuals, but it was a kind of new form of what primal screen therapy is a bit dismissive, I think, but it did involve kind of guttural like exhuming a lot of pain.

Amanprit Sandhu 08:02

Yeah, completely.

Morgan Quaintance 08:03

Tell me what you felt about it.

Amanprit Sandhu 08:04

So I think, Well, I was gonna say, the first thing to say is I cried so it had a real effect on me. But also, I think the thing is, it took you to a place that I would, you know, never sort of go to myself, I've also because this year, thinking about sort of women's spaces, and, you know, going to Pendel was really important, but alongside that I have been really interested in ideas around sort of male masculinity and where that sort of where that is now. And one of the strongest things that were coming, you know, that came out of this documentary was, you know, sort of men that had been taught how to be and just yeah, so that was sort of one thing, but also just, you know, the journey that you go on, as a viewer in that documentary, there were times when I felt like I shouldn't be watching and I really sort of loved the way the director didn't really intervene in the narrative. It was very much a fly on, fly on the wall. And at some times, it was kind of it was tiring, because you saw the same sort of repetitive, you know, therapeutic process. But yeah, I thought I thought it was amazing. So...

Morgan Quaintance 09:13

One of the things that struck me when I was watching it was that like absent fathers or fathers in general have a lot to account for. Yeah, and that's something that really needs to be delved into and unpacked really.

Amanprit Sandhu 09:22

Yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 09:23

And like, I suppose masculine, he really has been looked at this year quite a lot. And what, what kind of wounded, but then, because it's wounded, like attacking masculinity is capable of doing Yeah, I mean, from like, let's say pathetic people in like the alt right scene to the ultimate wounded masculine person in the world. Donald Trump. Yeah. So like, but yeah, this the documentary seemed to me to offer a positive way of working through some of this stuff. I mean, did you think so as well?

Amanprit Sandhu 09:53

No, completely and I was, you know, also just taken aback by the space they had created and, you know, I think sort of just going back to what you also said earlier, I think another thing that was really powerful was like, just how like, you know, in sort of, you could kind of if there's any sort of way that you can understand the violence, it's through sort of that documentary as well, because it's just the flip side of, you know, that first wound or the wound that they've had. And just to kind of humanize that a bit, I thought was not a bit a lot was really powerful as well. But, um, yeah, so the space that they had, like, managed to create was kind of key to that. So what you're saying about that redemptive. And what I loved about it as well is that a lot of these convicts are from, you know, sort of huge gangs, and they make a promise when they go into that space, that they'll leave all those sort of, I guess allegiances at the door. And that was quite amazing. Where sort of in their everyday life that they're, you know, that they have all these sort of, sort of tribes that they're part of, and the way that that was just kind of, you know, I guess it was a sort of undressing a continuous undressing as well.

Morgan Quaintance 11:04

Yeah, because it felt felt to me like that those are kind of positive attributes of a constructive masculinity, really, but that those are often used and turned to sort of coercive effect by gangs. So yeah, the idea of loyalty, dependability, understanding, strength and approval, you know, you always hear that these people have my back. But that's one of the things they do in the program, which really affected me, they were like, wouldn't, you know, we got you got like, 10 bad dudes behind you, like, go there.

Amanprit Sandhu 11:31

Yeah, and one of the most powerful scenes was when, you know, one of the convicts was saying, you know, he was talking about, you know, I feel like I want to give up, I want to commit suicide, and just that sort of process when someone else came up to him, and they were just spent, you know, you spent five minutes just watching them just sort of going through that process where he was like, you know, you're not going to do this, this isn't going to happen. And yeah, just really powerful stuff. I can't really articulate it in a way that's really sort of...

Morgan Quaintance 12:00

Does it justice, yeah, I know yeah.

Amanprit Sandhu 12:02

You just have to watch it, but it's a must see. And also, yeah, just in terms of therapeutic processes, I just found it really, I think they're doing some really amazing work. And it's just worth looking at just alone for that.

Morgan Quaintance 12:17

So unfortunately, the story of all strand, which is like a strand that's not produced by the BBC, but is bought by BBC is no longer available on iPlayer, but I tried to watch it in a sort of pirate version this morning, but it's not available either. But which makes me think it's gonna get some sort of a low level commercial release. Yeah. So hopefully, it might be out on one of the many like streaming providers online so people can catch it soon. But if you haven't seen it, it's like an absolutely phenomenal documentary. But now it's time to announce the first of this year's immaterial awards. Now they're call immaterial because there's no cash. There's no there's no prize. There's nothing except our praise, but everyone's good with that. And so Aman I'm going to ask you to do the honours, please. Open the stapled envelope, and tell us the recipient.

Amanprit Sandhu 13:05

Of...

Morgan Quaintance 13:06

Yeah and you alright there?

Amanprit Sandhu 13:08

I'm trying to do it with one hand sorry. Okay.

Morgan Quaintance 13:11

It's Lala Land!

Amanprit Sandhu 13:13

The 2017 Award for Best exhibition goes to Cherie, I can't ready that.

Morgan Quaintance 13:20

Silver.

Amanprit Sandhu 13:21

Silver for 'We Are Watching Oz' in London.

Morgan Quaintance 13:24

Right. So.

Audience 13:27

audience applause

Morgan Quaintance 13:31

So from 1967 to 1973. The British incarnation of the underground magazine Oz explored politics, sexual liberation, counterculture, civil rights and societal mores in a style that can only be explained as a kind of irreverence, psychedelic satire, spanning both divides of the pre and post Altamonte hippie era, editors Richard Neville, Jim Anderson and Felix Dennis, along with contributors, including Germaine Greer, Lillian Roxon, Robert Crumb, and Marcia Rowe. The magazine dealt with the optimism, cynicism and ultimately the contradictions at the heart of the underground. It was also a dab hand at revealing societal mores a talent that would land the team in an infamous obscenity trial for an edition edited by kids, one of which was Deyan Sudjic, actually, anyway, so Cherie Silver, her incredible exhibition at Chelsea Space was on display from the 14th of June to the 14th of July, and was an awe aspiring mix of clearly communicated deep research, beautifully displayed archival materials and an underlying narrative thread that both celebrated and interrogated Oz's history. I was interested in finding out the story behind studio visits best exhibition of 2017.

Cherie Silver (audio clip) 14:42

Slightly long story but I did my MA in curating and collections at Chelsea College of Arts and following that I was awarded the Chelsea Arts Club Trust Research Fellowship. And

my research interests have always been about looking into Australian artists in London and through the Arts Club, I was introduced to a woman called Clytie Jessup, who was an artist and gallerist. And she happened to mention Oz magazine and doing a fundraising auction for the obscenity trial in 1971. And embarrassed as I was, I had to say I'd never heard of Oz magazine, which, being Australian, I was shocked that I never heard of it. And it being something from the 60s and 70s, which really did have such a huge impact on so many people, the more I looked into it, the more interested I became in it, in the subject. And part of my research fellowship also meant that I was working at Chelsea Space, with the director of exhibitions, Donald Smith and my colleague, Karen DeFranco and they encouraged me to do the exhibition.

Morgan Quaintance 15:51

It sounds like you were learning about the subject, as you were kind of doing your research for the show itself.

Cherie Silver (audio clip) 15:56

Yeah, I really was. I was, I really came into it with no knowledge and I found Luckily, the University of Wollongong in Australia had published all of us online. So that was my first entry into sort of looking at the magazine and getting an impression of the written material, and also the graphic material and just general sort of research online. And then through Clyti Jessup, she introduced me to people who had actually been involved with the magazine. And that was quite intimidating to then speak to those people because they've lived through it and been part of it and I was there with no knowledge. So I had to read about it and find out as much as I could as quickly as possible so that I could then engage with these, these interesting people. Marcia Rowe contributed so much to my research, she was so generous, and I think it was really important to have her voice in there and quite a lot of the exhibition material came from her personal collection. So whether it be her employment letter from when she worked for Oz in Sydney, or there was a recipe on how to make hash cookies, that was from her personal collection as well. And then how her voice ended up developing. And I guess she she mentioned how she had this realization, that the personal is the political and that propelled her to start Spare Rib and it was from her work with Oz. That, basically, yeah,

made her do that. So I think showing the outcomes of Oz, I think was important. And yeah, really glad to hear that that came across in the exhibition.

Morgan Quaintance 17:37

And what did you want to achieve with the show,

Cherie Silver (audio clip) 17:40

I really wanted to show people about Oz and I thought, because I found it so interesting that other people would. So I wanted to make people aware of Oz, and how important the magazine had been at the time in raising certain political issues, social issues, and how interesting the graphic design and the art was behind it. And then to highlight the individuals that have contributed to it as well. Basically shout from the rooftops look, come and have a look at this interesting thing that happened in the 60s to a new audience. Hopefully, there was obviously an already an audience for it. But I was hoping that maybe people from my generation that didn't know about it, would be quite interested to learn about it.

Morgan Quaintance 18:24

So that's a Cherie Silver there talking about the Studio Visit 2017 exhibition of the year, 'We Are Watching Oz'. So now I'm going to turn to Erica Scourti for you to tell us a bit about some of your highlights of the year. But first of all, I want to talk about one of your projects, which was the 'Empathy Deck' project. So can you just for the benefit of the audience, explain what the 'Empathy Deck' project was, and your collaboration with Wellcome collection? And also what the project's legacy is?

Erica Scourti 18:52

Yeah, so the 'Empathy Deck' is still live at the moment. It's a Twitter bot, and it responds to its followers tweets with a unique empathy card, I'm doing quotation marks for those of you who aren't in the audience, because what is an empathy card? Well, basically, it's it's based on a tarot type of card, but also more kind of cheesy things like Oracle cards and Goddess cards that are based on chance, but they still kind of relate to you in some way. So what it does is it draws, it's an image which is taken, it's one of my kind of collage, images, drawings, and then there's text on top and the text is taken from over

300,000 words of my spellchecked diary, and kind of intercut with another big body of text taken from all sorts of advice and self help literature. So yeah, so it sends these it sends tweets out to people, but there's a very particular kind of empathetic framework around the kind of language it uses, who it responds to who it follows back. And all of that is kind of built into it, even though it's not necessarily very visible at the outset. That's kind of it's back end.

Morgan Quaintance 20:01

So just for the people who may not know, what is a bot.

Erica Scourti 20:05

So a bot is an automated agent, essentially that, that you set up, you script it, and then it acts on your behalf.

Morgan Quaintance 20:13

And how do you script a bot? If I was going to create one today out? I do it and how would I script it?

Erica Scourti 20:17

Well, there's actually a site called cheap bots made quick, I think and it's really great. Like, you can make stuff really quickly. I've managed to make things really easily just using a Google Doc. But this was actually made with a programmer called Tom Armitage. And actually, for me, this was interesting, because it was the first time I'd worked in this way, I'd always worked in a very kind of low fi, just using what's at hand, and that being a specific choice, whereas working with a coder, you need money. And that was where the Welcome obviously made this possible. So essentially, you employ somebody else, you commissioned them, and then you work alongside with them to kind of work out exactly how it's going to respond. The artwork, you know, what type of text it's going to use, what type of forms of text because one of the things it does is it does a lot of rhyming couplets, which are, which also kind of, you know, introduce an element of humour as well.

Morgan Quaintance 21:07

And empathy was something that was on my mind this year, but and it's interesting, actually, it feels like it might be coming back slightly, not as if it was a fashion, but just people are kind of discovering the history of its emergence, specifically that it's the trajectory from late 19th century German aesthetics, into English usage. And in the German, I'm not very good at pronouncing German. Yeah. Is it? Einfühlung, Einfühlung?

Erica Scourti 21:34

I think so, yeah, something like that.

Morgan Quaintance 21:35

But um, Daria Martin, I don't know if you've come across her work on mirror touch synaesthesia, but that there's a large section of the book all about the kind of feeling in of empathy. So what what attracted you to empathy as a kind of subject or launch launch point?

Erica Scourti 21:53

Yeah, I mean, different things. And also, by the time I think the 'Empathy Deck' actually went live, I was also thinking about empathy, in a different sense to do the kind of politics of empathy. And this idea of who are we supposed to have empathy for, particularly, when it's often the marginalized and depressed who are often kind of asked to have empathy for for bigots. You know, so that became kind of quite a contentious thing around empathy. But the the reason I kind of made the bot or was interested in doing it was, it was part of an exhibition, which was about, the, what happens when the asylum? Well, it was actually on the history of the asylum. So it was called Bedlam. And so I, my commission was kind of meant to be looking at how does the asylum and Bedlam, how is it kind of disseminated into online space and into like, the digital, so I was interested in in forms of self therapy, which is also an ongoing thing in my work, which is almost like I use myself as a kind of subject of these various kind of processes of self therapy. So it was this idea of, could I make, could I make a little something that would be sent rather than it just be to one friend or to a couple of friends? Could you kind of automate friendship on this scale, so that it responds to people when they've said something because it responds particularly to emotive language. So I kind of wanted it to be something that would maybe like, make you smile, or at least have that

sense of a kind of connection, which gives you that kind of, oh, me too, or somebody else has felt that too. So there is some sense in which I wanted it to act in a kind of therapeutic way, but without being a therapy tool.

Morgan Quaintance 23:28

And I suppose that the basic way of like, say, thinking about the internet or network technology is that they're fostering a kind of sociopathy. So an absence of empathy. But would you would you share that characterization? Or do you see it as a bit more of a complex relationship?

Erica Scourti 23:42

I think it's definitely complex, but I think that's also true. Yeah, I think I mean, you know, in the writing, that I've done around the 'Empathy Deck', I mean, that's one of the things I've kind of tried to point out is that, you know, Twitter particularly, is a space that from what we can see all the time with the accounts that they decide to not shut down, and the way that they prioritize traffic and participation over any kind of ethics. Clearly, it's a place in which a lot of non empathic or aggressive, racist, misogynist, transphobic language circulates. So yeah, it is an attempt to kind of combat that and also maybe just to point to the ways in which, particularly around anxiety, depression, when the sharing of that and the kind of creating of community that that is something that also happens online. So it's kind of you know, it's not one or the other these things coexist, unfortunately. But yeah, my the project in a way is that it's rather than saying like, because a lot of the language that it refuses to, to respond to, or to repeat is, like, offensive language in a way that's its way of saying, well, no, as artists, you don't have to reflect what's in the world. So you don't have to be like, oh, well, the world's fucked up. So I'm going to show you, you know, everything that's terrible about it. You can also be like, Well, no, I I'm just not going to repeat that back. And that's a form of, you know, it's a type of action, which is still empathetic, but still an action.

Morgan Quaintance 25:09

So another work that you're working on at the moment, made me think of a sort of tendency of maybe of being in the work, but also absent in the work that you produce. And this is you're saying, you're working on a ghost written book. And I thought, well,

how do you work on a ghost written book? Is it just by chilling and letting someone else do the text?

Erica Scourti 25:27

Well, I mean, that's actually that's done what...Yeah, I mean, I commissioned somebody to write my ghost written autobiography based only on what they found on me online, and a packet of intimate data. So that was stuff like my Amazon recommended, my YouTube history, snippets of Facebook and Gmail, conversations and emails. So this was then handed to a stranger who yeah, at that point, I did just chill. And then they wrote it. But then this year, I then wrote an essay about it. And it's kind of funny, because the essay has turned out as long as the book itself. So it's kind of turned out this like, though there's an interesting thing there in terms of, on the one hand, giving, giving over your, your image to somebody else to represent, you know, you're allowing them to kind of have agency over it. But then arguably, by then writing a 10,000 word essay in response, I've kind of tried to reclaim some of that and be like, actually, no, now, here's my version of what this was about. But yeah, that's coming out soon. So you have to read it to see what you make of it.

Morgan Quaintance 26:27

Is there always this, do you feel that there's always a kind of push and pull like that in the projects that you do, because I feel like there's that energy. Like, it's like, it's almost like you surrender it to the point of it just not being you and then you kind of pull it back or...?

Erica Scourti 26:38

Yeah, I'm really interested in that in terms of like, what you surrender to somebody else, and how you how you can allow somebody, either like another human so like the ghostwriter, or perhaps an automated process, or a combination of the two, to, to kind of, you know, to give up some authorial control while at the same time not just going like data in data out or kind of, I hand it to you, it's it's fully outsourced. I'm kind of interested in what happens in that, in that overlap.

Morgan Quaintance 27:06

And okay, so I just want to talk briefly about your, you selected for highlights this year, we won't go too in depth with them. But um...

Erica Scourti 27:13

Because I can't remember them all!

Morgan Quaintance 27:14

Yeah, so we might even just mentioned them. So the first one was '56 Artillery Lane' at Raven Row, what show was this.

Erica Scourti 27:20

So this was a show curated by Naomi Pierce and Amy Bud. And it was looking at the, the, the sight of the domestic or the space of the domestic as a site for sexual politics. And what was really interesting about it, apart from the kind of exhibition itself was how much effort they put into the live program. And I think maybe this is an overall kind of theme of 2017 of like, the way that live programs have you know, maybe in a cynical way as well, you could say that they it's a way to get people to come and see shows that they might not see otherwise, but a performance on but this was done like really you know, it was really solid and so that's two of the things I went to was I went to a workshop run Bhanu Kapil, who's originally from the UK but had come over from Boulder Colorado so that was a really interesting workshop on anti memoir she called it which included meditation and drawing and and also went to a screening called, a screening and performance called 'Sick Time is Resist Time', which was looking again at forms of therapy. The kind of I don't know what the word for it something like no not the not the military industrial complex. What's the other one the pharmaceutical industrial complex.

Morgan Quaintance 28:31

One of them yeah.

Erica Scourti 28:32

Yeah one of those. So yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 28:35

Brilliant. So we're just gonna list through the last few so there was Arthur Jeffer's video at the Lissen show, which is like a strange mysterious like lots of money thrown at this exhibition in a building I never knew was there.

Erica Scourti 28:47

Yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 28:47

But look like some sort of, I don't know evil villains lair in Blade.

Erica Scourti 28:52

And it's also useful I mean, cuz, yeah, it's at Fashion Week. It's that kind of building yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 28:56

And yet, Terre Thaemlitz at Auto Italia south east and you had the post cyber feminism festival ICA, which I don't know if you know, has in this week's issue of Private Eye the conservative with a small c satirical magazine been mentioned in Pseuds Corner.

Erica Scourti 29:14

Wow!

Morgan Quaintance 29:14

And it says Sonic Cyber feminism's reading group Intersectional Approaches, and if anybody doesn't know, or is familiar with Pseuds Corner, it's supposed to be the place where people use kind of pretentious verbiage and they get called out for doing so but so this expression Sonic Cyber feminism's reading group Intersectional Approaches has been pulled out by the sort of conservative a small c satirists as evidence of pretention happening at the ICA.

Erica Scourti 29:42

What just from the title?

Morgan Quaintance 29:43

Just from the title, yeah.

Erica Scourti 29:44

Amazing.

Morgan Quaintance 29:45

There you go make of it what you will, and but now it's time for us to announce the second second award of 2017.

Erica Scourti 29:56

This is good. I agree with this one. The 2017 Award for Best Criticism goes to Larne Abse Gogarty for her feature 'The Art Right'.

Audience 30:08

audience applause

Morgan Quaintance 30:13

Though so for those of you who may not remember earlier this year hapless gallerist and crypto fascist enthusiast, Lucia Diego came under fire for supporting white supremacists at her gallery LD50 well initially seemed an ill judged naive engagement with the fascist alternative right through an exhibition looking at outright esoterica. Was soon to be revealed as a more serious embrace of racism and a toxic soup of white supremacy, the Marga mindset and all the other bargain basement philosophy used to support it, a wave of spirited condemnation and frankly weakly argued support followed. But Larne Abse Gogarty's feature in art monthly was absolutely was an absolutely skilled dissection of the facts that will ultimately I believe become a canonical text. It is a classic. And I asked her where the research for that classic came from.

Larne Abse Gogary (audio clip) 31:00

There was two things I didn't want to do in this article is I didn't want it to sound like a set of petty squabbles between different fairly obscure ends of the art world like a kind of ultra left position, and I don't know a liberal or sort of esoteric position. And I didn't

want it to sound like a set of like, just like cussing, post internet art or something with with no real substance or attention or sort of flattening of that genre. Because I just think it was so much more serious than the net like catches, just that just like the minute I started doing research, I was like, this isn't about me finding something politically dubious in some person's artwork, because they're invested in, I don't know, Bitcoin or whatever. Like, it just felt so much more serious than that when you actually listened to what was going on, then. This is like an actual meeting of white supremacists who want to organize and this is about an organizational structure. And that to me felt like the most urgent thing to critique and the thing that was somehow obfuscated in some of the the articles like the one by, obviously, the one by Jonathan Jones, and JJ Charlesworth that were just sort of advocating for some sort of like libertarian free speech argument where this was so much more grave in my view than then being about that. I mean, this was literally about an art gallery hosting white supremacists. And that was the sort of level at which I wanted to make the argument. Do you think that's what criticism can possibly do now, or like, criticism in its most effective form, at the moment, needs to be less about call outs and less about kind of ad hominem stuff disguised in like kind of showy verbiage, and more about cool dissection of the facts and what's actually happening so that the tech stands the test of time? Yeah, I think that's true. I mean, I think that that that's not only true. And I think the reason being that you've written e-Flux is like a brilliant example of that. And I feel really, you know, I feel like what I wrote and what you wrote are kind of written in a similar spirit of trying to do something that actually works like a sort of investigative kind of writing. But then at the same time, I'm also really invested in writing about art in a way that isn't just, you know, that is about questions of form and aesthetics. And I think, I think that the same although that it takes shape in a different sort of way, when you're talking when you're doing something sort of investigative and maybe more sociological, I think the that like carefulness or attention that I felt I had to work with in that article that this just couldn't be a series of like speculations, and me, you know, sneering at stuff I didn't like, it was much more serious than that. I think that's also the way that I want to treat an artwork when I write about it. And I don't just want it to be about kind of tracking where something sits in a certain scene or like, moment, or in terms of who people are friends with, or where they're showing, but rather about, like actually paying attention to an artwork quite carefully.

Morgan Quaintance 34:25

So that was the award winner for Best Criticism of 2017 Larne Abse Gogarty talking about her brilliant feature, 'The Art Right'. So Shama I'm going to turn to you now to talk to you a bit about your highlights for 2017. I think maybe let's start with a mutual friend of ours. And recent recipient of Paul Ham- is it the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award? You know who I'm going to talk about. Who is it?

Shama Khanna 34:49

Rehana Zaman.

Morgan Quaintance 34:50

Yeah. So tell us why. What was it about Rehana's output this year that blew your mind?

Shama Khanna 34:56

Well, yeah, I mean, it's this year, which tops many years of hard work, but I guess yeah, I've well, kind of, I've worked with her on an event last year, at a work called Shades of Opacity and so yeah. So it started off as a kind of, you know, coming together of affinities and then just kind of having this backstage access to her work. And then also seeing kind of that materialize in a very public sphere. So. So with the WOCI index, the women of colour index at the women's art library in in Goldsmiths.

Morgan Quaintance 35:45

Yeah and so you and I have attended quite a few of those sessions. And it has been interesting to watch it develop from kind of a small meeting to somewhere that's kind of getting quite packed out on a lot of really useful things have been talked about. So, yeah.

35:58

Yeah. So this is something that she works on with Samia Malik and Michelle Williams Gamaker and they are kind of taking the lead from Rita Keegan, who started this slide library, was it the late 80s, early 90s? And it kind of laid dormant for a while until it was kind of reinvigorated by these three women researchers. And yeah, it's just kind of

quite an unusual kind of manifestation because like, it's within Goldsmith's, but it's not kind of endorsed by them, you know, that it all began as volunteers kind of using this resource and gathering people around it. Yeah. And it's just, yeah, I think the Paul Hamlyn award is just great timing. She's just had a baby, but she's not slowing down at all. Yeah. Which is amazing. I'm so glad to be in contact with her.

Morgan Quaintance 37:03

And one of the things me and you talked about was like the changing role of the critic or how the critic is being treated. And we noticed this sort of shift in a dynamic where organizations are almost trying to co-opt you as a kind of advisor, like you wrote a piece for Art Monthly on the Berwick Art Festival, Film Festival, and then had them contact you and say, oh, maybe we can talk about or maybe you can tell us. I mean, talk a bit about that. Like, do you feel like there's this expectation now? Or there's this action whereby the institution receives the criticism, and then tries to ask you to come and work as a kind of informal unpaid advisor?

Shama Khanna 37:39

Yeah, behind the scenes, right? Yeah, I think something. I mean, that's very important. But 2017 is how the internet seems to have come into its own. And it feels like we're used to feeding back and there is this forum and it's so so exciting, and really, like in terms of my research about immaterial art, and where it can be found where it's located. It's really exciting. And I've had to kind of pause my own research just to watch in a way. So like, very interesting, because they've employed the White Pube this year as the critics and residents, and I just find that. So with that kind of critics kind of being employed to, you know, what is their expectation? How critical can they be within that paid situation? So, yeah, it's interesting to hear their response to it. Isn't that net far from institutionalize because their work is not? But yeah, I found that very uncomfortable that, like you write something publicly, and then because you have this weird, social and professional relationship with somebody that you feel like they can email you and kind of put weird pressure on you. And yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 39:00

I got loads of that. Yeah. But somebody else said, let's talk about some of the other selections that you had. So so the release of the film 'Get Out' you were talking about 'Get Out'. Now, I haven't seen this yet. And it was an interesting kind of Twilight Zone vibe thing happening. So what was it about the film that grabbed you?

Shama Khanna 39:16

And it's just it's, it's....number one it's so funny, but it's also a thriller and it's also a documentary or it could be arguably. Yeah, so it's about a mixed couple. Whenever they... so the girlfriend is one of the girls the actresses in Girls and I thought that was really interesting casting and I've I don't know the name of the actor. He's a British actor, but he's playing an America. Yeah. Anyway, they go, she takes him to meet her parents after they've been dating for three months or something. And yeah, it's just this kind of really. How do I, how do I describe it?

Morgan Quaintance 40:10

Well, it's kind of like the Bizarro world Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Yeah. So instead of people being like, won over by Sidney Poitier, as the African American male coming into white Anglo Saxon Protestant household, they end up killing him, right?

Shama Khanna 40:24

Well, no, they attempt a lobotomy on him. Yeah. And basically, but he keeps meeting these other black men. And with all this stuff, at his, his girlfriend's parents place are victims of this lobotomy, the black staff, and, and it just follows his realization. And yeah, it's just quite funny. I've watched it at the Plex in Peckham, and people were applauding, they were laughing, you know, it's just such an exciting film.

Morgan Quaintance 41:01

So kind of extended cultural metaphor for the emasculation of African American males.

Shama Khanna 41:07

Yeah, yeah.

Morgan Quaintance 41:08

But funny. *laughs*

Shama Khanna 41:11

No, I think humour is another thing that's been so important this year. Like, even from Eileen Miles's work to...Yeah, I'm looking for humour, because it's such a way of connecting and of kind of, yeah, connecting from a marginal position as well to be able to kind of gain strength in, through humour.

Morgan Quaintance 41:36

So collecting from a marginal position gives us a good link for our next award. So can you tell us who is the third recipient of the immaterial award for 2017.

Shama Khanna 41:50

The award for the Best Ethnography goes to...Cenk Özbay for his book 'Queering Sexualities in Turkey: Gay Men, Male Prostitutes and the City'.

Morgan Quaintance 42:02

So the concepts of heteronormativity and homonormativity are thankfully under interrogation more and more these days. And the debate can often feel as if it's congealing around a new set of orthodoxies solely focused on the policing of appropriate pronouns and a kind of fixed notion of fluidity centred on the performative of effects of language. But oftentimes, when the boundaries between the constructions of heterosexual and homosexual blur, they do so in ways that are not as neat or label friendly as we might think. A prime example of that came in studio visits ethnography of the year Cenk Özbay's Queering 'Sexualities in Turkey: Gay Men, Prostitutes in the City' looked at male sex work in Istanbul during the noughties. What I found in the book was a vivid account of rent boys, their male clients and the social practices and locations in which they meet and interact. Unfortunately, Cenk was unable to talk with me earlier this week due to travel commitments, but here is an excerpt from a discussion we had earlier this year about this instant contemporary classic and a must read for anybody interested in contemporary masculinity.

Audience 42:08

audience applause

Cenk Özbay 43:11

It's really tricky, in the sense that like, first of all, yes, rent boys were in control. And the key point here is not class, not economic, or superiority, but masculinity. They had the masculine capitals, over gay men, what gay men were looking for, was masculinity embodied authentic, real masculinity and rent boys, were able to provide them this sort of capital, bodily and cultural capital. Everywhere in the world, you can find examples, different intricate cases of male prostitution, male sex work, or queer sex work if you like. And in many parts of the world, you can find accounts on how working class masculinity or migrants masculinity if you like it, ethnicised masculinities these are fetishized by gay men, urban middle class gay men. So those are not new things. What was new or what was really exciting for me is their complicit usage. Both sides like rent boys and gay men, the clients, they were complicit in this kind of display of masculinity uses of masculinity. So rent boys, sexual identity was always the confusion. They, they all said that they were straight guys. They never pronounced the word of course, they said they were normal, right. But on the other hand, you know that they also had to pretend that they didn't enjoy sex with men. But when you talk to them, again and again, after a certain time, you start to understand that some enjoy having sex with men, and some genuinely didn't, then that those like who did this for money or for some other motivation, and they honestly didn't enjoy it is a category in itself. But sometimes they do enjoy. And this came with certain circumstances, certain conditions, certain ifs, or sometimes they some of them define it is a face. This is normal, for example, to enjoy or this is bodily, there is no meaning behind it, it's it doesn't say anything about my character or my personality. Or, on the other hand, another group within the subgroup says this is the part of me, I accept it. I enjoy having sex with men, as well as women, or exclusively with men. So this also paved another way to redefine themselves as bisexuals or even in some, in a small number of the cases ended up being gay, like moving to the city centres, and living a gay lifestyle in the, in the middle class gay areas of the city. So this is kind of an amalgamation of like masculinity, the masculine capital, the varosha identity, whose masculinity is more superior, and more importantly, how those guys conceived their masculinity, and used it for their purposes, multiple purposes, material or symbolic.

Morgan Quaintance 46:33

So that was the brilliant Cenk Özbay talking about his amazing book 'Queering Sexualities in Turkey, Gay Men, Male Prostitutes in the City'. Now, I urge everyone to purchase it because it is absolutely phenomenal. And the annoying thing is I.B. Tauris have priced it at like 60 quid academic budget. So put pressure on I.B. Tauris write to them, email them, what's going on? This amazing book should be at the paperback price 10.99/9.99. Otherwise, we're not going to be able to access this incredible research. So yeah, anyway, get on that right to I.B. Tauris this week. Let's put some pressure on them. And hopefully next year, there'll be a paperback edition that's affordable for mere mortals. So my last guest this week is the brilliant John Douglas Miller. Now everybody on the panel is brilliant. I just don't you know, this isn't an exclusive thing. But I just wanted to say, John, I haven't seen you all year. This is the first time I've seen John. Oh, yeah, you kind of disappeared. And now I know where you were. Seems like you're in Paris for a little bit?

John Douglas Miller 47:34

Well, yeah, actually, first, I should say I do feel that I kind of kind of disappeared this year. And I should say that, actually, I feel slightly disappointed that I don't get telephone calls from galleries asking me to do things. But I think that's partly. Sorry. I think that's partly a kind of a conscious choice actually. To do with reasons that you kind of mentioned at the start of the show that and I think that Shama was also kind of alluding to as well, that there's a kind of need to, or I felt a need to kind of step back from things a little bit, I think, this year and kind of reconsider what criticism was going to be and what it was useful for. And what my kind of part in that might be. And I mean, I don't feel like I've actually come to any conclusions on that yet. But it was kind of a necessary process. Which is also explains why I haven't maybe seen as many shows in London, as I normally would. And I've seen a lot more in Paris this year. And even in Paris, it was more kind of the marquee shows. But what I noted about those marquee shows was that there's a a seriousness of intent and a seriousness of contextualization, that I haven't seen in major marquee shows in London for a very long time. You know, famously, the wall blurbs at Tate Modern, are written, I think that the guideline is for a 12 year old who reads the Observer. *laughs* And that's not the case in Paris, they

seem to treat their audience as it were, with a little more intelligence. The obverse side of that, of course, is that, okay, they have a certain respect for maybe a fantasy of the public sphere that doesn't really exist. But the reverse side of that, of course, is French universalism.

Morgan Quaintance 49:24

Sorry, French universalism as what? Explain that.

John Douglas Miller 49:27

Well, I'll come to that in a bit.

Morgan Quaintance 49:28

Okay sorry!

John Douglas Miller 49:30

And one of my choices was, Georges Didi-Huberman's 'Uprisings' show at the Jeu de Paume which finished on January the 15th, at the start of this year, and it wasn't chosen so much as a highlight as a as a kind of a problem maybe. So in that show, it's basically a kind of typology of gestures of revolt. At least the main room perhaps, was that. And of course, one of the quite famous problem with the show of people who have seen it was that the poster used an image of an anti-Catholic uprising in Belfast in 1967. And, of course, it looked like a moment from the street in 68, in Paris, but there was no kind of contextualize. And even in the show, they didn't kind of point out that there was maybe a problem here. And that was a major problem with the show was that it kind of flattened the idea of revolution, or uprising, to this kind of series of gestures, de-historicized, with specific elements of each of the different uprisings that it was kind of dealing with. But also had this narrative very kind of French narrative of uprising from capital usual kind of French capital P politics, from, you know, 1789, 1848, 1871, 1968. But it didn't really deal with any, you know, it's this kind of grand narrative, stuck in a kind of historical past, no kind of route out of it into the present. No, kind of didn't really deal with anti-colonial struggles, didn't really deal with feminist struggles, you know, so it was gonna massively problematic, but at the same time, contained a kind of vast amount of wonderful material.

Morgan Quaintance 51:22

So it was basically like, just ignore the framework as best you can to engage with like, the gold. That's...

John Douglas Miller 51:29

Yeah, I mean, I mean, he had access to all the major collections, and, you know, French museums, it was amazing stuff in there, you know, letters from Baudelaire in '48. These amazing photos of Brecht's preparations for very, I mean, it was just glorious in terms of what he had access to. But the frame was a total disaster.

Morgan Quaintance 51:45

I mean, it sounds like we were just talking just before the show about how I haven't been to Paris lately, but a few years back, I was going back and forth quite a lot. And I was going to the museum, what was it called? The De L'art De Modern... it's got a really long name and I can't don't speak French, I can't remember but it's the one next to Palais de Tokyo. And they had a series of amazing exhibitions. One of them was the Jean-Michel Basquiat retrospective, this is about four or five years ago, and followed by a general idea and Ryan Trecartin like these big shows, that should be big here. But, but like, you know, the Basquiat show we get is like a really dark and, like, why would a painting show ever be at the Barbican is not a painting location anyway, but...

John Douglas Miller 52:28

It's not really a painting show. Anyway, that's a kind of continuation of the method, over mythologized period of downtown New York.

Morgan Quaintance 52:38

And the other thing that you saw was Harun Farocki at the Pompidou in Paris.

John Douglas Miller 52:41

Yeah, another Paris show. *laughs*

Morgan Quaintance 52:42

Yeah. *laughs*

John Douglas Miller 52:44

Yeah, that was actually last week. We, you know, I mean, I've been a fan of Farocki for years and years, but it was kind of wonderful to see this retrospective. And also you know, it's it's so it's sort of desperately serious critical work. It was kind of good to see that.

Morgan Quaintance 53:03

So you but it wasn't all serious for you this year there was it because like, you were saying, you're keen, you really pleased to see that there's a bit of rise in health of small press publishing in the UK. Now for those of you don't know you're the scourge of pretension in in criticism, I say that or writing. I say that because you're famous, well, you're famous to me anyway, for writing that piece in that monthly about what was it again?

John Douglas Miller 53:27

Art writing.

Morgan Quaintance 53:28

All right. Yeah, but about the potential of art writing, which ultimately, I think contributed to the closing down of the weird art writing course at Goldsmiths. But so it's looking good. Is it that's...

John Douglas Miller 53:39

It's looking better yeah. *laughs* Yeah, there's, there's a kind of, in London especially there's a kind of wealth of new small publishers, Fitzcarraldo, And Other Stories. I saw yesterday actually, there's a new one, I don't know if people know Burley Fisher books independent bookshop is gonna they're about to launch their own publishing venture. And it was also it was a great year for experimental poetry pamphlets. Sean Barney's ghosts. I thought it was amazing. And there was a new pamphlet from GH Print, which was great. Verity Spot. And in some ways, actually, that's part of my year has been kind of engaging with the kind of poetry scene more than the arts, to be honest.

Morgan Quaintance 54:27

Fair enough. But I think like most people, it seems like there's a consensus on the panel today that actually, what you need to do is spend some time away from like usual spaces and contexts that we're supposed to inhabit in order to kind of re-energize really, absolutely. And with that, I'm going to ask you to open the envelope and name the final award for the 2017 immaterial awards Studio Visit.

John Douglas Miller 54:51

The award for Moment of 2017 goes to Lyle Ashton Harris.

Morgan Quaintance 55:01

All right, so the final award goes to Lyle Ashton Harris and the controversy around American artists Dana Schutz's painting of...I think she's American. Is she American? American artists Dana Schutz's painting of Emmett Till produced a lot of ink, keystrokes and talk this year, much of it without lasting merit or value. It did, however, provide Studio Visit with its moment of the Year for 2017. During an overlong and definitely boring conference at the Whitney Museum, convened to start a conversation about accountability, representation and race. The brilliant and legendary artists Lyle Ashton Harris articulated the anger and exasperation that we've all felt at the end of conferences in which much heartfelt sentiment was articulated, but nothing was done. At the Whitney poet Claudia Rankin's ponderous closing speech wrapped up the day by putting a blanket of thankful profundity over the close to boiling over rage by using the irritating rhetorical rhetorical device or speaking calmly and evenly with long gaps between everything that you say, in order to add a sense of gravity and import to otherwise but now observations that you make. As such, Lyle's interjection wasn't just about the Whitney. Lyle interjected for all of us, for anyone who's ever sat through a daylong art institution conference that came to nothing. And this year, there have been many, so Lyle seem to be standing up for all of us. And here he is to close out the show.

Claudia Rankine (audio clip) 56:34

I think that any evening should end with Richard with um,. I was gonna say Richard Wright, but with James Baldwin. And James Baldwin said that artists are human beings

and their greatest responsibility is to other human beings. And that question, I think, should be involved in the making of art. How am I responsible to other human beings in the making of anything I make? So I thank you all for starting this discussion. And, and I, and I hope that we will have other venues in which to continue. Yes, yes. Yeah.

Lyle Ashton Harris (audio clip) 57:34

I definitely respect what you're saying, Chloe. But this is not the first time this is happening. You know, this is going back to black male *indecipherable*

Claudia Rankine (audio clip) 57:40

I know. I know.

Lyle Ashton Harris (audio clip) 57:41

I think Michelle, you said to refer to Thelma's catalogue, but also let's deal with the reaction to the show itself. So I think it's important to have, this is nothing really new. This is an expansion, you know what's going on? And it's not I mean, black artist Raoul Peck, the Haitian, did a seminal film, 'I Am Not Your Negro'. Where it actually talks about, let's say whiteness, and what was the stake on blackness extracted for to create that imaginary whiteness, Coco Fusco said 20 years ago, that to ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony. I did a project on Jeffrey Dahmer in '96. It took 20 years to make it but it's in it's in the MoMa's collection. So it's not like black artists, or artists of colour have not actually imagined whiteness. I like Dana, the thing is, it's not complicated enough. I think the woman in the back somehow said, why is it, does she not imagine? It's about empathy, then let's deal. What would it mean to sacrifice one's son, it's not just in terms of perfect relationship to the mother, but to actually look at the mirror reflection of that whiteness that created us far in the first place.

Audience 58:47

audience in recording whooping and cheering

Lyle Ashton Harris (audio clip) 58:47

So let's not act as if this is the first time this is happening. We could go back historically go back to ??, 19th century, Frederick Douglass, one of the things that had to deal with

to go deep in Frederick Douglass' archive. So let's I don't want to have like a moment like a Kumbaya moment is happening in 2017. This is something we have been resisting for a long time. So let's deal with the historical specificity but also the cultural amnesia that has taken place. I can see to just take and I love the Whitney, I'm alumni of the Whitney. But when someone came to my studio, a curator of education to ask about black representation, she knew about them, she did not know about the black male public culture conference. Now how could a curator of education at a leading institution in the US not know about Black popular culture? So that's where we are right now. I don't want to have like a Kumbaya moment. Let's deal with the problem of cultural amnesia, not just with the Whitney, all institutions. My students are somehow saying we don't want cultural sensitivity. We want cultural authority, is what we want right now.