

Issue 163 May 2014 

Annals of the Twenty-Ninth Century

WYSING ARTS CENTRE, CAMBRIDGE, UK



'Annals of the Twenty-Ninth Century', 2014, installation view

Like the nearby labs of the Cambridge Science Park, home to tech and biomed companies Horizon Discovery Services, Frontier Developments and Futureneering Ltd, Wysing Arts Centre's programme of residencies offers space for experimentation: somewhere artists might gaze out over the lunar flatlands of East Anglia and ask: 'What next?' It's appropriate, then, that the Centre's latest exhibition of works by recent residents took its title from Andrew Blair's *Annals of the Twenty-Ninth Century* (1874), a proto-sci-fi novel in which one Diogenes Milton describes life 800 years hence. None of the nine artists in the exhibition engaged directly with Blair's text (the nerd in me will have to wait for an art work that plays on the writer's striking image of monkeys and fish dragooned into 'zoological armies'), although each dealt with time and change and the matrices through which

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First published in [Issue 163, May 2014](#) Iss
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these might be measured and glimpsed.

Fitted out with dark grey walls, black floors and strictly localized lighting, Wysing's gallery space hinted simultaneously at a provincial nightclub, a starship bridge and a family-friendly science museum. Near the entrance, Cécile B. Evans's *How happy a Thing can be* (2014), an intriguing meditation on the fortunes of form, was comprised of outsized 3D prints of a comb, a screwdriver and a pair of scissors, objects that have proved relatively immune to updates since their invention. On an accompanying flatscreen, HD footage of the construction, or perhaps destruction, of cheap vernacular housing was overlaid with plumes of digital blood and spittle, seemingly borrowed from Zac Snyder's classical gorefest and paean to Homeland Security, *300* (2006). Fantasy of a different stripe was offered up in James Beckett's *A Potential Role for Dungeons and Dragons in Chance Based Abstraction #1* (2014), a work in which planar sculptures were derived from dice throws made while playing the titular RPG, and also in David Osbaldeston's *The Measure of Some Things* (2014), a tabletop map of reality as understood by a brilliant – and quite mad – amateur cosmologist. Nearby, in Rupert Norfolk's video *Balls* (2013), five black basketballs bounced up and down in Wysing's gallery space, apparently in perpetuity, the looped footage like a stitch in time designed to hold the future at bay, and with it its dangers and its promise.

Towards the back of the space, a scribbled note by Gustav Metzger recounted the octagenarian Polish-Jewish artist's childhood desire for 'an art that would lift off – that would levitate, gyrate, bring [together] different, perhaps contradictory aspects of my being'. If this was impossible not to read through his evacuation, aged 12, from Nazi Germany to Britain, so was Seb Patane's nearby sound work Gustav Metzger as Erwin Piscator. *Gera, January 1915* (2014), in which Metzger rasped a passage from the experimental German stage director Erwin Piscator's book *The Political Theatre* (1929), describing marching off to war in an ill-fitting uniform. Accompanied by nothing more than speaker buzz, a military drumbeat and an oblong of blood-red light projected onto the gallery wall, Patane's piece braided together biography and history with a warning of violence yet to come. Something similar was vouchsafed by Michael Dean's *Untitled* (2014), in which the first page of a putative graphic novel was weighed down by a concrete tongue. Removing this appendage (so floppy-looking, yet so firm and heavy in the hand), visitors discovered a comic book grid populated entirely by smaller, penciled tongues, writhing around each other in a pictorial glossolalia. The composition of these images was apparently derived from news photos of contemporary atrocities. In Dean's hieroglyphic language, every story is a horror story, every word a weapon or a wound.

If 'Annals ...' was (loosely) about impending tomorrows, it was also about Wysing's residencies as a kind of sideways dimension,

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somewhere time might slow, or speed, or even loop. In Charlotte Prodger's *Prospex* (2013), a photograph of a male wrist wearing an expensive sports watch was encased in a Perspex block, bored through here and there with circular, watch-sized holes. In a show in which every work was a timepiece of sorts, this was the only clock face. Depending on the hour of one's visit, it was an image of the past, or the future. Twice a day, of course, this stopped clock gave the right time.

Tom Morton

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