

Live Your Questions Now Jenny Brownrigg

The survey show is recognised as a way to frame the works of wide range of artists in terms of age or geography. Increasingly, many survey shows predominantly focus on emergent artists in their 20s and 30s. Examples include: *Nought to Sixty* (2008), the survey show celebrating the ICA's 60th anniversary, presented work of emerging artists over Great Britain and Ireland; and *The Generational: Younger than Jesus* (2009), the New Museum in New York, exhibiting work of 145 artists who were under 33 years old.

What can we learn from an earlier generation of contemporary visual artists? *Live Your Questions Now*, in the Mackintosh Museum, The Glasgow School of Art in 2011, was a unique survey exhibition of Scottish, UK and international contemporary artists aged over 60 years old. The venue itself was 102 that year; sited at the heart of an arts and crafts inspired building designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Live Your Questions Now co-incided with Glasgow's hosting of the 7th British Art Show, *In the Days of the Comet*, curated by Lisa Le Fevre and Tom Morton (2011). Looking at the age range of the latter exhibition, over three quarters of the artists were in the 31-45 age range, with twenty one born in the 1970s. The exhibition title came from a quote from a letter Rainer Maria Rilke wrote to a young poet who had asked him for criticism on his poems and advice: "Live your questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." (*Letters to a Young Poet*, 1903)

By looking at the motivations of contemporary creative practice through the longevity of a career, the show demonstrated the work ethic of the artists where questions rather than answers drove them forward.

Sam Ainsley's (b. 1950, lives and works Glasgow) *Untitled* wall work doubled the outline of the map of Scotland, to form two shapes she saw as potential metaphors for lungs or wings. The words that hugged the contours of the shore became, when viewed from a distance like tributaries, echoing Madeleine de Scudery's map *Carte du pays de Tendre* (1654) - a map of the land of tenderness. For me, it was important that the map was painted directly on the walls of the Mackintosh Museum. Ainsley, now retired, was Head of MFA Programme at GSA over a formative period and had contributed much to the institution. It seemed right that her work was part of its very walls.

Helena Almeida (Portugal b.1934) has represented Portugal twice at the Venice Biennial, in 1982 and 2005. Her first major UK exhibition of work from the last 40 years took place in 2009 in Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. She is quoted as saying: "It is about getting beyond the limits of the body. We look at the body and see that it ends abruptly and the feet and the hands. It finishes there. There's nothing more - it's like the edge of a cliff overlooking the sea." Nearly all of Almeida's artworks both in photography and video, depict herself over her 40-year career. Many of her experiments have taken the form of private performances, which her husband, the architect Artur Rosa, photographs. The two photographs from the larger series, *BAÑADA EN LÁGRIMAS*, explore how her body's boundaries can be extended, through reflection of water on the floor. We showed her latest video work *Untitled* (2010) in the Mackintosh Museum and it was the only work to visibly give away the age of the artist. In the video work, she uses a black wire both as a restriction of movement and to extend her body to that of her husband. The couple then walk a line, backwards and forwards, until the wire falls off.

Throughout Alasdair Gray's (Glasgow b.1934) career, his art and literature has been interwoven paths, overlapping in form and content. He has worked as a teacher, painter, illustrator, playwright, scene painter, essayist, poet, novelist and

muralist. This exhibition offered the opportunity for his work to be viewed in the context of national and international peers.

Joan Jonas's (New York, b.1936) experiments and productions in the late 1960s and early 1970s were essential to the development of the genre. As part of *Live Your Questions Now*, we showed a small video work which initially looked to be playing with the saying 'You can't teach an old dog new tricks'. In *My New Theater IV - Dog Hoop*, Jonas' own white dog, is put through its paces jumping through a hoop. The film plays with the speeds of the dog's movements, slowing the action of jumping. The dog, at first appears controlled by the hoop and the person in command then returns to nature in the final shots, wildly barking.

Ana Jotta (Portugal b.1946) lives and works in Lisbon and has had a significant impact on a younger generation of artists in Portugal. She made her career as an actress (1969-1980) then returned to making contemporary art in her fifties. Jotta has built her practice as an artist through creating sequences of works where she attempts to dismantle the idea of a coherent style by superseding each previous body of work with a new format. This approach may be one frowned upon by traditional art school education, so it was refreshing to have it in this environment.

Běla Kolářová (Prague b. 1923, d. 2010) trained in photography but from the 1960s onwards, turned her attention to the experiments with collages and assemblages from everyday found objects. The exhibition included more explicitly feminist work, *Enlivening Palette*, (1986) in which Kolářová has used make-up to draw onto paper.

Lygia Pape (Brazil, b.1927, d.2004) was active in both the Concrete and Neo-Concretist movements in Brazil and exhibited in Venice Biennale 2003 and 2009. Her series of works called *Ttéia* began as experiments in the 1970's, for both gallery and outdoor spaces and were inspired by spiders' webs. In the '90s she revised and refined these structures of gold thread. A series of *Ttéia* works now exist as a set of instructions, following the artist's death, to be assembled in perpetuity. One of her smaller webs was assembled in the Mackintosh Museum.

Michael Kidner (UK b. 1917 d.2009) was a pioneer of Optical Art. His interests in mathematics, science and the theories of chaos informed an art that is at once rational and playful. For this exhibition we showed five works he made in the last year of his life when he was 92 years old. Although each work exists within a geometrical grid, reminiscent of children's colouring-in books, this sequence illustrates there are endless possibilities to be explored. When he could no longer draw the straight black lines of the grid, his assistant did, with Kidner colouring in.

An unexpected outcome of the exhibition was the response from mature students at The Glasgow School of Art. In the year 2011 when the exhibition took place, from a total student community of 1,941, 32 undergraduate students and 22 post graduates were 40+. Undergraduates in that age bracket made up 1.9% of their community; 9.9% of 40+ made up the post-graduate community. They reported that the show was inspirational as they were seeing practitioners of similar age or older having a viable contemporary art practice. Until that point, a number of the students felt that they might be considered too old for being part of a contemporary art scene on graduation. They felt that the exhibition *Live Your Questions Now*, through its location in a public gallery setting, validated an older age group as being experimental in process and production.

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