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## Alex Pollard The Santorini Biennale - 2012

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*Alex Pollard's 'Doormats' explore the possibilities for expanded painting within a socially networked context. Can painting remain a critical and useful tool under the conditions of social, emotional and immaterial labour?*

**Submitted by Alex Pollard**  
Output No. 1



# OUTPUT

I was invited to participate in the first Santorini Biennale by curator Tomas Poblete. My work was shown in an outdoor space (on top of a venue roof). I produced a doormat/carpet piece using caricatures of myself drawn by art world 'warm contacts', which included the curators drawing. The work positioned the persona of the artist and the social networks around him/her as a central theme.



Title

**The Santorini Biennale 2012 – ‘Doormats’ by  
Alex Pollard**

Submission No.

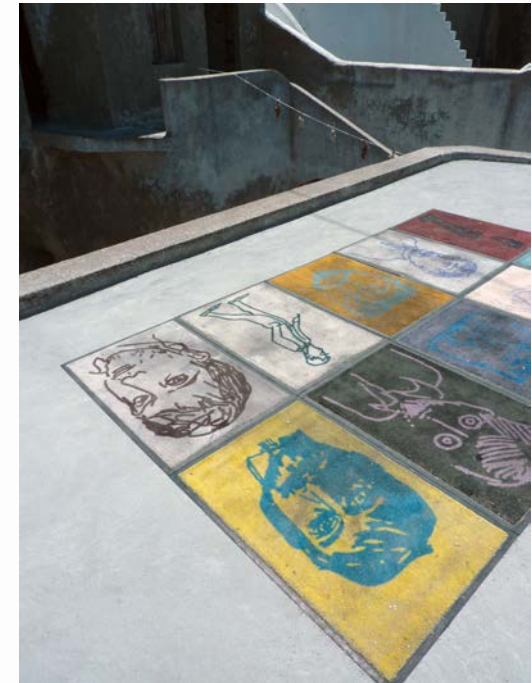
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Authors/Creators

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# CONTEXT

Greece as a context is extremely interesting at the moment in an economic sense. Austerity measures have been placed on the economy throwing Greece into recession. The Santorini Biennale sprang up within this context right at the time when things were really insecure in the country. The troubles that Greece face are essentially born out of a reckless engagement with semio-capitalism. My work for the Santorini Biennale attempted to take this on as a subject. In our age of information capitalism social and emotion labour form part of the complex contextual framework of immaterial labour conditions, helping to erode certain fundamental human rights relating to the distinction between work and leisure time. A key text in relation to the background research I have undertaken for this project would be Boltanski and Chiapello's book 'The New Spirit of Capitalism'. In their text the authors reveal how the commodification of critique has taken place. Business management in the late seventies adopted counter-cultural





# CONTEXT

attitudes and structures that were distanced from a hierarchical Fordist form of management. The new 'relaxed' structures favoured a more networked and open form of organisation involving worker participation and inclusivity in decision-making and 'dressed-down' ambiences and environments, which when coupled with flexi-time labour, helped to erode the distinction between labour and leisure time for the employee. This led to the erosion of psychological and material security for the worker and the sociability and community-minded ethos of counter cultural resistance groups became absorbed into the atmospheres of the experience economy allowing a more successful and subtle form of exploitation. The 'Doormats' piece attempts to work with this context in both a humorous and art historically sensitive manner. My work was also intended to critically examine ideas and theories relating to transitive or expanded painting discussed by David Joselitt in *Painting Beside Itself* (first published in *October Journal* 130 in 2009), playfully examining the potential of networks and painting as a critical tool.

Contextually my work relates to artists such as Martin Kippenberger, Michael Krebber, Merlin Carpenter, Jana Euler, Reena Spaulings and Meyer Vaisman in that I attempt to adapt painting or move it into line with a post-institutional critique discourse.



# METHODOLOGY

My methodology centred on a request I made to various people to draw caricatures of me. This group included friends, art world colleagues (such as curators and other artists), former students and tutors of mine, as well as recent acquaintances. The results of these requests make manifest the awkward power relations within this network, the drawings ranging from the affectionately insulting to the politely flattering. They are a form of coerced collaboration, achieved through charm or obligation, folding the immaterial and emotional labour of the art business into the work itself. The caricatures are then incorporated into the design of commercially produced doormats, with paint and dirt occupying equal billing on their surface. The Doormats were arranged in a formation reminiscent of Minimalist art (such as Carl Andre) and were shown on a roof space.

Key important questions/issues that are raised by this work are: what are the possibilities now for expanded painting within a socially networked context? Can painting remain a critical and useful tool under the conditions of social, emotional and immaterial labour? If painting can belong to a network, what are the positive and negative aspects of this and what part does the artist's persona play within this?

The methods I used to generate the work reflect our current socially networked context and problematize traditional authorial models by utilising open source or crowd-sourced methodologies. The caricatures themselves are drawn by 'warm contacts'. These drawings are then printed onto multi-coloured doormats by an Internet based firm who use post-fordist production techniques such as personalisation and short-run orders to generate capital.

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# DISSEMINATION

My work has been widely disseminated internationally. Other significant outputs that contribute to the research areas surrounding the Santorini Biennale are:

“The Irregular Correct – New Art from Glasgow” held at the Fremantle Art Centre in Fremantle, Western Australia. 2012





# DISSEMINATION

“Hot Lava” – Glasgow Project Room, Trongate  
103, Glasgow - 2012



# DISSEMINATION

‘Rosebud’ - Christuskirche, Herwarthstr,  
Cologne in 2013.

Here I took the idea of social labour even  
further by placing the work in an area of the  
showing space that I knew was going to be used  
for an art dinner for collectors and curators.





# DISSEMINATION

‘Everyone Else was either Busy or Dead’ –  
Schau Ort, Zurich, Switzerland. 2012.

This show was curated by artist Michiel Ceulers and featured three of my doormats. The mats were all positioned around the gallery space but were in front of doors, humorously playing with notions of utility and function.



# DISSEMINATION

'It's Hard to Find a Good Lamp' - Rhubaba, Edinburgh. 2012.

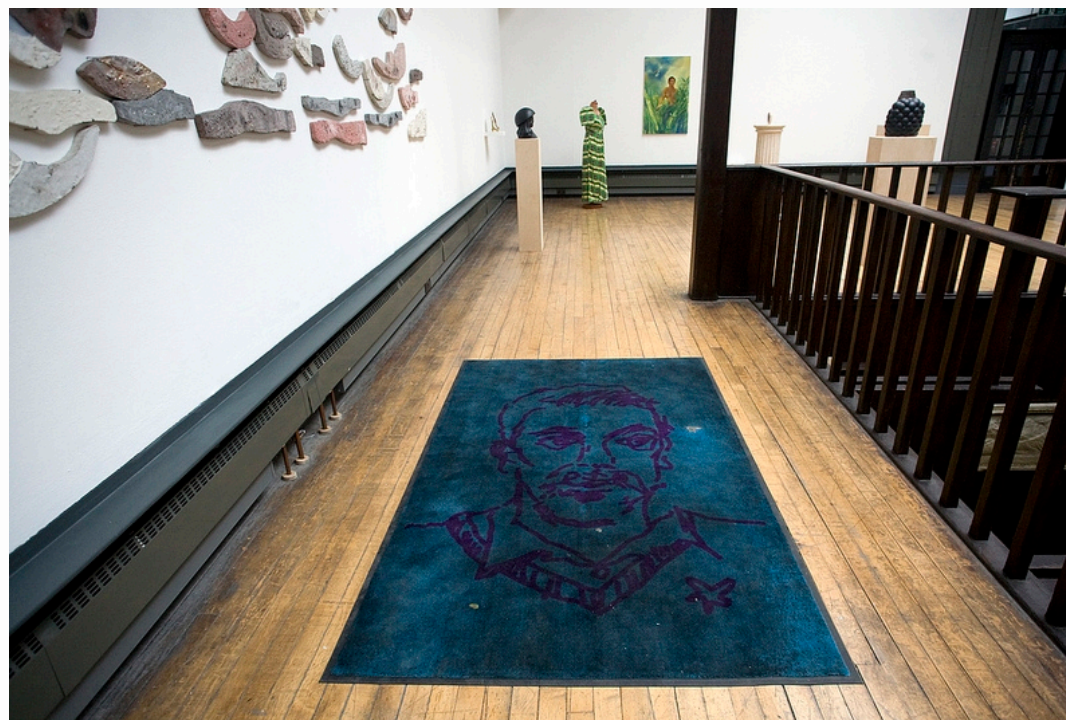
The caricatures for this show were drawn by Rachel Adams (a committee member at Rhubaba). The mats were positioned at the entrance of the gallery forcing the viewer into a form of participation.



# DISSEMINATION

‘A Conspiracy of Detail’ – Mackintosh  
Museum, Glasgow School of Art, 2013

I asked the curator of the space Jenny  
Brownrigg to do a series of caricatures of me.  
She agreed and resulting mat was positioned in  
a walk way between the two main showing areas  
encouraging the viewer to step on to the work.





## Acknowledgements

Various different funding bodies were responsible for a degree of support in the production of this body of work. The Research and Development fund at the GSA contributed to the mats produced in 'Rosebud' in Cologne. The Hope Scott Trust also contributed to the production costs involved for 'The Irregular Correct – New Art from Glasgow'. Creative Scotland have also supported me numerous times in the lead up to producing this work and have recently enabled me to participate in a research residency in Berlin for three months where I have been able to build on and develop the ideas within this document.

I acknowledge that without the help of the participating artists who have drawn caricatures of me I could not have undertaken this project.

Thank you to Dr Ric Spencer (curator at Fremantle Art Centre), Julia Ritterskamp (curator based in Dusseldorf), Michiel Ceulers (curator and artist living and working in Berlin), Rachel Adams (curator and artist living and working in Glasgow), Tomas Poblete (curator living and working in London), Jenny Brownrigg (curator at the Mackintosh Museum, Glasgow), the committee at the Glasgow Project Room.