

# Mary Mary

MANSFIELD, SUSAN; SCOTMAN, SEPTEMBER 2009

## Art reviews: Cerith Wyn Evans and Throbbing Gristle | Lili Reynaud-Dewar | Alex Dordoy

A large neon text, currently residing in Tramway 2, doesn't look like a whole lot at first glance: a lengthy text in white neon, which runs almost the length of the room, and a cluster of shiny mobiles dangling in the centre. But this long-awaited collaboration

between the artist Cerith Wyn Evans and Throbbing Gristle, industrial musicians once happily referred to as the "wreckers of civilisation", punches well above its weight.

As they sway and revolve, the mirrored discs show you fragmented pictures of the room, its far-flung corners, other occupants and occasionally – disconcertingly – yourself. However, each panel is also a speaker, a kind of "sound spotlight" which, while the description of the technology was lost on me, clearly involves some highly sophisticated acoustics.

The result is a landscape of sound and vision which is constantly shifting. The sounds coming from the different panels are layered and nuanced, from metallic drones and buzzing interference to musical notes and even whispering voices, and they are contained within aural columns that echo and reverberate, creating intense vivid pockets of sound.

Counterintuitive as it sounds, the best thing to do is stand still and allow the layers of sound to reveal themselves to you: deep throbs and snatches of voices; a crackling, like the sound of a radio playing low in another room; the occasional screech that puts your teeth on edge. Then take a few steps in another direction, stand still there and listen to the difference.

Evans's neon text is an amalgam of phrases from *The Changing Light at Sandover*, an epic book by James Merrill which claimed to record messages from the other side during 20 years of ouija seances. It would be easy – too easy, perhaps – to describe this work as spectral and haunting. The artists won't be drawn on what it "means", and we know Wyn Evans is interested in the conduits – the objects and systems which transmit messages – more than the messages themselves.

It's almost equally difficult to pinpoint its mood. Some people say they find it calming, though I'm guessing that means they've managed to miss the fingers-down-the-blackboard screech. What the collaborators have achieved is a visual and aural collage that is constantly changing, resisting definition: an interesting concept, but also a hard one to grasp.

## *Mary Mary*

It's almost like being present at a performance, albeit one enacted by machines. And there is a strong echo of performance in Lili Reynaud-Dewar's show at Mary Mary, where much of the work on show relates to a performance the artist created and filmed on the coast of France. Two typists batter away at their electric typewriters in wooden cages on the grass while a third woman (their boss?) helps lay out paper in a circle, and takes part in some sort of ritual within it.

Despite the show having a title like a doctoral thesis, Reynaud-Dewar's interest is not really in excavating the lost sociology of the typing pool, though her framed pages from "found exercise books" come close to recalling a bygone world. Nor is she concerned with issues regarding the status of women: shorthand typists are interesting here too, subservient in position to a male boss yet undertaking skilled work that gave many women independence.

In fact, Reynaud-Dewar's concerns are closer to surrealism. By picking up on the ritual elements of a now near-redundant profession and extending it into the realms of elaborate, meaningless fantasy, she aims to reflect on the strangeness of the rituals and patterns we all engage in.

I can imagine Alex Dordoy might quite like to get his hands on an electric typewriter. He'd probably dismantle it and paint all over its innards, as he did with a photocopier in the show last year at the Collective Gallery. Or it would be gouged, melted and smashed, as were an array of trouser presses in his current solo show at Modern Institute.

Dordoy, who graduated from Glasgow School of Art in 2007, is a vigorously prolific artist, applying his energy in equal measure, it seems, to creativity and destruction. He is drawn to found objects, often ones with a degree of obsolescence built in (VHS videocassettes are in evidence here), but whether he's making or breaking, he is always transforming objects into something new.

Dordoy is first and foremost a painter, whether he's sticking old video tapes to a canvas, painting on to an old rattan blind or depicting the face of American artist Julian Schnabel on a shaped tarpaulin. Schnabel once described his paintings as "the residue of what happens", and Dordoy's works similarly imply movement, as if they were the aftermath of an orgy of burning, smashing and painting.

Yet the most powerful works also have a still quality, like the mask of the artist's face that surveys the main gallery or New Voodoo (do you?), somewhere between a totemic figure and a glove puppet, which exerts a powerful presence over the second room. If he keeps working with this level of energy and assurance, Dordoy is a name we will all have to watch.