

# Mary Mary

Neil, Ken; Review text, Ken Neil Online, December 2011

German-born, Glasgow-based, Glasgow School of Art-trained, Torsten Lauschmann has worked with Dundee Contemporary Arts as part of the Discovery Film Festival to stage a huge, newly-commissioned installation for 'Startle Reaction'. The main space hosts the multipart installation with the adjacent gallery serving as screening room for the earlier video pieces, 'Misshapen Pearl' (2003) and 'Skipping Over Damaged Areas' (2010).

Lauschmann's popular 'Digital Clock (Growing Zeros)' (2010) appears in DCA reception, hand movements relaying digital time. Teasing us on entry with an interesting form of durational labour, the work tracks and records its own effort-value quite literally in hours, minutes and seconds. It's a timely piece in another sense for it introduces on behalf of the rest of the show the proximity of the hand crafted and the digitally orientated and tells us upfront that Lauschmann is still interested in the blending in action of these elements much more than he is in any false contestation between them. 'Misshapen Pearl' gives us a pop-video treatment of mind-body consternation read into the urban life of a street lamp – an overlooked pearl on a blackened and flattened canvas which is the city as capitalist surface. This is a Lauschmann from eight years back, remember, and although we recognise Lauschmann-like insight by way of the scripted voice-over, there is more telegraphing than poetic illumination and one moves in the loop to 'Skipping Over Damaged Areas' left in no doubt of the artist's then intimate relationship with Debordian anti-capitalist sentiment.

While waiting for the second film to queue, and to recover from the video-coated didacticism, one can glance up to see come down the spectacularly eerie, 'Self-Portrait as Pataphysical Object' (2006) – a chandelier of sorts made from a creepy combination of cables, electrical components and dim light. Like a futuristic Heath-Robinson sun, it hovers with an organic, animated status that nearly belies its tech-parts.

'Skipping Over Damaged Areas' is a skilfully edited montage of snippets of film titles and opening shots selected from all manner of genres. Meeting with confidence benchmarks set down by the Christian Marclays of this world, Lauschmann has stitched a humorous and engaging visual sequence cleverly matched by the invented narrative of the voice-over which takes its cues from the selected film titles. Actor Iain Champion's narration tells a story of mild movie horror, departing on occasion much to our delight from certain

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filmic visuals which are incongruently mawkish: body-switch comedy 'Freaky Friday' lends its title to a threatening episode of Lauschmann's story and something about language and translation is dismantled in the process of trying to mix in the mind the humorous visual and the menacing textual. The screening room, watched over as it is by Lauschmann undiluted in the chandelier, expresses well the ambition and technical prowess of the artist, and prepares the mind and the eye (and the ear) for the imaginative tactics of the main installation.

Ominous sub-woofer reverberations greet entry to the main gallery, unifying the darkened space and making clear the centrality of the sonic in Lauschmann's 21stC *gesamtkunstwerk*. As the constituent parts introduce themselves to the eye and ear through staggered perception of blinking LEDs, spotlights, and sporadic soundtracks, a pianola appears in the centre of the space, 'The Coy Lover' (2011). Brought into existence by white light and sprinkled with falling snow, it plinks and plonks and utterly haunts the massive room with its exacerbation of melancholic sound with absent musician. Moments later, the work is consigned to the gloom once more as Lauschmann's circuit of pre-programmed ringmastery exercises control.

This apparatus emerged earlier in 2011 from the inaugural Margaret Tait Award for the Glasgow Film Festival which Lauschmann won following nomination from gallerist Mary Mary. His GFF film, 'At the Heart of Everything A Row of Holes' tapped a rich seam in identifying the connectedness of contemporary binary technology and the punched rolls which sit at/as the heart of the pianola. Mere gaps in surfaces control the emanation from this magical instrument, and again as updated driver, Lauschmann conjures a curious simultaneity of human-disappearing technology and the stubborn persistence of poetry.

There is much more to this stimulating installation than this brief contribution can report, but one thing seems clear: the pianola is the lynchpin of this ambitious show, performing as touchstone for the artist's oeuvre to date. Perhaps Lauschmann thinks of his artistic self as but one carefully positioned hole on the surface of something – a strategic gap which awaits the effect of whatever is tripped by the artistic perforation.