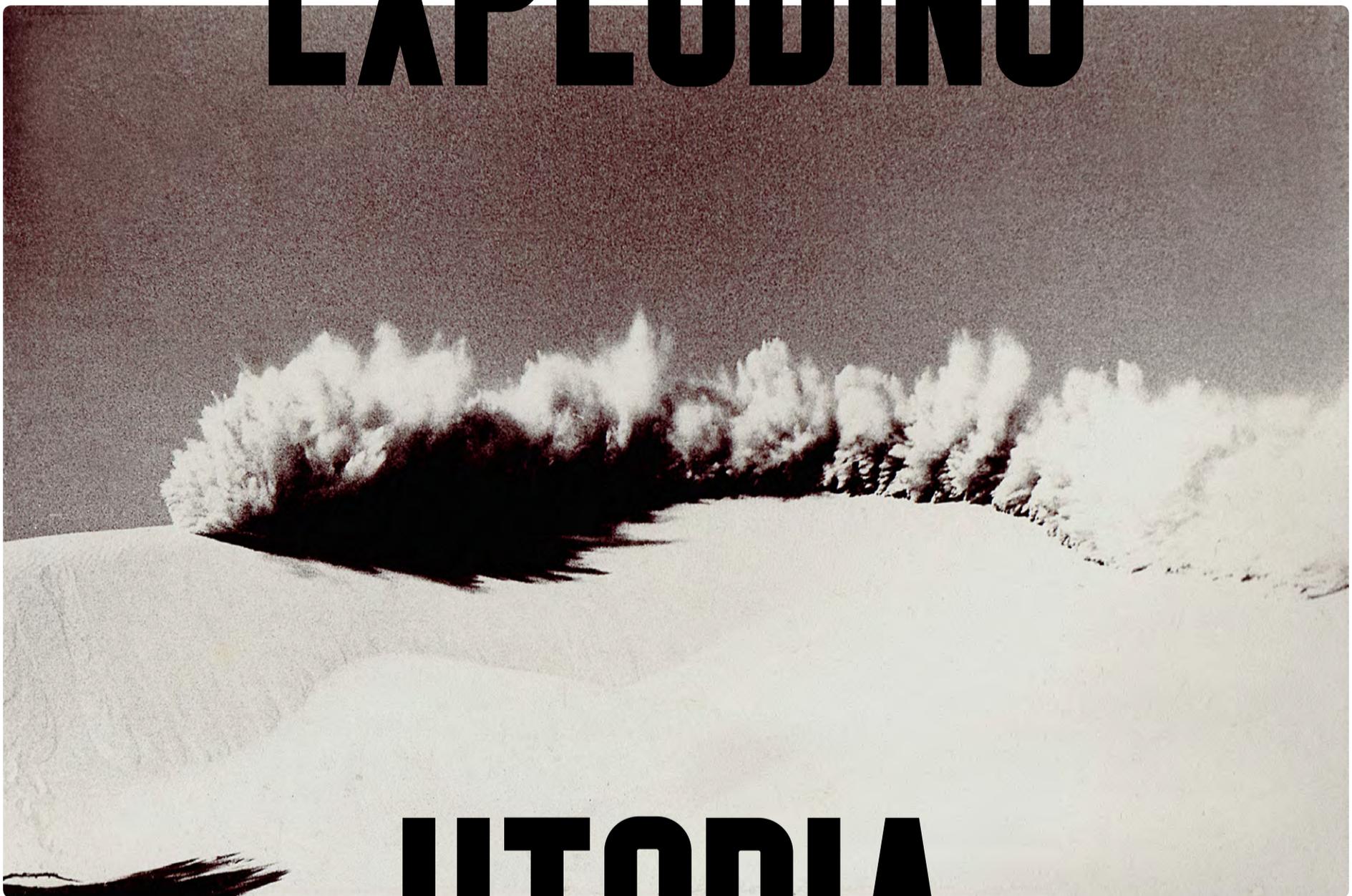


lauregenillard

EXPLODING



UTOPIA

curated by

ROZEMIN KESHVANI

Published by Laure Genillard Gallery on the occasion of the exhibition

Exploding Utopia
28 September — 21 December 2013

JAMES ACORD
MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI
FIONA BANNER
ANNE BEAN
TIM BURNS
PAUL BURWELL
STEPHEN CRIPPS
IVOR DAVIES
PETER FISCHLI + DAVID WEISS
ENRICO GAIDO
BOW GAMELAN
GUSTAV METZGER
MARIELE NEUDECKER
CORNELIA PARKER
WILLIAM RABAN
WERNER SCHREIB
LAWRENCE WEINER
RICHARD WILSON

Curated by Rozemin Keshvani
Publication design by Modern Activity

Cover image: Tim Burns, Mullaoo sandune explosions, 1974, photographs Tim Burns, courtesy the artist

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Laure Genillard is open
Thursday — Saturday 1—6pm

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Laure Genillard is a private noncommercial contemporary art exhibition space in Fitzrovia close to Oxford Street. Director Laure Genillard has operated her gallery since 1987, bringing a keen eye to developments in abstract and conceptual art and expanding on 1970s minimal art practices and discussions. The gallery became well-known for its large installations and for allowing artists the freedom to engage directly with the space. Laure has been seminal to the practices of several young British artists, whose work first showcased at her gallery, including Catherine Yass, Fiona Banner, Martin Creed, Peter Doig, Gillian Wearing, Simon Starling as well as many artists from the continent such as Maurizio Cattelan and Sylvie Fleury amongst others. Since early 2011, the gallery programme is run collaboratively with Hana Noorali and Lynton Talbot.

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Nuclear weapons represent the most potent form of time. They have the capacity to approximate the BIG BANG, the origin of the universe according to some thinkers. The use of an atomic bomb sets off the most extraordinary time absence conceivable. Two were put into action in Japan. The consequences remain with us to the present day.

Gustav Metzger, 'Time in Our Time to the Stars',
Lecture Demonstration, Bernard Sunley Theatre, 1997

AN IDEA — A MANIFESTO

The modern-day rupture between art and science is a post-Renaissance phenomenon, representative of the shift from theistic-based cosmologies to contemporary cosmologies founded upon scientific observation-based forms of knowledge creation. In a world where religion provided the armature for the classification and systematisation of knowledge, the artist was expected to intuit these *a priori* transcendent truths and bear them reverential interpretation. Consumers of artistic goods — the congregation, the disciple, and later the citizen — gazed upon these testimonials to religion and culture with adoration, reverence and worship. Culture and knowledge creation were in apparent harmony; the role of the artist — the transmission and reproduction of culture — and art — the curtain behind which hid the *Wizard of Oz*.

Science it seems has removed this curtain and exposed the wizard. Science, with its power to predict and control the material world, has given god the pink slip, usurping his power and dominion. Today, it is those tenets and structures which result from the apparent reliability of the scientific method, however indeterminate, which are the modern yardstick of truth. And ironically, perhaps unwittingly, art, with its infinitely plastic nature, now seeks to reflect, replicate and transubstantiate the 'truths' of science. The unfamiliar in science is captured, reproduced and made familiar through culture. Culture is consumed. Scientific truth, being contingent and derived from observation, is ever-changing, evolving and only asymptotically approachable. Truth has become subservient to the means of observation — technology. Technological change implies epistemological change whereby previous 'truths' must be re-evaluated. Culture too must struggle against its 'stale-by' date and reproduce new truths daily. The artist, in seeking to keep art relevant, faces this challenge — to avoid science is to risk becoming irrelevant; to reproduce it is to propagate a new form of religion.

In his 1964 lecture 'Chemical Revolution in Art' delivered at the Cambridge Arts Society, **GUSTAV METZGER** (b. 1926) declared the artist's absolute and unfettered right to the use of materials, including those chemical, molecular and atomic. With this declaration, he laid down his utopian vision — *We shall use science to destroy science.*¹ For the artist, there need no longer be any limit to the inquiry into materials and materiality. All materials may be subject to aesthetic examination, however seemingly ephemeral, unreal or unstable. However, there is a control over, often even a prohibition against, the use of certain materials — the atomic, subatomic, chemical and the biological. Science has declared a near absolute authority over the jurisdiction of such materials, an authority whose overt physical control gives rise to an imperceptible yet invidious code of systemic management over the interpretation and conceptualisation of these materials and their resulting possibility to shape thought and culture.

Still, there remains an invisible permeability between art and science which gives rise to a continual contagion and contamination of activity, both epistemological and methodological, between science and art and their impact on the development of culture. The principle of uncertainty propounded by Werner Heisenberg may also reflect a fissure through which the artist may distort, resist and re-frame the conceptual categories which are the underpinnings of science and the scientific method. Art becomes an ever-expanding frontier, a prescient force reflecting and anticipating apparent advances in scientific-technological development, and a challenge to science's near absolute authority over the jurisdiction of such materials.

Here the artist may engage with forbidden media — explosives, gunpowder and nuclear materials in order to invoke, provoke and highlight the position of the artist as agitator, explorer, risk-taker and experimenter, performer and stakeholder whose strategies and interventions are capable of re-forming and re-informing conceptual categories through a direct relationship with materiality.

A FIST FULL OF DYNAMITE

*You can't have an explosion without resistance. An explosion is only an explosion if there's something pushing against it.*²

These are the words of **LAWRENCE WEINER** (b. 1942) when I question him about his work, *Cratering Piece* from 1960. The artist experimented with explosives in the early 1960s in the landscape of California to create craters as individual sculptures. *Cratering Piece* comprised a series of contained explosions in Mill Valley, California. What did he think he was doing out there in the desert? Weiner held an explosives licence. He'd worked as a blaster somewhere. At the time, he imagined himself to be making individual sculptures — plant a few sticks of dynamite and 'run like hell'.³ Sand alone, the artist cautions, creates no explosion unless you pack it. Every explosion is different, each individual explosion having a contextual nature which has to do with the degree and context of resistance.

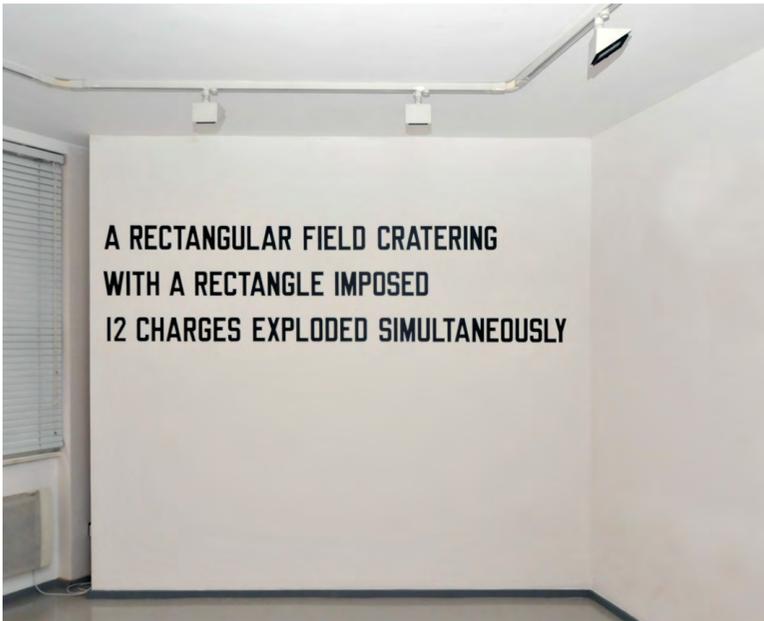
These early explosive action pieces, created before the artist formulated his 'Declaration of Intent' 1968, were aesthetic explorations in the idea of 'removal', highlighting the importance of negation in the creation of sculpture, in this case both violent and process-driven. These cratering pieces are echoed in Weiner's simple yet provocative statement — **A RECTANGULAR FIELD CRATERING WITH A RECTANGLE IMPOSED 12 CHARGES EXPLODED SIMULTANEOUSLY** — while the artist's decision to present this work as language effects the removal of yet another layer — that of the physical space sculpture invariably occupies. Weiner's acts of removal are no modernist exercise in abstraction. Through his repeated acts of removal, the artist reduces language to its sculptural form. Language becomes material through which the artist forms his sculptures — entirely concrete, completely material and provocatively interventionist. For Weiner, his explosive action pieces are an accomplished fact, and they are here represented as such. Weiner gives no instructions, no didactics. 'ONE CANISTER ONE ROCK' he quotes to me. His near Wittgensteinian statements are themselves an exercise in removal. Who would imagine the intensely political and concrete nature of these apparently simple factual utterances?

Considered within the context of sculpture, Cratering Piece was an extraordinary proposition at the moment of its initial execution, pre-figuring not only 'anti-form' but the first 'earthworks' by several years (e.g. Richard Long's first outdoor sculpture of 1964, or Robert Smithson's first site works in 1965). When Weiner recalls the work, he sometimes invokes the legend of Johnny Appleseed:

*The Johnny Appleseed idea of art was perfect for me. Johnny Appleseed spread apple seeds across the United States by just going out on the road and spreading the seeds. I do not know if this is true, but I would love it to be.*⁴

Cratering Piece was similarly conceived as a public intervention without art-institutional buttress, an idealistic attempt to 'leave things by the side of the road.' *The gesture itself was anything but romantic, causing the unauthorized disruption of a controlled environment, re-coding a Cubist 'shaping' of space as a formless act of violent removal, and replacing aesthetic skill with a different sort of technical competency (i.e. the 'structured' use of dynamite). Coupling literal debasement with an experience of de-differentiation, Weiner's craters would have been inseparable from the site of their production, offering one conclusion to the classic dilemma of how to perceptually distinguish sculpture from other objects in the world. When in 1968 Weiner made the even more radical decision to present the work in language, one of the artist's goals would be to render extreme this condition of immersion in 'real' space, paradoxically by dissolving the work's intrinsic connection to any particular site.'*

Kathryn Chiong, *WORDS MATTER: The Work Of Lawrence Weiner*⁵



Lawrence Weiner, A RECTANGULAR FIELD CRATERING WITH A RECTANGLE IMPOSED 12 CHARGES EXPLODED SIMULTANEOUSLY, 1968 LANGUAGE + THE MATERIALS REFERRED TO, dimensions variable (Installation view, Laure Genillard Gallery), photo: Lynton Talbot, courtesy the artist and Moved Pictures Archive. © 2013 Lawrence Weiner/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Michelangelo Antonioni, *Zabriskie Point*, USA, 1970, 110 minutes, colour, sound (film stills)

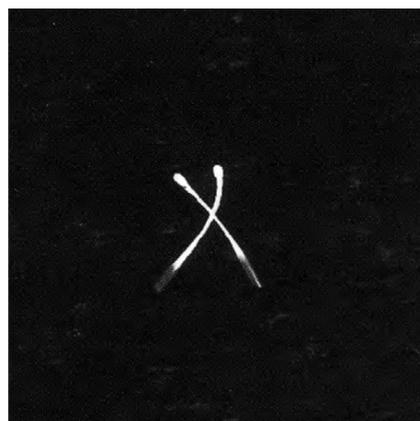
Barry Miles put me on to this extraordinary film one afternoon — **MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI'S** (1912-2007) remarkable *Zabriskie Point*. The film, ostensibly a story of the 1960s counterculture movement in California, belies a psychological and political exploration of transformation, juxtaposing Ruscha-like scenes of the late 1960s consumer optimism of California with the potentiality offered by the emptiness and space embodied in the endless horizon and undulating landscape of the California desert. The film, by all accounts a box office bust, contains the iconic five minute explosion scene filmed partly on location in Death Valley.

*The five minute sequence is marked by Eisensteinian overlapping editing (the house explodes over and over again), a super slow motion cinematography, and the abstract properties of the telephoto lens. Artefacts of consumer capitalism (a fridge, a television set, furniture, food, laundry detergent, clothes, Wonder toast bread, etc.) are transformed into kaleidoscopic colors and forms, accompanied by a manic rock score featuring primal screams and searing guitar solos. The final item to be exploded is the library, with hundreds of atomized books floating toward the camera. Can Antonioni be making a link to the opening scene (books linked to students/university) and the 'explosion' of the student revolution?**

POTENCY IN POTENTIALITY

CORNELIA PARKER (b. 1956) is known for her transmutations of matter through violent and chemical means to create psychologically and spiritually provocative installations.⁷ Explosives have been central protagonists in her practice and she has used fireworks, firearms, bullets, explosives, sulphur, charcoal, and saltpeter, to form pigment, indexical marker, sculptural material and as a means of transforming material. Parker's 'spent match' photogram presents an unexpectedly subtle violation of space, dislocating the viewer's expectations through the mirrored conflict it presents. As described by Parker, the 'spent match' photogram is created 'by laying spent matches on a piece of photographic paper and then using a live match to expose them'.⁸

The work draws parallels between life and death, potency and actualisation, destruction and creation, and resurrection. The indexical mark of the spent matches depends entirely on the flare offered by the match which is being 'spent' to create the photogram, mounting a disturbingly loaded opposition. What is left of the pictured matches is itself a trace; yet even that trace only exists through the spent life of another. So elusive is existence, that what is seen, what is captured, is only a mirrored reflection of a loss that has already occurred. Parker's work anticipates the many paradoxes which originate in ideas of creation through destruction; but it also summons in the anisotropy of time, casting doubt on the very notions of 'potential' and 'actual', and the apparent dichotomy between them. The spent match piece creates a disjunction in the flow of linear time. Both sets of matches are spent. Which has in fact formed the image? The photogram is a trace of the spent matches, but it is also physically a reflection, a memory of the very flame that is its illuminator, its creator. Time bends in on itself confusing creator and created and anticipating the many oppositions reflected in the surrounding works.



Cornelia Parker, *Two Spent Matches Exposed by a Live One* 2001
Unique photogram, 61 x 61cm, courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery

This transformational paradox is also echoed in **FIONA BANNER'S** (b. 1966) seldom displayed 1997 sculpture, *The Works*, a cardboard packing box containing a mixture of both self-made and carefully chosen fireworks. When a single fuse is ignited, the pyrotechnic elements explode in a carefully choreographed sequence lasting four minutes and twenty five seconds. The box is accompanied by a printed play list which notates this action. *The Works*, while unexploded, remains in its pure state of potentiality, a score which might unfold if ignited, but which by its very existence as a score, has in some sense already happened, thus calling into question which of the two, the score or its execution, is represents the real work of art.

THE WORKS

00.00 MIN	STROBE LANCERS	150 SEC
	BLINKER FLARES	
01.00 MIN	WHISTLER	20 SEC
32 SHOT	SUBATOMIC STARBURST	
	WHITE TAIL SCREECHERS	
	CYCLONIC SPRING REPORT	
01.20 MIN	STROBE STROBE	30 SEC
01.30 MIN	RACKETER	20 SEC
16 SHOT	WHISPER AND STREAK	
	SHARD TRACERS	
	TWISTER	
	BLINK BLINK	10 SEC
	LIGHTENING FLASH	
INTO BLACK		
01.50 MIN	METEORITE	40 SEC
	RED PARA FLARE	
INTO BLACK		
02.05 MIN	COMET	20 SEC
50 SHOT	SQUIGGLE	
02.10 MIN	POP	10 SEC
02.35 MIN	3 BARRAGE MINE	5 SEC
25 SHOT	WHISTLE FLARE	
25 SHOT	RUSHING STARS	
25 SHOT	SHOOTING STAR BURSTER	
	CRACK UP-ONE	
	LOUD REPORT	
	TUNNELER	
	CRACK UP-TWO	
02.50 MIN	STROBE LANCERS	150 SEC
	BLINKER FLARES	
03.00 MIN	WHITE COMET	10 SEC
16 SHOT	CRACKLING STAR	
	CYCLONIC WHISTLE	10 SEC
	WHITE SIREN	
	LOUD REPORT	
03.00 MIN	2 x PARA FLARES	40 SEC
	SUPA NOVA-RISING	
03.20 MIN	BLAZING NIGHT	26 SEC
25 SHOT	BLAZING RAIN	
	ARIEL SPLASH	
	SUPA NOVA-FALL OUT	20 SEC
	STROBE AND LIGHTENING	
3.35 MIN	2 X ULTRA FAST WHITE COMET	
32 SHOT	CRACKLING STAR	26 SEC
	PITCH WHISTLE	
	LOUD REPORT	
	STILL BLINKING CRAZY	
03.45 MIN	3 BARRAGE MINE	
75 SHOT	-SIMULTANEOUS	
	ATOMIC BOOM	5 SEC
	ASTEROID BELT	
	ARK LIGHT	
25 SHOT	WHITE COMETS AND SPLASH	
	HUMMERSTAR AND RAIN	
03.50 MIN	LIGHTENING FLASH	
	STROBE LANCERS	35 SEC
	BLINKER FLARES	
04.25 MIN	BLACK	

Fiona Banner, *The Works*, 1997, inkjet print, 151 x 73.7 cm, courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery



Fiona Banner, *The Works*, 1997, screen-printed cardboard box, chipboard, tin foil, pyrotechnic components, fuse
87 x 77 x 33 cm, photo Fiona Banner, courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery

The Works, (1997), continues this narrative of unframable event. A box contains a number of fireworks (some custom-built, some of military origin and some that are generally available) and a print provides a timed sequence of the display that would last four minutes and 25 seconds. To a degree this arose from Banner's body of Vietnam works (namely *The Nam*) the fireworks display being both special effect and firefight; one aspect of the narrative, isolated to stand for the whole. Furthermore, once the fuse has been lit, the display's composition would be without edge and without space and exist as a timed event punctuated by darkness, and then gone. The unused box of fireworks represents only the idea and potential of the work whereas the event of the display echoes Derrida's understanding of the sublime as being found 'in an "object without form" and the "without-limit" is "represented" in it or on the occasion of it, and yet gives the totality of the without-limit to be thought'. Representation here becomes a cognitive event of making meaning as a means of imposing a frame that does not actually exist except as time (a 'this happens' rather than 'that')⁹...

Andrew Wilson, 1997, *Only The Lonely*

THE BOW GAMELAN



The Bow Gamelan, *The Navigators*, 1989, photo: Ed Sirrs, courtesy The Bow Gamelan Archive

MATERIALS WITHOUT HISTORY

The artist who chooses to work with the materials of science undertakes a distinctly political act. She asserts her authority to speak to the materials of science, and simultaneously asserts her right to work with previously history-less materials, redefining their parameters and content within the context of the history of art.

The Bow Gamelan ensemble was co-founded in 1983 by **PAUL BURWELL** (1949-2007), **RICHARD WILSON** (b. 1953) and **ANNE BEAN** (b. 1950). The artists intentionally developed a practice of creating site specific instruments of sound, arguing that the avant garde must by its nature be an art of poverty whose ideas originate from available materials and the previously discarded objects of society.¹⁰ Ideologically, these materials were significant for their absence of history or previous tradition in the structure and history of music and performance, but also for their site specific nature. Creating and performing with materials *in situ* is a way of redefining the parameters of what has happened and what might happen in a way that may alter not merely consciousness but the trajectory of history. Paul Burwell explains that he gave up making instruments from natural materials and found objects for ideological reasons.¹¹

Why do I grub around in dustbins to find car hubs to play as gongs? Why isn't my work taken sufficiently seriously that I would use real instruments?...For ideological reasons really because these things are history-less.. They don't have any sort of history or tradition...These instruments that we have been making for the past few years are not a cheap version of a guitar. There is something about objects that have been left... abandoned that makes them very fertile to the imagination...

Paul Burwell, speaking about *Made in Japan*, at the Toga International Theatre Festival, August 1988.

WILLIAM RABAN (b. 1948) met Paul Burwell in the 1970s when he was manager of the London Filmmakers' Cooperative workshops. as the London Musicians Collective (of which Paul was co-founder) shared space in the same building. It wasn't until nearly 20 years later when he was collaborating with performance artist Anne Bean that the two really became acquainted. Raban had already begun to document some of Burwell's performances when Paul began work on a commissioned performance to open The Green at 3 Mills Island, Bromley-by-Bow — the two hour pyrotechnic spectacular *Rights of Passage*. William who was interested in seeing how dramatic fire performances could be transformed using digital video documented the performance using only a single Sony VX 1000 digital video camera. Remarkably, Raban later edited the film in one straight sitting following a conceptual edit to create a thrillingly stunning and rare piece of pyrotechnic performance art-video-documentation.

The Bow Gamelan's spectacular 1997 production *Offshore Rig* was created over a fortnight on the disused island Lots Ait near Kew Bridge.¹² Working around the tides, the artists designed and built a site-specific musical orchestration set, which included instrumentation from discarded remains on and around the island — pontoons, steam whistles, power hammers, vacuum cleaners, scaffolding, timber leads, water hoses, pyrotechnics, 'barrel-a-phones' created from beer barrels fished from the river, broken glass, cabinet lockers, propane filled gas balloons, flares, coloured smoke and paraffin soaked rags, and the abandoned oil drums dredged up from the river's bed. Richard Wilson describes the Gamelan performances as process unfolding, regarding his role not so much as performer but as technician who sets in motion, and works to maintain, a momentum through which the objects themselves 'do the performing'.¹³ In his obituary to Paul Burwell, David Toop tells that The Bow Gamelan 'opened up opportunities to build surreal, monstrous junk-sculptural creations from blow torches, tin baths, tumble driers. These constructions were integrated into a sometimes dangerous spectacle of noise, light, fire and explosions, described by the *New York Times* as "an industrial strength racket."'¹⁴

The performance at Lots Ait realised all these possibilities ten-fold, overlapping industrial chaos with processed sound, silence with delicate whistles, and showers of light with lightning flames and explosive flashes to culminate in a violent overture and spectacle of percussive pandemonium and light.



Percussionist Paul Burwell with flaming oil drums in The Bow Gamelan's *Concrete Barges*, Rainham Reach 1986, courtesy The Bow Gamelan Archive. This performance took place despite the tides and consequently the artists completed their performance in deep water.



The Bow Gamelan, a pyrotechnic explosion from the performance of *Great Noises that Fill the Air*, 1988, courtesy The Bow Gamelan Archive



Performance of Paul Burwell's *Rights of Passage* performed at The Green at 3 Mills Island
Film stills from William Raban, *Rights of Passage*, UK, 1997, 6' 39", Mini DV, courtesy William Raban



Mariele Neudecker, *Psychopomp* 2010-11, two Giclee prints of Hercules Missile graphite-rubbing. Full length each: 1350 x 84.5cm, installation dimensions variable. Installation view Trondheim Kunstmuseum 2013. Photograph: Erik Reitan, courtesy the artist and Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin

MARIELE NEUDECKER (b. 1965) has interacted with the instruments of nuclear technology to create her work, *Psychopomp* (2010/2013). On her visits during a three month residency at the Headlands Centre for the Arts to the historic and restored Nike Missile Site in California in 2010, Neudecker came across six specimens of the now obsolete Hercules Missile, an awesome twelve and half meter behemoth designed to intercept the Soviet ballistic missiles developed in the 1950s and 60s. Gaining permission to work on the subterranean site, Neudecker created her twin monolithic graphite rubbings of the missiles, one an authentic rubbing; while the second rubbing has been slightly altered to become a 'decoy', both creating a reference to the integral use of decoys within an operational defense system and giving the work its paradoxically reflexive quality.

Neudecker's graphite rubbings have religious connotations. Here the artist implicitly draws on the power of icons, exposing both our innate tendency toward image worship and awe — the icon, the brass rubbing, the triptych, as well the implied power over life the icon represents — the phallus, the Shiva lingam. The icon may be seen as transference of real powers to an object, itself a form of 'spiritual' technology. Have we grown to worship the instruments of war and technology, replacing them for the omnipotence of god? Do we unwittingly place our faith in these new icons of mass destruction, imagining them to represent the retribution and punishment of a now non-existent god? For *Exploding Utopia*, the artist has reproduced the rubbings to scale for the first time, choosing to install them only partially exposed, fan-folded on continuous stationary, both a nod to the conceptual art practices which grew out of the Cold War period and an unspoken reminder of the hidden yet unassailable interconnectedness between computer and military technologies.



Mariele Neudecker negotiates a Hercules Missile to create her graphite rubbings on site at the Headlands Centre for the Arts in 2010, courtesy the artist

JAMES ACORD (1944—2011) has the singular distinction of being the only individual to have ever been licensed to own and handle nuclear materials.¹⁵ A sculptor working with granite, Acord was interested in how nature uses more than one material to create a concentration that forms a single unified whole.¹⁶ The artist discovered that granite contained radioactive uranium and became determined to place small amount so uranium in metal containers within his granite sculptures. Acord believed sculpture to be 'an art of technology'¹⁷ and he eventually moved to Richland, Washington, home to the Hanford nuclear site where plutonium was manufactured for nuclear weapons. Acord became part of the local nuclear community eventually being invited to lecture to physicists, metallurgists, chemists and engineers on art history, the role of sculpture and his vision as an artist. Here he studied and researched the secrets of nuclear fission. Acord described the principle behind sculpture as 'the ordered arrangement of mass and void'.¹⁸ Recognising this principle to operate in nuclear processes, he argued that the physicist and the sculptor shared a fundamental commonality. For him,

*the idea of transmutation, central to alchemy, was equally applicable to radioactivity and also to sculpture, both of which involve the mysterious transformation of elemental materials.*¹⁹

The artist created medieval style reliquaries in which he placed symbols of nuclear technology. As he told the *Guardian* during a residency at Imperial College, 'I can't help feeling that today's nuclear industry is not unlike the church of the 12th and 13th centuries. We have a priesthood living in remote areas, interacting only with each other. Yet these are the people who make decisions for you and me.'²⁰ The artist also visited the Blackett Laboratory facilities of Imperial College, where he hoped to have access to a nuclear reactor to create sculpture, and although he was welcomed by the technicians, his residency there never happened. James Acord embarked on a twenty year project to accomplish his dream of transmuting radioactive technetium 99 into safe ruthenium 100. He extracted minute amounts of tri-uranium oxide from his collection of Fiesta Red tableware to create his reliquaries and even extracted americium 241 from smoke detectors in order to transmute uranium into plutonium.²¹ Toward the end of his life, Acord claimed to have realised his dream, creating sculpture through the use of neutron capture.²²

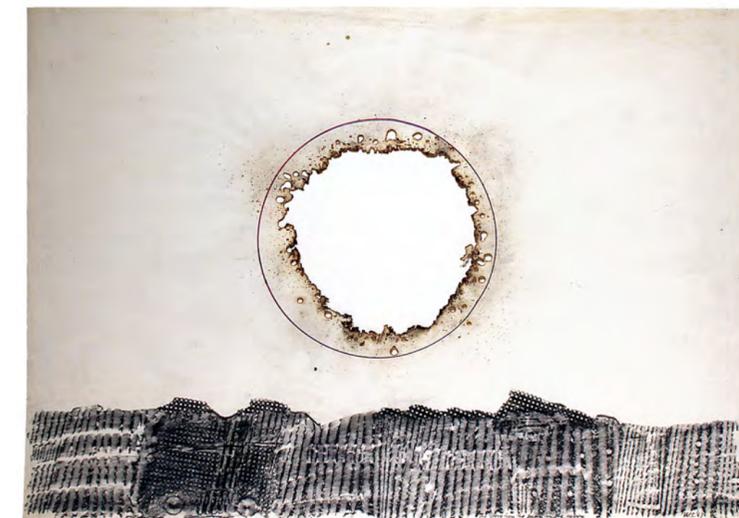


Werner Schreib, *destroy your poverty*, 1966, courtesy the Werner Schreib estate

THE POWER OF PERFORMANCE

German artist and concrete poet **WERNER SCHREIB** (1925–69) trained as an explosives expert in the German military. Under the influence of Max Ernst, he developed a style he coined 'semantic painting', declaring destruction to be a form of poetic transformation and stamping his works with the phrase 'destruction et transformation poétique' and developing his own vocabulary of mechanical process-driven and destructive techniques in art. In the 1960s, just shortly before his tragic death, he began to create works which directly challenged and destroyed the pictorial medium through the use of explosives, gunpowder and fire. A follower of the ideas of the surrealist poetry of Comte de Lautréamont, Schreib viewed destruction as a legitimate means of design. He made numerous fire sculptures and Pyrogravures, inserting powder and fuses into his paintings to create works through destructive means, a technique he called 'fumeage'.

Performance was central to the artist's Herelicitian-inspired practice and he viewed the medium as a necessary means of subverting the oppressive art historical past of Germany. He performed his pyrogravures not merely in galleries, but in numerous unrehearsed outdoor public happenings, most notoriously bringing about the auto-ignition of an image of German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard in his *Death of Lucullus* happening at the London Free School playground in Westbourne Park during the 1966 Destruction in Arts Symposium.²³ Schreib, an active participant throughout the events of DIAS, was deeply affected by his DIAS experience, even going so far as to craft a small artists book he titled *Destroy your Poverty* for 'the chaps he met in England'.



TOP: Werner Schreib, *Eruption*, 1968, frottage, pyrogravure, collage, 62 cm x 79 cm, courtesy the Werner Schreib estate
Werner Schreib, *The Man in the Moon*, 1967, frottage, fumeage, pyrogravure on paper, 63 cm x 87 cm, courtesy the Werner Schreib estate

Nothing may not be happening. Bending, a tall figure jackknifed at the waist, fettling among chemicals, cable, elements. A flare in the murk, chased by sputtering, then a blast. Pressure, vibrations and resonance. Screen white out, microphone shut down. In that moment of aftershock, with the smoke gathering in soft, malevolent folds, and metal reverberations dispersing into the air, the art of Stephen Cripps came into being.²⁴



Film stills from one of a series of performances of Stephen Cripps at the ACME Gallery, London (1-5 June, 1981). William Raban, *Stephen Cripps at the ACME*, UK, 1981, 5' 27", colour, sound (magnetic), 16mm, courtesy William Raban

David Toop, 'Aftershock', *Stephen Cripps, Pyrotechnic Sculptor*



Outfitting Ivor Davies with flame resistant clothing prior to his performance of *Anatomic Explosion* 1966, photograph Beaverbrook Newspapers, courtesy Ivor Davies Collection

William Raban was also fortunate to make a film with pyrotechnic sculptor, **STEPHEN CRIPPS** whose art was brought to a sudden close when he died unexpectedly at the age of 29. Cripps was particularly fascinated with gunpowder and the percussive possibilities available through explosively generated sounds, creating works which exploited the uncontrollable encounter of explosives. Toop describes Cripps as an 'artist whose raw materials included sound light, chemical reaction, detonations, fire, industrial waste, motion, humour, panic, absurdity, pathos and a unique, oxymoronic gentle brutality'.²⁶ Cripps had known William Raban for a number of years. The two collaborated throughout Cripps's five one-man performances at the ACME gallery, Covent Garden in June 1981 to create an extremely rare documentation of the artist's furious and uncompromising pyrotechnic performance works. Raban's film vindicates Cripps's seemingly insane energy — detonations as wild pranks, maddening sounds, unexpected flashes, darknesses interrupted, the sudden pandemonium of sound and expectant silences shattered by the shock wave of a sudden sonic boom — to capture the creation of an all-encompassing kinetic sculpture of a deeply primeval and instinctual awareness of the immediate present in which creation and destruction appear to manifold into a dialectic whole.

Welsh artist **IVOR DAVIES** (b. 1935) was co-organiser of the 1966 Destruction in Arts Symposium and the day-long meeting held earlier that same year, the Ravensbourne Symposium on Creation Destruction & Chemical change.²⁷ Davies had training as an explosives technician which he later used to choreograph performances in which explosives were a central feature. His performance piece, *Prelude to Anatomic Explosions*, held, rather ironically, at the Army Drill Hall in Edinburgh in September 1966, pre-empted his subsequent performance at the Destruction in Art Symposium later that month. Davies constructed various anatomical drawings and assemblages comprised of cardboard and paint together with found materials — a tube of paper that created a hooting sound on exploding, a stuffed dog, a woman's bust — which he then filled with explosive charges and detonated with a car battery, leaving behind the debris and causality of war. His motivations to use destruction in his work are very much a reflection of what he sees as the element of mass destruction in our society. Davies describes his wartime experiences as a child as filled with a terrible fear and thrilling awe. The artist recalls one occasion when his father took him into the garden to witness the spectacle of war — the search lights, the bombing, the anti-aircraft fire. That which is 'awful may also be rather beautiful' says Davies.²⁸



Ivor Davies, *Prelude to Anatomic Explosion*, Army Drill Hall, Edinburgh, 1st September 1966, photographs of performance: *The Scotsman*, courtesy Ivor Davies collection



Ivor Davies with anatomic assemblage before his performance of *Anatomic Explosion* 1966, photograph Beaverbrook Newspapers, courtesy Ivor Davies Collection



Tim Burns, *Against the Grain: More Meat than Wheat*, 1980
A3 film poster (detail), courtesy the artist

Australian artist **TIM BURNS** (b. 1947) has, since the 1960s, employed explosives together with film, surveillance technologies, video, installation and performance, to create situations which critically reflect on what Lucas Ihlein describes as 'our hypermediated, industrialised western society'.²⁹ Burns eschews the studio and instead creates live performance pieces and subversive interventions in the public sphere to initiate unexpected perceptual shifts and dislocations in the expectations of the viewer-participant. Throughout his practice as an artist and teacher, Burns has watched artists struggle to make art that is capable of touching the world and speaking to life. His provocative 1980 film, *Against the Grain: More Meat than Wheat*, was inspired by real life action groups such as the Baader-Meinhof Gang.³⁰ The film opens with Albert Camus' conclusion from his 1951 novel:

It is a question of finding out whether innocence, the moment it begins to act, can avoid committing murder. We can only act in our own time, among the people who surround us. We shall be capable of nothing until we know whether we have the right to kill our fellow human beings, or the right to let them be killed. Since all contemporary action leads to murder, direct or indirect, we cannot act until we know whether, and why, we have the right to kill.

Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté (The Rebel)*, 1951

The film is a fictional reflection on the motivations of an artist who takes to direct action by planting a smoke bomb in a wreath delivered to a cenotaph during an ANZAC Day parade. Set in Australia, the film's geographical isolation echoes the torment and political isolation of the artist. Burns constructs a montage, interposing his cinéma vérité with sampled source material from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and fictional archival footage, to create a film that convincingly explores the connection between art and life, and the artist and direct action, to create a work of 'reverse appropriation' where didactics disappear into a troubling and ambiguous irony.

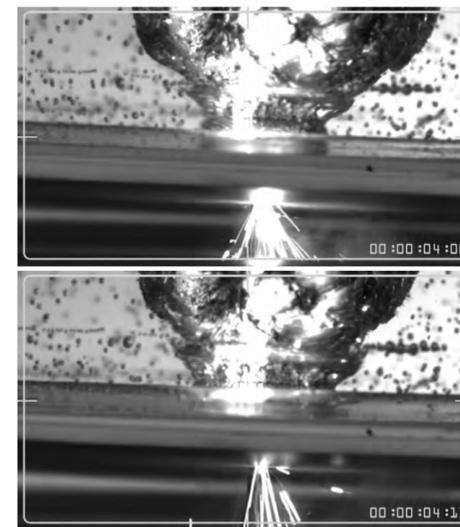
MOMENTUM AND ACCIDENT

PETER FISCHLI (b. 1952) and **DAVID WEISS** (1946–2012) presented their masterpiece, *Der Lauf der Dinge* in 1987. The film presents a nerve-racking yet humorous saga which exploits the possibilities of mechanical laws, inviting us to contemplate the seemingly improbable maneuvering of a mechanical universe based on 'cause and effect'. A series of 'unfortunate events' unfolds over an 100 feet of precisely crafted physical interactions beginning with a single spark which, followed by a chemical and mechanical dynamics of near-impossible relations and connections, causing oil drums to roll, skates to soar, matches to ignite, sparks to fly, petrol to burn, candles to melt, wheels to turn, water to spill, glass to break, pendulums to swing, paint to flow, objects to self-inflate, and smoke to erupt, all in a precisely orchestrated symphony of cause and effect which highlights the seemingly impossible tension between momentum and accident in the unfolding of everyday ordinary events.

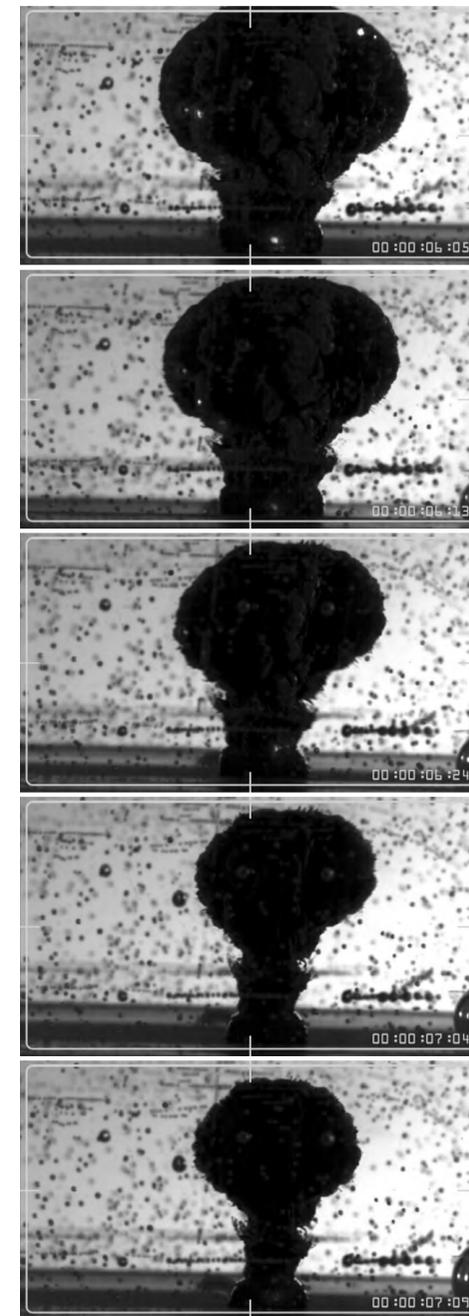
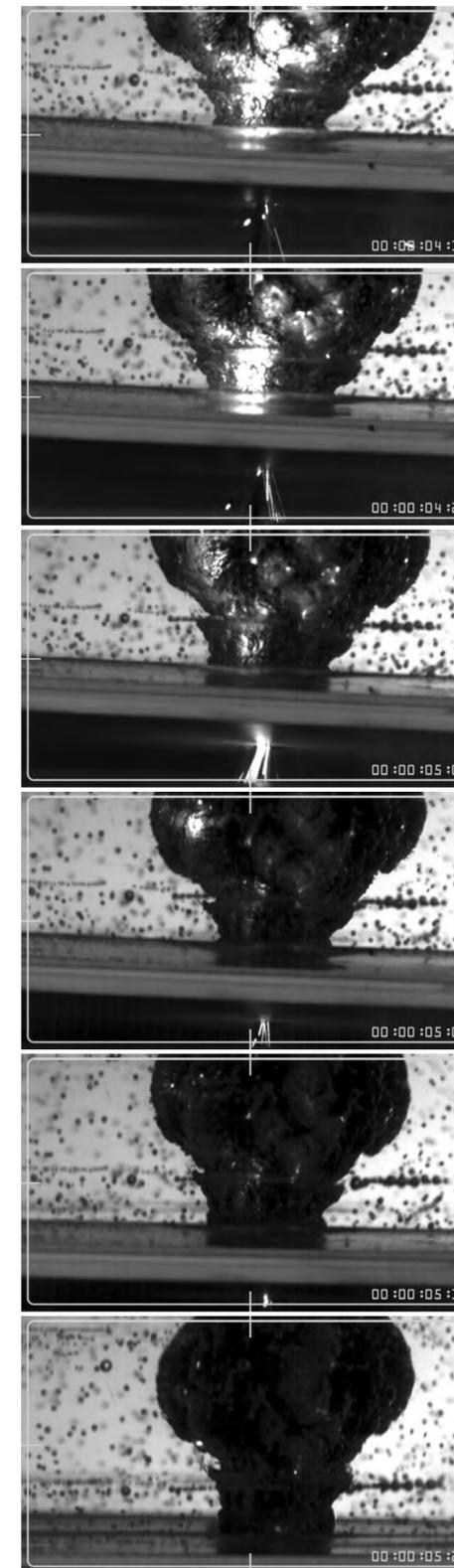
Italian artist **ENRICO GAIDO** (b. 1971) has developed a building-engineering inspired practice which focuses on the examination of incidents (apparent accidents), which interrupt the otherwise inevitable chain of causality. He regards residue, dust and cracks, waste, stains and tears as examples which interrupt a chain of causality and bring about the types of collapse we experience daily. Research has led Gaido to explore the use of explosives and gunpowder specifically. Whereas gunpowder has been used to trace indelible writings in works such as *Che fare* or as a source of light in movement that generates sound compositions in *Tribute to Anfone*; the artist has used explosives in his performance work, *Il Tetto — Adamo's Home Project* to nullify the freehold right that would otherwise ensue to a person who builds a house overnight. The work references a post-neorealist film by Italian director Vittorio De Sica film *Il tetto (The Roof)*, 1956) in which a poverty-stricken couple claim their right to home ownership by erecting a house overnight.³¹

Gaido is interested in ideas of time, and the 'event' as a microcosm of the whole. Employing his combined knowledge of pyrotechnics and engineering principles, the artist has created installations that realise and reflect the performative aspect of 'event', both as concrete image and animated and consumed by time. His practice is necessarily performance-based and his new work *Freezing Utopia* has been created through a series of micro-explosions triggered within a gelatin base to capture the very instant of fracture while the gelatin retains the imprint or trace of the explosion at its exact moment of fracture.

Throughout his practice, Gaido has investigated the principle of 'strain hardening' — the notion that all materials undergo three distinct phases dependent upon the amount of force or 'strain' applied to the material. In the first phase material remains 'elastic'. It may recover its original state soon after the load is released. In the next state, the 'plastic' state, materials are deformed in an irreversible way by becoming tougher but less able to reform again which consequently makes them more fragile. The third and final state is that of 'fracture', the breaking point beyond which there is no return. An explosion may be seen as the experience of matter in this third and final state. So many variables, a momentum, a necessary degree of resistance and the avoidance of so many accidents, to bring about what might otherwise appear an inevitable conclusion — the 'explosion'.



Enrico Gaido, *ECHO (IL TETTO project)*, sequence of video stills, 2010



Tim Burns, Mullaaloo sandune explosions, 1974, photographs Tim Burns, courtesy the artist



Enrico Gaido, *Rendering Module* (GELATINA STILLs project), video still, 2009-13

ENDNOTES

1. Gustav Metzger, *The Chemical Revolution in Art*, Society of Arts, Cambridge University.
2. Curator interview with Lawrence Weiner at his studio in New York 5 April 2013.
3. Ibid.
4. Weiner, Benjamin H.D. *Buchloh in Conversation with Lawrence Weiner*, Lawrence Weiner, London: Phaidon, 1998. In a notebook dated 2001-January 2002, Weiner includes two encyclopedia [sic] entries on the life of Johnny Chapman (1774-1845), a.k.a. "Johnny Appleseed".
5. Kathryn Chiong, *WORDS MATTER: The Work Of Lawrence Weiner* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University 2013). Reprinted with the kind permission of the author.
6. Excerpt reprinted here from Donato Totaro, 'Zabriskie Point (1970, Antonioni): A Scene by Scene Analysis of a Troubled Masterpiece' in *Offscreen*, vol.14, no 4. www.offscreen.com/index.php/pages/essays/zabriskie_point_1970/ (downloaded on 17/09/2013).
7. For further discussion, see Iwona Blazwick, *Cornelia Parker* London, Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2013.
8. Ibid.
9. Andrew Wilson, 1997 in 'Only The Lonely', *Fiona Banner, Bridget Smith*, Lo-Rez Press. Reprinted here with the kind permission of the author.
10. Paul Burwell speaking about the making of *Made in Japan*, at the Toga International Theatre Festival, August 1988. Private recording.
11. Ibid.
12. Interviews with Paul Burwell, Anne Bean and Richard Wilson during the making of *Offshore Rig*. The full performance of *Offshore Rig* featured in a 1988 *After Image* production for Channel Four directed by Anne Thorburn.
13. Ibid.
14. David Toop, 'Paul Burwell', Obituary, *The Guardian*, Monday 5 March 2007, at 32. www.theguardian.com/news/2007/mar/05/guardianobituaries.obituaries (downloaded 16 May 2013).
15. Chris Arnot, 'Sculpting with Nukes', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 26 October 1999, www.theguardian.com/culture/1999/oct/26/artsfeatures (downloaded 17/09/2013).
16. Lecture by James Acord at the Seattle Art Museum in 1992, www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0NH17NAvQE
17. Ibid.
18. James Acord speaking at 'The Influencers' conference in Barcelona in 2010, theinfluencers.org/en/james-acord/video/1 (accessed 14, 17, 21 and 22 September 2013).
19. Philip Schuyler, Profiles, 'MOVING TO RICHLAND-I', *The New Yorker*, October 14, 1991, at 59, archives.newyorker.com/?i=1991-10-14#folio=059 (accessed 19 September 2013).
20. Chris Arnot, 'Sculpting with Nukes', *The Guardian*, Tuesday 26 October 1999, www.theguardian.com/culture/1999/oct/26/artsfeatures (downloaded 14 September 2013)
21. Ibid.
22. James Acord speaking at 'The Influencers' conference in Barcelona in 2010, theinfluencers.org/en/james-acord/video/1 (accessed 14, 17, 21 and 22 September 2013).
23. Descriptions and images of this happening may be found in *Art and Artists*, London 1966, Vol. 1, and also Barry Farrell, 'Happenings, The worldwide underground of the arts creates The Other Culture' in *Life*, 17 February 1967, pp87-102.
24. David Toop, 'Aftershock', *Stephen Cripps, Pyrotechnic Sculptor*, ACME 1992, reprinted here with the kind permission of the author.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. For a discussion about this symposium, see Dom Sylvester Houedard, 'Change as Creative Destruction' — the Ravensbourne Symposium on Creation Destruction & Chemical Change", *Art and Artists*, London 1966, Vol. 1, No. 5, S. 46f.
28. Curator interview with Ivor Davies on 5 December 2012.
29. Lucas Ihlein, *Artists Profile*, February 2013.
30. Curator discussions with the artist Tim Burns during September 2013.
31. Under ancient law, he who built a house between sunset and sunrise, with walls, roof and smoking chimney, could claim the freehold of the property. This law is to be found under both civil and common law systems, including Italian law.

POSTSCRIPT

Nearly fifty years ago, the artist Gustav Metzger articulated his utopian vision of the artist as an independent explorer of material whose undertaking would pose a challenge to the conceptual categories and epistemological foundations of science.

EXPLODING UTOPIA invokes a vision of the artist as a dynamic protagonist whose contribution to knowledge-creation and ways-of knowing is crucial. By engaging aesthetically with the stuff of destruction — sodium nitrate, potassium nitrate, saltpetre, black powder, nitro-glycerine, dynamite, atomic, sub-atomic and other explosive materials — each of these artists has produced works which inhabit unstable realities, embrace ambiguity, interrogate sculptural process and kinetic possibilities to uncover unrealised potentialities and engage unforeseen possible worlds. The studio becomes reinvented as a laboratory of the future, the space of the studio is transformed into the space of the world and the artist realises his or her identity as one who challenges and reinvents the prescriptive canon of culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition would not have been possible without the wonderful generosity and commitment of so many people. We gratefully acknowledge the artists for their participation in the show and for loaning work from their personal collections. A special thank you to Lawrence Weiner for kindly welcoming me into his studio, and whose work was the spark that ignited the idea for the show; to Fiona Banner for sharing her wonderfully poignant and rarely exhibited piece; to Cornelia Parker for permitting us to show a work which is critical to the ideas explored in the exhibition; to Ingeborg Schreiber-Wywiorski for digging through the archives and sharing with me her beautiful memories and works of Werner Schreiber; to Tim Burns for indulging me in overseas conversations about art, life and politics; to Enrico Gaido for his incredible opening night performance of *Freezing Utopia*; to Ivor Davies for many hours of illuminating conversations about art and the avant garde; to Mariele Neudecker for sharing her many precious hours with me brainstorming, and for creating a site-specific installation for the exhibition; to William Raban for granting us the special privilege of premiering his film *Rights of Passage* and creating a special cut for this exhibition of his film, *Stephen Cripps at the ACME*; to Vhils whose work I wished to have shown in this exhibition; to Anne Bean for her advice and generous introductions; to Richard Wilson for sharing his documentation of the The Bow Gamelan; to Fischli and Weiss for creating the perfect piece for the show; to David Toop for generously sharing his wealth of knowledge and experience and for introducing me to the work of The Bow Gamelan and Stephen Cripps; to James Acord, Michelangelo Antonioni, Paul Burwell, Stephen Cripps and Werner Schreiber for the courage to make your art and to Gustav Metzger whose friendship and lifetime of work and ideas are the inspiration for this exhibition.

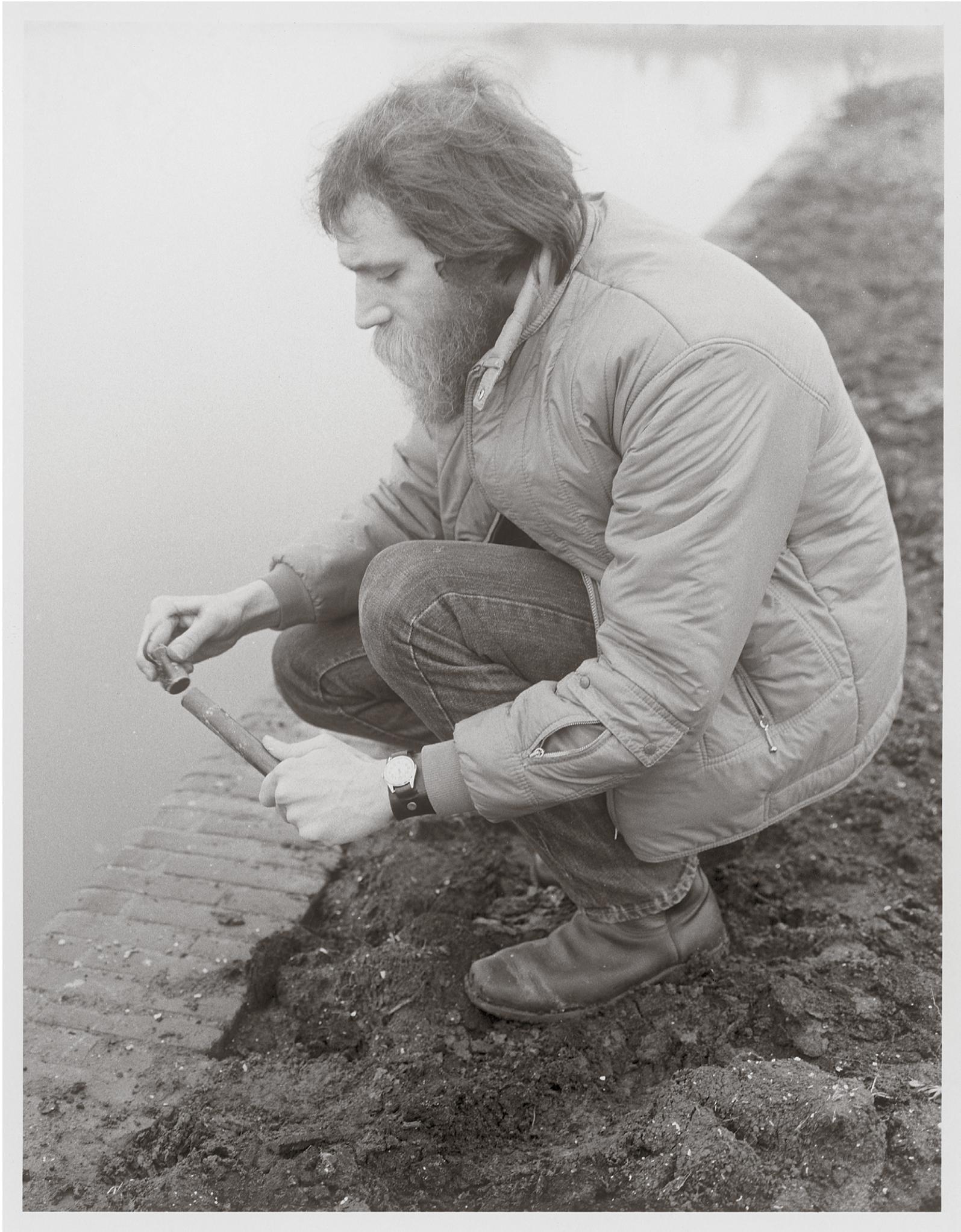
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Rozemin Keshvani, Curator

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Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Culture and the Arts**



Lawrence Weiner, THE RESIDUE OF A FLARE IGNITED UPON A BOUNDARY
Weiner setting his flare for the work on the city line of Amsterdam for "Square Pegs in Round Holes," Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1969
Courtesy Moved Pictures Archive, NYC, © 2013 Lawrence Weiner/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York