



22-28 October 2011, 10am-5pm daily
Guildhall Shopping Centre, Queen Street, Exeter EX4 3HP

“The value of art objects is imaginary ... their value is part of a social reality, a shared dream.” Sal Randolph¹

Three mirrored sequins donated by a highly regarded UK artist during the installation of his work in Plymouth. A colourful canvas by a popular Southwest painter. Some everyday objects that may or may not be taken from a major work by a contemporary artist featured in the British Art Show. Which of these items has the greatest aesthetic value? Which would command the highest price? Most importantly: which is the most interesting?

HEIST invites its audience to consider a range of objects of varying provenance – and to draw their own conclusions about the relative merits of each. The project explores the mechanics of the contemporary art market, including the value assigned to different types of art or artefacts. It reflects on the legal as well as illegal transactions that utilise art as a commodity or currency.

HEIST is an artist-led curating project developed as a response to the visit of the British Art Show 7 (BAS7) to Plymouth. It uses theft as a metaphor and mechanism for dealing with the large and disparate body of work that makes up BAS7 and the associated Fringe events.

Bypassing many of the usual rules of thematized curation, HEIST has allowed the success or failure of a series of negotiations with artists and galleries to dictate the content of a show. Removed with apparent haste from Plymouth, a loose collection of art, artefacts, relics and ephemera is re-presented in a vacant shop in Exeter.

Negotiations began in June 2011, with ‘heists’ taking place during September and October. ‘Stolen’ items were replaced with a limited edition HEIST artwork in a gesture of artistic exchange. Following the exhibition, all items will be displayed indefinitely in an online archive.

What theft reveals

By experimenting with a concept as emotive as theft – however playfully – it was inevitable that the project would encounter occasional resistance, hostility and even fear. An alert about planned thefts, circulated by security staff on the BAS7 opening night in Plymouth, apparently originated from the HEIST project’s light-hearted social networking activity. More often, though, artists and curators at all levels of the art hierarchy responded with humour, understanding and generosity, demonstrating the ongoing vitality of the ‘gift economy’ that sustains visual arts practice outside the commercial gallery system.

Theft puts into perspective our relationship with art as makers, curators, audiences or owners. It helps us

understand art’s psychological impact, in that its loss (or the threat of it) can evoke stronger feelings than the art object itself. According to the psychoanalyst Darian Leader², it was only when the *Mona Lisa* was stolen in 1911 that people recognised its significance. More people went to view the empty space in the Louvre than had gone to see the painting in the previous year.

Artists as collectors, artists as thieves

HEIST can be contextualised not only within the activity of art theft but in the use of theft as an art practice. For example, in 2009, Róisín Byrne stole a rhododendron from Simon Starling’s botanical installation in Spain. The same year, she also made an exact copy of a new work by Ryan Gander and attempted to exhibit it as her own. Slightly less transgressive and more in tune with HEIST is Ivan Moudov, whose 2002-07 work *Fragments* consists of selected ephemera stolen over a period of years from various artists’ works.

Gentler forms of artistic lifting – such as appropriation, imitation and quotation – are much in evidence across BAS7. The 3000+ film clips used by Christian Marclay in his celebrated 24-hour work *Clock* were reputedly never legally cleared for use.

Forgery has long been a partner to art theft and raises another emotionally charged issue: that of authenticity. How we feel about an object or artefact often depends on narratives of attribution and connection (or otherwise) to ‘the real’.

Acquisitiveness presents itself as a desire to collect and categorise, with BAS7 artists such as Keith Wilson, Matthew Darbyshire and Elizabeth Price worrying at strange taxonomies. The magpie urge – and the strong narrative tendency that accompanies it – are never far from the practice of curating or contemporary making.

The British Art Show

HEIST is part of a range of fringe activities developed by Southwest visual artists to coincide with the visit of BAS7 to Plymouth (17 September to 4 December 2011). Widely recognised as the most ambitious and influential exhibition of contemporary British art, BAS takes place every five years and tours to four different UK cities. BAS7 is curated by Lisa Le Feuvre and Tom Morton. For details of BAS7 see plymouthbas7.org and for information on the Fringe see fringe.gotanyrice.com/

¹ Sal Randolph (2005), *Beautiful Money (Art as Currency, Art as Experience)*, www.salrandolph.com, accessed 21/07/11

² Darian Leader (2002) *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing*

Artists and works represented* in HEIST

Becky Beasley	<i>KORREKTUR</i>
Blue Curry	<i>Untitled 2010</i>
Martin Bush	<i>Dawn Spirit 2</i>
Jaeyeon Chung	<i>Nec Plus Ultra</i>
A Circle	<i>A Circle</i>
Steven Claydon	<i>An Equivalence Propelled</i>
Steve Clement-Large	<i>Civil Servant</i>
Cullinan Richards	<i>Twenty rolls of tape</i>
Ryan Curtis	<i>Journeyman (Borrowed Bucket)</i>
Scott Daniels	<i>(To go with) To Go with the Comet</i>
Matthew Darbyshire	<i>An Exhibition for Modern Living</i>
Clinton De Menezes	<i>Procession</i>
The Durds	<i>Covert Karaoke Tour: Devonport</i>
Ella Golt	<i>Fishing Tool – Net (Component)</i>
Luke Fowler	<i>Composition for Flutter Screen</i>
Hollis Frampton	<i>Lemon</i>
Ria Hartley	<i>The Train Project</i>
Jamie House	<i>Camera Obscura Starmap (Wearable Pinhole Viewer)</i>
Ian Kiaer	<i>Melnikov project, silver</i>
Mark Leahy	<i>#myLife Event {background</i>
Thais Lenkiewicz & Steven Maynard	<i>1,172</i>
Simon Le Ruez	<i>Colonia</i>
Low Profile	<i>Would you like this badge?</i>
Roy Menachem Markovich	<i>Untitled 2010</i>
Simon Martin	<i>Untitled (2010)</i>
Nathaniel Mellors	<i>Ourhouse</i>
Guy Oliver	<i>What's Wrong With This Picture (Sorry, Miserable, Squashed, Thing)</i>
The Otolith Group	<i>Hydra Decapita</i>
Maddy Pethick	<i>I drew the British Art Show, Plymouth, 2011</i>
Elizabeth Price	<i>User Group Disco</i>
Beth Emily Richards	<i>The Handcuff King</i>
Tom Smith	<i>xoFyrutneCht02</i>
Edgar Schmitz	<i>To Go with the Comet</i>
Sue Tompkins	<i>Hallo Welcome to Keith Street (A Version)</i>
U:1 Artist Collective	<i>Nomadic Traces</i>
Sandy Wager	<i>The Naked Crown</i>
Jessica Warboys	<i>Volcano Vertigo</i>
Keith Wilson	<i>Zone 1</i>

*While this exhibition contains many complete original artworks, some works listed here are referenced by related objects, residues or documentation. For full details, please consult exhibition invigilators or see the archive at www.foundspace.co.uk/heist_archive

Acknowledgements

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www.foundspace.co.uk

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