



**Director's Report, Peltz Gallery,
Academic Years 2014-15 and 2015-16
Professor Annie E. Coombes, Department of History of Art**

General:

The Peltz has gone from strength to strength over the past two years, consolidating the mission statement set out in the first annual report. In addition the Gallery is becoming known for exploring the role of visual art in politically and historically contentious topics and in humanitarian debate. This joint report for the years 2014 - 2015 and 2015 - 2016 contains exhibition and event highlights from both years. It also sets out some highly successful new initiatives which we will be able to build upon in the future.

Estates:

A huge thank you and congratulations to alumnus and donor, Daniel Peltz, Hon. Fellow of Birkbeck who was awarded an OBE for charity and philanthropic services in the 2016 Queen's honours list. Thanks to his continuing support the Peltz has been able to address a number of critical resource issues. Consequently in the Summer of 2014 -15 the existing lighting system was substantially upgraded to enable adjustments to both direction and intensity of each individual light fitting. This makes a significant difference to the viewing experience and conservation of works on show. We are now also able to monitor both humidity and temperature in the Gallery and in the glass vitrine which has been made environmentally stable in conformity with museum standards enabling loans of more fragile and sensitive artifacts from major national and international collections. The oak flooring has been leveled and sections replaced so that it no longer constitutes a safety hazard and a Bosch laser spirit level purchased to ensure professional installation of works. Recorded CCTV facilities have been extended and Neil Chamberlain-Keen, the College Management Accountant, has enhanced our insurance cover so that international transport and loans can be accommodated. The other major improvement is the laser people-counter which enables Birkbeck academics, practice-based PhD students and collaborating artists to monitor the success of their exhibitions and events in the Gallery and is an indispensable tool towards meeting the Research Councils' demands for impact evaluation.

Internships:

2015-16 has seen a new initiative in the Gallery. Funding was awarded to develop internships at the Peltz by the Research Student Unit under the Birkbeck Generic Research Skills scheme designed to enhance the research skills of PhD students across the College. Managed by the Peltz Director and School of Arts Impact Development Officer, Dr. Wendy Earle, the curatorial training programme was extremely successful. Three PhD students from the School of Arts each benefitted

from 40 hours of training and paid employment to support the development of the Peltz Gallery events programme. Drawing upon their own professional expertise, Hannah Barton (Autumn term), Raul Valdivia Murgueytio and Paula Clemente Vega (Spring and Summer terms) installed and de-installed exhibitions, developed our mailing lists and other promotional activities including trying out new opportunities for public engagement. Both the interns and the colleagues responsible for exhibitions, have expressed strong appreciation for the training programme. Crucially the interns were also given scope to pilot new outreach programmes for Birkbeck students, local schools and other audiences.

Because of the success of the programme we have been awarded funds for a second year to extend the opportunity to three new interns from among Birkbeck's PhD student body.

Artist-in-Residence:

Another first for the Gallery was our Artist in Residence competition in July 2015 funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) and the School of Arts. The Peltz initiated a partnership with Bow Arts, an arts education charity and gallery based in the East End providing studios for over 400 emerging artists.

The residency was designed to connect academics with artists from Bow Arts in order to create new work inspired by interdisciplinary research produced within the School of Arts. The aim of the residency was to explore how visual art and academic research might simultaneously develop reflective practices, advance critical thinking and produce new working methodologies for both fine artists and academics.

Five pairs of artist and academic were shortlisted by the Judging Panel (Prof. Coombes, Dr. Earle, Director of Bow Arts Rosamond Murdoch and Sarah Weir former Executive Officer of Arts Council London currently CEO of Waddesdon Manor). The winning proposal was *'Artist's Impression: Mangled Metal'* a floor installation made of cardboard, glue and acrylic by John Timberlake following discussions with Dr. Gabriel Koureas (History of Art).

The installation explored issues around the representation of the figure of the 'terrorist' and the use of mangled metal as a frequent exhibitionary strategy by museums of war in representations of so-called 'small wars' and the War on Terror. Timberlake's moving installation recalled the devastating effects of bomb blasts and coincided with the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings which had an immediate and lasting effect on those of us based in Gordon Square that fateful summer. Timberlake's art work was a fitting commemoration of the victims of the attacks and a celebration of the survivors.



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The Residency held a number of associated events in the Gallery and at Birkbeck Cinema including two roundtables: 'Remembering Small Wars: Veterans, artists and academics in conversation' and 'Commemorating 7/7: artists, architects and academics debate' which brought in new audiences to the Peltz, including former veterans from the war in Afghanistan and curators from the Imperial War Museum. A video of our 'Commemorating 7/7' roundtable can be found here:

<http://media.bloomsburymediacloud.org/media/commemorating-7-7>



Exhibitions:

The Peltz exhibition programme has become increasingly international in scope both in terms of themes addressed and artists exhibited including representation from Cyprus, South Africa, Chile and Taiwan. We have also steadily augmented our partners and benefitted from grant awards from diverse funding bodies. These include the Wellcome Trust; the Leverhulme Trust; the British Council; The National Portrait Gallery; Goldsmiths College; the Royal College of Art; the Heritage Lottery Fund; the Government of Cyprus; the Ministry of Culture (Republic of China, Taiwan); Dr. Samuel Yin; The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust; CMS Cameron McKenna; DIRAC (the Chilean Office of Cultural Affairs); NAZ; One to One Children's Fund; the Terence Higgins Trust and LUX Artists' Moving Image.

A full list of exhibitions and gallery events can be viewed here

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/research/peltz-gallery/past-events-and-exhibitions-at-the-peltz-gallery>

We opened the 2014-2015 academic year in October with our contribution to Black History Month, 'Biography of an Archive: June Givanni's Pan African Cinema Archive'

curated by the Director in collaboration with June Givanni and Dr. Emma Sandon (FMACS). This was followed by 'Moving Portraits' an exhibition curated by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust featuring survivors of genocide now living in the UK, each photographed with an object evocative of their own story. Participants included survivors of the Holocaust and the genocides in Rwanda, Darfur and Bosnia.

The Peltz was proud to host the first solo show in the UK for one of the most important artists working in Taiwan today. 'Kao Chung-Li: The Man with the Film Projector' was curated by Chou Yu-ling, a PhD candidate and professional curator in FMACS, showcasing a number of Kao's multi-media works including 'My Mentor, Chen Yingzhen' based on the memories of Chen Yingzhen a left-wing intellectual



who suffered at the hands of both the right-wing authoritarian government and the liberal intellectual community in Taiwan of the 1960s and '70s. Prior to Kao's solo exhibition the Peltz reassembled a disparate archive to chart the history of the 'underground noise scene' (a form of punk) – an expression of the critical period of the transition from an authoritarian regime towards democracy and a neoliberal capitalist society in 1990s Taipei. The exhibition was part of the Taiwan Spotlight Project and curated by YU Wei.

Other forays into sound installation included 'AGORA' by composer and artist Ain Bailey, a multi-sited installation prompted by an investigation into the acoustics of sites of assembly. Bailey's composition was a collaboration with Birkbeck's Department of Geography, Environment and Development Studies while Leverhulme Artist-in-Residence in the Department.

Four Research Centres within the School of Arts have contributed regularly to the success of our exhibitions and related events programme, in particular the Centre for Iberian and Latin American Visual Studies; Birkbeck Institute of the Moving Image and the Centre for the History and Theory of Photography. In November 2014 this resulted in a collaboration with the Royal College of Art. Susan Butler's new video work explored the visual effects of the distance of earth from the sun in mid-November. A 'meditation on the fragile and ephemeral coincidence of the sun's movement, the tree's last foliage, the resulting shadow's duration and its framing by the surrounding urban architecture', the installation encouraged an intimate form of reflection which often resulted in individuals sitting silently on the large sofa which was part of the installation, mesmerized by the shadows cast on the walls of the Gallery.

A growing body of research conducted under the aegis of the Centre for Medical Humanities, housed in the School of Arts has frequently found expression in exhibitions at the Peltz drawing in new audiences. From November 2015 to January 2016 the Director curated 'Positive Living: Art and AIDS in South Africa' supported with funding from the Wellcome Trust. The show told the story of the struggle for self-representation by those affected by HIV/AIDS during a dark period from 1999 to 2006 when former President Thabo Mbeki was intent on denying the relationship between HIV and AIDS and consequently withheld life-saving treatment from hundreds



of thousands of the most vulnerable South African citizens who were only just emerging from the scourge of apartheid. The exhibition explored how fine art, photography, printmaking, painting and other creative practices produced effective challenges to the South African government including initiatives from some of those communities hardest hit by the pandemic. It included works by Sue Williamson and Penny Siopis and Artist Proof Studios. Gideon Mendel, Nondumiso Hlwele and Nontobeko Peyi from the Keiskamma Art Project all came and spoke to students and specialist audiences in the Gallery.



A raft of events associated with the history of visual campaigns around HIV both from South Africa and also within Britain (thus engaging with the African Diaspora in the UK) began with an international conference 'Women and HIV/AIDS in South

Africa: Medicine, Art, Activism' which included a keynote by Justice Edwin Cameron (Constitutional Court South Africa) and lectures by Professor Cathy Campbell leading UK AIDS researcher and Vuyiseka Dubula former Deputy of the famous Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa. On World AIDS Day the exhibition culminated in a panel of experts on the history of visual campaigns on HIV from the UK: internationally celebrated photographer Sunil Gupta and AIDS and gay rights campaigners Parminder Sekhon and Simon Watney (author of the first book on the visual representation of HIV, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* in 1987).

Collaborations across Birkbeck:

The Peltz is primarily a resource to showcase the interdisciplinary research within the School of Arts but it is also at the forefront of enabling academic researchers across the College to realize grant applications which encourage interdisciplinary research working creatively with visual artists. It often provides a home for the fruits of their collaboration as with 'AGORA'. In February 2015 the Peltz was part of a cycle of events organized by the Politics Department, highlighting the critical housing crisis in the capital. The Chilean photographer Carlos Reyes-Manzo has produced photographs of the spaces and places used as dwellings by the world's populations in order to provoke questions about the nature of 'dwelling as a form of being in the world...' and to acknowledge how buildings foster inequality, poverty and alienation.

In the Summer of 2016 another Chilean artist, Livia Marin in a collaboration with Margarita Palacios, researcher in Birkbeck's Department of Psycho-Social Studies, similarly explored the significance of place and location. In 'Tejas Verdes: I was not there' Marin was concerned with the conundrum of how to represent the terror of detention and extermination in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship without reproducing such violence. The artist's intervention in the Gallery consisted of a set of ghostly peeled resin casts taken from sections of the built environment of Chile's detention centres – traces of presence now absent.



Similar themes were also explored using manipulated photographic traces from a family album in the final dissertation show of Victoria Ahrens, a PhD candidate from the History of Art Department in September 2016 which fittingly brought the year's exhibition cycle to an end.

A full list of exhibitions and gallery events can be viewed here

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/arts/research/peltz-gallery/past-events-and-exhibitions-at-the-peltz-gallery>

Future Developments:

The Gallery looks forward to building on the achievements of the past two years and to fostering the use of the Peltz as a research tool for provoking new creative outcomes and intellectual collaborations at Birkbeck. Already exhibitions and supporting events booked for the next academic year have attracted new funders and partnerships.

We aim to continue exploring different avenues for attracting an even greater diversity of audiences to our exhibitions and events. Thanks to the efforts of the School Manager, Verity Hutton, and with the support of the Dean of the School of Arts, Professor Hilary Fraser, a new post of Events and Communications Officer has been established at the School. This new post, working with the College's Public Engagement Officer and with the interns in the curatorial training programme, will enable us to increase the Gallery's public visibility and ensure that Birkbeck benefits from the additional recruitment potential and the outward-facing reach of the public engagement opportunities offered by the Peltz.

Thanks:

The Director particularly wishes to thank Verity Hutton, our School Manager, for her consistent and generous personal and practical support which has, since the founding of the Peltz, immeasurably facilitated obtaining the relevant College backing for crucial building and maintenance work. Verity has been a truly wonderful colleague and it is with great sadness that I have to report that she is leaving the College. All of us at the Peltz wish her every success and happiness. Another key administrative support in the life of the Peltz, Claire Adams, is also leaving the College to return to her native Australia. She will be sorely missed.

The Gallery has benefitted immensely from the professional photographic skills of Dominic Mifsud and the film and podcasting expertise of Mansour Shabbak. The Director extends her heartfelt thanks to them for the many hours they have both spent making a record of the Peltz's activities. Our web maestra for the School of Arts, Nancy Campbell, has been our key support for web-based publicizing of Peltz events and exhibitions and has maintained the Peltz website along with a huge raft of other responsibilities. Thank you. Andrew Youngson, in the Birkbeck Press Office has worked tirelessly to support the Peltz and to find other promotional outlets for its events.

We do not have a dedicated install and de-install team at the Peltz and the Gallery is therefore very thankful for the expertise of colleagues at the National Portrait Gallery, Ian Gardiner and Glenn Taylor and for the good will and hard work of Birkbeck Estates, especially Gary McCarthy and his team of carpenters and decorators as well as the expert lighting assistance of Arfan Khan (Birkbeck electrician) and the skills of Dave Murray in monitoring and collating the footfall from each exhibition. Audio Visual set up and other specialist technical assistance has frequently come from Steve Hurford, with Dave Wilcox supplying his expertise to ensure correct installation and functioning of computer and digitized technology. Many thanks to you all.

The Peltz relies on the advice and creative input of members of the Arts Space Steering Committee: Dr. Patrizia di Bello, Dr. Gabriel Koureas, Dr. Ben Cranfield, Dr. Luciana Martins, Dr. Sophie Hope, Dr. Michael Temple, Dr. Heather Tilley and Dr. Wendy Earle. Many thanks to you all for the time and energy you have put into the Gallery over these past two years.

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