

ALMA PEARL

Positions, part three

11 July – 10 August 2024



Milena Dragicevic, *Erections For Transatlantica (Noor)*, 2024

Alma Pearl is pleased to present *Positions, part three*, an exhibition curated by writer and critic John Slyce. *Positions* is a cycle of exhibitions structured around personal and professional connections, conviviality and the social. The elective affinities that emerge are both animated and at once expected but still come forward as an uncanny if not wholly unexpected surprise.

Featuring Frank Ammerlaan, Charles Avery, Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press, David Batchelor, Terence Birch, Keith Coventry, Milena Dragicevic, Hester Finch, Lucy Kumara Moore, Jeff McMillan, Neal Rock and Richard Woods.

“This is the third iteration and smaller by half in number of artists participating than the first two. For perhaps this reason, I suspect, some themes may have guided the selection of artists and works. The curation, as much as it happens, is decidedly social. I am happy to invite the selected artists to suggest what they would like to

show in a given context. My aim is to make manifest and material conversations and overlaps in work, life and practices, but more importantly to then allow the work to speak of this in hushed tones rather than burdening something so effervescent and ethereal with a voice-over that kills the magic. No one works in isolation to other voices or positions. Art, for me, is always already a social practice. This I feel is perhaps even more apparent in this third iteration.

As a space, Alma Pearl functions as something of a möbius strip where the front could be considered the back and the back the front. *Positions, part 3* thus has two alternative beginnings and endings. One version starts with Richard Woods' isometric considerations on a tree stump shifting between two and three dimensions of painted wood. Charles Avery then offers a new evolution to his Islanders cycle in the noumenal presence of (*A world of seven things or Alimentari*). These shape-shifting atomic forms are at once graphic and abstract, and Charles' (*Figure one with another thing*) is positioned at the close (or opening room) in the show. *Untitled (Burgundy H-211)* is a beautiful relief and relic—a painting that Jeff McMillan began in 2020 and installed on the exterior wall of his studio off the Holloway Road. Harvested here in 2024, Jeff has reformed the painted linen as a concertina thus continuing a thread that runs through the show where one thing becomes another. David Batchelor's *Cave Painting 02* is from a new series of paintings on aluminium where colour is pushed to the edge opening a central dense black void that electrifies the border. Milena Dragicevic's *Erections for Transatlantica (Noor)* is a recent work in her ongoing series where a fictional place is established to make possible multiplicities of being and identity in paint. *Noor* here refers to Noor Inayat-Khan, or Nora Baker, or even her codename Madeleine which she used as an agent in the Special Operations Executive during the Second World War. A wireless operator, Noor was sent from the UK to occupied France to aid the French Resistance. Betrayed and captured, she was executed at Dachau.

Keith Coventry's estate paintings—at once social and formal—have been amongst my favourites since the 1990s. *Manor Estate* is from 2001 and takes its Constructivist form—I believe—from the arrangement of public housing in Bermondsey. Alongside in the second room is Hester Finch's *Why did you disobey your program* from 2024. This painting operates equally on a conceptual and visual plane as she combines new technologies with old to explore earlier moments in popular and visual culture—particularly film—as well as painting in the second half of the 20c. Within the surface here is a rumination on military might, robots, masculinity, and sex.

Room 3 opens with Lucy Kumara Moore's portrait of *Sophie Scholl* from 2023 joins that of *Joan Didion*, 2024. Didion—an inspiration to many—is depicted here with all her wrinkles and wisdom gathered across a writerly life. Scholl was a German student and member of the anti-Nazi non-violent resistance group the White Rose.

Scholl, here looking very much a Bauhaus woman and as well reminiscent of the post-1989 club scene, was convicted of high treason after being found distributing anti-war leaflets at the University of Munich. She was executed by guillotine in February of 1943 aged 21. Neal Rock's work *Lepsis*, 2021 speaks of the bodily fragment as well as the combined line and form of drawing in painting. At once poetic, mournful, and reflective, Neal is conjuring here something elegiac through abstraction. *Untitled (inaccessible)*, 2019, by Terence Birch represents interconnected objects. Depicted is a place where prosthetic legs could become crowned in forests and residual limbs sensitive to tree stumps. As the artist reclines against his easel, all share the same space dreaming of a hopeful future, or perhaps just a quiet night. Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press closes the room with *2024 (Tomcat)*, 2024, an image of a calendar that gathers all the months and days across a calamitous year for peace.

For me, there is a votive tone to Room 4. Frank Ammerlaan's *Untitled (Body Armour Series)*, 2022 is a diminutive but powerfully beautiful painting made from folded lead. Its iridescent sheen renders the poisonous connotations of the material inviting. Alongside is *Birch, Gatsby, Gabriola* by Fiona Banner aka The Vanity Press from 2021. The solid typefaces in oil bob in the seascape of a found painting. One thing becomes another. As we reach the end (only to discover we are back at the beginning), we encounter Charles Avery's *(Figure one with another thing)*, 2024. Positioned somewhere between the devotional and the ridiculous, a confection of shapes that have migrated from the start of the show gather as a Madonna, an icon of sorts for another time and place that is a metaphor for our own."

John Slyce