Stills promotes Photography as an art by providing a range of expertise, facilities and services which explore and develop the medium and contemporary visual arts practice. We provide Residents with critical and technical expertise for one year to develop a new phase of works. Our priority is to enable and engage with the process of artistic development, thus liberating the artist to experiment freely with specialist support, while increasing our understanding of their motivations, methodologies and practical needs. www.stills.org

Front cover image: The DILATE Archive, Act 1: Stepping Out, 2009 (video still) Lyndsay Mann participated in Stills’ Residency Programme in 2008 / 09

Lyndsay Mann

Essay by Kerstin Mey
In the moment where skin gets into contact with itself, it folds in on itself, consciousness of the embodied self comes into being, asserts Michel Serres in his seminal text The Five Senses (1984, English 2008). Lyndsay Mann speaks to and provokes and trace such moments. Her phrase ‘We rise to the hope that it physically can’t go with ideology’ maps out a programmatic framework for her recent body of work that has unfolded in multi-media directions around central sculptural concerns. This somewhat cryptic and contrived statement ‘surfaced’ as laser-cut out in a classic serif typeface on a grey cloth. The unhemmed fabric carrier is suspended over a wooden slat in a seemingly makeshift fashion. It dissects the exhibition space between a steel column and the wall boxing. Its appearance presents itself in terms. The voice of the lettering through which the fold of the fabric shines takes on a powerful presence over the smooth tactility of the textile skin. This at first sight rather lacunary intervention gradually reveals its ideological heavy weight when it is grasped as covet reference to the foundations of Christian belief: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God,’ (John 1:1); and ‘And the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us...’ (John 1:1-2).

Text-based displays have played a prominent role in Mann’s aesthetic strategy, where writing forms an integral part of her exploration of self and reality. Her creative inquiry writing forms an integral part of her exploration of self and reality. Her extensive reading and research is directed at an understanding of how the ideological attitudes manifest in the physical behaviour of the human body.

Mann’s creative endeavours are admittedly motivated by an acute sense of the deteriorating rootlessness of human existence in the material world. Such perceived loss of objecthood has been triggered by the ever-increasing reach of the digital ether and the impact of virtual realities. Does this alter our ability to harness, to the physical groundings of our environment disappers? What are the consequences for the work of art when its material basis disappares? What does this do to its power of communication and to its agency in (any) national exchange? These are some of the questions that have inspired and philosphical concerns. Therefore it is perhaps not surprising that the juxtaposition of material display and sound and/or –audio-visual performance has evolved recently as a powerful trajectory in Mann’s spatial interventions. Indeed, the sound of her own embodied voice and the experimentation with its expressivity and performativity has brought an altogether new dimension to her deep material practice. Reciting her own writings, she writes essays even while she is in the process of losing her own paintings and emotional resonances with a resonant voice that embraces the rich modulations of longing and desire. Yet the sources and destinations of these affects in question are deliberately covert, refusing to be located through locational operations. Instead, the seductive voicescapes lure the imagination and in some instances invoke mysterious narrative associations.

The woven carpet of noise generated in the audio work ‘Greater Than’, where the spoken voices intimate, strangled sounds based on the recording and editing of individual words into sound structures woven into the rhythmic structure of the narrative. Their syntactical sampling and layering creates an expressive acoustic spatiality that invokes an echoing and absorption of utterances saturating the exhibition space. The sculpture rather than simply adhering to the physical groundings of the material world, the woven carpet of noise generated in the audio work ‘Greater Than’, where the spoken voices intimate, strangled sounds based on the recording and editing of individual words into sound structures woven into the rhythmic structure of the narrative.

In the moment where skin gets into contact with itself, it folds in on itself, it friction between the skin’s cognition and rationalist containment of the physical objects on site and in sight of Mann’s recent exhibition. The sculptural intervention could be seen to be grasping in its entirety and thus requires an interaction from the viewing and perceiving viewer and her body. Such physical exchange depends on space for the body to manoeuvre, and on distance to direct the screening gaze and haptic sensing.

To the recent group show Heavy Infuence (Edinburgh, 2009), the artist contributed a small object on a pastel covered by a perplex display case and set in proximity to a video work. In the latter, the artist hosts a part scripted, part improvisated dialogue in a 3-way interview dynamic, where the viewer is unsure whether the primary character is talking to herself or conducting an experimental conversation.

Her handmade exhibit consists of trade quality metal brackets, nuts and bolts cruely screwed together. Its mechanically engineered DIY ‘body’ is largely concealed, wrapped and stitched snug in skin-tone fabric. Speaking eloquently of its process of assembling the work oscillates between rehearsed craftsmanship and calculated improvisation. As it stretches along a main diagonal axis, it resembles a resurrecting human structure, particularly with the humanizing of Henry Moore’s covet bronze sculptures reverberates. According to the artist, this ‘object lesson’ symbolises her brain; a potent associative link that comes to bear pain. The digital audio visual image sequentially as semi-transparent overlays on Mann’s face in the accompanying video piece. This insertion and partial ‘cover-up’ intersects with the artist’s direct on-screen address of the viewer.

The sculptural invention is remarkable in another way as it converges Mann’s software and hardware approaches into one almost ‘animate’ body with a dual existence: the ‘object’-a reminder of conceptual gesture. Geometrically, the montage, which vacillates between part for the whole and whole for its parts, embodies and exemplifies the artist’s conviction to integrate the corporeal with the concept, the physical with the conceptual and the conceptual with the physical. Such a fusion is profound to the emotive dimension of speech. Its realisation echoes Julia Kristeva’s attempt in her work Revolution in Poetic Language (1974, English translation 1984) to open up spaces for the manifestation of female subjectivity inbetween the hostile and exclusive symbolic regime of representation and significance based on the Laws of the Father.

Those interpellations and pauses, intonations, the pitch and rhythm of the female voice – her own – are as rupturing as they are suggestive. Mann’s ‘resoundings’ may propose proximity and possibility, and yet they could also intimate excess, chaos and provoke imitation or indifference in which true poetic invention is swallowed up or ground down. The work deliberately remains within significant ambiguity. A similar effect is achieved when the artist captures the throwing of rocks from Dean Bridge – an infamous stone throw spot in Edinburgh in her video work ‘Twenty Four Hours of Progress.....’ Rhythm and repetition are foregrounded with subtle differences between each sequence.

Sound’s ubiquity and emotive veiling suggests a contraposition to the formalist geometry and rationalist containment of the physical objects on site and in sight of Mann’s recent exhibition. The sculptural intervention could be seen to be grasping in its entirety and thus requires an interaction from the viewing and perceiving viewer and her body. Such physical exchange depends on space for the body to manoeuvre, and on distance to direct the screening gaze and haptic sensing.

To the recent group show Heavy Infuence (Edinburgh, 2009), the artist contributed a small object on a pastel covered by a perplex display case and set in proximity to a video work. In the latter, the artist hosts a part scripted, part improvisated dialogue in a 3-way interview dynamic, where the viewer is unsure whether the primary character is talking to herself or conducting an experimental conversation.

Her handmade exhibit consists of trade quality metal brackets, nuts and bolts cruely screwed together. Its mechanically engineered DIY ‘body’ is largely concealed, wrapped and stitched snug in skin-tone fabric. Speaking eloquently of its process of assembling the work oscillates between rehearsed craftsmanship and calculated improvisation. As it stretches along a main diagonal axis, it resembles a resurrecting human structure, particularly with the humanizing of Henry Moore’s covet bronze sculptures reverberates. According to the artist, this ‘object lesson’ symbolises her brain; a potent associative link that comes to bear pain. The digital audio visual image sequentially as semi-transparent overlays on Mann’s face in the accompanying video piece. This insertion and partial ‘cover-up’ intersects with the artist’s direct on-screen address of the viewer.

The sculptural invention is remarkable in another way as it converges Mann’s software and hardware approaches into one almost ‘animate’ body with a dual existence: the ‘object’-a reminder of conceptual gesture. Geometrically, the montage, which vacillates between part for the whole and whole for its parts, embodies and exemplifies the artist’s conviction to integrate the corporeal with the concept, the physical with the conceptual and the conceptual with the physical. Such a fusion is profound to the emotive dimension of speech. Its realisation echoes Julia Kristeva’s attempt in her work Revolution in Poetic Language (1974, English translation 1984) to open up spaces for the manifestation of female subjectivity inbetween the hostile and exclusive symbolic regime of representation and significance based on the Laws of the Father.

Kerstin Mey (2009)