

Things Happen All the Time

Ana Milenkovic

Georgia Gendall

Harry Grundy

Oliver Hoffmeister

Slugtown are pleased to present *Things Happen All the Time*, a group exhibition of four artists based across the UK: Ana Milenkovic, Georgia Gendall, Harry Grundy and Oliver Hoffmeister.

Our current climate is defined by global turmoil, chaos and confusion. For many, it feels like our grip on reality and choice over our direction is, at best, slipping from one's grip. At worst, it seems out of our hands completely.

The title of the exhibition is taken from an excerpt from the film *Magnolia* (1999) by Paul Thomas Anderson. Taking place over 24 hours in the San Fernando Valley, California the film focuses on a kaleidoscopic web of interrelations between a seemingly disparate cast of characters all seeking forgiveness, reconciliation and connection. Weaving its way through the narrative is the notion that no matter how hard we might try and control the path of our lives, we are all vulnerable to the chaotic and often absurd interruptions of chance and coincidence.

Things Happen All the Time features the work of artists who explore what it means to cede control. For some that comes through employing chance and luck in their practice. For others, they explore ritual and ruling systems.

Ana Milenkovic chooses to paint those who wield the power to influence. Hanging at the entrance to the exhibition is a closely cropped portrait of Elon Musk. He holds a hand over his mouth in a pose that conveys introspective musing, or perhaps boredom. Either way, his presence as the only recognisable portrait looms over the exhibition like a spectre. He doesn't

hold our gaze, but he's watching. His is an insidious power. His algorithm seeping into daily lives, holding sway over what we see and what we don't.

In *Penny*, an image of British politician Penny Mordaunt, Milenkovic repositions the focus from the MP to the red ministerial folder Mordaunt holds in her hands. The cropping is tight, disregarding the politician entirely save for the work's title, and making the plush leather-bound folder the central focus. In doing so, this inanimate, banal object, replete with the tabs of multi-coloured dividers, becomes much more than that. It is an object that despite, and perhaps because of, its simple everydayness, is made sinister by its contents and who is holding it. A simple red folder with the power to influence the lives of so many, but brandished by a representative of a party focussed solely on its own self-preservation.

Unlike *Elon*, and *Penny*, there is no subject in *Chit-Chat*. *Nothing* is the subject. A gap, a blank space. Much of the surface depicts the sleek leather interior of a car under the light of camera flash from a press photographer. On either flank are slivers of two people, their faces all but cropped out. Clad in a magenta hat and matching jacket it becomes clear one is the late Queen Elizabeth II, the other, also in a hat and pinstripe blazer (that looks expensive – even in paint) evidently another royal. Milenkovic's painting is soaked with tension, painting the space between the figures as a claustrophobic vacuum. It brings the monarchy, its legitimacy and purpose under the bright heat of the spotlight at a time when the once powerful institution is wobbling like never before.

Whereas Milenkovic works predominantly from images taken herself or mined from the press, the paintings and drawings of Oliver Hoffmeister are formed entirely in the artist's head and on the canvas. Making figurative work with no photographic reference point is an increasingly uncommon pursuit in an image-saturated, post-real world. Hoffmeister chooses to approach his paper and canvas with little to no frame of reference, allowing the shapes and marks that form on the surface to lead him; paving the way for the next intervention, the next mark. They are paintings made from hundreds of micro-decisions on the course of action to take.

As a way to begin, sometimes he will start with a shape, other times with a self-imposed rule that operates as a loose framework. In *Profile & Frame*, and *Face & H* for example, he uses the capitalised letter 'H' as pictorial scaffolding upon which to build his

paintings. In this glyph-based series, he manipulates and exploits the fallibility of language to truly communicate. The letters provide no information or context, a dereliction of their usual duty as a team player in the game of communication. Here they are reduced back to their formal basics, empty combinations of verticals and horizontals, leaving the viewer to piece together what is unfolding. A futile task. The figures present in many of Hoffmeister's works give little away either. They watch and look with faces that betray no emotion, despite finding themselves in unsettling pseudo-ritualic situations. They know something we don't, and it is unnerving.

There are two central protagonists in Georgia Gendall's video work *Why Did the Scarecrow Win an Award?*. In the short film, the farm setting becomes a theatrical stage for our main characters: the scarecrow (played by the artist) and the crop of wheat they oversee. Gendall made the film over the course of one growing season in Cornwall, using footage taken exclusively from motion sensor cameras. Over the course of many days, the cameras record the wind animating the wheat, pick up the buzzing of insects close to the lens, and catch glimpses of local deer. The dialogue that plays out over audio and text is a combination of overheard snippets and scripted speech, and follows a back and forth conversation between the scarecrow and the wheat. At times it is sublime – when Gendall stands arms outstretched in the baking summer sun, the wheat billowing around her, it is a wonderful pastoral scene. Until, hard cut, the timestamp clicks into late August, and a spluttering tractor harvests the wheat in a melee of swirling machinery and diesel fumes, puncturing the bucolic sight.

The film is a candid reflection on the realities of rural life; of queer existence, farming, and land access. It disrupts and upends romantic ideas of the rural as idyll, and ultimately showcases how local ecosystems, humans and farming, operate under the behest of global food production – a behemothic system equally vital and destructive, growing at such a rate as to be running out of control.

Similarly to Gendall, Harry Grundy's practice explores the natural world. A world which, in the artist's words, finds itself 'in a deeply unnatural moment'. In *Things Happen All the Time*, Grundy exhibits two works. *Finding a Six, Ten Plans* features a small wooden plan chest, the sort used to archive drawings and paper, placed against the gallery wall. One drawer from the chest is removed, hung vertically

on the gallery wall. Two hand-carved chalk dice sit in the drawer. They are made from locally sourced chalk – these from the cliffs of Botany Bay, Kent. The drawing within the drawer, is a result of the artist rolling the dice until he rolls a six.

Climate Thing is a photograph of a seascape, with sea and sky meeting at the horizon perfectly in the middle of the image. The grey sea, set against a grey sky gives a distinctly British feel, and the work is installed tight behind the grey concrete pillar of the gallery, mostly obscured. Once again, Grundy leaves the decision making in the work up to chance. Taking a thermal measurement of the pillar (19°C), he scours his image archive for a picture taken at a time with the precise matching temperature. Grundy has installed the work to deliberately hide behind the pillar. He wants viewers to touch, hug, lean on the pillar, in order to better view the photo and to feel the temperature sensation of the image.

In both works, Grundy highlights the uncomfortable truth of the climate emergency. It is a crisis on a worldwide scale, and requires wholesale action at a governmental level. It can feel impossible to tackle alone. But, in *Climate Thing* and *Finding a Six, Ten Plans* Grundy's approach manages to make the issue feel real. Personal, and condensed. Touchable and manageable. Not necessarily optimistic, but not negative either. Enjoy it, savour it, and take action where you can.

For all enquiries, please email:
contact.slugtown@gmail.com

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