

UK

MELISSA GORDON Spike Island, Bristol

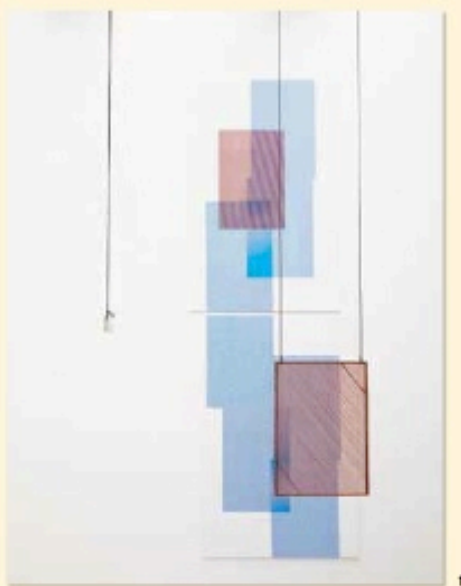
'Material Evidence' was Melissa Gordon's first solo exhibition in a public space in the UK, the result of a residency hosted by Spike Island and Spike Print Studio. As well as site-specific productions, the show included work from three ongoing series – Gordon's continuing investigations into the legacy of Modernist abstraction and the intimacies of process. The particular success of 'Material Evidence' was how Gordon synthesized in her site-specific work both her inter-series dialogues and her response to the eight-metre-high main gallery.

This response was *Structures for Viewing* (2013), a two-colour triptych and diptych. Each set of canvases comprises screen-printed blocks of halftone lines on the diagonal, and, suspended a couple of metres in front of these, wooden frames strung with nylon cords of contrasting colours, threaded on the opposing diagonal. Patterns of disturbance occurred where blocks had been overlaid, while further interference could be introduced by the visitor, either via his or her movement through the gallery, or by viewing the prints through the half-mesh of the suspended screens. To walk between screen and canvas felt disruptive.

Process – or, rather, the evidence of process – is the focus of Gordon's 'Material Evidence' series, which she began in 2011. The two paintings created for this show, *Material Evidence (Table)* and *Material Evidence (Wall)* (both 2013), were based on photos of the work surfaces in Gordon's London studio, the images blown up and cropped to highlight details then re-created on canvas. The series title recalls an earlier painting of Gordon's, *Crimeboard for an Elusive Primodono* (2005), a montage of images from an incident room. 'Material Evidence' similarly depicts a presence indicating an absence, a series of traces in place of a missing referent.

The term 'Material Evidence' suggests proof, but also justification – a loaded term in the context of Gordon's 'Blow Up' series (2011), her study of Western Modernism's legacy of patriarchal abstraction. Gordon is on the look-out for weaknesses in the male line: she researches reproductions of works by canonical artists (Mondrian, Pollock and Van Doesburg), specifically, images that reproduce visible traces of deterioration in the original work. She then abstracts from these abstracts: enlarging these signs of distress, she highlights the works' limited life span as objects in the world, simultaneously extracting from them new abstractions. The resulting black and white screen-prints suggest the inkiness and granularity of photocopies of photocopies; they speak of well-worn, over-handled images.

Similar strategies of mediation and abstraction are evident in a third line of enquiry, the series 'The Daily News RIP' (2013), in which Gordon engages with the structures of newspaper layouts to create scenarios for abstract composition. Taking the front pages of now-defunct newspapers, Gordon empties them of text and uses the remaining grid structures as the basis for full-colour



paintings. This exercise brings to mind Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day* (2003), where he transcribed all the text printed in *The New York Times* on 1 September 2000. The weighting of news items via the paper's layout and grid structure was removed in Goldsmith's act of transcription, hierarchies of significance destabilized by facile juxtapositions. In Gordon's two diptychs, *Daily Evening Star/The Washington Star* (1952–1997) and *Daily Evening Transcript/Boston Evening Transcript* (1848–1941) (both 2013), suggestions of informational hierarchy were retained by the structures, despite their being emptied of text; her use of colour to fill in the grids suggested an encoding, rather than an elimination, of the original content.

Thematic ley lines cut across this show, paralleling the cross-hatching created in *Structures for Viewing* by the interactions between viewer, canvas and screen. These cross-currents were not restricted to the gallery: the field of response and counter-response extended across the nearby river, to the Arnolfini Gallery and Ian Hamilton Finlay's exhibition there: among the hundreds of post-cards on display was one bearing the text, 'Join the Saint-Just Vigilantes and be a counter-composition.' The accompanying image, a black abstract which brought to mind one in Gordon's own 'Blow Up' series, with a note from Finlay: 'acknowledgement to Theo van Doesburg'.

NATASHA SOOBRAMANIEV

1
Melissa Gordon, *Structures for Viewing*, 2013, installation view, screenprint on canvas, frames, rope, pulley system, 1.9 x 3 m

2
Liubov Popova
Maquette for the City of the Future, 1921, framed photograph, 14 x 21 cm, installation view

3
'Indifferent Matter', installation view, foreground: Andy Warhol, *Silver Clouds*, 1966, helium-filled metalized plastic balloons

UK

ANGUISH & ENTHUSIASM Cornerhouse, Manchester

We live, as the apocryphal Chinese curse goes, in interesting times. With ongoing reverberations from 2010's 'Arab Spring' and Occupy, the indignados and unrest from the suburbs of Stockholm and across Brazil, we find ourselves in an era of incessant protest and activism. So what comes next? 'Anguish and Enthusiasm' took its name from a chapter in Russian writer Victor Serge's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1945), which describes the period between the 1917 revolution and the foundation of the USSR. The question of the exhibition's subtitle, 'What Do You Do With Your Revolution Once You've Got It', remained unanswered, but was approached with various documentary forms, all of which acknowledge that any attempt at answer can only be a fiction. 'Anguish and Enthusiasm' featured a dozen artists and filmmakers over three floors, with almost six hours of moving-image works, not including the ambitious accompanying screening programme.

Co-curated by the Cornerhouse's programme director Sarah Perks and Irish artist Declan Clarke, 'Anguish and Enthusiasm' was part historical corrective and part cautionary tale. It bounced from instances of upheaval from the past two centuries to examinations of post-communist governments, skipping through the UK, Angola, China, Germany, France, Cuba and Russia. Rather than simply making the obvious point that revolutionary ideals are dissipated after any sort of change, the exhibition benefited from trying to locate how these ideals mutate and continue to disseminate, not always beneficially. Jun Yang's short video *Paris Syndrome* (2007–8) made the point bluntly but effectively, placing a young Chinese couple in a range of bizarre and sterile empty city sets, as they stare blankly into the distance. It could be a clothing ad set in Miami or Los Angeles or anywhere, though it was actually filmed in a series of new housing developments in the Guangzhou region – a Hollywood fantasy in the world's largest 'Communist' regime. At times, though, the exhibition's broad focus was overreaching: a small portrait, Jeann-Marie (c. 1888), by Berthe Morisot is used as an example of how, according to the exhibition booklet, 'whether intentionally or otherwise, the Impressionists helped to reclaim the [Paris] city centre for the bourgeoisie and eradicate the legacy of the [1871] Commune from the city'.

But sweeping overstatements were tempered by uncertainty. From the outset, 'Anguish and Enthusiasm' felt like a series of abandoned stage sets, as we wandered into the ordered remnants of Sarah Pierce's *Gog* (2013). Wads of tape, paper and other debris from installing an exhibition were arranged in spot-lit piles on low plinths. Easels displayed photographs documenting the show itself being installed. Next door, Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc's short film *Ça va ça va on continue (It is OK, it is OK, We Go On, 2012–13)* pits a Portuguese academic, apparently researching Angolan theatre,