

Culture > Art > Reviews

Johanna Billing, Camden Arts Centre, London

Swedish artist, Johanna Billing makes films that document loosely choreographed events. This exhibition is comprised of six projects from the last eight years of her career.

Billing's films typically involve a brief gathering of young people in a single location. These subjects often become both actors and spectators with the camera alternating in focus between the individual and collective. To that end, creative activities such as music and dance figure prominently in her repertoire. *You Don't Love Me Yet* (2002-9) is an ongoing project to amass cover versions of the titular song by Roky Erickson.

From San Francisco to Milton Keynes, Billing has organised over 20 gigs worldwide inviting local bands to give their take on the song. DVDs from the project's seven-year tour are scattered across a table in the main gallery for visitors to select for self-service viewing. Treatments vary in degrees of irony and earnestness as the musicians attempt to give the song its ultimate rendition. The atmosphere skirts between conviviality and competition as a sometime act of homage becomes occasionally closer to a battle of the bands.

Other works present a more united front. In *Magical World* (2005), a group of school children in a dilapidated cultural centre in Zagreb sing about transformation. The subjects of *This Is How We Walk on the Moon* (2007) and *Magic and Loss* (2005) are similarly focused on the task at hand (sailing and moving house). Billing's signature gathering and her themes of community, authority, direction and authorship are illustrated with such rigour by this selection of work that her metaphors for society and the creative process are hard to miss.

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS

I'm Lost without Your Rhythm (2009) is the centrepiece and title film of the exhibition. It documents a live event involving dance and drama students at a school in Iasi, Romania. Billing worked with a choreographer and a group of local musicians to devise the basic elements for a partly improvised performance. Halfway up a curved staircase a young woman pretends to smoke an imaginary cigarette. On a blue carpet a group of teenagers roll their heads or draw circles with their arms and legs. The dancers move about the building, running through the corridors, flopping to the carpet and drumming their fists and feet on the walls and floors.

The degree of creative effort on the part of Billing's participants coupled with her casual observational style of editing is occasionally hard to bear. There is an over-enthusiastic pianist in *Magical World* deftly obscured by the edit and the cleaners, caretakers and surly youths on the sidelines of *I'm Lost without Your Rhythm* are another case in point. They form a Greek chorus of bewilderment in the film, undermining any real interest in the floor show.

To 13 September (020-7472 5500; www.camdenartscentre.org); then Arnolfini, Bristol and Modern Art Oxford