

1-2 WARNER YARD
LONDON EC1R 5EY
TEL: +44 (0)207 837 5991
OFFICE@HOLLYBUSHGARDENS.CO.UK
WWW.HOLLYBUSHGARDENS.CO.UK

From: Frieze
Reto Pulfer
By Linda Taylor
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Frieze

UK

RETO PULFER Spike Island, Bristol

On an unusually hot British summer evening, Reto Pulfer's installation *MMMS Reticulum Gewässerzeiten* (2015) appeared like a desert mirage in the intense white light of the central gallery at Spike Island. (An unwieldy if descriptive title, *MMMS* stands for maps, mnemonics, methods and spiele – games in German; *reticulum* is Latin for net; *Gewässerzeiten* roughly translates as 'water times') Tremulous ribbons of golden yellows and aquatic blues hung from a large, partially constructed nautical net hoisted overhead. Below, a bell, a cotton tent, a food tin and canister, a sail-like shelter stitched from bed sheets and an arrangement of painted wooden string instruments resembled both a Bedouin camp and an improvised childhood den. The net is an orderly grid indicating safety but also invoking the depths and caprices of the ocean. The scene is set for a story or, rather, myriad possible stories – of adventure, peril and survival in distant lands and treacherous seas – but told and imagined from the comfort and sanctuary of under the blankets.

This amalgamation of the familiar and the fantastical continued in an adjacent corridor with Pulfer's 'Maps' series (2009–15). The large watercolours are approximations of places Pulfer has lived, visited or imagined – from his birthplace of Bern to Ancient Abydos. The artist's two-part performance on opening night had a similar air – casting the artist as a wandering minstrel bringing tales of the long ago, far away or yet-to-be. (A verse from a Gilbert and Sullivan opera came to mind: 'A wandering minstrel I; A thing of shreds and patches; Of ballads songs and snatches; And dreamy lullaby!') The final stages of a live raku firing taking place on the pavement outside the gallery were introduced by the sound of Pulfer's electric guitar – rather than the lute or lyre of his medieval counterpart. Layering looping chords with the closed-eyed, earnest concentration of a wannabe rock star, the artist produced waves of sound that continued to

reverberate as he ceremoniously lifted each ceramic from the kiln to cool in sawdust. Raku ware, whose name derives from the Japanese family that have been making it since the late 1500s, is particularly prized for use in the traditional, ritualistic Japanese tea ceremony. The technique, honed over centuries, nevertheless continues to give rise to an infinite array of unpredictable results. This has a particular resonance in terms of Pulfer's work, where a convergence of system and chance, stability and mutability, is reflected in the show's title: *Gewässerzeiten* is a neologism that combines the German words for 'water' and 'tides' – one fluid and unstable, the other predictable and regular. Pulfer's use of systems is revealed in *Methoden und Spieletisch* (Methods and Games Table, 1988–2015), which comprises 44 works laid out and minutely labelled like museum exhibits. The works include combinatorial games and charts, and maquettes of improbable sculptures that the artist made as a child. *Methoden und Spieletisch* acts as a kind of reference grid and creation myth for Pulfer and his work.

A guitar interlude also introduced the second part of the performance in the central gallery. (My rock star allusion holds – at one point, Pulfer played the guitar behind his head, Hendrix-style.) The artist enacted an indecipherable but peculiarly compelling ritual, tying the freshly cooled ceramics to other elements of the *MMMS Reticulum Gewässerzeiten* installation with shoelaces. He leapt, crept and crawled between objects, as though re-enacting a private, silent story. It made me think of the Classical mnemonic technique by which lengthy orations were memorized by visualizing a path through an imagined familiar space (sometimes known as a 'memory palace'). Continuing the performance, Pulfer used handfuls of silt from the local river (which had been incongruously standing by, topped with nettles, in a wheelbarrow) to daub the words *Pass auf Gina* (Watch out Gina) and *verfolgt* (hunted or pursued) – fragments of latent narratives – on the gallery floor. Pulfer signalled the end of the performance with a jubilant vocal trill and sounded the bell before leaving the building. I like to think of him riding off into the sunset on his trusty steed, but perhaps I'm overly affected by quixotic tales.

LINDA TAYLOR

IRELAND

DISPLAY SHOW Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin

Curated by Gavin Wade (with Céline Condorelli and James Langdon), the first iteration of 'Display Show' (it will travel to Eastside Projects, Birmingham, and Stroom Den Haag, the Hague, over the next year) looked anew at avant-garde exhibition-making, whilst simultaneously stressing the politics inherent in its contemporary forms. One important reference point, the De Stijl group, prioritized the synthesis of life and art; another – the Bauhaus designer Herbert Bayer – created the 'Universal' typeface, which eliminated the need for capitalization. 'Display Show' reconsidered these utopian propositions and, by extension, the modernist project more broadly. Its embedded working method, which has been integral to many of Wade's artistic and curatorial projects at least since 'This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things' (2009), works to foreground the possibility of display's transformative role within a contemporary public sphere.

Throughout, individual but scarcely demarcated works appeared to seep in and out of each other: works by Fiore Novè-Josserand (*Thoughts on the conceptualization of space and mechanisms of display, relative to subjectivity and emotion, in schematic form, with reference to [Herbert Bayer] [Frederick Kiesler] [Lina Bo Bardi] [Eileen Gray] [Adolf Krischanitz] [El Lissitzky] [Carlo Scarpa] [Franco Albini] among Others, Temple Bar Version, 2015*) and Ellis McDonald (*Numinous Objects, 2010-2015*) were mounted on top of Wade's Z-Type Display Unit (*After Kiesler & Krischanitz*) (2015). Wade's sculpture, in turn, referenced both De Stijl designer Frederick Kiesler's L+T display units (1924) and architect Adolf Krischanitz's mobile wall system, created for the renovation of the Vienna Secession in 1986. The size and position of Andrew Lacon's wall-based work, *A Display for Sculpture 07* (2015) was dictated by Wade's – admittedly counterintuitive – proposal for the location of the gallery's new entrance, on the internal back wall of the space. One of Condorelli's pieces, *Sound of the Swindler* (2015) comprised a 20-minute ambient recording of her studio, the sounds of work and daily life blurring with the noise from the lively Dublin streets outside the gallery space: a nod to Kiesler's holistic approach to exhibition-making. Similarly, Christopher William's *Hortenkachel* (2013), an abstract representation of a type of brick used in German buildings to eliminate the need for windows, worked in symbiosis with Wade's luminous *Mobile Wall System with two permanent pole positions* (*After Krischanitz & Kiesler*) (*For Christopher Williams*) (2015) – on which it was hung. Throughout the exhibition, a kind of humility pervaded, with the sense of each component playing a part in an organic whole. Within a dominant culture of individualism – perpetuated by strategies of subjective display – this subjugation of the individual to the whole was refreshing.

The extent to which our sense of self is bound up with forms of display formed an omnipresent motif. McDonald's digital

