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Contemporary Art Magazine



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Hollybush Gardens, Unit 2, BJ House 10 — 14 Hollybush Gardens, London E2 9QP, 19 Oct 2010

## Ruth Proctor: Luck and Protection



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**Artist :** Ruth Proctor  
**Title :** Untitled, Film Still  
**Date(s) :** 2010  
**Website :** [www.hollybushgardens.co.uk](http://www.hollybushgardens.co.uk)  
**Credit :** Courtesy Hollybush Gardens and Ruth Proctor

### Review by Sally Mumby-croft

Luck and Protection is the title of Ruth Proctor's current exhibition at Hollybush Gardens. Upon entering the gallery, the visitor encounters three new pieces of work made during her recent residency in the Columbian city of Cali.

The first, a performance entitled *Super Ruda* (2010), is composed of a slide show and fly posters. The title refers to a superstition local to Cali, where the herb Ruda is said to be imbued with lucky properties, or if used to describe person, it means the characteristic 'tough'. In the slides, Proctor walks the streets wearing a black wig and a cape made from an umbrella used by street vendors to protect their wares. At intervals the cape is lifted upwards, as if in a gesture of protection.

Proctor's choices of props, such as the umbrella in *Super Ruda* are embedded - almost unnoticeably - with the notion of superstition. These translate cross-culturally, as for example it is bad luck to open an umbrella indoors according to British and Columbian lore.

The fly posters dispersed by Proctor around the city represent a transaction between art and culture, a contract that is subsequently imprinted upon the city's architecture. What the artist has absorbed culturally during her stay is returned via the poster. Through an action that is both fleeting and permanent, *Super Ruda* becomes buried within the complex fabric of a living city.

It is through the fly posters, present on the gallery walls and in the slides, that Proctor plays on the double meaning of the word Ruda. The understanding of the word is dependent on locality, culture and perhaps dependent on whether a city's inhabitants feel the need for luck or protection. The fly poster has physically re-inserted a superstition back into public domain via the city's walls

Whether it is through slides, text, sculpture or interventions into architectural space, Proctor draws attention to humanity's shared fear of the unknown or unexplored. In taking up the role of the artist-shaman, Proctor forces us to question the roots of superstition, and it's relevance to our increasingly technophile, digitised world.

In Luck and Protection, Ruth Proctor questions our emotional relationship to superstition as a shared culture. Through the intervention of performance with objects embedded with supernatural properties, Proctor draws attention to the continued and unwavering faith in them to provide both good fortune and a sense of security.