

Press Release

Secular Icons in an Age of Moral Uncertainty

Nathan Coley

Mimosa Echard

Simon Fujiwara

Sara Naim

Indrė Šerpytytė

Curated by Coline Milliard

1 December 2017 –

3 February 2018

Private view:

Thursday 30 November, 6–8pm



Nathan Coley, *Secular Icon in an Age of Moral Uncertainty*, 2008. Fairground lights and aluminium, 46 × 99 × 10 cm
© Nathan Coley 2017. Courtesy Parafin, London

For further details and images
please contact:

Marta Jiménez Tubau

Parafin

+44 (0)20 7495 1969

marta@parafin.co.uk

Caroline Widmer

Pickles PR

+44 (0)7908 848 075

caroline@picklespr.com

At a time when the notion of belief is particularly fraught, *Secular Icons in an Age of Moral Uncertainty* examines contemporary takes on some of the objects we turn to for meaning or solace. Pictures, screens, movies, and commodities are filtered here through formally abstract conceptual propositions, linked by a sense of indeterminacy. Taking its title from Nathan Coley's eponymous grids of fairground lights, the exhibition brings together forms of image-making which – while redolent of an art history spanning from Byzantine icon painting to 20th-century avant-gardes – decidedly engage with the now. Which 'now' they specifically address, though, remains open to interpretation: is it the lure of gore, of entertainment, of luxury? The grisly spectacle of terrorism or the untapped riches of technological obsolescence? More than the objects themselves, what's under scrutiny in *Secular Icons* is the act of looking, the dynamics driving our gaze, and the multitude of projections a collection of pieces so radically distinct encourages.

Nathan Coley is perhaps best known for his large-scale illuminated text pieces, such as *There Will Be No Miracles Here* (2006), which often challenge the human compulsion to belief. Coley's series *Secular Icon(s) In An Age of Moral Uncertainty* (2007-8) reduces the text pieces' formal language to its bare-bone sculptural elements: metal structure and fairground lights. What remains are ambiguous light boxes at once minimal and saturated with visual memories of the funfair, as well as of the now-ubiquitous glow of the smartphone screen. Illuminating their viewers, Coley's *Secular Icons* are simultaneously authoritative and frivolous, awe-inspiring and toy-like. Like most of the works in the exhibition, these pieces articulate a push-and-pull, endlessly unresolved.

If an icon is primarily understood as an object standing for, and allowing access to, another entity – be it religious or cultural – then **Indrė Šerpytytė's** *2 Seconds of Colour* (2015) is among the most icon-like pieces in the exhibition. Her monumental light boxes bring to mind geometric abstraction, but their referent is gruesome. The artist captured the blocks of colour that first come up in any Google Images Search before the pictures are fully loaded. Here the burnt red, deep brown, and opaque black rectangles were triggered by the term 'Isis Beheading'. They stand in for the desert sand, the sky, as well as the victims and executioners' bright clothing. The stark emotional detachment of these Mondrianesque compositions is a powerful response to the mechanisms of spectacle increasingly cultivated by extremist groups. Šerpytytė's pieces forbid any pathos while communicating through their size, and sheer volume, something of the horrors of war and of the folly of any forms of fanaticism. Like all icons, they carve out a space for reflection, connecting us to a reality that cannot be fully comprehended.

Mimosa Echard's *Braindead* (2015) also contrasts opposites, namely the tension between its seductive, shimmery veils and the gory images the series is based on (all lifted from Peter Jackson's 1992 comedy horror movie of the same name). To compose each work, the artist spreads silver acrylic paint on one of the film's ketchup-red stills. She then covers it with a thin piece of fabric and lets it harden. When the photograph is torn away, some of its pigments remain embedded in the paint. Echard embraces the disturbingly entertaining power of broken skin and gushing blood. She stages smooth body surfaces and glistening innards – outside,

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inside – eliciting the uncomfortable site that connects the two, the wound. *Braindead* also tackles the painting medium itself, inevitably loaded with the legacy of movements such as Supports/Surfaces and Abstract Expressionism. Echard's painting is equally physical and process-based, at times almost performative. But ultimately it's the piece, not the gesture, that the artist offers for contemplation. She pins it to the wall, like a relic, or a hide stretched out to dry.

The skin has been cured for some time in **Simon Fujiwara's** *Fabulous Beasts* series (2015-17). Luxurious second-hand fur coats have been shaved to expose the intricate sewing patterns constructing the garments. The leather reveals dozens, sometimes hundreds, of tiny fragments, hinting at the number of animals killed for each jacket. Mounted on stretchers like canvases, Fujiwara's works also summon up a traditional painting language. Yet, although formally suggesting a form of abstraction, the *Fabulous Beasts* are readymade compositions that never cease to refer back to the world. Their seams chart paths in uncanny landscapes, mapping intricate links between comfort, vanity, desire, and death.

Like Fujiwara's *Beasts*, **Sara Naim's** *Reactions* (2016-7) have terrain-like qualities. As with Echard's *Braindead*, they conjure up skins, inside and outside, but here the artist grapples with the materiality of the image itself. The *Reactions* capture the chemicals sandwiched between the positive and negative sheets of an expired Polaroid film. Naim dissects the film's membranes, scans them, and blows choice details up. She relentlessly tests the possibilities of the photographic medium, and the many ways it can exist in two- and three-dimensional spaces. In her hands, damaged film isn't the end of an image, but the beginning of its reinvention: from photography to sculpture. The results are beguiling polyptychs, whose commanding presence echoes the altarpiece's.

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Artist Biographies

Nathan Coley

Nathan Coley (born 1967, Glasgow) was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2007. Recent solo exhibitions include the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2017), Parafin, London (2017), Kunstverein Freiburg (2013), the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver (2012), ACCA, Melbourne (2011). His work was included in *Generation: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland* (2014), *You Imagine What You Desire*, 19th Biennale of Sydney (2014), *Mom, Am I Barbarian*, 13th Istanbul Biennial (2013), *Tales of Time and Space*, Folkestone Triennial, UK (2008), *Days Like These*, Tate Triennial of Contemporary British Art, Tate Britain (2003), and in the *British Art Show 6* at BALTIC (2005). His work is represented in many collections worldwide. Nathan Coley lives and works in Glasgow.

Mimosa Echard

Mimosa Echard (born 1986, Ales, France) studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris and lives and works in Paris. Solo exhibitions include *Pulsion Potion*, Cell Project Space, London (2017), *iDeath*, Galerie Samy Abraham, Paris (2016) and *Dead is the New Life*, Vitrine au Plateau/FRAC Île-de-France, Paris (2015). Recent group exhibitions include *Le Rêve des Formes*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2017), *Pre-capital*, curated by Nicholas Bourriaud, La Panacée, Montpellier, *Independence Day 2*, Sommer Gallery, Tel Aviv, and *The Plates of the Present, So Far*, Galerie Praz-Delavallade, Paris. In 2016 Echard exhibited in *Faisons de l'inconnu un allié*, Lafayette Anticipation, Paris, following her residency at Fondation d'Entreprise des Galeries Lafayette (2015). Her work is in public and private collections including the Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, the Musée National d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Musée Régional d'Art Contemporain Languedoc Roussillon Midi Pyrenees, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Fondation Lafayette, and Samdani Art Foundation. Mimosa Echard is represented by Galerie Samy Abraham, Paris.

Simon Fujiwara

Simon Fujiwara (born 1982, London) studied architecture at Cambridge University and Fine Art at The Städelschule, Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Frankfurt. He lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include *Joanne*, The Photographers' Gallery, London (2016), *The Humanizer*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2016), *Grand Tour*, Kunstverein Braunschweig (2013) and *Simon Fujiwara: since 1982*, Tate St Ives (2012). Recent group exhibitions include *Making and Unmaking*, Camden Arts Centre, London (2016), *Berlin Biennale 9*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin (2016), *British Art Show 8*, Leeds Art Gallery and tour (2015) and *History is Now: 7 Artists Take On Britain*, Hayward Gallery, London (2015). His work is in collections including Tate, London, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Centre Pompidou, Paris, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York and MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt/Main.

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Sara Naim

Sara Naim (born 1987, London) studied at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London College of Communication and The Slade School of Fine Art. She lives and works between London and Paris. Solo exhibitions include *When Heartstrings Collapse*, The Third Line, Dubai (2016) and *Heartstrings*, Hayward Gallery, London (2015). Recent group exhibitions include *The Third Image*, Biennale des Photographes du Monde Arabe Contemporain (2017). Sara Naim is represented by The Third Line, Dubai.

Indrė Šerpytytė

Indrė Šerpytytė (born 1983, Lithuania) studied at the University of Brighton and the Royal College of Art, London. Recent solo exhibitions include *Absence of Experience*, CAC Vilnius (2017), *Pedestal*, Parafin, London (2016), Still House Group, New York (2016), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow (2015) and Ffotogallery, Cardiff (2013). Important recent group exhibitions include the 10th Kaunas Biennial (2017), *Age of Terror: Art Since 9/11*, Imperial War Museum, London (2017), *The Image of War*, Bonniers Konsthall (2017), *Ocean of Images: New Photography 2015* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015), *Conflict, Time, Photography* at Tate Modern and the Museum Folkwang, Essen (2014-15) and the National Gallery, Vilnius (2013). Šerpytytė will participate in the inaugural Front International Triennial of Contemporary Art, Cleveland in 2018.

Editor's Notes

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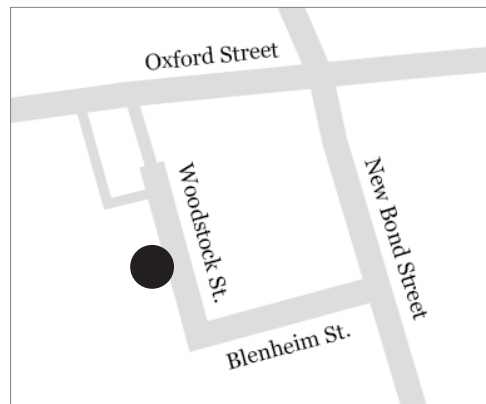
Parafin was launched in September 2014 and is located at 18 Woodstock Street, just off New Bond Street. Parafin represents a broad selection of contemporary artists from emerging names to established international figures.

Gallery artists

Fernando Casasepere	Nathan Coley
Tim Head	Nancy Holt
Hynek Martinec	Melanie Manchot
Enrique Martínez Celaya	Justin Mortimer
Katie Paterson	Hiraki Sawa
Indrė Šerpytytė	Alison Watt
Hugo Wilson	Uwe Wittwer

Woodstock Street, Mayfair

Woodstock Street is located on the northern edge of Mayfair, London, between New Bond Street (via Blenheim Street) and Oxford Street. Parafin is situated near to the historic tiled Art Deco entrance of auction house Bonhams.



Opening Hours

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