

# HA HA ROAD

12 August – 23 October 2011



QUAD Gallery Guide

Gallery Guide produced for the exhibition:

*HA HA ROAD* at  
QUAD Gallery, Derby, England  
from 12 August – 23 October, 2011.

Exhibition co-produced with Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales.  
Mostyn dates: 3 December – 8 January, 2011.

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IMAGE FRONT COVER:  
*Ha-Ha Road, Woolwich, London*  
Courtesy of Nick Constantine, 2009

# HA HA ROAD

12 August to 23 October 2011

Exploring the use of humour in contemporary art, *Ha Ha Road* presents the work of 25 international artists who play with a "rupture of sense".

Taking its title from the name of a street, the exhibition plays on its double meaning. Apart from its connection with laughter, a "ha-ha" also refers to a type of sunken boundary: a wall or fence set into a trench, forming a hidden division in a landscape whilst preserving the scenic view. This invisible frontier serves as a neat metaphor for our relationship to the world of laughter.

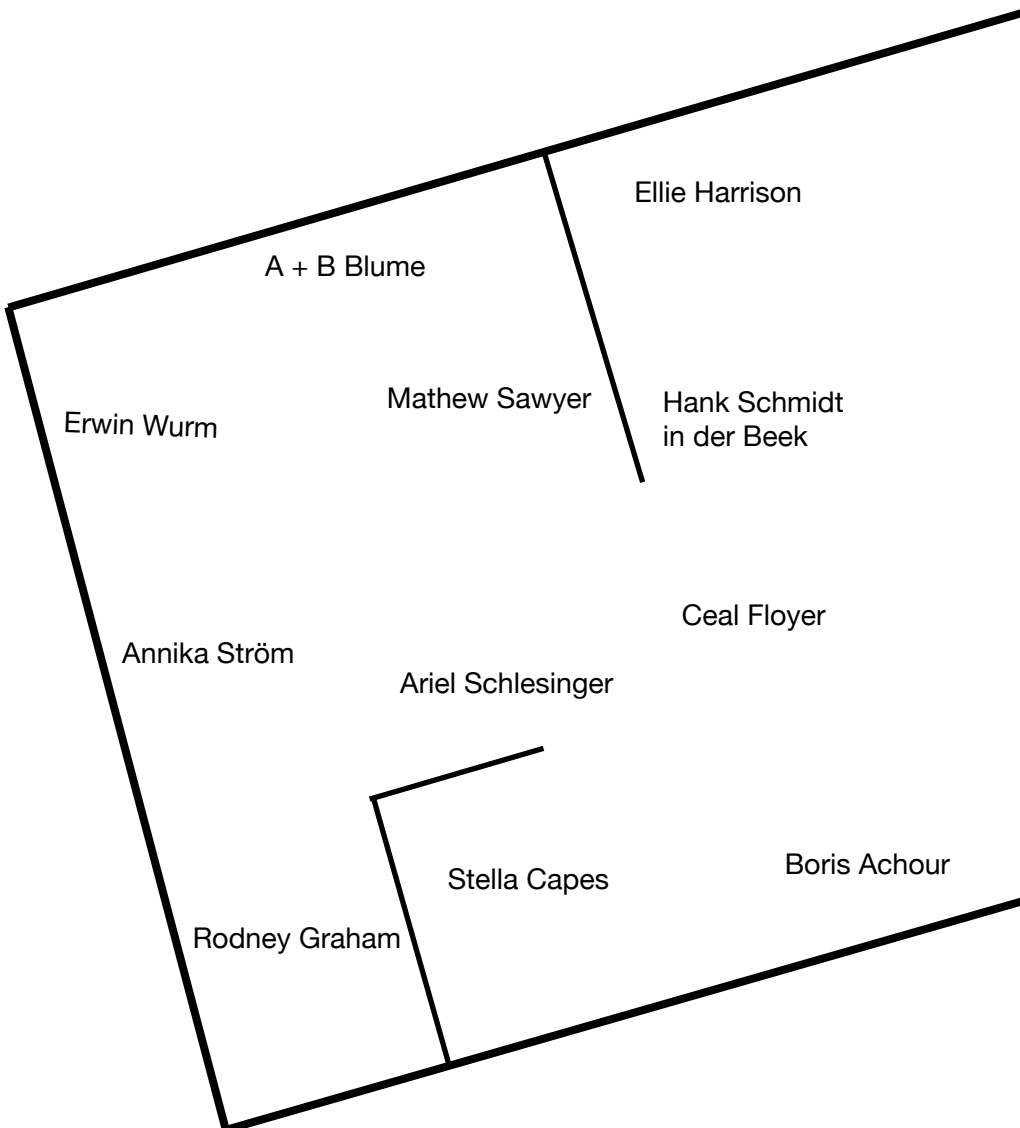
Strangely indistinguishable from the familiar terrain of normality, a joke transports us to a place where sense breaks down, where the familiar is turned on its head, where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, and where the world means differently. Nothing has changed and yet everything has changed. This is the paradoxical condition of humour, and the source of its disruptive power.

The show explores what it means to step over this barrier and to set foot into the inexplicable and illogical world of humour. The selected artworks demonstrate how acts of absurdity, irrationality or playfulness can interrupt reality and momentarily destabilise common assumptions.

The strategies used by the artists in *Ha Ha Road*, serve to illustrate the liberating freedom of thought at work in humour. They invite us to look at the world from the other side of the fence.

*Ha Ha Road* is curated by Dave Ball and Sophie Springer.

The exhibition is produced by QUAD in collaboration with Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno.



Erwin Wurm

A + B Blume

Mathew Sawyer

Ellie Harrison

Hank Schmidt  
in der Beek

Annika Ström

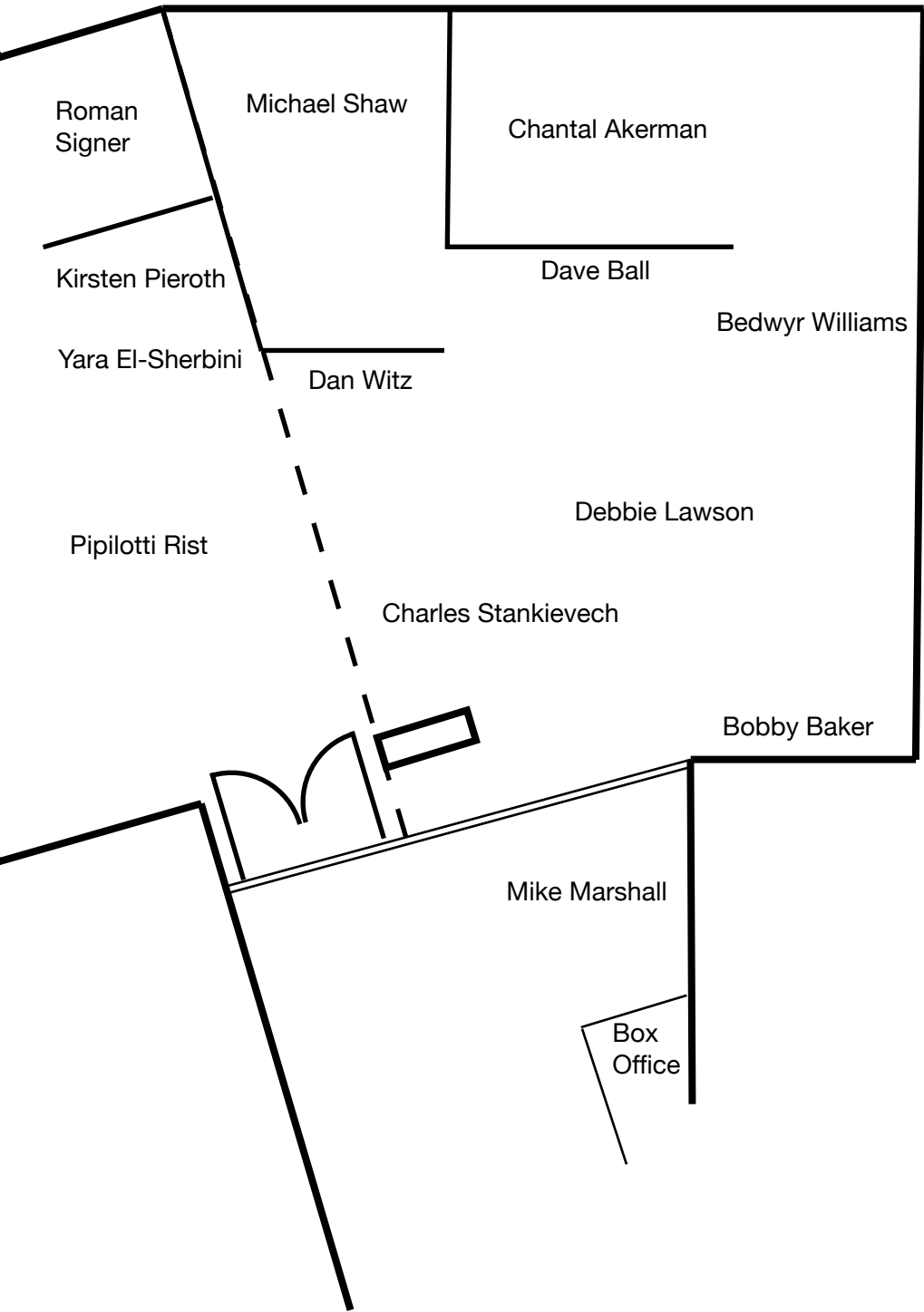
Ariel Schlesinger

Ceal Floyer

Rodney Graham

Stella Capes

Boris Achour



Roman  
Signer

Michael Shaw

Chantal Akerman

Kirsten Pieroth

Dave Ball

Bedwyr Williams

Yara El-Sherbini

Dan Witz

Debbie Lawson

Pipilotti Rist

Charles Stankieveh

Bobby Baker

Mike Marshall

Box  
Office

## WITH

BORIS ACHOUR  
CHANTAL AKERMAN  
BOBBY BAKER  
DAVE BALL  
ANNA + BERNHARD BLUME  
STELLA CAPES,  
YARA EL-SHERBINI  
FISCHLI + WEISS  
CEAL FLOYER  
RODNEY GRAHAM  
ELLIE HARRISON  
DEBBIE LAWSON  
MIKE MARSHALL  
KIRSTEN PIEROTH  
PIPILOTTI RIST  
MATHEW SAWYER  
ARIEL SCHLESINGER  
HANK SCHMIDT IN DER BEEK  
MICHAEL SHAW  
ROMAN SIGNER  
CHARLES STANKIEVECH  
ANNIKA STRÖM  
BEDWYR WILLIAMS  
DAN WITZ  
ERWIN WURM

# BORIS ACHOUR

*Sommes #2, #4 + #5*, 1999

Photographs

Courtesy of Galerie Vallois, Paris

The word “somme” in French means both “nap” and “sum”. Given that Boris Achour’s (b. 1966) photographs depict the artist napping on the hedges of the wealthy inhabitants of Hollywood, it doesn’t take a great leap to read the title as referring to a sum of money. Are these acts of laziness then, in the materialism of an all-too-comfortable world? Or is it simply boredom at the suburban banality of the location? Probably both, but Achour also sees himself as a rebel, as “a punk the wrong way round; instead of making a fuss and breaking everything,” he says, “I don’t move.” The artist’s strangely inactive acts of defiance throw into sharp focus the environment around him: his withdrawal from the world articulates something ever-so-slightly critical towards it. Characterised by its radical diversity of theme and approach, Achour’s work over the last twenty years has been shown widely across Europe and further afield. This exhibition marks a rare showing of his work in the UK.

# CHANTAL AKERMAN

*Saute ma Ville (Blow Up My Town)*, 1968

Video projection of original 35mm film, 13 min

Courtesy of Paradise Films, Brussels

Chantal Akerman (b. 1950) is a Belgian filmmaker and artist who has directed more than 40 short and feature-length films, which often revolve around the everyday life of women—exploring such existentialist topics as love, sex, money, fear or loneliness. *Saute ma Ville*, the short film on view here in the exhibition, is Akerman’s very first filmic piece and might even be seen as an early expression of a punk mentality. Not yet twenty, Akerman herself plays an adolescent woman who, as a rebellion against the boredom of conventions, spontaneously decides to make a vigorous mess of her own kitchen—before blowing it all up with one final big explosion.

Seven years later, in 1975, this remarkably amusing short film was used as a kind of draft for Akerman’s feature film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), which The New York Times praised as “the first masterpiece of the feminine in the history of cinema”.

# BOBBY BAKER

*How to Shop*, 1993

Video, 5 min

Courtesy of Daily Life, with thanks to VET, London



“Oh, you must be joking. I can't possibly do that,” says the artist to herself in the tinned fish aisle of the local supermarket. “Oh alright, I know I've got to,” she continues, before finally—and not without some difficulty—putting a whole tin of anchovies horizontally inside her mouth. Bobby Baker's short video *How to Shop* is taken from her larger cycle of performative works, the *Daily Life Series*, in which she explores social norms of behaviour. In such investigations, the politeness and respectability of Baker's demeanour as a middle-aged and middle-class woman only serves to emphasise the sense of ridiculousness and teasing

subversion of her encounters with everyday objects and rituals.

Over a long and influential career as a performance artist, Baker has consistently played around with boundaries of propriety; she has, amongst other things, danced with meringue ladies, made a life size edible cake version of her family to be eaten by visitors, opened her kitchen to the public, and driven around the streets of London strapped to the back of a truck screaming at passers by through a megaphone to “pull yourselves together”.

IMAGE ABOVE:

Bobby Baker: *How to Shop* (1993), LIFT, London.

Photograph: Andrew Whittuck



# DAVE BALL

*Tin Anagrams*, 2007

Fourteen tins with altered labels

Courtesy of the artist

Finding a certain poignancy in the fact that “cheap sick” is an anagram of “chick peas”, or that “sliced mushrooms” is made up of the same letters as “hot monstrous bum”, Dave Ball (b. 1978) has decided to get his scalpel out and make some subtle interventions. Sharing the fascination of crossword lovers and Scrabble enthusiasts everywhere, he is drawn to the possibilities thrown up by the simple act of rearranging letters. By reconfiguring the names of tins of food, the artist creates a “minor rupture” in the world, suggesting that things don't necessarily have to be the way they are.

Through his art practice Ball explores ideas of absurdity, humour, and the everyday social world; he is also the co-curator of this exhibition.

# ANNA + BERNHARD BLUME

*Parapsychose (vegetarisch) (Parapsychosis (vegetarian))*, 1984

*Kleine Demonstration (Little Demonstration)*, 1989

*Mr. & Mrs. Blume as Mr. & Mrs. Francis Bacon*, 1995

*Hommage à Francis Bacon*, 1996

Polaroid collages

Courtesy of Buchmann Galerie, Berlin

Ever had a problem eating a lettuce for dinner because it has suddenly spun off the plate like a huge bug? This is the kind of surreal scenario that the German artist couple Anna and Bernhard Blume (both b. 1937) have been staging in their work since the 1970s. Ironising the petit-bourgeois notion of “home sweet home”, piles of broken dishes, attacks of flying potatoes or a pair of grandparents jumping furiously on the sofa are typical motifs for the Blumes, who use photographic means to dissolve habitual expectations of security, order and normality into scenes of chaos and collapse. Better known for their large format series, the four smaller Polaroid collages on show in *Ha Ha Road* negotiate similar themes. Along with paper cut-up techniques, everyday objects like green washing line and a set of coloured plastic bottles become tools for contorting and deforming the artists' faces into grotesque grimaces.

# STELLA CAPES

*From Ravensor Odd, 2006*

Video, 6 min

Courtesy of the artist

“If you bury someone upright from the neck-down,” says Stella Capes (b. 1978) of her work *From Ravensor Odd*, “then they’re not able to laugh”. In the video we see a man buried shoulder-deep in sand near a fast-approaching tide. “It’s to do with your diaphragm not being able to collapse under the pressure,” she adds. To help him out, a gramophone has been placed right next to his head playing a 1920s laughter-soundtrack. Set on Spurn Point—a peninsula on the Humber Estuary, North Yorkshire, with a life cycle of 250 years—the title refers to a previous landform, Ravensor Odd, which no longer exists due to erosion. The spit of land is cyclically rebuilt from the debris of towns and villages to the north that have been lost at sea. Using a variety of media in her work, including video, performance, photography and sculpture, the London-based Capes frequently generates situations that explore the vulnerability and pathos of human endeavour.

# YARA EL-SHERBINI

*Jokes From the Dark Side, 2005*

Invented joke, plastic letters

Courtesy of La Caja Blanca Gallery, Palma de Mallorca

Does anybody really like jokes? We generally greet them with a groan, or at best a half-hearted titter at their sheer temerity. And yet we can't avoid them, whether it's the ritual reading out loud of terrible Christmas cracker gags, or enduring the latest offering of the office joker. For better or worse, they're a fully-fledged part of our culture; and Yara El-Sherbini (b. 1978) recognises this, using her own jokes to confront the viewer with the tensions of religious and racial identities. Sometimes her jokes are funny, sometimes they're not; but that doesn't really matter. What matters is that they take us with them: they disarm our habitual patterns of thought, break through our good sense, and then put the pieces back together in a new way. We're already laughing (or cringing) before we realise what's happened. But is it the joke or the idiosyncrasies of our contemporary society that's left us with such a feeling of unease and discomfort? The Derby-born El-Sherbini's multi-disciplinary approach to art making explores ideas of what art is and can be through the use of humour and popular culture. Her playfully contentious works aim to disarm the viewer, engaging them with social and political issues.

# FISCHLI + WEISS

*Der Rechte Weg (The Right Way)*, 1983

Video, 55 min

Courtesy of T&C Edition AG, Zurich

It's not entirely clear why they're dressed up as a rat and a bear; and it's not entirely clear why they've ventured so far into the wilderness. But then again not many things make a lot of sense in Peter Fischli (b. 1952) and David Weiss's (b. 1946) classic work *Der Rechte Weg*. The film is full of playfully bizarre scenes expressing a childlike innocence and wonder at the world mixed with a knowing adult scepticism. It's also undercut by more than a hint of male bonding. Endless moments of mock-epiphanic wisdom litter the film as the fake rat and the fake bear journey their intrepid way deeper and deeper into the majestic splendour of the Swiss Alps. Just what kind of journey is this?

Since they started working together in the late 1970s, the Swiss duo Fischli + Weiss have produced a highly influential body of playful and often hilarious work, which includes collections of clay model figures, photographic surveys of nondescript airports, delicately balanced household objects and sausage sculptures.

# CEAL FLOYER

*Solo*, 2006

Koenig & Meyer 'Proline' mic stand, 22mm mic holder, hairbrush

Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London

Ceal Floyer's (b. 1968) elegantly deadpan work revolves around relationships between conventions and expectations. Like in Magritte's iconic painting from 1928, *The Treachery of Images* ("Ceci n'est pas une pipe"), Floyer's work ensnares us in a witty game of representation and meaning. With efficient means she creates visual puns whose literality ruptures our assumptions of everyday objects. For example the work *Light Switch* consists of a 1:1 image of a light switch that is projected onto the wall. In *Ladder* a slim aluminum ladder is leaning against the wall—only that all of its steps except the first and the last have been taken away.

*Solo*, the readymade on view at *Ha Ha Road*, is particularly playful. By inserting a hairbrush into a microphone stand she formally stages a personal fantasy—awakening the bedroom pop star in all of us.

# RODNEY GRAHAM

*Two Movements for a Prepared Cello*, 2010

Video, 2.57 min

Courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Rodney Graham (b. 1949), whose work grew out of the 1970s tradition of Conceptual Art, is one of the most acclaimed Canadian contemporary artists. With a background in history, anthropology and literature, his diverse body of work uses strategies of appropriation, quotation and transformation to explore motives of Western culture and intellectual history. *Two Movements for a Prepared Cello*, one of the artist's most recent videos, aligns itself within a whole series of video works that feature none other but Rodney Graham himself acting out different characters. Telling funny little stories of mishap and failure, all these pieces share a language of slapstick and farce, whilst pointing towards a multiplicity of other meanings. In *Ha Ha Road*, a cellist's cufflinks have vanished inside his instrument, confronting us with the ambiguous comedy of a performance that is situated somewhere between an accidental 'anti-concert' and the tradition of John Cage's prepared piano.



Rodney Graham: *Two Movements for a Prepared Cello*, 2010.

Courtesy of Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

# ELLIE HARRISON

*Vending Machine*, 2009

Vending machine, computer with BBC News RSS feed, crisps

Courtesy of the artist

Programmed to release a packet of crisps every time an economy-related word features in the headlines of BBC News's RSS feed, Ellie Harrison's (b. 1979) *Vending Machine* really is offering you something for free. But it's an uneasy exchange; your complimentary crisps come at a price: your peace of mind. Harrison is inviting us to reflect on the social impact of a recession-hit economy in which we're all implicated. She understands what it takes to make the casual viewer of art pay attention to what's going on in the outside world, and how passive consumers can be transformed into politically conscientious and accountable members of society. All you need to do, it appears, is give them free crisps.

Harrison's recent work has taken a scientific yet playful approach to exploring the causes and implications of the recent "crisis of capitalism". The politicisation of her work has been accompanied by a questioning of both the function of art and the role of the artist in an age of perpetual crisis.

# MIKE MARSHALL

*The Earth is Flat*, 2001

Video, 8 min

Courtesy of the artist

Mike Marshall's (b. 1967) video *The Earth is Flat* is set in a desert in Egypt; "the most mundane piece of desert I have ever seen," he says. In it, Marshall is running across the desert, towards the horizon. He is telling jokes whilst he's running: reciting them from memory, endlessly, joke after joke after joke. Why is six afraid of seven? Because seven ate nine. What do you call a fly with no wings? A walk. Why do cows have bells? Because their horns don't work. What's the difference between ignorance and apathy. I don't know and I don't care. Alone in the featureless landscape, the artist appears to have staked a forlorn faith in humour as a source of truth in a barren world. The beauty of ordinariness and the appeal of understatement are elements that run throughout the London-based Marshall's video and photographic oeuvre. His work examines aspects of our surroundings that might normally be overlooked, and finds within them wonder and interest.

# DEBBIE LAWSON

*Sunset Island*, 2008  
Bathroom carpet  
Courtesy of the artist

Imagine staring at your grandmother's ornamental carpet and finding that its floral pattern has suddenly erupted three-dimensionally into the living room. Turning furniture, rugs and other domestic objects into fantastically dreamlike landscapes of crawling foliage, copulating wood and dancing coat stands is the gift of British sculptor Debbie Lawson (b. 1966). Whilst she typically exerts her powers in the context of more refined targets such as Persian carpets or inlaid wood panels, *Sunset Island* reveals the hidden potential of your ordinary toilet mat. Bathed in rosy pink, this diminutive sculpture could well be the result of reading *Robinson Crusoe* on the privy.



Debbie Lawson: *Sunset Island*, 2008.

# KIRSTEN PIEROTH

*Dead Ant*, 2005

Paperback novel, ant

Courtesy of the artist

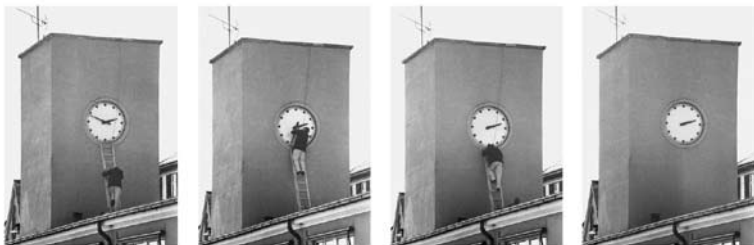
*Twenty-Seven Minutes*—Minute hand stolen from a public clock tower in collaboration with the director of a local company, Copenhagen, 2004

Stolen clock hand, black and white photographs

Courtesy of Alexander Schröder, Berlin

When Kirsten Pieroth (b. 1970) was invited to work with the Copenhagen-based furniture design company Montana Møbler A/S, she decided to collaborate with its director to steal the minute-hand from a nearby public clock. Her work *Twenty-Seven Minutes* somehow manages to contrive this theft as the inevitable response to a project brief. A similarly absurdist logic is played out in *Dead Ant*, which features an ant squashed by a Penguin edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle. The evidence of this particular murder has, we're invited to conclude, been left on the detective novel itself.

Pieroth is an internationally recognised artist whose strategies often employ everyday objects, situations and activities, isolating them from their original settings and inserting them into different contexts. By introducing multiple references and possibilities of interpretation, she leads her viewers into indeterminate territory, inviting them to speculate on the arbitrariness of their habitual readings of things.



Kirsten Pieroth: *Twenty-Seven Minutes*, 2004.

# PIPILOTTI RIST

*I'm Not The Girl Who Misses Much*, 1986

Video, 5 min

Courtesy of Videoart, Switzerland

Although *I'm Not the Girl Who Misses Much* is one of her earliest video works, it already deals with many of the same issues addressed by her recent spatial and video installations. Her art bursts forth with colour and optimism, and generally deals with the body, gender and sexuality. In the video, Rist herself performs—with both breasts exposed—a rambunctious dance. Over and over she repeats the line “I’m not the girl who misses much”—a slightly rewritten song-lyric by John Lennon. Bearing in mind the importance of MTV at the time of the video’s production, the work can easily be understood as an artistic parody of both the “music video” and the repetitiveness of pop music.

# MATHEW SAWYER

*No To Bad Things*, 2000

Signs, five placards, five timber pole handles

Courtesy of the artist

We all know them, we all have them: the days on which pretty much everything goes wrong; the days that start without milk in the fridge and with a flat tyre on the way to the office; the days when frustration at work leads to pointless drama with the partner at home; the grey and rainy days when nothing feels like any fun at all; the days when the baby is teething and won’t stop crying; the days that x and the days when y...

In the face of such never-ending dreariness, Mathew Sawyer (b. 1977) utters a demand that is clear and explicit. His comprehensive message “NO TO BAD THINGS” is manifested in black and white on a stack of picket signs. As if to underscore both the existential urgency of this desire and, of course, its absurd hopelessness, the five signs have ended up enormous in size and absurdly heavy in weight. Realistically unfeasible and physically unmanageable, Sawyer’s timely protest signs seem to dwarf anyone who stands near them.

*Smelly feet and marriage crises and moldy strawberries;  
Being broke and car wreckage and many disappointments;  
Bed bugs and cavities and missed deadlines;  
Dog bites and bee stings and other bad thing.....*

We just have to live with them!



# ARIEL SCHLESINGER

*Untitled (Socks Holder)*, 2009

Silk print, unwashed socks

*The Sound Two Empty Spaces Make When They Meet*, 2009

Doubled vinyl record, turntable

Courtesy of Galerie Gregor Podnar, Berlin

Spinning silently on a turntable, two conjoined vinyl records appear to be some kind of factory error—the result of a cutting machine malfunction, perhaps. Oblivious to the fact that its creation serves no purpose in the world, the machinery appears to have kept faith in its deviant logic, and fashioned a fortuitously innovative design. *The Sound Two Empty Spaces Make When They Meet* is, of course, not the product of a technological glitch; it's a quite deliberate piece of reasoning by Ariel Schlesinger (b. 1980). If his conjoined record ever could be played (which it can't), it would play nothing more than the sound of ambient background noise. His *Untitled (Socks Holder)* too takes



something that really ought not to exist and somehow or other manages to convince us that it's a pretty damn good idea. Well, what else would you do with dirty socks?

Working with everyday materials like bikes, printer paper, rolls of masking tape, and gas stoves, the Israeli-born Schlesinger's works often play around with the normal functioning of objects. By introducing subtle shifts of usage and revealing inspired connections between things, the artist conjures up in his creations a startling and playful poetry.

IMAGE ABOVE:

Ariel Schlesinger: *Untitled (Socks Holder)*, 2009.

Courtesy of Galerie Gregor Podnar, Berlin

# HANK SCHMIDT IN DER BEEK

*Zillertaler Alpen Nr. 2 (Zillertal Alps No. 2), 2009*

Photograph / Photographed by Fabian Schubert

Courtesy of the artist

What's the difference between a beautiful Alpine landscape and the pattern on a checked shirt? There isn't one. No, that wasn't a failed attempt at a joke—it's a description of the apparent logic behind Hank Schmidt in der Beek's (b. 1978) photographic work *Zillertaler Alpen Nr. 2*. Overlooking a misty hilltop expanse, the artist stands in front of his easel; he's pondering the sublime mystery of nature, overcome by the majesty of what stands before him. At least that's what he ought to be doing: in fact he's painting the red check of his own shirt. And looking back rather smugly at the photographer, as if to say, “not a bad likeness, huh?”

The Berlin-based Hank Schmidt in der Beek's work is often characterised by a transience or a deliberate denial of meaning. Other works include a series of real-time paintings based on brief glimpses of famous works caught in artist film-biopics, and collages featuring dada-esque juxtapositions of cultural iconography.

# MICHAEL SHAW

*Prepared Fan and Acoustic Guitar, 2011*

Acoustic guitar, desktop fan, guitar stand, sparkly shred

Courtesy of the artist

Departing from experimental turntablism and circuit-bending, the London-based Michael Shaw's artistic practice occupies the spectrum between found object installation art and noise music. Amongst many other things Shaw creates unexpected sonic experiences by combining recycled and modified hardware, household items and musical instruments like drum-kits, keyboards and stringed instruments. While his work—whether live on stage under the alias DJ Tendraw, or in the gallery—is often loud, rough, and full-on, for *Ha Ha Road* he has devised a surprisingly subdued yet highly hypnotic piece. A bunch of silver tinsel woven into the metal cage of a small desktop fan incessantly blows against the strings of an acoustic guitar, which ever so often responds with an almost inaudible “plink”. The work at the same time inheres an air of gentle beauty and pathetic failure.

# ROMAN SIGNER

*Arbeiten (Works)*, 1994 – 1996

Video, 17 min

Courtesy of the artist

The Swiss artist Roman Signer (b. 1938) is known for his experiments involving explosives, collisions, propellants and the forces of gravity—often caught using photography or video. Departing from the realm of sculpture, Signer has spent several decades inventing his very own rules in order to build his "time-sculptures": compositions of the ephemeral in space. Although meticulously planned, executed and documented, Signer's actions delight their viewer as embodiments of pure playfulness showing a profound disinterest in the rational values of the everyday world. In Signer's art—once fondly described as a "collection of catastrophes"—otherwise banal objects such as tables, barrels, chairs, doors, bikes or boats become the protagonists of poetic mini-choreographies and slapstick acts of outright hilarity.

Why not try this at home?

# CHARLES STANKIEVECH

*Die Mauer (The Wall)*, 2009

Nine vinyl records with covers

Courtesy of the artist

Charles Stankieveh (b. 1978) is a Canadian artist who often uses installation and sound art to tell stories inspired by landscape, architecture and history. Embedded in this practice, Stankieveh's minimal installation *Die Mauer* intertwines languages of conceptual art, cold war iconography, institutional critique and rock 'n' roll pop culture. In 2009, exactly 30 years after the album release (1979) and 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the artist bought all *The Wall* vinyl records by Pink Floyd for sale at the popular Mauer Park Market in Berlin. That day, there were 9 used LPs of various editions and prices available from various independent sellers. In the context of *Ha Ha Road*, the long assemblage of freestanding covers with their album art of white bricks daubed with graffiti resonates with the idea of the "barrier" at play in the exhibition's title. But positioned on the gallery floor, due to their specific design, the covers make a humorous reference also to one of the UK's greatest art scandals ever: the vandalism of Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* at the Tate in the 1970s. Protesting the idea of "a pile of bricks" actually being art, someone smeared this work with paint. We would invite you to be a little more gentle.

# ANNIKA STRÖM

*This work refers to Joseph Kosutt, 2004*

*Please remove me from your mailing list, 2010*

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy of the artist and Gerhardsen Gerner Gallery, Berlin

Swedish artist Annika Ström (b. 1964) addresses subjective states of crisis and insecurity in songs, videos and text pieces displaying self-reflective phrases like “excuse me I am sorry” or “I am a better artist than I deserve”. The two sentences selected for *Ha Ha Road* however make ironic references specific to habits in art and the artworld. The dry request to “please remove me from your mailing list” transports us into the realm of networking, career building and self-promotion. As an artwork on the gallery wall this distancing from expected system requirements of the profession becomes a funny oxymoron. On the second canvas a deliberate misspelling of the name of Joseph Kosuth—an artist himself hugely famous for his text art—creates a mockery of the kind of contemporary art which lives from its referencing of 1960s/70s Conceptual Art.

# BEDWYR WILLIAMS

*I Also Make My Own Work, 2009*

Fixed gear bike, iPod, DeWalt drill, spirit level, wallet, tape-measure, tobacco, mobile phone, page from a radio play manuscript

Courtesy of Ceri Hand Gallery, Liverpool

“What do you do for a living mate?” asks the paramedic to the young man who’s just been run over by a bus. “I’m an artist,” he groans, on the brink of losing consciousness, before adding, “well, I’m more sort of a gallery technician.” Inserting his critique of the artworld into the unlikely scenario of a fatal bicycle accident, Bedwyr Williams (b. 1974) invents a darkly humorous tale in which his tragic hero’s last words are the all-too-often-heard caveat: “but I also make my own work.” The installation of the same name stands as a testament to the harsh reality of a world indifferent to people’s true vocation. One of Wales’s most acclaimed artists, Williams’s work often speaks about his own uneasy position within a metropolitan cultural sphere that can’t even pronounce his name properly. His live work *Urbane Hick*—performed at the opening of *Ha Ha Road*—continues his surreal commentary on the practices and customs of the artworld. This time the artist is apparently promoting his new monograph *Bedwyr I Think I Missed Your Performance*—the title of which hints at a not-entirely conventional approach to self-publicity.

## DAN WITZ

*Prank (Greenpoint, Brooklyn)*, 2004

Photograph, weather balloon attached to house front

Courtesy of the artist

Based in New York, Dan Witz (b. 1957—whose last name fittingly signifies “joke” in German) is internationally known as one of the pioneers of street art. Working predominantly in realist painting, he has, since the late 1970s, used his signature icon of tiny hummingbirds and other deceptively real looking imagery to freshen up the city’s public space. *Ha Ha Road* however presents one photograph, *Prank*, which documents the outcome of an object-based intervention, literally a “practical joke”. Witz made a single addition to the façade of a typical Brooklyn house, transforming its visual character completely. In the image, a red weather balloon sits in the centre of the house’s three windows like an enormous clown nose. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and humour theorist Henri Bergson maintained that, for its lack of human features, landscape couldn’t really be a source of laughter. Thanks to the artist Dan Witz however, urban landscape is allowed to laugh back at us!

## ERWIN WURM

*One Minute Sculptures*, 1997

Video, 60 min

Courtesy of the artist

Erwin Wurm’s (b. 1954) video *One Minute Sculptures* has something of the quality of an instruction manual. It demonstrates, quite simply, how to make sculptures. The materials required are ready to hand—chairs, pens, cups, balls, and the artist’s own body. Not that it needs to be Wurm’s body of course: ours will do just fine. We too should lie on the floor and prop up a chair with our eye-socket, the work seems to say. Having inspired numerous pop videos, fashion shoots, and internet imitations, *One Minute Sculptures* has already seeped into the cultural consciousness. Its success lies in its simplicity: sculpture isn’t about refined techniques and materials, it’s about imagining the world differently and not being afraid to try things out. In this sense we’re all sculptors—we just have to have faith in our ridiculous ideas, even if only momentarily. Wurm is one of the most highly regarded and influential artists working today. His work in sculpture, photography, video, and drawing often takes the real world as its subject-matter, throwing it back to us in bizarrely distorted formulations—in the process rendering the absurd and the non-absurd curiously interchangeable.

## ABOUT THE CURATORS

**DAVE BALL** Dave Ball (b. 1978) is an artist and writer based in Berlin. Through his multi-disciplinary practice, Ball explores the notion of a “rupture of sense” at work in various modes of seeing, thinking and behaving, and particularly as it is manifested in humour. He holds an MA in *Contemporary Art Theory* from Goldsmiths College, London and a BA in Fine Art from the University of Derby. And he is really bad at telling jokes.

**SOPHIE SPRINGER** has childhood memories of jet-planes hitting the sound barrier while growing up in West-Berlin in the 1980s. With an MA in *Contemporary Art Theory* from Goldsmiths College London, today she works as an editor, curator, translator and artist. At the pioneering art theory publisher Merve Verlag Berlin she has facilitated books and events by thinkers such as Thomas Hirschhorn, Michel Serres, Brian Massumi, Nina Power and Hélène Cixous. This summer, besides co-curating *Ha Ha Road*, her text artwork and publication project *TRAVERSALS (With Ladder)* is currently exhibited on the occasion of *5X5Castelló2011* at Espai d'Art Contemporani de Castelló, Castelló, Spain. Experience tells her that “laughter is the body thinking” (W. Watson).



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# ADDITIONAL EVENTS

## BEDWYR WILLIAMS

*Urbane Hick*

Thursday 11 August, 18.30

Preview Event

Continuing his surreal commentary on the practices and customs of the artworld, Bedwyr Williams presents a performance entitled *Urbane Hick*. Apparently promoting his new monograph *Bedwyr I Think I Missed Your Performance*, the book's title hints at a not-entirely conventional approach to self-publicity.

## FISCHLI + WEISS FILM SCREENING

*Der Rechte Weg (The Right Way)*, 1983, 55 mins

Saturday 22 October, 18.00

Free Entry

In the uncannily bizarre and hilarious classic by the artist duo Fischli + Weiss, a rat and a bear take a hike through the majestic splendour of the Swiss Alps, confronted with their fractious relationship, philosophical debates and the power of nature.

## YARA EL-SHERBINI

*Pub Quiz*

Saturday 22 October, 19.00

Free Entry

Can you name a movie in which an Arab was not shown as either a bomber, a belly dancer, or billionaire? Join artist and quizmaster Yara El-Sherbini for an evening of playfully provocative trivia-based competitiveness. There are prizes to be won!

## HAHA RAMBLE

Sunday 23 October

Starting at QUAD, Free

A 5km trail of the Bonnie Prince Charlie Walk, with *Ha Ha Road* curators and Alison Lloyd of the Contemporary Art of Walking. Treating urban walk as if it were hills and finishing with a guided tour of the exhibition.