

Spike Island Gallery Guide

Amanda Beech - *Sanity Assassin*

Sanity Assassin runs from 23 Jan to 11 April 2010, Tuesday-Sunday. Screenings run from 11am every 20 minutes. Last screening starts at 4:40pm.

Spike Island presents the first major solo show in a public gallery by London based artist Amanda Beech (1972). Beech was awarded the main production residency for UK artists at Spike Island in 2009, which contributed to the making of her new body of work *Sanity Assassin*.

Sanity Assassin investigates the way in which our democratic and liberal ideals are played out through forceful narratives of freedom in philosophy, politics, literature and popular culture. Beech's practice often evolves through research visits to sites in which private power or public law is manifest explicitly in architecture and the organisation of social space. Locations for recent works include the brutalist 1950's housing estate *Harlow New Town*; the state line that cuts through a hotel casino between California and Nevada in the USA, and Norway's state oil company *Statoil*. Most recently Beech's research has taken her to Los Angeles, the site and source of *Sanity Assassin*. Here, LA stands in for the archetypal neo-liberal power base with its architecture of fear and oppressively regulated public space.

Sanity Assassin, as a wider project, consists of a book, an independent reader published by *Urbanomic*, and as an art work: a three-channel video installation with a sculptural element presented here at Spike Island for the first time. The artist has carefully choreographed the experience of encountering each constituent part of the installation and the visitor is first greeted by a floodlit mirrored plinth which displays a series of polished yellow metal chainsaws. This glamorous structure with its subliminal horror movie overtones is in part homage to the corporate lobby of a real Los Angeles showroom and is a mechanism of pure display. Beyond this are a three large-scale offset projection screens supported by black struts. As the floodlights dim, the soundtrack of the video installation starts up, acting as an aural prompt for the audience to orientate themselves in the second gallery. Computer generated, vertical rain reminiscent of the film-noir cinematic style plays across each screen before hard edged, uniform edits, set to a pulsating noise score, guide us through a private and nocturnal LA landscape. The video, like the sculpture, embodies another level of abstract violence, free from the representation of the human subject whose presence is implied but not revealed by fast tracking camera work.

Flashing text interrupts the sequence made up of collaged found and invented narratives gathered during Beech's research trip and that also includes her wider reading developed from this. This includes material ranging from hearsay, FBI files, interview correspondence, pulp literature and music. The text plays between the screens, channelling psychological transmissions from two central characters whose divergent philosophies ultimately merge into one nihilistic polemic: neither are the 'dark' to the others 'light' nor the 'good' to the other's 'evil.' The first part of the video work plays out a relationship between the philosophy of Arnold Rottweiler, and one of his followers. The text depicts live speech as if in transmission from an out of reach place; it rails against the culture machine's alienation of nature and

espouses a form of ideal space that can only be achieved through self-enforced seclusion. The second part of the work gives us another set of mantras from the philosophy of Artemis Starr. Here we hear the voice of the new world order, purporting to embody nature as self-empowerment. Both characters depicted in the work live in a world where their beliefs ultimately descend into a form of psychosis. Their radical individualism leads either to dark suicidal horror or pure physical violence.

Stylistically, in its speed, and combination of graphic, textual and documentary style footage, the work references both MTV-style montage and the film title sequences of Saul Bass. There is, however, no coming feature, no mystery to be revealed by tracking shots - there is only the 'now' time of *Sanity Assassin*.

Alongside the exhibition, *Sanity Assassin* is available as a limited edition publication from Urbanomic Press and from Spike Island. A display copy can be found alongside publications chosen by the artist and five video works in the Resource Area.

Biography

Amanda Beech makes artworks, writes and collaborates on curatorial projects. Her work explores the relationship between democracy and violence in neo-liberalism by scrutinising the forceful rhetoric within narratives of freedom, which play out in philosophy, politics, literature and popular culture. Constructing narratives that take in particular biographies, sites, social mythologies and mixing them with the bounds of philosophical inquiry, her work operates as a space of seductive power, will and force - a world that emphasises decisiveness as its guiding principle and that deals with our share in it. She is a member of the steering committee of *The Political Currency of Art* research group, and Co Director of the research group *Curating Video*.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Image-Force*, Urbanomic Studio, Falmouth, UK, 2009; *Statecraft*, The Temple of Utopias, Harlow, Essex 2008; *Falk*, MOT International, London 2006 (with cat).

Recent Group exhibitions include: *One Way Street*, Sheppard Gallery, University of Nevada, Reno and KX Gallery Hamburg, Germany 2007; *Ubiquitous Media*, Tokyo University, Japan, July 2007; *The Mortar of Distribution*, Artprojx, London 2008; *The Institute of Pyschoplasmics*, Pump House Gallery (with cat) 2008; *Let us Pray For Those Now Residing in the Designated Area*, DNA Gallery, Berlin 2009; and *Greetings comrades, the image has now changed its status*, Ocular Lab, Melbourne, Australia 2009.

Events Programme

A programme of talks, screenings and events will take place at Spike Island throughout the exhibition including **Amanda Beech in Conversation with Robin Mackay** on 9 February and **a symposium in collaboration with Media Art Bath** mid March 2010.

Spike Island Arts Council England: South West Residency

London-based Amanda Beech (1972) was awarded the 2009 Spike Island Arts Council England: South West Residency at Spike Island by Marie-Anne McQuay (Curator, Spike Island); Nicola Hood (Director Spacex), Lucy Byatt (former Director Spike Island), Peter Stiles Visual Arts Officer Arts Council England South West.

The residency contributed to the making of Beech's new body of work *Sanity Assassin*. This significant open submission award offers a three month residency and exhibition opportunity for UK based artists. The residency has previously been awarded to Elizabeth Price (2008), Ruth Claxton (2007), Ged Quinn (2005), Kevin Reid & Ganghut (2004), James Ireland (2003) and Alex Frost (2002).