

Spike Island Winter Exhibitions

Saturday 22 January - Sunday 10 April

Gallery opening hours: Tuesday - Sunday, 11am - 5pm

Further resources available at www.spikeisland.org.uk

Main Galleries

Maelfa

Sean Edwards

Spike Island presents *Maelfa*, the first major solo show in a public gallery by Sean Edwards. Edwards is interested in the poetics of failure, regret and disappointment. He often explores these qualities through the properties of marginal, mass produced objects, transferring their surfaces or shifting their forms through a series of processes to create art works that reference the makeshift properties of the original. With *Maelfa*, Edwards has for the first time extended his focus to an entire building and lived system, focusing on its disappearing communities and faded utopian aspirations.

Built around a block of high-rise flats on a council estate in 1973, the Maelfa Shopping Centre in the Cardiff suburb of Llanedeyrn was intended to provide a thriving focal point for the community. As a classic municipal build of its period, the centre's potential as a new, intensely localised system of living was compromised by institutionalised cost-cutting that undermined the original modernist architectural principles of flow, space and light. Ungenerous proportions, poor construction and an air of geographical isolation led to the Maelfa's steady decline over subsequent decades. Even in its heyday, the centre had the air of a ruin in waiting: on its opening weekend a local newspaper announced the Centre was 'Soon to be filled with the buzz of shoppers?' ending what could have been a statement of confidence with a telling question mark.

In 2007 the site of the Maelfa Centre was earmarked for redevelopment, and Edwards undertook a residency there in 2009 ahead of its scheduled demolition, making photographic and filmed studies of the building and interacting with the people who still use it. The nature of his gaze is contemplative and reflective rather than critical: Edwards grew up in Llanedeyrn, using the centre and its library on an almost daily basis and returns frequently as an adult to visit members of his family who still live on the estate. The entire body of work presented here in *Maelfa*,

the sculptures, video, drawings, photographs, paintings, slides and prints, can almost be seen as a kind of monument to the Maelfa, to the future that could have been and the strange suspended present that it finds itself in now – the planned new development has recently been halted due to the current recession. The Maelfa Shopping Centre therefore remains as it has for decades, in a kind of twilight state, half activated and half abandoned.

Many of the images and structures in the gallery appear at first to be hovering towards abstraction, yet they are all essentially figurative studies taken from the Maelfa Centre. For example, the large black and white prints in the central space are based on fragments and details, with the artist magnifying and degrading close ups of dust, aged notes in empty unit windows, tiles and architectural features. The two sculptures, the wooden ovals in the central space, *Four Windows*, and the large suspended structure in the back perimeter gallery, *The Reference*, are, respectively, taken from a distinctive window shape within one shop unit and the inverted roof of the now inaccessible reference library, rendered here at a 5:1 ratio.

The thirteen framed photographs of *Tea at My Father's House, Parts One to Thirteen* in the central gallery hint at a human presence, as well as explore the multiple reflections produced by the Maelfa's glass fronted interior arcade. These images run in a film-like strip along one wall and are echoed by the large video installation that is located in the final gallery. This slow paced, high-definition video is simply entitled *Maelfa* and was shot on location in the centre. For twenty four minutes, the camera glides smoothly through the building's interior surfaces, creating a dream-like portrait of the space from one end to the other. No exterior shots are ever shown, but with one sweeping movement the camera pans up and down, across glass and through corridors in a style familiar to us from haunted house movies and science fiction films. In directing the

camera towards the windows, the artist creates an extreme close-up which allows the viewer to witness three planes simultaneously: the focus slowly shifts between the shop front's display and the shelved objects deeper within the store, all the while allowing moments of activity in the shopping centre behind the camera to reflect into view. We witness fleeting glimpses of human presence, and just once the spell of the panning camera is broken as a man (the artist's father) gestures and speaks to the camera: this is only choreographed scene within the whole film. The work is also entirely silent so that the incidental sounds of people walking through Spike Island's gallery become a kind of improvised soundtrack.

As well as the Maelfa Centre's interiors, we learn something of the outside of the building and its surroundings through the slide work in the back perimeter gallery, *Winter Light Between*, which documents the fleeting yet intense winter light as it shifts between the tower block of the centre and a concrete walkway. We also gain other clues to help us piece together a complete portrait of the site through diagrammatic studies, drawings and prints in the front perimeter gallery which are accompanied by an integrated reading area. Here we have bound copies of the original plans for the Maelfa Centre and other documents on its history, as well as books chosen by the artist including a new, eponymous monograph produced by Bedford Press which focuses on Edwards' residency period in the centre.

As a collection of parts, *Maelfa* plays with our perception, pulling us in to look at details and making us stand back to take in fragments of a building that have been rendered at varying scales. The architecture becomes a device for producing images as well as an ordering system for living. *Maelfa* can be read as an investigation of a specific place with deeply resonant personal associations, but it is also a study of a generic space, one that is exactly like other municipal developments which were built in the UK in the 1960s and '70s. Therefore, as well as evoking memories of places we too may have encountered, it also recalls the broader aspirations of state-sponsored modernism whose futuristically charged optimism has not been completely erased, but can still be glimpsed in the form of a concrete pillar, curving archway or stretch of linoleum flooring.

Sean Edwards (1980, Cardiff) is based in Wales. Recent solo shows include *Outpost*, Norwich (2010), *Limoncello*, London and *Tanya Leighton*, Berlin (both 2009). Recent group shows include *Temporare* Kunsthalle, Berlin, *Lisson Gallery* London, and *Wallspace*, New York. Edwards graduated with an MA from the Slade School of Art in 2005 and has been involved with the artist led space g39, Cardiff, since 2008. He has recently been the recipient of a Creative Wales Award 2010/11 and is represented by *Limoncello* and *Tanya Leighton*. In 2012 Edwards will undertake a solo show at Chapter, Cardiff.

Related events

A number of talks and events will further explore the themes of *Maelfa*.

Wednesday 26 January, 6pm

Author and journalist **Lynsey Hanley** will read from her book *Estates: an intimate history* and discuss her broader research into economic, social and spatial segregation, and the role played by education in social mobility.

Wednesday 09 February, 6pm

Author, journalist and blogger **Owen Hatherley** will discuss Modernist architecture and urbanism, drawing upon his books *Militant Modernism* and *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*.

Tuesday 22 February, 6pm

Author and academic **Sam Gathercole** will give an illustrated lecture on 'Signs of Post-War Housing', discussing the ways in which such signage both orientates the visitor and imposes a set of ideas on the environment.

Thursday 31 March, 6pm

Artists **Sean Edwards** and **Melanie Counsell** in conversation with writer and critic **Dan Smith** about their respective exhibitions and wider practices. Melanie Counsell's *Lutecia* is at WORKS|PROJECTS from 19 February through 2 April.

Tickets for these events are £4 full, £2 concessions. Please ask at Reception or see the Spike Island website for further information.

Invocations of the Blank Page

Martin Creed, Ryan Gander, Vlatka Horvat, Gareth Long, Anna Molska, Ignacio Uriarte

Curated by Frances Loeffler, independent curator and member of Spike Associates

This exhibition uses the blank page as a metaphor for the processes of creative expression. The works selected gesture towards or take the form of blank sheets of papers — creased and folded, falling through space, or traversed by the body — and move between the free-fall lightness of thought and the weight of words as they form on the page.

In Anna Molska's film *Perspective* the artist ties ropes to her back and walks through snow. As she moves forward the ropes pull tight, converging into a one-point perspective — the classic compositional tool. The ropes break and unravel moments later as she falls. The snowy landscape in Molska's work can be read as the empty expanses of a blank page, while the ropes form a delicate drawing in space.

Ryan Gander's large print from the series *Felix provides a stage...* documents the making of his work *A sheet of paper on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and fell to the floor* (a fleet of 100 15cm crystal spheres, each laser-etched inside with images of falling sheets of paper). By elevating the documentation of time spent in the studio with his assistant Felix to the status of new work, the artist collapses the processes of production and reception, dwelling on the moments before the realisation of an art work.

Both Vlatka Horvat and Ignacio Uriarte re-work blank sheets of paper, cutting, ripping and reassembling their fragile forms to create new geometrical arrangements. In Uriarte's *Blocs*, the ubiquitous office notebook pad is ripped in consecutive layers. The resulting complex, undulating pattern suggests both the fun of playing with office materials during work time

and a fretfulness born of the tedium of the 9 to 5 grind. Horvat's four pieces from the series *Pages (Repaired)* show a repetitive, almost ritualistic process of disassembling and reassembling. Here, pages are cut in gradients ranging from tight grids suggestive of topographical mapping to loose, meandering lines. The artist then repairs them, delicately, invisibly (on the back of the page) or in ways that bring the seams and sutures unashamedly to the fore.

Likewise working with minimal means, Martin Creed's *Work No. 88: A Sheet of A4 Paper Crumpled into a Ball* is tight with the possibility of creating something from nothing by way of the most futile of gestures. Gareth Long's *Work in Progress* forms part of an ongoing series of works centering on questions of artistic subjectivity and the intersections between art and labour. A looped depiction of the cartoon character Daffy Duck, seemingly locked in the throes of 'writer's block', *Work in Progress* points with light brevity and humour to the sincerity and anguish of the creative process.

At the heart of the exhibition lies a concern with the elusiveness of meaning, the inadequacy of language and the struggle for creative expression. *Invocations of the Blank Page* is accompanied by an essay which expands these themes written by Frances Loeffler along with expanded artists' biographies which can be downloaded from our website at <http://www.spikeisland.org.uk/exhibitions/invocations>.

Spike Associates is an informal, self-supporting post-graduate programme for artists, writers and curators.

Credits and Thanks

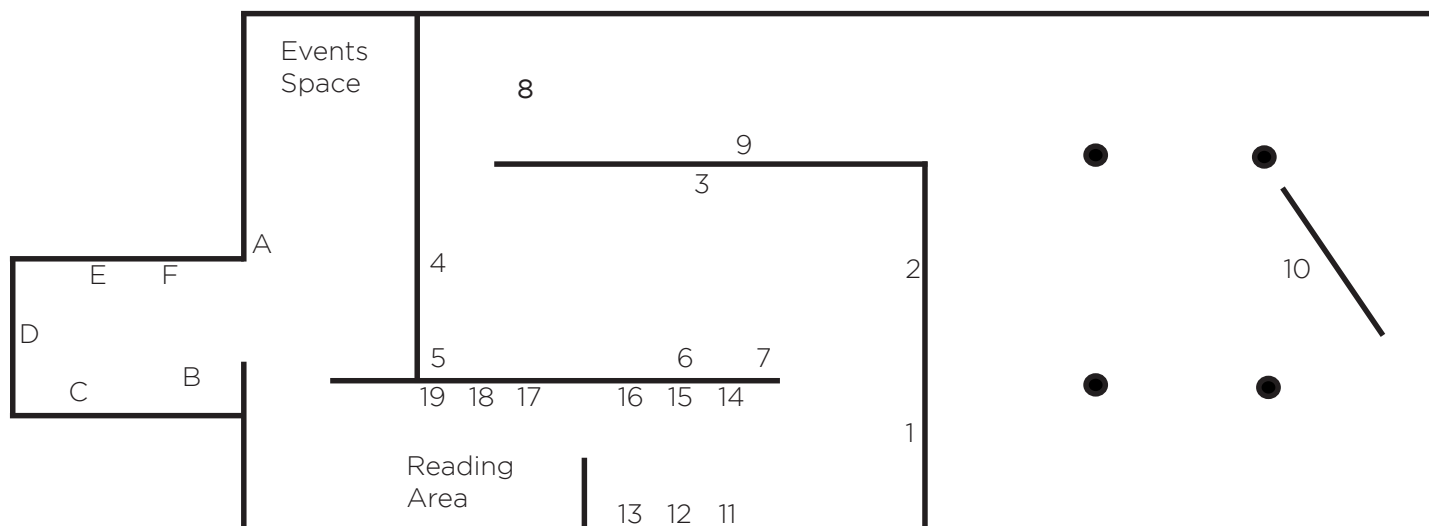


The Elephant Trust

Picture This



Special thanks to Safle, Limoncello, Tanya Leighton, Gemma Wright, Hello Blue, Fitting Frames, Regan Print and Andrew Short.



Maelfa Main Galleries

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| 1 | <i>Painting of an Empty RS Box</i> , 2008, oil on photocopy on board | 11 | <i>Floor II</i> , 2011, screenprint (Edition 1 of 5)* |
| 2 | <i>Dust</i> , 2011, giclée print | 12 | <i>Floor III</i> , 2011, screenprint (Edition 1 of 5)* |
| 3 | <i>Tea at my Father's House (Parts One to Thirteen)</i> , 2011, archival giclée print | 13 | <i>Floor I</i> , 2011, screenprint (Edition 1 of 5)* |
| 4 | <i>Tiles</i> , 2011, giclée print | 14 | <i>The Towerblock III</i> , 2010, graphite on paper |
| 5 | <i>Four Windows</i> , 2010 - 2011, MDF, hardboard and surface filler | 15 | <i>The Towerblock I</i> , 2010, graphite on paper |
| 6 | <i>Note</i> , 2011, giclée print | 16 | <i>The Towerblock II</i> , 2010, graphite on paper |
| 7 | <i>Daylight</i> , 2011, giclée print | 17 | <i>Untitled (Maelfa Plan)</i> , 2009 - 2010, graphite on paper |
| 8 | <i>The Reference</i> , 2011, plywood and surface filler | 18 | <i>Notebook Page 9</i> , 2010, gouache and graphite on paper |
| 9 | <i>Winter Light Between</i> , 2011, slide projection | 19 | <i>Notebook Page 17</i> , 2010, gouache and graphite on paper |
| 10 | <i>Maelfa</i> , 2010, 24'44", single channel HD projection | | |
- *Part of a Spike Island/Limoncello limited edition of four new black and white screenprints. Prices available from Reception.

Invocations of the Blank Page Project Space

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| A | Ryan Gander, <i>Felix provides a stage (Eleven sketches for 'A sheet of paper on which I was about to draw, as it slipped from my table and fell to the floor')</i> , 2008
Photographic print, 225 x 150 cm
Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London | D | Anna Molska, <i>Perspective</i> , 2008
Video: 1:31, colour, sound
Courtesy the artist and Broadway 1602, New York |
| B | Martin Creed, <i>Work No. 88: A sheet of A4 Paper Crumpled into a Ball</i> , 1995
A4 paper, approximately 2 in/5.1 cm diameter
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, London | E | Ignacio Uriarte, <i>Blocs</i> , 2010
A-4 paper, 32 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Nogueras Blanchard, Barcelona |
| C | Gareth Long, <i>Work In Progress</i> , 2010
Video: 5:12, colour
Courtesy the artist and Kate Werble Gallery, New York | F | Vlatka Horvat, <i>Pages (Repaired)</i> , 2009
Letter-size / A4 paper, artist tape, 8.75 x 11.75 inches each approximately
Courtesy the artist |