

PRESS RELEASE

Flaming July

24 July 2010 to 15 August 2010
Leighton House, Kensington

Private view and opening Friday 23 July 2010, 6pm to 9pm

An exhibition curated by Brooke McGowan and Liane Lang, part of the Cultural Olympiad Project *Once Upon a Time in the West*, supported by the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

Alice Anderson
Paul Buck
Ana Čavić
Justin Coombes
Jennifer K Dick
Hilary Koob-Sassen
Anouchka Grose
Nick Hornby
Liane Lang
Annabelle Moreau
Kate Williams
Julian Wild



In 1962 a painting was discovered by builders behind a false wall in a house on Clapham Common, London. They took it to a local picture framer, Ingo Finke, who realised what it was and agreed to handle it for them. An opportunity was missed when, aged fourteen but already a passionate devotee of Victorian art, Andrew Lloyd Webber spotted the picture in what must have been Finke's shop window, but could not afford it. The painting was *Flaming June*, painted in 1895 and acclaimed, and instantly sold, at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition that year. In 1915 it was placed on loan at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, where it remained a popular exhibit until 1930 when it was returned and subsequently disappeared.¹

From *June to July*: in reference to this work and in response to the oeuvre and life of Frederic Leighton, Brooke Lynn McGowan and Liane Lang are proud to present *Flaming July*, an exhibition of contemporary art, writing, and performance. *Flaming July* is part of *Once Upon a Time In The West*, and part of West London's contribution to the Cultural Olympiad. The project takes as its point of departure the rich history of artist studios in West London and examines it through the eyes of contemporary artists and writers. This exhibition of entirely new and site specific works responds to the legacy of Leighton, his house, and artist studios in West London.

The title is of course a tribute to the artist's *opus*. However, it is more than that. *Flaming July* refers not only to the painting itself, and recalls not only the month in which the Cultural Olympiad weekend is held, but also a more nefarious and questionable legacy. Indeed, if the aim of *Once Upon a Time in the West* has been to investigate the 'story' and 'history' of studio, space, and artistic practice in West London, then the aim of *Flaming July*, through a series of site specific works, is to consider the subliminal, suppressed, and often Orientalist legacy of Leighton in light of a greater, more conflicted, and more international London.

Every archive incites the urge to burn.

Live performance on the night include Jennifer K Dick reading texts relating to Leighton House and the work of the artists in the exhibition, a performance by Ana Cavic, a reading by Paul Buck of Armpit, a fictional monologue and by Kate Williams of her short story *Psyche*.

Artists/Writers/Performers

"The drape exceeds its role as a prop or cover and becomes, in Leighton's painting, a sculptural, subjective, and active agent", **Liane Lang** comments. Her animated video work *Material Displeasure* was made over several weeks in the rooms of Leighton House. It manifests an abstracted spatial orientation and connotes hallowed and ghostly hauntings. Space and time collapse and repeat as a wandering—a flaming orange, blood red and translucent white ream of fabric—form undoes its own formal qualities. The

¹ Many Thanks to Simon Wilson for making available his research.

work revels in colour, taking in subtle changes of light over many hours of the day, observing a sunbeam on a painting or the shadow of a chair. These meditative moments are interspersed with objects lent hyperanimacy, developing a narrative relation between the material object and its ambiguous history.

Sculptor **Nick Hornby** has produced a new life size tribrid: by dissecting two of Leighton's gestural sculptures with a fragment of wallpaper from the dining room. Blown up to six feet, the wallpaper graphic cuts out an elegant aeronautical sweep, and the two figures balance teetering on their combined foot. He says: "Leighton amassed fragments, vignettes, colours, as he circumnavigated the a world of Art, history, taste, and society. His studio was a reflection of his taste, and a projection of how he wished to be perceived." Hornby collects three motifs from Leighton house and evenly distributes them around 360.° The pieces trisect one another carving out a new synthetic, an admixture. Like other work, this piece is a puzzle to be unfolded.

For **Alice Anderson**, alienation exists at the base of being. Anderson's work speaks in semi auto-biographical tones of the place that the other takes in the understanding of self. Alice Anderson has produced a new two-minute video work at Leighton House for Flaming July, *Butterfly Ritual*, from the series of performances *Childhood Rituals*. Anderson re- interprets gestures and actions from early childhood using ginger thread or ginger dolls' hair. She made use of the Arab Hall, which conjured strong personal memories of her Algerian born mother who had an Arab balcony in the house. Alice Anderson uses her North African cultural background to create sculptures, films and performances exploring fictional childhood memories'.

From west to east: the famed Arab Hall in the home of the late Lord Leighton stands as a testament to the displaced and projected fantasies of Victorian England, whose own bounded spaces were as prey to the sensual improprieties of power--from sex to money and beyond—as any imagined by this generation in the near or far East.

Justin Coombes' art evokes strange, unstable relationships between personal memory, historical memory and landscape. For Flaming July he has produced *Saint Elsewhere*, a piece comprising of a photograph and a fictional letter written by the character in the image: a gay journalist. The piece was inspired by speculation that Leighton was homosexual and asks whether repression, for example the socio-sexual constraints of Victorian society, might be both a hindrance upon, and a fantastic spur to, creative endeavour.

The writer and historian **Kate Williams** is the author of *England's Mistress*, *The Life of Emma Hamilton* and *The Young Victoria*. Kate has produced a short story especially for Once Upon a Time in The West. *Psyche* is the fictionalized tale of Ada Pullen, Leighton's model and later a celebrated actress. Kate will be reading from the story in Leighton's studio.

From *Psyche's* phantasies to her axil, **Paul Buck** has created a new work for Flaming July titled *Armpit*. *Armpit* is a way to focus on the relationship of the model posing with arm aloft before the artist in the studio, brush in hand. The darkness that lurks beneath

that image often spills into sexual encounters. The Armpit presented here takes the form of an artwork (painting/text/photo) and a performance of the text that paints.

With a close attention to the dynamics of space as an expression of power and privilege, **Annabelle Moreau** has created *Infinite Lighting* in reference to the glorious north facing studios in historic artists houses. The surface of the piece is engraved by a multitude of fine lines converging into vanishing points. Light changes as it is caught by the grooves of the metal, creating an ever-changing environment, emanating and ephemeral. The vision evades into the infinity depicted. The piece stands as a window echoing the North light so sought by artists.

With a poetic take on the thin line between fact and fiction **Ana Čavić's** performances and text pieces thrive on the non-linear world of magic realism. Inspired by myths surrounding Leighton's models, *Climbing the Walls (Dream Walking)* is the latest in a series of site specific ephemeral performances that focus on subtle and fleeting interventions in found spaces. Instead of climbing around interior spaces without setting foot on the floor on this occasion the artist will focus on the floors themselves, making her dreamlike way around Leighton House's creaky floorboards and ageing stairs without making a sound or leaving a trace whilst holding the audience absolutely captive.

"If you desire to see a Japanese effect, you will not behave like a tourist and go to Tokio. On the contrary, you will stay at home." (Oscar Wilde *The Decay of Lying*) For *Flaming July* **Julian Wild** has created a work constructed from Japanned hardwood. Japanning is a process that was developed in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries to emulate Japanese and Chinese lacquer work. Japanning is representative of the appropriation of Eastern aesthetics and artifacts used within the fabric of Leighton House. "The title of the piece *Indeterminate System* comes from my approach of having no predetermined notion of the shape of the sculpture before I started to make it. This work is about a fine surface finish being applied to an awkward object. In mathematics an indeterminate system is a system without a solution."

Recent graduate and emerging talent **Annabel Wightman** presents *Evasion* whose theme of the illusory nature of time represents the fleeting nature of our 'grasp', on both intimacy and being, with long redolent light bulbs suspended over a series of waxen clasped hands. A poetic comment on the condition of hubris involved in the life of the house itself, the artist comments that "The work strives towards a supplicatory mood."

From opening a window to going out of doors: **Anouchka Grose** has produced a cd single featuring two pop songs, each composed in relation to the legacy of Isadora Duncan, studio space and the artist's own ambiguous relationship to Kensington, where she grew up. The first song, *I Want to Dance All Over Your Face*, was written in Kensington Square in 1987. The second, *I Invented You*, was written in 2010 and takes its title from a line in Isadora Duncan's autobiography. Isadora Duncan used the communal garden in Kensington Square as an unofficial studio while she lived there — in a cramped, furnished house — in 1899. She was first discovered by a well-known actress, while dancing on the lawn. The music is a tribute to the artist's resourceful use of space.

The poet and critic of visual poetics, Jennifer K Dick, author of *Fluorescence*, *Retina/Rétine* and *Enclosures*, has produced works in response to the work of the artists exhibiting in *Flaming July*. In the texts she will read, space and time, pasts and presence are skewed and fragmented. Language becomes a tool for touching, glancing at, moving towards or hiding from the sieve of time, Leighton House then and now, the art produced in the 21st century placed in a space that lingers in other, lost centuries.

Further information:

This site-specific exhibition will be presented at the home of Frederic Leighton in Kensington until mid August. Open 6 days a week (closed on Tuesday), 10.00-17.00.

Brooke Lynn McGowan and Liane Lang are leading two walks as part of *Once Upon A Time in The West* on 24./25. and 31 July and 1 August. Titled *A Model Village* and *Madness in Grey* the walks take a group of visitors to many historic artist studio buildings in West London. Please visit www.rbkc.gov.uk for details.

Liane Lang is the lead artist for *Once Upon a Time in The West*. The project curator is lecturer and art historian Brooke Lynn McGowan.

Brooke Lynn McGowan is an academic, curator, and writer. Brooke was born and raised in California and educated at Cambridge University, England as well École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. In addition to completing her PhD in Modern Languages, art history and contemporary aesthetics, she has worked with the Barbican Art Gallery (London), the Louise T Blouin Institute (London), Reconstruction Arts (England) DOX Center for Contemporary Art (Prague), as well as countless other galleries and institutes in the US, UK, Europe, and Asia. Her writing includes poetry, prose, essays, critique and journalism. She lives and works in the UK.

Liane Lang grew up in Germany and the US. She studied at NCAD in Dublin and completed a BA at Goldsmiths College followed by a Postgraduate Diploma at the Royal Academy, where she graduated in 2006. Her work is concerned with notions of animacy, which she investigates in photography and video works. Many of Lang's works examine museum objects, modes of display and the verisimilitude of art objects. She lives and works in the UK.

The project is supported by the Borough Of Kensington and Chelsea for the Cultural Olympiad.