

And the politically enacted collision of virtual and real is what informs Dawood's best work. This exhibition centres around a virtual-reality experience, *Encroachments*, 2019. The viewer, wearing a headset, walks through a series of scenes. First, you follow a ghostly father and child through Ferozsons bookshop in 1980s Lahore. Before its recent closure, Ferozsons was the oldest Urdu bookshop in the world. Its recreation here, right down to the worn floor tiles, becomes an act of preserving the real. But reality slips. A secret door opens into a smoky games arcade. You are immersed in a game of Space Invaders, aiming lasers at advancing aliens, as a portrait of Muhammed Ali Jinnah looks down from the wall.

Next, you approach and explore an architectural model of the proposed US embassy in Karachi. It warps fluidly as you walk around it. Halfway through the real building's construction, Islamabad replaced Karachi as the Pakistani capital, so the scheme was downgraded to a consulate before completion. Certain parts of the building do not officially exist, because they once housed a CIA supercomputer. The building has always hovered between realities, and exploring it in VR makes perfect, eerie sense.

The non-VR stuff in the exhibition is arranged kind of artlessly (for some reason, the four paintings entitled 'Encroachments I-IV' are hung in the wrong order), which seems a wasted opportunity for the virtual to spill into the gallery space. The terrazzo patterns which appear in the VR and also fill the walls of the room attempt this, but it doesn't quite come off, despite the verve of a neon alien playing tricks with your peripheral vision.

It's within the virtual space itself that Dawood's visual philosophy comes into its own. The final VR scene is a tea shop in one of Karachi's illegal townships, called 'encroachments'. A proprietor, sweat beading his computer-generated forehead, serves tea calmly. Then, without warning, an explosion rocks the virtual universe. The man throws his arms over his face and the world goes white. Like a CIA operative inside a supercomputer, we're both dead and not dead.

The gallery's health-and-safety disclaimer warns that 'anyone with vertigo or agoraphobia should not take part in the VR experience', which is perhaps sensible considering the disorienting slippage of the virtual zones. But, asks Dawood, is our own sense of reality any more stable? And if fear of real space bars us entry to the virtual, where is there to hide?

Dawood says he likes the 'idea of an archive of an archive', building spaces in VR as a repository for information. But he is fully aware that, in a war of (dis)information, as in Jorge Luis Borges' fabled library or airdropped propaganda, at some point the repetition stops being an 'accumulation' and becomes *reductio ad absurdum* nonsense. Our reality blinks out of existence as soon as we try to build on it. As the artist says: 'Non-space can become space. And then return to non-space again very quickly.'

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Adam Gallagher, *Elephant Tusk Pyre*, 2020

Ruth Angel Edwards, Cole Denyer and Adam Gallagher

Le Bourgeois, London, 2 February to 7 March

'Too many cam'ras and not enough food' is one of the lyrics in 'Driven To Tears', an album track released on *Zenyatta Mondatta* by The Police in 1980. A few bars of this song play on loop in the toilet at the back of Le Bourgeois, a gallery located just a little deeper into Catford than Laurence House, where Lewisham Council routinely refuses people help with housing and other essential benefits. Visible from the gallery's window, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (Domestic Resuscitation box), all works 2020, consists of a plinth supporting a taxidermied canary in a small tank. Referencing another *Zenyatta Mondatta* track, 'Canary In A Coalmine', the forlorn state of the dead bird and the Shoreditch-steam-punk-meets-Damien Hirst aesthetic calls on viewers to mourn connected personal and political losses. Showing flashes of affection for anti-art, Arte Povera, psychedelic imagery, cheap commodities and craft, Ruth Angel Edwards, Cole Denyer and Adam Gallagher's collaborative multimedia installation offers a grounding response to those parts of the electorate that keeps repeating versions of the undying Tory lie that people are inherently selfish, only want the best for themselves and their families, and should never feel guilty for acting in ways that destroy far-reaching bonds.

Evoking the London 2012 Olympic legacy and the cynical sale of multicultural ideals, Cole Denyer's *Host Nation* (*We Are Open/Peace Triangle*) borrows from visual merchandising strategies used by supermarkets to direct shoppers through the aisles towards the tills. Three laminated floor vinyls interpret the CND peace logo with the round hub and three-pronged inverted arrow as one of eight arms and hands in different skin tones and holding each other tight. In this way, *Host Nation*'s insignia bears comparison to the logo of CAIWU (Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union), and serves as a reminder of workers still refusing to be divided after the neoliberal destruction of trade unionism, as well as the loss of jobs to outsourcing and automation - from the supermarket self-check-out aisle to airport border control, the customer or passenger does the work of a former employee.

Since visiting this show, elephants and scaffolding foam have become indissociably connected as I walk around. The 40 tusks in Gallagher's centrally placed work *Elephant Tusk Pyre* are made from the canary yellow cylinders seen everywhere in the city where maintenance and construction occurs. Covered with newspaper, painted ivory and adorned with decorative moths, the tusks, tenderly tapered and overlapping at the top, form a macabre exoskeleton around an inner tarpaulin tent containing crying onion face pots, purple fairy lights and fruit machine decals of the kind you would find in a seaside arcade. This work compresses and expands the meaning of 'white elephant', paying homage to the animal and gesturing to anti-gentrification struggles around the development of south London's Elephant and Castle streets and the area's link through heraldic imagery to the Worshipful Company of Cutlers and, hence, to the weapons and the ivory trades.

Taking three 49" television screens, bought smashed, for its display system, *Street Art* by Edwards watches over *Elephant Tusk Pyre* from three upper corners of the space. This work is a slide-show of videos where subcultural characters - women and dolls taken from assemblage paintings shown by Edwards last year in Berlin - have had their heads cut out and pasted back into public space before being filmed. This process reads as restorative, counteracting the erasure of graffiti from urban landscape. *Street Art* still refuses to clean up on reinsertion into the gallery - beneath the screen damage, the image bleeds.

In the office, an original painting by Edwards incorporates a staring blue-haired figure and ripped skateboard apparel. She is accompanied by a series of A4 posters, one of which *detourns* Futurist perspectives by depicting a V-Force paintball mask as a fashion accessory for the next war. Although the diagnosis is bleak, at the time of writing I am excited at the prospect of a performance night at Le Bourgeois, which may bring sparks of chaos against adjustment to a depressed vision. I am still energised by vivid images held in mind from Auto Italia and Peak, where Edwards and Gallagher collaborated in 2018-19 with The Unwelcome Collection. Of particular note was the procession of Curtly Thomas through a former Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre space, wearing a pregnant stomach and walking with an air of majesty, scattering grey stones of cat litter as if they were confetti.

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Karrabing Film Collective, *The Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland*, 2018, film

Film

49th International Film Festival Rotterdam

Despite the bewildering array of thematic taxonomies at International Film Festival Rotterdam, set on cross-referencing every film, somehow a distinct theme-between-themes remix emerged around collectivity, and it was this that enriched a small corner of the sprawling programme.

Whether as a means to make work, as something formed by the work, or as a route to showing work, five collectives here approached plural practice united by the will to reappraise dominant narratives, challenge political hegemony or lever real change - some all three.

The indigenous Australian Karrabing Film Collective presented an overview of their fierce and fabular films. Members Kieran and Aiden Sing, Angelina Lewis and Elizabeth A Povinelli outlined the struggles which animate their work: colonial oppression, particularly via the judicial system; the despoiling of the land; the stolen generation and its active legacy; and the racism of the settler state. In the Karrabing's home, Belyuen, life is lived communally, and the formation of the group served as a means to galvanise kin, organise collectively and form a well of solidarity on which to draw. Favouring improvisation over scriptwriting, the group's work purposefully harnesses an oral idiom at risk of disappearing, yet forgoes memorialising in favour of reanimating pervasive stories: here is no dead archive, but a living set of instructions, destabilising the colonial project by refusing the division or dispersal of their culture.

What the Karrabing and Phil Collins's *Bring Down the Walls* - housing a collective formed for the work itself - have in common beyond immediate thematic concerns around incarceration is the strength of the group as a path to solidarity and resistance. The sum of a tortuous process, Collins's film started as a project to create a band with inmates of the notorious Sing Sing prison, and by doing so to think around incarceration and rehabilitation, but the state authorities reneged on their involvement shortly after filming started in 2015.

The project's eventual emergence as a one-off nightclub in Brooklyn, delivering classic house tracks by night while dissecting the prison-industrial complex by day, is an improbable feat of bravura out of reach to many but emblematic of much of Collins's work. *Bring Down the Walls* brings together former inmates and community activists, largely through a feminist and queer lens, to establish, respectively, the city's latest-running, loudest-thumping club and a daily forum to share, organise and form resistance around the US prison system. Furious by day, joyous by night, by standing up and voicing the impossible - an end to prison - it wills it to no longer be so; and despite the white heat of the injustices that propel it, the tenor of the film is love and hope.

Where Phil Collins's method has been invariably to work with communities to enact something of the truth of their situation as a means to achieve a certain catharsis, Francis Alÿs's *Sandlines* seemed at first glance as though it might share at least its method and possibly its outcome, billed as it was as 'a collaboration with the children of a small village in the Nineveh province of Iraq'.