

The skilful interplay between performance and object was further developed in *Bureau de Change*, first presented in 1987 at Matt's Gallery, London and subsequently acquired by Tate. On 30 March 1987, Van Gogh's *Still Life: Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers*, 1888, sold at Christie's in London for a record £22.5m. *Bureau de Change* was Finn-Kelcey's response: a theatrically spot-lit, floor-based recreation of the oil painting rendered in coins protected by a CCTV camera and a patrolling uniformed guard. The auratic object is reduced to nothing but spare change in a concise questioning of the art market and the wider attribution of value.

The first exhibition to include Finn-Kelcey after she graduated was a group show of emerging artists at the then Museum of Modern Art Oxford in 1968. It is fitting that her first retrospective was mounted here, if tantalising that the exhibition was not extended into the Piper Gallery which could have accommodated one of her large-scale installations from the 1990s. Nevertheless, 'Life, Belief and Beyond' firmly asserts Finn-Kelcey as an important figure in the complex landscape of postwar British art. Further institutional recognition should deservedly follow. The sheer range of work on view is testimony to Finn-Kelcey's remarkable dexterity as an artist, and her drive to critically subvert and humorously challenge the status quo. Describing her work, she once said: 'I work in the belief – or dare – that I can continue to reinvent myself and remain a perennial beginner.' This important survey affirmed Finn-Kelcey as ever restless, fearlessly teetering between states of reverie and earthly critique. ■

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In Case There's a Reason: The Theatre of Mistakes

Raven Row London 30 June to 6 August

The most headline-grabbing performance art has featured guns, bodily fluids, excrement, nudity, beds and placards. Scandalous material of this type is conspicuously absent from Raven Row's survey of The Theatre of Mistakes, which partly accounts for why this artist collective has been under-evaluated. Founded in early 1970s London, the group has taken a cross-disciplinary approach to performance, theatre and participation. This exhibition was appropriately multifaceted, presenting an expansive archive, as well as a free public workshop and a performance piece. Documents and photographs from the 1970s were arranged on glass-topped tables and walls of the



upper floors, while the lower-ground level was set aside for the live elements.

Over the years The Theatre of Mistakes has proved itself adaptable to a range of situations – a farm, a prison, an urban residential street, as well as more glamorous settings such as the Serpentine Gallery, Hayward Gallery, Paula Cooper Gallery and the Stedelijk Museum – in a consistently pragmatic and direct manner. Amongst an array of early photo documentation of performances and workshops that took place at the Purdies Farm artistic retreat is a cardboard tag with the hand-written message 'TOMORROW BUY A BAR OF SOAP + PAINT IT BLACK!'. This uncredited, Yoko Ono-inspired example of instruction-art is seminal for what rapidly developed into complex lists of instructions, stage directions, games, manifestos and pedagogy.

The earliest documents show that the group was originally called 'The Ting' and then 'The Ting: Theatre of Mistakes' and later simply 'The Theatre of Mistakes'; 'Mistakes' referring to the Keatonesque potential of mistakes that occur within a structured performance. Later, the group created the conceptual piece *Mutuality*, 1976, a series of joint signatures by members Anthony Howell, Fiona Templeton and Mickey Greenall, who simultaneously held a single pen with inevitably scrawly results. The 'best' version was made into a rubber stamp to be used as an identifying mark for the many documents that were being produced; that their logo is indecipherable betrays a fundamental wariness around authorship and leadership. 'Mutual authorship', as they they called it, is a reasonable solution considering that over a hundred performers and artists contributed between 1974 and 1976.

The Theatre of Mistakes
The Street 1975
performance



John Stezaker, *Mask LXXVII*, 2007, Courtesy The Approach, London. Photo: FXP photography.

East Gallery^{NUA}

IN QUOTES: collage and assemblage in contemporary art

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