



Mark Wallinger, *Construction Site*, 2011. Projected video installation, 1 hour 21 minutes. Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London.

## Systemising the Abstract and Mundane

MARK WALLINGER

VOID, DERRY-LONDONDERRY, 7 SEPTEMBER - 25 OCTOBER

As part of the UK City of Culture celebrations in Derry-Londonderry, Void presents a show combining both new and recent works by Mark Wallinger (b. 1959). Twice nominated for, and once winner of, the Turner Prize, Wallinger has established himself in the art world since graduating from Goldsmiths College in 1985. He has also represented England at the Venice Biennale 2001 and been the subject of an important solo exhibition at Tate Liverpool in 2000. Regardless of his significant and lengthy career, spanning 30 years, the artist still remains something of an enigma, proving hard to place in any obvious artistic category. In contrast to his indefinable output, through his practice he attempts to systemise nature, creating order from the abstract and the mundane.

Over the years, Wallinger has tackled numerous contentious topics and expressed them through a variety of forms. For example, *Race, Class, Sex* (1993) is a series of sensual and aesthetic paintings of horses, which explore the British relationship with sport and national identity. His personal enjoyment of horse racing meets his left-wing politics in these works, questioning ownership and pedigree. Another preoccupation for the artist is that of organised religion, which appeared in *Ecce Homo* (1999). This depicts a pale figure of Christ wearing a barbed wire crown, which was placed on the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square. However, rather than criticising religion, the piece was actually a call to recognise the humanity of Jesus, and acknowledge his position as an important political figure during his lifetime and continued influence today.

Wallinger's more recent works, although still socially engaged, concentrate more closely on his interest in order. In 2012, Wallinger produced new commissions for BALTIC, Gateshead. Among those exhibited was

*1000000000000000* (2012), which catalogued and compared 65,536 stones. Each stone was placed within a square on a large checkerboard, which is the simplest binary device for implying order. Similarly, *The Other Wall* (2012) maintained randomness in the form of a monumental brick wall. 3,000 bricks were numbered sequentially before construction; they were then distributed with no acknowledgement of the numbers.

One of the featured works in the Void exhibition is *Construction Site* (2011). In this hour-long film, Wallinger records three men building a scaffold on a pebbly beach, playing with viewers' perception as all of the action remains below the horizon line until the structure is complete and the figures rise above it. The second half follows the deconstruction of the same piece, returning to an empty beach. This process repeats continuously on a loop. Not just acting as a comment on observation and the use of film in art, the grid format of the scaffolding and the systematic approach to building also makes reference to Systems art and the infamous style of Piet Mondrian.

Curated by Elaine Forde, the show also includes Wallinger's portrait paintings, which were started in 2007 and all use the letter 'I'. One of these, *Self Portrait (Times New Roman)* (2012), appeared on the outer wall of BALTIC. Running the entire length of the impressive building, the rectangular white sheet was simply emblazoned with a capital 'I'. The bold statement embodied the character of individualistic society and the purpose of a self portrait without the artist drawing himself. Wallinger's continuously unique and ironic approach encourages audiences to reconsider and question the simplicity and character of the surrounding world. [www.derryvoid.com](http://www.derryvoid.com).

## Iconic Britain

SIMON ROBERTS: PIERDOM

FLOWERS GALLERY, LONDON, 10 SEPTEMBER - 12 OCTOBER

Based in the seaside town of Brighton, it is no surprise that photographer Simon Roberts (b. 1974) found himself turning his camera towards the piers that line the British coast. Embodying both the heyday of English holidaymaking and its subsequent demise, the seaside structures have taken on an iconic status along with the traditional huts and bad weather characteristic of British beaches. Roberts' new exhibition and book of the same name, *Pierdom*, capture the nostalgia and the altering function of piers over time.

Prior to World War II, the coastline boasted over 100 piers, either modest and practical or luxurious and elegant. Since the dismantling of several during the war to prevent German landings, many more have been destroyed by ferocious weather or fires. Today, under half of the originals remain as they once were, and they now stand as cultural landmarks, referencing history, national identity and the altering economic position of Britain.

Primarily constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, during the explosion of Victorian resorts and railways, piers were erected as docks for pleasure steamers and other sea craft. Over time their humble beginnings advanced into the more extravagant homes of bandstands, cafés and music halls. Acknowledging their importance over time, Roberts compares the original architectural structures with their modern interpretation and usage. For example, his images of abandoned piers such as *Birbeck Pier* (2012) are contrasted with those like *Ryde Pier* (2012), in which the local community and everyday function of the landscape are represented by a skateboarding park that appears at the forefront of the picture. It was this combination of culture and society that caught the photographer's interest, discovering an ingrained fascination with the relationship be-



Simon Roberts, *Teignmouth Pier*, July 2011. © Simon Roberts, courtesy Flowers Gallery, London.

tween humanity, the surrounding environment and important British pastimes.

Roberts records the symbolic constructs with great technical precision. His images capture peripheral details, which include the surrounding landscape and have the effect of enriching the observation of each work. Utilising formal devices associated with the picturesque, the pieces align audiences with contemporary issues, acknowledging the precarious connection between society, nature and urban environments. Through deciding to survey a small part of British history and landscape, he is able to undertake an architectural and anthropological study of the country. [www.flowersgallery.com](http://www.flowersgallery.com).

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