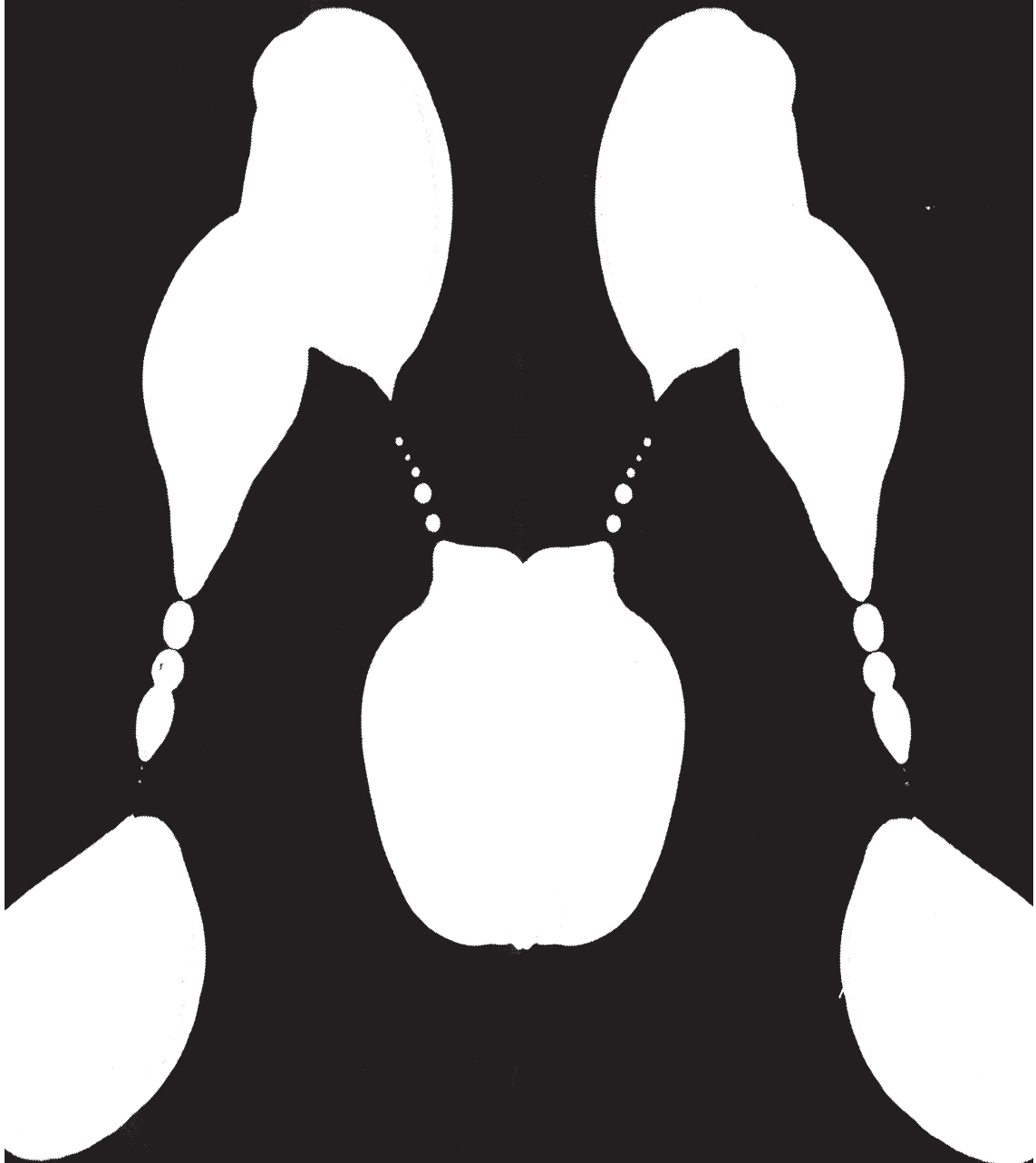


Depression.

When I am depressed, there is a power at work somewhere. ¹



¹ Seth Price, *Décor Holes*, www.distributedhistory.com

Alighiero e Boetti

1940, Turin, Italy. Died in Rome, 1994

In 1972 the Italian artist Alighiero Boetti renamed himself, adding the “and” to denote a split personality or a duality in the artistic persona, drawing attention to the fact that the artist was torn between being at once a public figure and simultaneously withdrawn and mysterious; the showman *and* the one who reveals mystic truths. *Gemelli* (Twins) (1968) is a self-portrait of the artist holding his own hand. The doctored photograph was produced as a postcard and distributed as a calling card. As with his enigmatic *Manifesto* (1969), an editioned poster featuring the names of his peers alongside apparently meaningless symbols, the work reflects on the failure of the historical avant-garde to realise its promise, and the subsequent re-branding of avant-garde forms and strategies. This questioning of the function of the artist and pessimism about the artist's role in society however was not the end point for Boetti. He was especially interested in seeing this kind of schizophrenia as a strategy that could be put to work to resist conformity in an age of rampant consumerism.

Nairy Baghramian

1971, Isfahan, Iran. Lives and works in Berlin and London

The works of Nairy Baghramian are often more absent than present. Her sculptures tend to occupy the fringes of exhibition spaces – they linger at thresholds or in doorways, as is the case with the two works on show here, *Bouncer* (2006) and *Door Stools (Stool on the Left, Stool on the Right)* (2006). However little space they take up physically, they create space by anticipating and engaging with the physical presence of the spectator. They inspire associations with minimalist sculptures, but do not make the same claims for their own autonomy. They reference furniture and design, lean against walls, obstruct doorways. They are anti-monumental. Her work is nearly always context or site-specific, and often refers to many things outside of itself and its immediate context, such as personal narratives and the works of other artists and designers, and to literature and politics. In a playful way, her work subversively critiques the minimal art of the 1960s and 1970s and its claims for the neutral, the self-referential and the universal.

Gillian Carnegie

1971, Suffolk, UK. Lives and works in London

Since the early part of the 20th century painting has periodically been pronounced dead. In a sense, painting, as it continues, lives with these deaths and incorporates them into its formal and conceptual foundations. We can see this in the deathly palor of much contemporary painting and the end games that are played out in its name. In Gillian Carnegie's paintings, although the colours are often muted and the forms are often familiar, the works fall into neither camp. But neither is she a "traditional" painter, despite the fact that she paints in recognisable genres: still life, landscape, portraiture, abstraction etc. Her desire to fulfil the requirements of these categories, yet retain something of contemporary painting's scepticism, creates an interesting tension. Her work is neither traditional, nor truly modern.

Untitled (2008) depicts a tree stump and its shadow. The shadow has as much weight and corporeality as the object which created it. This game of reflecting on the real and the illusory in paint is as old as painting itself, but Carnegie manages at once to accept this as *the fait accompli* of painting and the source of possibility for its continuation. *Yellow (2007)* again faithfully adheres to a recognisable genre. In this case portraiture. But she has chosen to paint not her face but her rear end. The provocation here makes more visible the provocations that are more subtle but just as insistent in her other works.

Stephan Dillemath

1954, Hessen, Germany. Lives and works in Munich

Stephan Dillemath's practice functions as a mirror to contemporary society and its "corporate fairytales" promoting global capitalism – what the artist calls the "society of control". It is unclear whether his work, like the late 19th century Lebensreform (Life reform) movements, is modern or anti-modern. Movements like these grew out of a deep dissatisfaction with the effect of 19th century industrialisation, and Dillemath's practice seems to be similarly positioned with respect to late 20th century privatisation of the public sphere, oscillating between an expression of a political struggle and nihilism.

Dillemath has stated that today's credit crisis facilitates for an opportunity to transform a society that is totally "fucked up by the market". His installation made for *Depression* combines existing works and new elements. Dillemath revisits the Lebensreform movement with a "back to nature" chair made from twigs, and also includes sculptures from the *Marktverficktes Sein* series, including some mouldy dislocated plaster arms in a glass vitrine - *A Failure to Control the Animal Spirit* (2009) - which possibly alludes to the pathological character of capitalism. The installation also includes a three dimensional representation of the truncated rhombohedron that features in Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (1514), under which is trapped a cast of the artist's back. Dillemath's multidisciplinary practice, inspired by an escapist attitude, resides on the debris of modernity.

Chris Evans

1967, Eastrington, UK. Lives and works in Berlin and London

Chris Evans' projects, sculptures, films and paintings often start their lives as a title, before expanding into large-scale projects that involve consultancy, multiple collaborations and legal contracts and permissions. As the politicization of culture intensifies, the relationships between institutions, their sponsors and artists become ever more entwined and dependent. Evans' projects operate along the fault lines of these relationships by on the one hand evoking old systems of support and patronage, and on the other, by inserting, virally, new protocols or processes into existing systems.

Home Entertainment (2009), made specifically for *Depression*, alludes to the increasing democratization and commercialisation of culture. For the duration of the exhibition, a wind vane holding the phrase "home entertainment" is placed onto the chimney on the roof of Marres. Evans was first attracted to the fact that for every generation the phrase has a different connotation. Today it is most commonly associated with the home cinema systems that seek to replicate the experience of the cinema in the comfort of one's own home. *Home Entertainment* refers at once to the segregation of culture from the experience of everyday life, as well as to the desire to recast collective experiences as personal ones.

Claire Fontaine

Collective artist, founded in 2004. Lives and work in Paris

Claire Fontaine is a Paris-based “collective artist”, described by those that created her as a “readymade” artist, and whose name was taken from a brand of French school notebooks. Her work often resembles the iconic works of conceptual artists. With sculptures and installations, Fontaine investigates the possibilities for social and political change within the cultural sphere, with an ironic and arch attitude. Her series of “Brickbats” – a projectile wrapped with a threatening message used by protestors – act as a suggestion of violence, but also work as a metaphor for inertia. Rather than threatening messages, her Brickbats are wrapped in colour scans of book dust jackets, adjusted to fit the size of the brick. For *Vivre! Vaincre soi-meme, la depression (brickbat)* (2006) the cover originates from a book, coincidental authored by another Claire Fontaine, is a self-help book for those wishing to conquer depression. The other work by the artist on show in *Depression is Passe-Partout (Ramallah)* (2008), made from handmade lock picks – bicycle spokes, safety pins and hacksaw blades – collected during several visits to Israel and Palestine. The notion of property, and of trespassing, gains an urgent political dimension here, whilst also reflecting on human misery.

Melanie Gilligan

1979, Toronto, Canada. Lives and works in London

Melanie Gilligan is a critic, musician and artist. As Petit Mal, an electro-pop duo she fronts with writer Ben Seymour, Gilligan wrote the eponymous song that features on the soundtrack of *Crisis in the Credit System* (2008). In it she sings with icy insouciance, "I found a bubble inside a crisis, a hole full of emptiness". The four-part film explores the crisis in the credit system that presaged the global financial crisis that we are currently living through. Filmed in a style reminiscent of a television drama, *Crisis...* depicts five employees of a large investment bank being put through their paces during a brainstorming retreat at a country mansion. They are shown role-playing different scenarios that will presumably help them and their company to find new and innovative ways of tackling the credit crisis.

Conceived, written and filmed before Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy on 15 September 2008, the film is as prescient as it is searching. It was released on October 1st 2008 and made specifically for distribution on the internet (<http://www.crisis-inthecreditsystem.org.uk/>). Rather than focus on the specifics of our current crisis, the film deals more generally with the types of abstractions and speculations that could be said to underpin both economics and culture at the beginning of the 21st century.

Karl Holmqvist

1964, Västerås, Sweden. Lives and works in Berlin

The works of Karl Holmqvist are concerned with language – language as text and the language of images. The sources for his writing range from pop songs and films, beat and concrete poetry, to the mystical writings of William Blake and spiritual texts. Using collage and cut-up techniques, quotations from these very different sources are rearranged in a nonhierarchical way, creating new formal and linguistic compositions. He liberates language from the demands of linearity that are usually imposed upon it. His sculptures quote or rework works by other artists, who themselves have used the strategies of appropriation and the readymade. In this way he pays tribute to their work and at the same time reconsiders and reuses it.

In *Depression*, Karl Holmqvist shows, among other works, two sculptures – each consisting of four letters that form one word – reminiscent of the straightforward, materially 'poor' works by the Lettrists. In another work, Holmqvist has fly-posted walls with a compilation of posters from an earlier work, the artist book *Cat People* (2006). The Xeroxed book begins with cutout images from the 1980s movie *Cat People* before developing a kaleidoscopic network of ambiguous associations. *Untitled (Nest)* (2006) echoes the work of American artist Cady Noland, known for works that explore the notion of fame, gained by people for failure or evil doing. In the garden, the posters are repeated on several billboards. Here, the animal-actress Natassja Kinski seems to have found a natural habitat in the garden greens.

Anja Kirschner and David Panos

1977, Munich, D. Lives and works in London

1971, Athens, Greece. Lives and works in London

The Last Days of Jack Sheppard (2009) is the third film that Anja Kirschner and David Panos have made together. As with the previous two, *Polly II: A Plan for a Revolution in Docklands* (2006) and *Trail of the Spider* (2008), the film pitches contemporary issues into historical events and vice versa. By mixing straight-forward modes of storytelling with a dizzying range of theatrical and documentary devices the artists make clear that narrative is a construct that persists equally in documentary and fiction films.

The Last Days of Jack Sheppard is made up of scenes that detail the life and times of Jack Sheppard, an 18th century petty criminal who became something of a folk hero with his legendary feats of escapology. His exploits were recorded and ghost written into a memoir by Daniel Defoe. This all takes place against the backdrop of the 'first' credit crisis – the bursting of the South Sea Bubble in 1720. The birth of the novel: the narrativizing of real events into a fictional form, and the early days of financial speculation are explicitly conjoined in the film – all part of what Defoe called, "the projecting age".

Lee Lozano

1930, Newark, USA. Died in Dallas, 1999

In New York in the 1960s Lee Lozano was very much part of the scene but her career, unlike those of many of her peers, was a short one. She adopted a number of distinct styles and strategies and then gradually withdrew from the art world, before bowing out completely in the early seventies. Her paintings and drawings from the early sixties were full of suggestive imagery: tools, electrical equipment and other objects, and more abstract organic forms, standing in for male and female genitalia. Later her paintings and drawings became more formal and abstract, and her palette more sober.

Towards the end of the sixties, as Lozano felt increasingly alienated from systems that governed the (New York) art world, she intensified her attempt, which was always a part of her work, to collapse art into life. Her conceptual "text pieces" from the late sixties detailed these attempts. In *Real Money Piece* (1969) she invited her peers to take money from a jar, and wrote down their responses. *Withdrawal Piece*, which is included with other "pieces" on a single sheet of paper, from 1969, makes tangible her exhaustion. One of her last pieces was a simple instruction to herself not to speak to women for a month. Eventually, in the early seventies she saw these strategies through to their logical conclusion and withdrew from the art world completely. She moved to Texas and little is known about her life between this point and her death in 1999.

Alan Michael

1967, Glasgow, UK. Lives and works in Glasgow

Michael's paintings in oil and acrylic on canvas cast a steely eye over the surfaces and signs of the modern western metropolis. Working mainly from photographs he blends images together or refines them, making paintings that both attract and repel. In *Cars and Houses* (2008) the reflections from a new Mini, the BMW update of the classic design, are captured in hyper real sheen. This is at odds with the text painting, *Blue and White* (2008) – echoing the style of Russian avant-garde – that hangs close by. Here the classic font is repeated ad nauseam, painted in blue with a sickly underpainting of green and yellow showing through. The ambivalence shown his subjects is as indebted to pop art as to the dispassionate gaze of European art house cinema of the 1960s and 70s. His paintings, particularly those that take the Mini as their subject, court nostalgia. But as with the surfaces themselves, the reflections multiply and fracture intent, leaving one feeling as dazed and confused as a shopper on Oxford Street on a Saturday afternoon – pop art's love affair with consumerism has gone sour. And, as with the text painting *It's Positive* (2008), whether they mean what they say, or say what they mean, seems to be beyond the point.

Melvin Moti

1978, Rotterdam, NL. Lives and works in Rotterdam and New York

On request, the artist Melvin Moti has created a poster to accompany the exhibition. His design, using a moiré pattern, creates the disturbing effect, which occurs when two matrices are overlaid at an angle. The result is a defect. This unanticipated fault creates an effect so dominant it demands total attention and focuses one's view solely on the defect. On TV it is an especially recurrent phenomena when a striped shirt or tie starts to interfere with the screen creating such a disturbance to the eye and brain that one has to turn away. Ultimately this visual-physical error spreads like an infectious disease, spreading unchecked into the psyche. In Melvin Moti's films various scientific experiments are reworked into new constellations exploring the way the visible effect the mental processes.

Seth Price

1973, East Jerusalem, Israel. Lives and works in New York

Price is known for his meticulous and mercilessly sharp analysis of contemporary culture. He seeks to expose how social and economic changes determine the status of all cultural objects, and our relation to them. His sculptures, wall pieces and films are augmented by his writing, which makes explicit his interest in notions of “redistribution” within the contemporary context of our digital world. He draws on a vast range of sources, which he “samples” and remixes, including television advertising, self help books and early video art. In his essay *Décor Holes (aka: Depletion, Unique Source/ All Natural Suicide Gang, Akademische Graffiti, Was ist los)* Price examines the term “sampling”, which he sees as not being concerned with repetition, but with the creation of new and discrete productions. For his vacuum-formed works, like *Untitled (2008)* presented here, he casts objects such as vintage bomber jackets, flowers and body parts in high-impact polystyrene – the material used for vacuum packing industrial goods and consumables. In the corner of each work the year of production is embossed, like a sell by date. The other works by Price on show in *Depression* are two “Gold Key” works from 2007. These pieces form part of a series made from images taken from the internet showing banal everyday actions. In the case of *Gold Key* the image is of a set of keys being passed from one hand to another. Deeply concerned with circulatory systems of distribution and redistribution, Price takes a critical distance from these systems, whilst also immersing himself in them.

Jim Shaw

1952, Midland, USA. Lives and works in Los Angeles

Jim Shaw is an omnivore. His work constitutes an obsessive cataloguing of the disparate elements that make up contemporary culture, from high to low; from the culture of the American West (consumer culture, the entertainment industry, religious fundamentalism, politics) to high art. Shaw employs an extensive range of forms in his sculptures, drawings, videos, paintings and installations. He borrows forms from cartoons, 1950s advertising, abstract expressionism, theatrical and film props, and amateur painting. The figure of the 'zombie' has featured in many of his works. This offers a way in to thinking about his practice, which is cannibalistic in nature and seems to want to absorb everything. For the past seventeen years he has been recording his dreams in notebooks. These are subsequently turned into *Dream Drawings* and *Dream Objects*. Shaw's production could be seen as schizophrenic, but, for Shaw, it reflects the consciousness of a disintegrated, North America; a nation with an identity crisis, where the labor movement has been replaced by born-again Christianity. Shaw's critical considerations however do not only concern religious fundamentalism, but also the elitist and 'cultish' art world.

Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan

1976, Norfolk, UK. Lives and works in Glasgow

1971, West Yorkshire, UK. Lives and works in Glasgow

Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan have worked together since the late 1990s and their collaborative practice takes many forms. But all of their work is concerned with the mutability of forms and their meanings. At first glance the work appears to belong to a tradition of post-minimal sculpture. Their work however doesn't seek to extend some kind of phenomenological exploration of space, rather their concern is with the transference of meaning between different forms through time. Two of the works in *Depression* feature a form that the artists call the "thingamajig", the dictionary definition of which is, "a person or thing whose name one has forgotten or does not know or does not wish to mention". *Think Thingamajig* (2009), placed in the garden, is a cube that hovers just above the ground. This slight separation of object from ground robs it of the monumentality and the grounded, everyday quality of the minimalist object. The painted pink square on each side of the black cube also adds an illusory aspect at odds with the "specific object". This is a mysterious object, it looks rather lost and pathetic – it's function and meaning forgotten: an object without an object. It appears again in the drawing, *Think, Think Thingamajig, Think* (2005). This time a man in a top hat, looking miserable, wears it around his torso. He looks to be sitting atop a cliff, his feet dangling in the sea far below. Who is this Victorian Gulliver, and why is he so glum? These, and three other works by the artists, make up a new grouping of works put together especially for *Depression*, which have been collectively titled, *Three Lean Meanings and Other Feelings* (2009).

Barbara Visser

1966, Haarlem, NL. Lives and works in Amsterdam

Since the early 1990s Barbara Visser has used photography to investigate myth making and authenticity. Her pictures often don't come with dimensions, and the question of finished work is always a mute point. Visser is interested in doubling, reproduction and the role of the artist in the production and destruction of their own myth. *Boris* (1991) was first produced as a black and white postcard; the version shown in *Depression* was made in 2006. The image is of Boris Becker, the German former tennis player and now media personality. But it is not the "real" Boris, it is a wax work version. Becker, like all celebrities, is essentially unknowable. The more we see him – the more his image is reproduced – the more opaque his "real" self becomes. Visser doesn't merely question and destabilise the integrity and authenticity of images per se, or certain images in particular, in order to expose certain hierarchies and systems that govern representations in the media and beyond. She also questions and jeopardises the integrity of her own image making and the hierarchies and systems that authenticate it.