



# RACE FOR THE PRIZE

Paul Lewthwaite  
Geoff Diego Litherland  
and Jonathan Gillie



14 - 24 October 2010  
The Wasp Room and Max Warbourgh Space, Tether.

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Gallery Installation Images  
Bonington Gallery  
2010

This collaborative endeavour seeks to expose confluences that have arisen in the artists' recent work and future direction, which will result in a series of explorative exhibitions.

The artists' practices are rooted in an ongoing investigation with the processes and formal elements inherent to the media of sculpture, painting and moving image. This understanding of history and technique is not the only overlap in the artists' work. Recently they have been drawn to the imagery and narratives found within the genres of science fiction. By appropriating these ideologies, which often have pseudo-religious undertones and apocalyptic prophecies, they seek to create an interchange between fantasy and stark reality.

The works aim to exploit the way sculpture and painting can manifest the abstract and intangible into something bordering on reality. Lewthwaite's sculptures are assembled from laboriously crafted components and ready-made objects. Their stage set qualities and odd forms play with illusions of interpretation, highlighted by the choice of materials and peculiar surface treatments. Litherland's paintings emerge from dark, geometric backgrounds where painterly abstractions jostle with 3D forms to generate awkward compositions that aspire to enlighten yet offer little resolution.

Together the artworks create an 'out of the ordinary' and slightly uncanny atmosphere in the gallery space. Vivid primary and fluorescent colours combine with muted ochres. The detritus of semi-recognisable forms and shapes are laid out ready to be reassembled by the audience.

Gallery Installation Shots  
Bonington Gallery  
2010

(below) *Higgs Bridge*  
animation detail  
Jonathan Gillie  
2010



The exhibition is complimented by the digital animations of Jonathan Gillie, whose work references current aesthetics in the visual, as well as the musical avant-garde. His animations are heavily layered compositions in which process and precision play an equal role to instinct and experiment. Attempting to visualize current thinking in science, electronic music and moving image he produces an imagined, exotic environment, as familiar as it is alien and as mechanical as it is organic.

As an introduction to the collaboration, the artists have set out their evolving intentions in three related mini-essays.





# Finding Structure: On the Nature of Materialisation and Replication

Paul Lewthwaite 2010



*Evidence of  
Mechanisation*  
2010  
Painted laminated  
roofing ply and resin,  
found industrial com-  
ponents  
h: 20cm, w: 76cm,  
d: 25cm

There are certain objects and images that exist within a shared cultural experience. They have an established provenance, a defined historical identity and a type of agreed visual syntax, but no actual physical manifestation outside the realm of the fantastical. They exist within mythologies, music, folk tales, religions, adverts and movies.

Artists have often explored the potential of materialising these disembodied artefacts, dragging them into the real world. Cornelia Parker, in her 1991 *Cold Dark Matter: Exploded View*, seemingly freeze-frames an exploding shed. With all its connotations of disrupted domesticity, armed forces bombing ranges and Big Bang Theory allusions, the work is primarily a cartoon disaster (1). This is the comic book explosion made real.

More recently, Andy Holden's huge knitted boulder is, at once, a craft project taken to a monumental extreme, and the realization of the mythic cartoon boulder straight out of the Road Runner series (2).

The promise of sculpture is that it seems to have the capacity to ground the ephemeral, ethereal aspects of experience, solidifying objects through the manipulation of often incongruous materials.

The problem is, however, that things are rarely neat when trying to pinpoint what the original implied source of an art object is, within a framework of repeated quotations and replicated motifs. Languages mutate, innumerable visual signifiers, from various cultural influences, continuously cross-pollinate. There is no clear distinctions between archetype and copy, sign and signified. In any form of object making, there is an impossibly complicated series of cross-referencing taking place even when the "realness" of sculpture gives the illusion of a definitive visual statement.

When I consider the sleek, glossy work of Takashi Murakami, for example, I recognise an appropriated, culturally specific style that stimulates a cascading domino effect of related recognitions. I think of Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira, Hokusai's Great Wave, Pokemon, Ukiyo-e or floating world, Van Gogh, MacDonalds toys, Yoshitomo Nara, Roy Lichtenstein, Howl's Moving Castle, Final Fantasy, The 5.6.7.8's. It goes on. This is a spontaneous, mixed-up, series of cognitive associations that are sparked off by the colourful plastic world of Murakami. It is a multi-specific personal response.

Takashi Murakami understands this, of course. His ideas on the "Superflat" (3) do not just refer to his "2D" aesthetics of printed comics, animations and plastic models. He regards his vision as flattening the hierarchy of culture, doing away with distinctions between consumer culture, Fine Art, pop, video games, East/West, political ideologies. His is a type of knowing, warped, child-vision. All is valid. This is distinct from a more cynical or ironically self referencing post modernism. Everything is sort of super-cool and on a level playing field. "The World of the future might be like Japan is today "Superflat", said Murakami. In this context, the obsessive mapping and categorising of reference points within the visual arts can seem vaguely purposeless, just a way of validating ideas or perhaps avoiding copyright infringement.

But since art can only exist in a context, it is necessary to try and consider the framework in which an individual artist's visual flourishes, cultural motifs and colloquial metaphors are situated.



*Disaster Box*

2010

Burnt and treated timber, flex, paint,  
ready-made stand.

h: 142cm, w: 53cm, d: 37cm



*In Case of  
Uncertainty*  
2010  
Painted board  
and timber, found objects  
h: 120cm, w: 54cm,  
d: 36cm

From a British centred perspective, when I think in a "Superflat" way, I do not instantly envisage Manga uber-sexy heroine robot people. They are there, but there also seems a sort of weathered cultural identity, steeped in tea stains and rainy day haze. Rust gets under the surface. There is frost damage and austerity. It can often seem like a subtle gloom penetrates British art history and associated visual culture. Compare the works of Paul Nash with Pablo Picasso, for example.

That is not to say that there isn't an equivalent to the hyper-drive shiny Japanesque within my own experience. Throughout my life I have absorbed an immense amount of science fiction imagery from books, comics and television. It is just that it tends to be a bit grubbier, a bit more cobbled together. Blake's 7, Doctor Who, 2001 AD have a DIY type feel. Northampton, not Tokyo, produced Alan Moore.

Of course, other non British influences add to this mix, as my 1977, BBC authorized Star Trek annual (Happy 7th Birthday) still testifies.

### ***Bibliography***

- (1) "I think the explosion was another clichéd cartoon death", Cornelia Parker, interview with Bruce Ferguson, Dean, Columbia University, NY School of the Arts, October, 1999.
- (2) "Reminiscent of the rocks that forever threaten to crush Wile E. Coyote in the Road Runner cartoons", exhibition text by Lizzie Carey-Thomas for Pyramid Piece and Return of the Pyramid Piece, Andy Holden, 9th January to 10th April, Tate Britain, 2010.



So what do I get from this pulpy world of Sci-Fi? I think of air-brushed images of hovering zero gravity mushroom shaped rock chunks, floating about in Roger Dean's album covers (4). I can picture the harlequin chequered industrial space freighters warping their way through Chris Foss's cosmic tempests (5). Book covers, comics, albums, posters, film props, toys.

Even these associations are not clear. Perhaps I am picturing the paintings of Glenn Brown (6) and his purposefully blatant appropriations of Foss, Tony Roberts and John Martin. This is a second-hand reading as a primary source.

As I start a new body of work, considering a Sci-fi aesthetic, I am unsure exactly how it will develop. I am drawn towards the aeronautic spoiler shapes that have no purpose in a vacuum, other than to look "spacey". There are the wild, dirty colours of monumental floating machines. There is ray-gun kitsch. Perhaps I will end up with a series of "Red Dwarf" set props, comic book illustrations in 3D form or subculture totems.

By the time Star Trek had been re-launched in 1987, the replicator had been invented (or imagined) to use on board the Starship Enterprise. This is a "device using transport technology to dematerialize a quantity of matter, then to rematerialize it in another form" (7). In essence, this is what I shall be doing.

Dredging the messiness of remembered ephemera, making a sense of space flotsam, things will be sifted, filtered through and broken down, before being transformed into corporeal form. The works will be specific, purposeful, personal, but, more than likely, hard to pin down.

#### ***Bibliography (cont)***

(3) Takashi Murakami introduces "Superflat" during exhibition at Pinksummer Gallery, Italy, at the conference with Mitos Manetas at the Brera Art School, Milan, 2000.

(4) Album cover examples: In a Word: Yes, 2002, and Keys to Ascension, 1996, by Yes.

(5) See Travelling Cities, 1990, Chris Foss.

(6) See The Loves of Shepherds (after "Doublestar" by Tony Roberts), Glenn Brown, 2000.

(7) Okuda, M., Okuda, D. and Mirek, D. (1994) The Star Trek Encyclopedia, A Reference Guide to the Future. New York: Pocket Books. p. 274.



*The Seemingly Magical  
Power of Science  
2010  
Painted steel, flex,  
dials, clamps  
h: 35cm, w: 107cm,  
d: 73cm*

# Notes for Future Paintings

## Geoff Diego Litherland 2010

*They seek to be grounded (1) whilst also being drawn to notions of transcendence and immanence (2) they entrap history, (3) reconnecting forms and ideologies (4) in order to foretell future endeavours (5) and calamities (6).*



*God Delusion  
Machine  
2010  
Oil on Linen  
38cm x 38cm*

1. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Earth, soil, this archaic substance is intrinsic to grounding the work, not only as the physical ground built up of dark washes of earth tones, ground down from found pigments, but as a metaphorical *prima materia* (Ruland, 1612) which, according to alchemists, is the alleged primitive formless base of all matter. As a starting point it's far more enriching than a blank canvas as all the nutrients and minerals are in place to allow growth to happen. Forms slowly emerge resembling both the close up images of bacteria evolving and the far away structures of a universe forming.



2. Artists have for some time now been drawn to the philosophical and religious interpretations of transcendence (Huxley, 1953) and immanence (Deleuze, 2001) either through the depiction of religious narratives or by trying to evoke a physical reaction from their audience. Be they the hellish and bizarre creations of Hieronymus Bosch, where a vengeful God unleashes the forces of hell on a grotesque and sinful population or the visionary imagery of William Blake depicting God before creation, both painted in glorious Technicolor and High Definition.

These ideas of transcendence and immanence still inspire contemporary artists today. James Turrell has made it his life's work; exploring how natural and artificial light can create transcendent spaces.

Immanence has played an important thematic role in science fiction too, there's Solaris, the sentient Gaiaesque thinking planet in Stanislaw Lem's 1961 novel and the ability to control the life force of the universe in Star Wars.

3. A structure was needed to aid in the capture and entrapment of the past, a net that dredges and filters our entire universe and history. This fractured, randomly generated triangular grid is at once chaotic yet formal and functional, it alludes to both the natural and digital world. Through its generative construction it has the potential for a multitude of images to emerge from it and is not dissimilar to the preliminary framework and structures of 3D computer animations. In relation to the strict grids that computers and systems use they can be differentiated in Deleuzian terms through his and Guattari's concept of Desiring Machines. (Sack, 1996) In his essay Painting Theory Machines, Warren Sack elaborates on these; while Turing machines are founded upon a strict attention to the "grid", "desiring machines" are formulated in a smooth, unstratified space which can break the "grid";

*Buy the Sky*  
2010  
Oil on Linen  
53cm x 53cm



4. These paintings strive to make connections with other objects however nearby or distant they seem. Whether they are other paintings by the same artist or other artworks exhibited nearby. In *Desiring Machines* (Sack, 1996) Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari introduced ideologically impossible systems of production that have inspired contemporary painters for some time now, most notably Lydia Donna and Fabian Marcaccio.

In his essay *Painting Theory Machines*, Warren Sack goes onto explain the importance of details in *Desiring Machines* as they; "push one to examine how small variations and minutia connect an artifact, like a painting, to a larger "outside" world. Deleuze and Guattari encourage us to see an infinity of details connecting a desiring machine to others: It is this insight that can inspire one to stand up close to a painting and see a larger significance in the brushstrokes and small variations in pigment."



*Transmission Impossible*  
2010  
Oil and Gold Leaf on Linen  
40cm x 40cm



5. If God is infinite and most religions and theologians would argue that he is, whether we're talking about the all seeing Old Testament avenger or the life force of the cosmos Qi, then it would be appropriate to conclude that there are infinite ways of communing with him. This need to connect to God can take the form of prayer in an Islamabad Mosque, meditation in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery or even the observation of minute particle collisions in a multibillion-dollar quantum physics experiment in Switzerland. (Martin, 2004)

To test the probability of this concept and set out to make it as difficult as possible to attain some sort of communiqué, a God Delusion Machine, if you wish to call it that, would be required. It would be a clumsy and awkward mechanism with no moveable parts, made out of a material devoid of any spiritual properties and garishly painted to warn others of it's dangerous potential. It would need to be placed somewhere inconspicuous and one would need to lay in wait inside it.

6. This approach and study of the past is reminiscent of Psychohistory, the fictional science in Isaac Asimov's Foundation (Asimov, 1951) universe, it combines history, sociology, and mathematical statistics to make (nearly) exact predictions of the collective actions of very large groups of people. Not dissimilar to aspects of chaos theory today, it studies the past to predict a future; where man's destiny is no longer left in the hands of chance.

### ***Bibliography***

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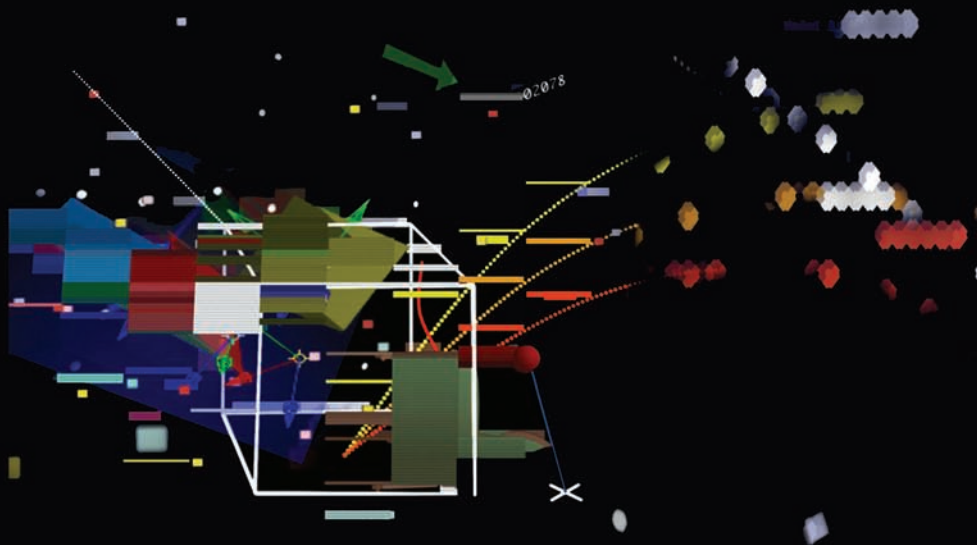


*Tamper Plateau*  
2010  
Oil on Linen  
50cm x 50cm



# Artist Statement

## Jonathan Gillie 2010



*Gravity*  
2010  
Digital Animation

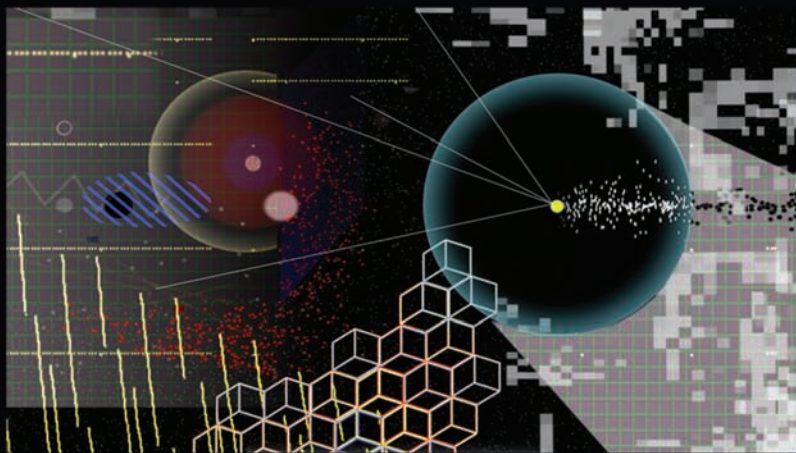
The search for the Higgs Boson particle at Cern is in some ways the perfect creative foil, mathematically possible, its elusiveness only serves to increase our intrigue, with more than a passing hint at the metaphysical. At the time of writing the only definite is that we know exactly where it isn't. How does one visualise the unseen and undetectable? If James Wells' proposal is correct, then the detection of the Higgs Boson will simply be a bridge or window to other exotic particles of a hitherto undetected world.

How do we describe what this may look like?

Aesthetic sensibility often folds back on itself, so that current digital aesthetics segue seamlessly with century old sound generators. Baroque compositions reference synthetic zones without people. Space is produced rather than discovered from abused and obsolete technologies. Data moshed imagery celebrates the gaps and fissures produced through ill advised equations and once we immerse ourselves within it we realise that there is never an absolute, only further layers to explore.

Space within the animations is at once astronomical and intimate, the temporal space may be portraying seconds or light years. Objects seem familiar yet exotic, pitched somewhere between organic and synthetic, they are the imagined illustrations from textbooks and educational animations. Particles swoon and collide as we observe apparently chaotic acts that have their own exorable momentum. Mistakes within the work are only partially obscured, lending a history, a build up of experimentation within the work and evidence of human error.

The directions and velocities of smashed particles are laid over quantified units of space. Heavenly bodies systematically orbit and loop, linear waves ebb and flow through singular points of precision in a desire to visually interpret and understand the scientific and cultural phenomena that we absorb today.



*Point Never*  
2010  
Digital Animation





## Artists' Biographies & Contact Details

**Paul Lewthwaite** has exhibited extensively in an international context. He has produced commissioned large-scale permanently sited sculptures throughout Britain. As well as winning several awards, Paul is an Elected Associate of the Royal British Society of Sculptors and Associate Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Nottingham.

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**Geoff Diego Litherland** has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally. Recognition to date has included being selected for the John Moores 25 Painting prize at the Walker Gallery in Liverpool and winning the 2008 Nottingham Castle Open. Geoff is currently an Associate Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University and is undertaking a part-time MFA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths University of London.

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**Jonathan Gillie** graduated from Nottingham Trent University in 1997, after which he formed av\_dv with Jim Boxall, exhibiting their live visual work in Italy, Austria, Greece and Finland as well as the UK. His current practice is centred on digital animation and sound production with a particular interest in symbolic depictions of scientific and cultural phenomena. Race for the Prize marks the first exhibition of his animated work.

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3

Two scientists were racing  
For the good of all mankind  
Both of them side by side  
So determined  
Locked in heated battle  
For the cure that is their prize  
But it's so dangerous  
But they're determined

*Race for the Prize  
The Flaming Lips 1997*