

Committee: Barbican Centre Board	Date(s): 22 July 2020
Subject: Barbican Visual Arts Annual Report	Public
Report of: Leonora Thomson, Interim Artistic Director	For Information
Report author: Jane Alison, Head of Visual Arts	

Summary

The Barbican Strategic Plan and the City of London Corporate Plan give a strong framework for the Visual Arts programme, especially in relation to equality and inclusion, income generation and supporting artists.

This report provides an overview of the Visual Arts department's current areas of activity and strategic focus. It outlines the impact of our programme over the past year, and points to key future strategic initiatives. The report is structured as follows:

1. Mission Statement and Introduction
2. 2019/20 programme review: past and existing shows
3. Forward Exhibition Plan: Autumn 2020/Spring 2021 (as announced)

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

1. Mission statement and Introduction

VISUAL ARTS MISSION STATEMENT

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve are among London's leading art spaces. The focus of the visual arts team is on the following programming strands: modern and contemporary art, design and architecture, photography and performance created in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We have increasingly become known for the rigour of our research, telling new stories, the quality and uniqueness of our installations and for a certain fearlessness and creativity in our curation. In addition to presenting major retrospectives or thematic exhibitions in the Art Gallery and Commissions in The Curve, we create a comprehensive programme of talks and events for the general public and work closely with the Barbican Creative Learning team to reach out to schools, young people and community groups.

The multi-disciplinary and civic ethos of the Centre is at the core of our thinking and adds richness to everything we do.

Introduction

Summary overview:

This has been a roller-coaster year of successes, disappointments and challenges. It began with the outstanding critical and popular success of *Lee Krasner: Living Colour*, followed by the ambitious, and in many ways art historically important, *Into the Night*, which sadly did not achieve the audience we hoped for and met with mixed reviews. Regarding the latter, important lessons have been learnt – summarised as too much complexity and financial risk in a thematic exhibition, design mistakes, a poor title and a marketing campaign that missed the mark.

Masculinities tapped into the current zeitgeist and in the short time that the exhibition was open to the public was visited by over 20,000 people. Sadly, we had to close it after 26 days as a result of COVID-19. It will re-open on 13 July for 42 days.

For the 32nd Curve commission, critically acclaimed American artist Trevor Paglen created a new work that investigated the dark underbelly of artificial intelligence. Demonstrating Paglen's constant mining and exposure of unethical practices within the computer industry, the exhibition drew an attendance of almost 60,000.

In the Pit, to run alongside *Into the Night*, we commissioned a rising star in the field of contemporary performance and dance, Jamila Johnson-Small, known for her genre-defying practice. Our support gave her outstanding profile and experience working with a publicly-funded institution. The audience each night was notably diverse in demographic.

Our Curve programme will continue when we re-open with the Nigerian-American artist Toyin Ojih Odutola, the 33rd commission in this space. This project marks the first solo show by a black female artist in the Barbican's art galleries, and Ojih Odutola's first-ever UK exhibition. The commission was due to open on 26 March 2020 and has already garnered great anticipation from the press.

With *Masculinities* already up and running and Ojih Odutola largely installed, it means it is a relatively simple matter to re-open both as lockdown is eased. *Masculinities* will open on 13 July and Ojih Odutola on 11 August. We are pleased and proud to be among the first galleries and museums in London to re-open.

The entire visual arts team of 30+ have adapted well to working remotely, but it has been a challenge of some magnitude. Our autumn exhibition, *Dubuffet: Brutal Beauty*, was due to open this autumn and travel to Quebec afterwards. As it became clear it would be impossible to guarantee the inclusion of loans from America due to COVID travel restrictions, we had to move this project into the spring of next year, as the earliest possible opportunity. This meant, in turn, postponing the exhibition we had planned for the Spring 2021 slot until 2022. *Michael Clark*, originally due to open this June following on from *Masculinities*, will now be shown in the autumn. *Masculinities* was due to travel to the Photo Festival in Arles this summer, and the

cancellation of this festival has made it possible to extend the Barbican run for 42 days after re-opening on July 13th.

When COVID lockdowns struck, *Lee Krasner* and *Into the Night* were both touring. *Krasner* closed in London on September 1, 2019 and transferred to the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, where it opened on October 11. The exhibition was open for three months, closing on 12 January, 2020, after which it transferred to Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, Switzerland where it ran from 7 February until it had to close on 20 March. The exhibition re-opened on 12 May and, all being well, will remain so until 16 August. We are thrilled that Lee Krasner will then complete the final leg of its European tour, opening at the Guggenheim Bilbao in the autumn (dates still pending) for what will be the first ever exhibition of Krasner's work in Spain.

Much work has also been done to progress the shows we are planning up until the end of 2023.

2. 2019/20 programme review: past and existing shows

Lee Krasner: *Living Colour* (30 May – 1 September 2019)

Lee Krasner: Living Colour was the first European retrospective of the work of Lee Krasner (1908-1984). It featured a broad selection of her most important paintings, collages and drawings, contextualised by film and photography from the post-war period. Audiences ranged from art enthusiasts and regular Barbican visitors through to younger audiences engaging with our education programmes and local community groups attending special workshops and guided tours. The exhibition was covered widely across national and international press and media outlets, receiving 5-star reviews and wide-reaching praise across social media.

***Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art* (4 October 2019 – 19 January 2020)**

Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art explored the social and artistic role of cabarets, cafés and clubs around the world. Spanning the 1880s to the 1960s, the exhibition presented a dynamic and multi-faceted history of artistic production. Focusing on global locations from London to New York, Paris to Mexico, via Berlin, Vienna and Ibadan, *Into the Night* included over 200 works rarely seen in the UK. It was the first major show staged on this theme and presented an alternative history of modern art that highlighted the spirit of experimentation and collaboration between artists, performers, designers, musicians and writers. The exhibition featured live jazz performances and full-scale recreations of spaces, such as the multi-coloured ceramic tiled bar at *Cabaret Fledermaus* in Vienna (1907).

***Masculinities: Liberation through Photography* (20 February – 17 March 2020) (closed after 26 days due to COVID-19)**

Men and masculinity find themselves under the microscope as never before. The show explores how masculinity has been variously experienced, coded, performed and socially constructed through photography and film from the 1960s to the present

day. The exhibition significantly exceeded its target attendance in the 26 days it was open; re-opening will take place under social distancing rules, but is expected to do well.

If *Masculinities* had continued without the disruption of COVID, we would have been on track to exceed target by £122,611, which would have resulted in the exhibition achieving £193,119 surplus (expenditure: £425,700; income: £618,819).

Art Gallery attendance

Exhibition	Daily Attendance				Total paid attendance		Total attendance including comps & Private View
	Target		Actual		Target	Actual	
	Paid	Inc members/comps	Paid	Inc members/comps			
Lee Krasner: Living Colour	510	663	540	716	48,450	51,272	71,204
Into the Night: Cabarets and Clubs in Modern Art	525	682	207	319	55,125	21,753	35,348
Masculinities: Liberation through Photography*	520	676	710	900	*13,520	*18,455	*24,567

*Figures represent 26 days' attendance – closed 16 March due to COVID-19

Trevor Paglen: *From 'Apple' to 'Anomaly'* (26 September 2019 – 16 Feb 2020)

For his commission, Paglen drew on ImageNet, a research project based at Princeton University, that consists of a dataset of over 14 million images that are used to train digital networks for a wide range of applications including surveillance systems and driverless car. The installation consisted of a vast mosaic of approximately 30,000 photographs, presenting a stark reminder that the forces behind artificial intelligence networks are rife with the hidden politics, biases, stereotypes and philosophical assumptions of their human programmers.

Heavy handed, we crush the moment

A performance commission by Last Yearz Interesting Negro

(Jamila Johnson-Small) (Thu 28 Nov—Sun 1 Dec 2019, The Pit, Barbican)

Over four evenings, Last Yearz Interesting Negro (the performance project of artist and dancer Jamila Johnson-Small) presented a series of genre-blurring happenings in the Pit, staging a newly commissioned choreographic work over the course of each evening that opened up to feature performances by different guest artists. This was a groundbreaking new work that attract a diverse and young crowd.

Toyin Ojih Odutola: *A Countervailing Theory* (Originally planned for 26 March-26 July 2020; Due to re-open 11 August 2020 – 24 January 2021)

Touring to the Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg, Denmark (18 February – 6 June 2021), and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, USA July – December 2021)

This epic cycle of 40 new large-scale works explores an imagined ancient myth conceived by the artist, accompanied by an immersive soundscape by artist Peter Adjaye. Ojih Odutola's work is concerned with drawing as a process of storytelling. Drawing on an eclectic range of sources, from ancient history to popular culture, the artist considers these new power dynamics and the consequences of transgressing them.

3. Forward Exhibition Plan: Autumn 2020/Spring 2021 (as announced)

Michael Clark (7 October 2020 – 3 January 2021)

This will be the first ever major exhibition of the work of cult dancer and choreographer Michael Clark. Celebrated for his technical rigour and fine-tuned choreography, Clark is a Barbican Associate and a long-term collaborator with the organisation since 2004. Reflecting on his influence beyond dance, the exhibition explores his legendary collaborations across the visual arts, music, fashion and film, with artists and performers including Charles Atlas, Leigh Bowery, Sarah Lucas, The Fall, Cerith Wyn Evans, Peter Doig, Wolfgang Tillmans and more.

Jean Dubuffet: *Brutal Beauty* (4 February – 23 May 2021)

This will be a major monographic exhibition of the work of Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985). Dubuffet's radical vision, manifested in daring experimentation with materials as he sought out "anti-cultural positions" aimed at capturing the extraordinary texture of ordinary life, has had a tremendous impact on the history of art, both in Europe and the US – and yet this is the first retrospective in the UK for more than fifty years. Including over 100 works, the exhibition will celebrate Dubuffet's playful spirit and constant innovation, which has secured him such a powerful legacy for artists working today. In our politically turbulent times, Dubuffet and his tough aesthetic feel more relevant than ever.

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