

REHEARSAL FOR A PUBLIC ADDRESS

This exhibition brings together a collection of works made over the past year, rendered from quite different materials – paper, wood, fabric, cardboard, text. These works, in their excess of colours, forms, and ideas emerge from activity in the studio where uncertain inquiry, mistakes, and confusion are generative, where things both do and do not make sense and the pressure of the former must often be resisted. Placing these pieces together in the gallery they are briefly provided with an opportunity to address each other and also to participate in some form of public address. This takes place in a public sphere that is increasingly oversaturated with information, images and words, where meanings are fluid, time is short and context is everything.

The centre point for the show is a set of 48 monochrome portraits, drawn using colour pencil and making reference to paintings of the same name by the German painter Gerhard Richter. Here a cache of corrupted online images from the Encyclopedia Britannica provides the basis for the drawings and the historical public figures appear in various stages of digital degradation. Arranged according to their gaze this somewhat arbitrary group of strangers presents an imposing yet almost tragic, soon-to-be forgotten spectacle. These politicians, writers, artists and titans of business are being misremembered, badly categorized, lumped together according to no discernible schema. They are casualties of a period that has handed over the responsibility for remembering pretty much everything to the Internet.

Nearby, two large hand-woven tapestries recreate an ephemeral moment from the familiar online search process of a Google images page. But in this case we see the brief moment before the images appear, and the blocks of colour offer a kind of abstract interpretation of the typed phrases. In this paused state one is left to guess at the images that would have arrived – the black of a microphone from a public speaking instruction manual, the red and yellow of protest posters from gatherings around the world.

On the stage facing the portraits a speech has been collaged together using phrases and slogans from each of the drawn figures and it scrolls across the screen in an endless loop, waiting to be read. A microphone and speaker are arranged to broadcast the words back to their original producers. In the background a selection of aphoristic slogans from the speech reappear on brightly coloured posters, stuck down on pieces of found cardboard as if made to be held up at some unfamiliar rally or march.

Installed on one side of the entrance passage is a set of soft fabric banners that hang together quietly and rely on their colour and form to hint at covered up images and text. On the opposite wall, printed on many fluttering A5 pages, an iconic passage from Marx is consecutively translated through over 100 languages from A to Z. That the alphabetic process in this case begins with Afrikaans and ends with Zulu is a convenient coincidence. The passage slowly unravels, becoming simplified and more absurd as the mistranslations compound, until it emerges as only two apparently meaningless words. Yet somehow, together with everything else, they almost make sense.