

MARY REID KELLEY

PILAR CORRIAS - LONDON



Above and right: MARY REID KELLEY, video stills from *You Make Me Iliad*, 2010. Video stills from b&w digital video/sound. 14 mins. 49 secs. Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias, London.

It's surprising to see how the First World War compares to the Second in contemporary culture. Books and films about the ascendance of Nazism and the epic gestures of the American and British army flood the market with regular monotony, but austere public monuments notwithstanding, there's relatively little around about what happened between 1915 and 1918. This might be due to poor documentation or the absence of notable figures like Stalin and Churchill, but the first conflict has in fact every reason to claim a

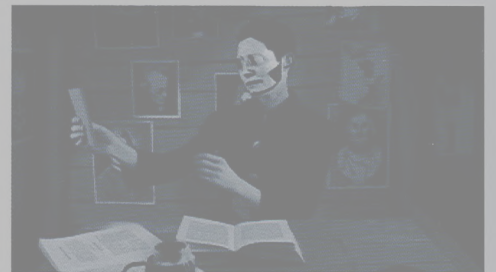
more prominent place in today's perception of history. It was the first time the world was faced with a tragedy of that scale; the line between good and bad was extraordinarily blurred; and it was the last conventional war, where military casualties were much greater than civilian. This latter aspect, coupled with historians' tendency to overlook the role of women in such circumstances, is at the core of Mary Reid Kelley's *You Make Me Iliad* (2010), a film inspired by the English poet and Greek mythology translator Alexander Pope.

Shot in elegant black and white and combining stop-motion animation with poetry and live performance, the film is set in German-occupied Belgium, and revolves around two protagonists — a German soldier and a local prostitute — both played by the artist herself. The conversation between the two is full of metaphors and rhymed phrases, each revealing a far more complex subtext. The scene is highly dramatic if not lyrical, yet it's also imbued with a sense of mockery. This is in part because of the dialogue's rhythmic structure, and also because of the characters' makeup and the cartoon backdrops in which

they move, which gives the whole experience a sort of Alice-Cooper-meets-Neo-Realism feel. Entrapped in a language made of euphemisms and cliquish rhymes, the soldier is fighting a battle he knows he cannot win.

His comically sad struggle makes a clever metaphor of the limits of verbal communication, but the real power of *You Make Me Iliad* is in the representation of the small episode, and how casting a light on this is often the key that leads to the comprehension of the big picture.

Michele Robecchi



MICHAEL FULLERTON

CHISENHALE - LONDON



Above: MICHAEL FULLERTON, *The Bitch Messed With His Head*, 2010. Oil on linen, 45 x 60 cm. Right: MICHAEL FULLERTON, *Columbia Space Shuttle*, 2010. Screenprint on newsprint, 583 x 224 cm. Courtesy Chisenhale, London. Photos: Andy Keate.

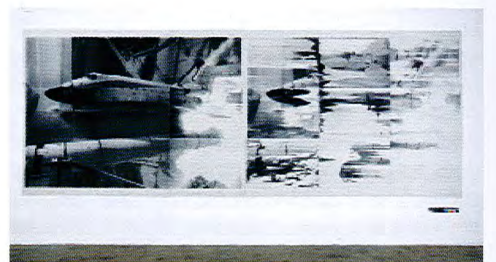
Institutions have lives of their own. Chisenhale was once a powerful London showcase for emerging UK artists, as it produced a string of breakthrough shows across the '90s that helped to launch the careers of important British artists. In the '00s, drift set in and the program lost its way and much relevancy. Michael Fullerton's "Columbia" signals a return to what the gallery does best: provide a stable platform for ambitious projects and practices.

Fullerton's extended project is cohesive even before coming into the frame of an institution. The Glasgow-based artist explores the instability of a sprawling signifying chain emanating from the term and figure 'Columbia' — a woman and symbolic personification of a nation, a river, a sailing ship, an alternative name for a continent, a space shuttle exploding across the sky and so on — at the level of word and image. Each work from 2010 is accompanied by a wall text, functioning more as a counter-text than an explanatory note. The quiet drama or, in turns, violent traumas of individual lives are set against a broader backdrop of corporate intrigue and ideological machinations operating at a global reach.

Fullerton explores the viral spread and degradation of a once-intoxicating ideal as it is threaded through the analogue and then digital means of print and electronic communications media.

Media and materiality — the arcane and archaic — is a focus in Fullerton's diverse practice. And painting, situated alongside its source, figures significantly here as an important means to open up the submerged and forgotten fabric of individual lives gone astray in the storms of wider social and political contexts. Institutions, like nations, come and go. It is far more rare to see either return to a former glory.

John Slyce

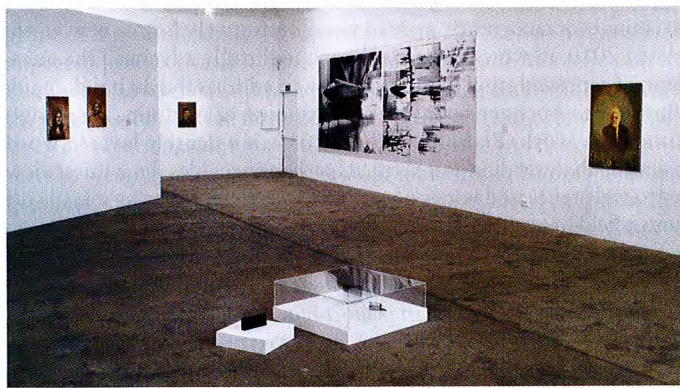


## LONDON

## Michael Fullerton

CHISENHALE GALLERY

Just how many skills is a twenty-first-century artist expected to master? If Michael Fullerton is the measure, then—per his recent exhibition “Columbia”—the contemporary artist must be an expert researcher, writer, draftsman, storyteller, sleuth, technician, and sculptor. He must work with readymades, video, lasers, painting, printing, and wall text. He must be sociopolitically and historically astute—in Fullerton’s case, about Alan Turing, the brilliant computer-technology pioneer who, after helping Britain win the war with his code-cracking genius, was convicted of homosexuality and cruelly subjected to hormone injection treatment, eventually committing suicide. In this show, Turing featured in two portraits: one an enlargement of a newspaper photo (*Using Polish Technology, Alan Turing Devised a More Sophisticated Machine to Crack ENIGMA*) (all works 2010), the other a more sensitively painted, human-scale oil, *Why Your Life Sucks (Alan Turing)*. The label for the latter, detailing Turing’s personal tragedy, prompted viewers to backtrack to the reproduction of the official portrait and to reread its flat and factual accompanying wall text: It now sounded sinister, deliberately hiding so much behind institutional blandness. So the artist must be a cunning curator, too. And he must paint exquisitely, proving himself able to convincingly copy eighteenth-century historical painting (*Loyalist Female [Katie Black] Glasgow, 3rd July 2010*) or early-twentieth-century regional figuration (*The Bitch Messed with His Head*), this last oil a portrait of the alluring Mirren Barford, who (as we learn from the true story narrated in the accompanying label) was engaged to Jock Lewes, cofounder of Britain’s notorious Special Air Service during World World II. He was killed in action before they could marry.



View of “Michael Fullerton,” 2010.

This was the exhibition as pulp novel: intricate and involving, sprawling and sexy, laced with foreign intrigue. Arguably a single work, the show was loosely clustered around the personification of the United States as Columbia—also the C in CBS. The television network’s noted eye logo painted on a central gallery wall seemed the likely representation of the show’s absent center, a stylized void that is also an unblinking orb. The camera’s eye, the painter’s gaze, the hunter’s watch (a bird of prey occupies a small video screen), the prying eye of homophobic suspicion: Modes of looking were both object and subject. But the eye cannot always be relied on; visual data can be ambiguous (*BASF Magic Gold* presents a baffling metallic pigment that appears both gold and green at once) or even absent: A model ring laser gyroscope in the center of the gallery reproduced the automatic orientation device used on submarines and missiles to navigate without visual input. Was the theme of “Columbia,” punning on Robert

Smithson, “sight” and “non-sight”? A tangle of innuendo was communicated through clarity and excess: overlong texts, doubles (the twin newsprint images of *Columbia Space Shuttle*, each revealing less than the other), even triplicates, as in the personified Columbia, here a goth babe on newsprint rotated ninety degrees, casting six seductive eyes upon viewers wherever they might roam.

The whole show was expertly choreographed, down to the green laser beam that rotated around the gallery, causing pangs of paranoia each time it shot past one’s leg. History, gossip, and various open-ended digressions were conveyed through skillfully ventriloquized idioms, ranging from museumspeak to tabloid tell-all, from personal letters to advertising lingo. One left mesmerized, educated, and impressed.

—Gilda Williams

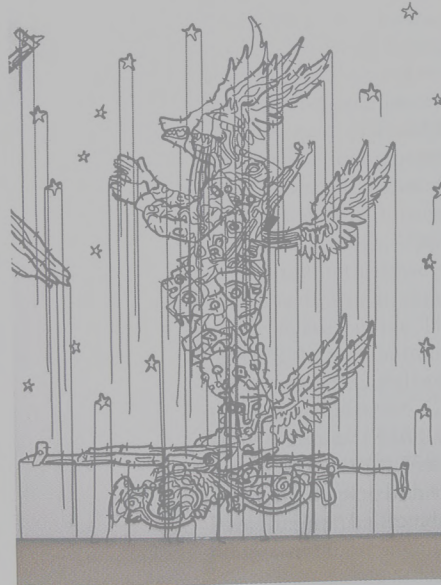
## Hew Locke

HALES GALLERY

There have been more than a few processions in art in the past decade or so; actual performances aside, one recalls the cinematic one in William Kentridge’s animated *Shadow Procession*, 1999, for instance, as well as the motionless sequence of rhesus monkeys in Chris Ofili’s suite of paintings *The Upper Room*, 2002. Like those parades carved in marble on Roman pediments or represented in mosaics on the walls of Byzantine churches, such works depict triumphs of one sort or another—but contemporary triumphal processions tend to be heavily ironic. Kentridge’s film, as critic George Baker has noted, shifts uneasily between a sense of celebration and an evocation of “the misery of forced immigration, the relentless entropy that accompanies the conditions of displacement and exile.” Ofili’s paintings, substituting primates for the twelve apostles, mock their own color-besotted ceremoniousness.

Hew Locke’s *The Nameless*, 2010, is another depiction of a procession, this time in the form of a grand-scale installation made of black beads and cord glued and taped to the four interior walls of the Hales Gallery during this recent exhibition. Depicting a train of human, animal, and hybrid figures, it recalls *The Upper Room*, in part because monkeys feature in both works. As in Ofili’s paintings, the monkeys in *The Nameless* seem to invite us to identify with them—to see them as almost human—and yet there is something eerie, mocking, perhaps

Hew Locke, *The Nameless* (detail), 2010, cord and beads on wall, dimensions variable.



threatening about them. But Locke’s procession actually has more in common with Kentridge’s than with Ofili’s, not only because it is articulated in severe black and white and has a raucous, almost promiscuous quality (even without the aid of a sound track), but because it, too, feels at once celebratory and funereal. It has a cast of characters drawn from the cultural memory of several continents, as figures of pre-Columbian aspect rub shoulders with others that recall African, European, and Middle Eastern sources. But these far-flung figures have picked up something extra during their travels: Many of them are toting rifles. Are these conquerors or resistants?

As disparate as the origins of his images may be, and as ambiguous their import, I don’t think Locke is inviting us to go source hunting. There’s a reason why he called the piece *The Nameless*: In this syncretic parade, each creature has half lost its iden-