

a reference to a filmmaking technique. The question for the retrospective filmmaker, the chaos theorist (for whom moving water was a primary model) and the purveyor of 'frequentist statistics' – as the coders call their field – is to elicit structure and meaning out of a world succumbing to entropy. If the 1960s and 1970s are decades, like any other, of a complexity which challenges the generalisations of political hindsight, they can generate composed images, in the form of the lush, period living room of a Portuguese architect, in which Wardill's camera lingers, before turning to gaze over a twilight bay. The past has become a catalyst for a sumptuous filmic spectacle, and why should it not, you may ask, in a film?

The second work in the show, *I gave my love a cherry that had no stone*, 2016, shares with *Night for Day* its extravagant 1980s interiors – it is filmed in a modernistic concert hall complex, deserted but for a single male figure who moves like a dancer through its elegant, half-lit spaces, but without music to back him up – and also a preoccupation with how film's versions of time and space interface with the real dimensions outside the frame. The protagonist's digitally treated movements have a robotic quality, which correspond to the sliding movements of the camera following him. His crisp dress shirt, sleekly fitted trousers and dancer's physique give him the air of an automaton, an ideal figure to match the overweening beauty of the interior, until both figure and ground come to appear as generically streamlined, and unreal, as the other. The man seems both expansively mobile and on tracks from which he cannot deviate, as if imprisoned within his own gestures, having relinquished his free will to the camera which, in tracking him, fixes his motion into an immutable record of it.

This virtuoso conceit on the paradox of filmic suspense – how it depends on a suspension of disbelief in its open-endedness – is an analogy for Wardill's subject in both films: our ambiguous present, poised (or trapped) between a past which has determined it and a future it seems unable to prevent itself from determining. If she approaches that subject obliquely, she is keen to utilise the full weight of filmic realism to prevent its slipping into etiolated abstraction. At one point in *Night for Day*, we watch passengers leave a ferry as a crowd waits to board behind the glass through which they, like us, observe the disembarkation. It's everyday realism – rainy, everyone looking exhausted – but the window is also a metaphor for the crossroads of the present (destination of the past/gateway to the future) and how a film's constantly elapsing illusion of real time imperfectly reflects it.

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Remote Work

Lubaina Himid: The Mourning Kangas

Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool, 18 May to 19 June


The Grundy chose an appropriately freewheeling way to usher in the summer, with two overlapping shows which, in subject matter and mood, reflect the uncertainty of the times as well as the place; in Blackpool, which has long struggled to reinvent itself, many tourist-oriented shops look like they may never reopen after the second wave of the pandemic. Furthermore, as the title of the Grundy's main show suggests, many artists have changed the way they previously practised. In addition, the artworks in the gallery's main rooms have been deliberately mixed together, Lubaina Himid's new paintings, for instance, interacting particularly well with the work of some of the younger artists behind 'Remote Work'.

Nicola Dale, much of whose background has been in performance, has produced *Echo Chambers*, 2021, a set of circular towers tall and wide enough to contain a standing adult. Other tall sculptures have human-like heads mounted on them; originally plastic dummies of the sort used in shop window displays, they have been brightly painted and wear interwoven strips, reminiscent of bondage gear, which block the models' eyes or ears. These towering heads are grouped in circles, some facing inwards and others outwards. One pair of heads guards the gallery entrance, exerting an unsettling power. The work derives from a long-term project investigating isolated systems of thought where participants listen only to others with similar opinions. This was itself derived from the artist's study of an antique copy of Ovid's *Art of Love* annotated by a series of male readers with handwritten thoughts about love and, of course, sex.

Some of Dale's heads seem to stare at Himid's 'The Mourning Kangas' series of paintings from 2020. Kangas are rectangular, patterned fabrics, featuring a visual motif plus a worded message that are worn or used, mainly by women, in East Africa. Neatly describing the distracted, enclosed atmosphere of the past 15 months, Himid has produced painted versions. One example, *Eclipse*, features images of the occluded sun accompanied by the unanswerable words, IS IT A QUESTION OF PASSION, without a question mark. Another, *Shelf*, includes images of objects such as a speed camera, as well as a quote from Walter Benjamin's essay 'Unpacking My Library': NOT YET TOUCHED BY THE MILD BOREDOM OF ORDER. A wickerwork shopping bag is accompanied by a much stranger quotation: HUNG AS IN A BASKET FROM A SINGLE DULL STAR, excerpted from Nick Farriella's parody of how F Scott Fitzgerald might have pondered the spread of influenza in 1920.

Less legible messages appear on objects we seldom notice but which are here brought to light by Keiran



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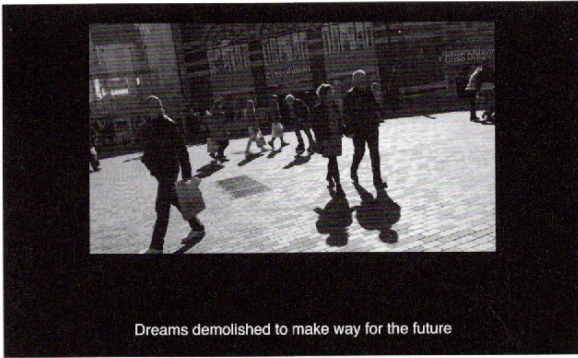


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Cairan Wood, *Echo in Time*, 2021, video

Leach's series of street utility boxes named after their graffiti, such as *Fever*, *Kaza* and *Ghoul*, all 2021. These boxes are dotted around the large, well-lit gallery spaces, appearing so familiar at first that they hardly register. But, once noticed, their objecthood seems to invade, muscling-in with their stolid bodywork and brash spray-painted lettering to rival the gallery's old, white, cast-iron radiators.

But in the case of other Remote Workers, some of the information they provide seems fishy - deliberately so. There is news, for instance, of a curator called Johnny Highland who disappeared last year from the Grundy. His notebooks feature in the hilarious set of installations *Believe It or Not*, 2021, by the Manchester-based collective Shy Bairns, whose name derives from the old northern expression 'shy bairns get nowt' or 'quiet children get nothing'. This group, comprising Izzy Kroese, Erin Blamire, Eleanor Haswell and George Gibson, therefore makes a noise about things that have been going on in a seaside resort we thought we knew so well. Screens show readouts from Reddit about the weird side of Blackpool, which of course became famous for its ghost trains, creaking piers and fortunetellers. And now, thanks to the wonders of TikTok and smartphones, we are able to see images of fireballs off the Fylde Coast, among what Shy Bairns refer to as 'Many Things About Blackpool That Don't Make Sense'. Speculation abounds as we mull over questions like 'Are seagulls getting bigger because they eat too many chips?'

Further echoes of a lost 20th-century world appear in David Penny's *Whetstone*, 2021; a series of photographs that respond to Walter Nurnberg's industrial photography, examples of which are also on show. Working in Britain from the 1930s until his retirement in 1974, Berlin-born Nurnberg developed new approaches to photographic lighting, dramatically illuminating his subjects, from steel foundries to engineering works and chemical labs, frequently highlighting the people who worked there. Penny's interest in the connections between humans and technology results in a hypnotically fascinating digital animation of an idealised modernist machine that mutates and moves - accompanied by an old recording of the song 'I Only Have Eyes For You'. Nearby, a series of 3D prints make solid other digitally machine-made images in ways that seem by comparison strangely ancient, as if archaeological relics.

Ciaran Wood's *Echo in Time*, 2021 is a film utilising video footage shot by the artist's father, Tom Wood, over 20 years ago at Coopers Townhouse, a traditional pub on Cases Street in Liverpool. Since the 1980s, that location - originally a narrow street connecting the

old Central Station and St John's Market - has been overshadowed by the brash but bland entrance to the huge St Johns shopping precinct. The film, however, is pre-pandemically intimate, crowded with pub-goers singing along to karaoke tapes, talking, drinking and laughing in ways that endless months of Covid quietness have made seem irretrievably lost. The hazy scenes, shot before the smoking ban, also remind the viewer that pubs, especially Liverpool's pubs, are all about the people who gather there. But the film avoids nostalgia with an edgy voice-over that points out 'there's a crick, there's a crack, there's a lack, there's a loss'. The sense of camaraderie and the performative nature of the human interaction we witness give rise to the idea of Liverpool being 'haunted by phantom architecture' - the result of the city centre being redeveloped without consideration for the public spaces that were there before the shopping malls moved in.

The mood of isolation from the crowd is palpable, but what 'Remote Work' also captures is a queasy sense of being exiled from history.

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Leo Fitzmaurice: Enjoy Civic Life

Humber Street Gallery, Hull, 19 May to 5 September

When entering Leo Fitzmaurice's show, 'Enjoy Civic Life', it's immediately clear what interests him as an artist. You are greeted by a slew of recognisable symbols and branding, some of which are straightforward and clear, some are more enigmatic, but all hover around some degree of deep-seated familiarity. From supermarkets to cars and fast food, Fitzmaurice's work is rooted in the design of the everyday, questioning its influence on us and our relationship with it.

Precision is the other instantly apparent element of Fitzmaurice's practice. This is a very neat exhibition - satisfying even, if that sort of thing appeals to you - with works arranged in careful patterns, at exact angles, so that the resulting effect is something like a three-dimensional diagram or infographic. This affirms the ideas of familiarity and recognition, as though the whole show is a pattern that you could learn to read. And even if you don't necessarily understand it, there's an identifiable sense of order that certainly looks as if it makes sense.

One work, in particular, makes this apparent. You might not even register *Appearances* (all works 2020)



Leo Fitzmaurice, 'Enjoy Civic Life', installation view