

## Living Organism

### Kate Liston, Holly Argent and Tess Denman-Cleaver

Kate Liston presents her film 'Treatment' in a lineup of works that have made an impression on her practice.

Living Organism places a number of artists' practices in the same cinema space, bringing Kate Liston, Ella-Bergmann-Michel, Tess Denman-Cleaver and Joyce Wieland closer to each other, revealing (and hiding) an entanglement of voices present in the same region.

This selection of films includes 'Where Old People Live' (Wo Wohnen Alte Leute, 1931) by Ella Bergmann-Michel (1895-1971), a German-born artist who exhibited in the region in the 1970s and who Liston frequently and informally nicknames (the anonymous) 'EBM'. The title of Liston's *Film for EBM* (2018) currently in the exhibition 'Women Artists of the North East Library' (Workplace Foundation, Gateshead) initially suggested to me the work was a kind of 'gift' or 'homage to'. Over time I've come to see it as speaking more about the desire to suture ourselves to others, or at least an attempt to shorten the distance.

Liston's visit to the Ella Bergmann-Michel archive at The Sprengel Museum in Hannover revealed the artist's relationship to the North East and subsequently aided a re-evaluation of the Hatton Gallery's archive, contributing new information to Bergmann-Michel's file.

For Living Organism, Tess Denman-Cleaver presents a performance work 'with' Liston's film 'Treatment'. Since starting the project *Women Artists of the North East Library*, I have been thinking about how as artists we account for our attraction to another's practice, especially when it comes to collaboration. Denman-Cleaver's choice to make work 'with' something, reveals a feminist working method - suitably citing, yet allowing both 'Treatment' and 'Mutualism' to exist alongside one another. Refusing simple definitions, both Liston's and Denman-Cleaver's practices suggest to me there is another way of *reading* the North East arts scene, as something fluid and relational, sometimes contingent upon one another's practice.

Liston's identification with 'Handtinting' (1967) brings Joyce Wieland into this conversation. I remember first seeing 'Handtinting' in Newcastle in a film workshop with Holly Antrum. So, if Wieland is also a confidant of Liston and Denman-Cleaver, this legitimately raises the question, what type of connection validates a 'woman artist of the North East'? Perhaps, this is the next thing we need to have a conversation about.

Holly Argent

Women Artists of the North East Library is an evolving exhibition and public programme at Workplace Foundation in Gateshead, curated by Holly Argent. Presenting work by Phyllis Christopher, Tess Denman-Cleaver, Kate Liston and Harriet Sutcliffe, the exhibition has since included interventions by Jade Sweeting & Janina Sabaliauskaite and Sophie Buxton. Open until 9 September 2018. For more information about the next library events at Workplace visit [workplacegallery.co.uk](http://workplacegallery.co.uk). To hear about future library news please get in touch with Holly at [womenartistsnelibrary@gmail.com](mailto:womenartistsnelibrary@gmail.com)

### **Where Old People Live (Wo Wohnen Alte Leute)**

Ella Bergmann-Michel (1895-1971)

Germany 1931 13'

16mm transferred to video, black and white, silent

The film observes a working day in an old age home in Frankfurt, Weimar Germany. Modernist architecture moves in tandem with its inhabitants, activities are gestural: it becomes a social being, a 'living organism'.

### **Handtinting**

Joyce Wieland

Canada 1967 6'

16mm transferred to video, colour, silent

The film presents a sequence of hand-tinted outtakes from a Job Corps documentary. Through their repetition, the small movements, actions and incomplete gestures appears to be choreographed.

### **Treatment**

Kate Liston

UK 2017 18'

Digital video, colour, sound

'Treatment' opens as a girl gets ready in her apartment before going out for a run. On-screen, the words of a script appear and move in and out of sync with her actions. An amber-coloured liquid is prepared. The landscape nearly appears serene, but with an irregular pulse. 'Treatment' cuts images short of actions, interrupting our gaze to tell us how we ought to be seeing.

### **Mutualism**

Tess Denman-Cleaver

2018 10'

Performance

Tess Denman Cleaver uses 'Treatment' as a context and structure within which to think and write. As a performance, 'Mutualism' is both a response to and a conversation with Liston's film.

**Ella-Bergmann-Michel** was a German-born twentieth century artist whose expansive practice included precise abstract collage and painting, surreal biomorphic drawing and experimental documentary photography and filmmaking. She often exhibited with her husband Robert Michel, and the pair had their first UK exhibition in, Newcastle in 1967, in the Gulbenkian Gallery of the People's Theatre, Heaton. The success of this exhibition meant the show was picked up and extended by Laing Art Gallery. She was an important member of the New Frankfurt Alliance – a group of artists and architects involved in the modernisation of Frankfurt in the 1930s, and its documentation. It was through this alliance that Bergmann-Michel produced the film *Where the Old People Live*.

**Kate Liston** is an artist based in Newcastle upon Tyne who works with moving image, installation and writing that is sometimes performed. Notable recent exhibitions include: *Oh-Link Zone*, Black Tower Projects, London (2018); *Feel After the New See* at The Hatton Gallery, Newcastle (2018); *The Scientific Method* at The Tetley Gallery, Leeds (2016); *Feminism and the Body in Performance* at MART Gallery, Dublin (2015); *The Decorator and the Thief* at Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland (2015); and *They Used to Call it the Moon* at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead (2014). Liston is currently working towards a publication titled *Oh-Link Zone* drawn from the event and exhibition at Black Tower Projects, which was based on her PhD thesis 'Link Zone: an exploration of the sensation of knowledge through a practice of art and writing'. She is a lecturer in Fine Art at Northumbria University.

**Tess Denman-Cleaver** is a North East-based artist, originally from Gateshead. Her work spans live performance, performance writing and publication, performative workshops and installation. Recent projects include *In the waste land... and other poems* (Turner Contemporary, 2018); *Time Passes* (St Ives, M\_HKA Gallery Antwerp, Paul Melon Centre, 2017-18); *Villa Stein* (Audiograft Festival, 2018); and *Expanded Analogue* (Wilkinson Gallery, 2017). She is currently Artist in Residence at Middlesbrough Town Hall, creating new work for Middlesbrough Art Weekender 2018. She is working with artist Tim Shaw on a new commission for English Heritage and Arts & Heritage in Summer 2018, and between June 2018-19 is Artist in Residence at the Sonic Arts Research Unit (Oxford). Tess was the Artistic Director of Tender Buttons theatre and performance company between 2010-18. She was a programmer at The Northern Charter between 2015-2018, and recently completed a PhD on landscape and performance philosophy at Newcastle University

**Holly Argent** graduated from Newcastle University in 2017. She curated the exhibition 'Women Artists of the North East Library', an evolving exhibition and public programme at Workplace Foundation, Gateshead (June-September 2018). Other recent exhibitions and performances include, Arthouses, Whitley Bay (August 2018), The Everyday Political at CGP, London (July 2018), Studio is Sudden: with Giles Bailey and CIRCA Projects (2018), Can I be me? at The Northern Charter (2017) and ArtHouses (2017). She set up the Women Artists of the North East Library with Rene McBrearty and co-curated *Where Do We Go From Here?* at Ex Libris Gallery. She was awarded the Forshaw Rome Residency at The British School at Rome from Newcastle University (July 2017) and the Luby's Legs Foundation Emerging Artist Bursary. She currently sits on the Programme Committee at The Northern Charter.

**Women Artists of the North East Library** is an artist-led project that brings together donated material, including: books, images, oral histories and music, to form a usable resource that contributes to the history of women artists working in the region. The Library was initiated by Holly Argent & Rene McBrearty in 2017 with the help of The Northern Charter Graduate Bursary 2017-18. The library has a rolling programme of events, which to date includes open library days; Walking Library for Walking Women (with Dee Heddon and Misha Myers); What she left us – the archive of Carole Luby, with Dawn Felicia Knox; a one day residency at BALTIC Library and Archive; Zine Workshop with Ellen Welsh; and Feminist Walk of Newcastle with Professor Maggie O'Neill for the conference Undisciplining: Conversations from the Edges hosted by The Sociological Review. The Women Artists of the North East Library is currently run by Holly Argent.