

# STRANGE LOOP

Curated by Ben Crothers & Phillip McCrilly

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*"And yet when I say "strange loop", I have something else in mind — a less concrete, more elusive notion. What I mean by "strange loop" is — here goes a first stab, anyway — not a physical circuit but an abstract loop in which, in the series of stages that constitute the cycling-around, there is a shift from one level of abstraction (or structure) to another, which feels like an upwards movement in a hierarchy, and yet somehow the successive "upward" shifts turn out to give rise to a closed cycle. That is, despite one's sense of departing ever further from one's origin, one winds up, to one's shock, exactly where one had started out. In short, a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop."*

– Douglas Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop* (2007)

*STRANGE LOOP* explores the complex relationship between past, present and future, examining how the context in which we live determines our interpretation of history and our perception of the future. The works in the exhibition challenge and explore the ways in which we remember, re-imagine, reinterpret, re-enact, revisit and repress past events, demonstrating that history can be approached just as fluidly as our imagined futures. We are urged to question how human memory affects our perception of personal and global histories and the impact that this has on future events.

Within this, *STRANGE LOOP* also considers artists, works and subject matter which are somehow out of place within their own contexts. Whether expatriates, beings from another planet or concepts within alternate realities, the lines between fact and fiction, past, present and future all become distorted, blurred or challenged. Anachronisms, inaccuracies and disproved theories abound in the coming together of multiple temporalities which create uncertainty as to where beginning, middle and end exist, if at all.

The exhibition features works by: Amanda Beech; Cliff Chiang; EASTERJESUS PRODUCTIONS (Stine Omar and Max Boss); Simon Fujiwara; Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff; Pil and Galia Kollektiv; Beth Lau; and Ryan Moffett.

## **IN CONVERSATION - Friday 03 May, 1pm-2pm**

*STRANGE LOOP* curators Ben Crothers and Phillip McCrilly will discuss the inspiration and thought processes behind the exhibition and their approach to selecting the exhibited artists and works. They will be joined by artist Beth Lau. The discussion will be led by curator/writer Alissa Kleist, and will form the basis of her response to the exhibition, to be published in the forthcoming *STRANGE LOOP* catalogue.

## AMANDA BEECH

*Alien* (2002)

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Amanda Beech's artwork and writing investigate the condition of lawlessness, contingency and instability when imagined as a natural state of the human condition, looking to how we can now understand politics, agency and power in this context. Her work has focused on the rhetorical force of the image as a substantive object and how this allows a re-thinking of the terms by which we name art's critique in the context of contingency. Beech's work in video, print and sculpture has taken up this notion of force through entangling narratives of power and agency from philosophical theory, noir-ish narratives of TV shows such as *24* and *CSI*, the hard-boiled writing of James Ellroy, and real political events. Inspired by these discourses on power in the context of groundlessness, her work examines and produces the condition of language as force – and the force of language.

With Too Many DJ's mash up of *Destiny's Child* vs. *Nirvana* and Ridley Scott's 1979 science fiction horror film, *Alien*, Beech's *Alien* (2002) underscores the force of what is often assumed to be the passive, humanised space of the viewer to the level that equals the spectacle of the observed. Temporalities collide in the mixing of Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* (1991) and Destiny's Child's *Bootylicious* (2001), which itself samples the 1981 track, *Edge of Seventeen*, by Stevie Nicks. The songs are mixed to create an anachronistic soundtrack to Scott's film, with Beech transforming *Alien* into a visually striking music video with fast-paced editing and flashing imagery, the grainy, lo-fi film footage at odds with the futuristic scenes portrayed onscreen.

Beech is co-director of the Political Currency of Art Research Group ([www.thepoliticalcurrencyofart.com](http://www.thepoliticalcurrencyofart.com)) and is Dean of Critical Studies at CalArts, California, USA. Recent solo exhibitions include *Final Machine*, Lanchester Gallery Projects (2013) and Ha Gamle Prestegard, Norway (2013); and *The Church The Bank The Art Gallery*, Banner Repeater, London (2012).

## CLIFF CHIANG

Wonder Woman #16 (2012)

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*“What if your past is a lie? How do you move forward and define yourself? Writer Brian Azzarello and I have focused on these questions in crafting our ‘Wonder Woman’ story, turning the classic hero’s journey into one of self-discovery and self-determination. When designing the covers, I usually try to focus on images of strength and agency, but here Wonder Woman is struggling with the physical and psychological horror of a monstrous swarm of flies. This particular chapter deals with vision and multiple perspectives, and introduces a character suffering from schizophrenia, so I also wanted to highlight Wonder Woman’s eyes. Her gaze meets ours, and in it we see her panic and desperation and acknowledge it with our own revulsion.”*

Cliff Chiang is a comic book artist based in Brooklyn, New York. Graduating from Harvard University with a joint degree in English Literature and Visual Arts, he worked in editorial at Disney Adventures Magazine and Vertigo/DC Comics before making the leap into freelance illustration. Clients include DC Comics, Lucasfilm, Warner Animation, and Dark Horse Comics on books such as *Batman*, *Human Target*, *Green Arrow & Black Canary*, and *Swamp Thing*.

Chiang is currently working on *Wonder Woman* with writer Brian Azzarello as part of DC Comics’ *The New 52*, a 2011 revamp and relaunch by DC Comics of its entire line of ongoing monthly superhero comic books, in which all of its existing titles were cancelled, and fifty-two new series debuted in September 2011 with new first issues. Among the renumbered series were *Action Comics* and *Detective Comics*, which had previously retained their original numbering since the 1930s. Changes made to DC’s internal continuity were intended to make characters more modern and accessible.

Wonder Woman has undergone countless transformations since her debut in *All Star Comics* #8 (1941), with appearances in comic books, cartoons, and live-action television series, simultaneously building a rich history yet existing in a floating timeline where she does not appear to age and retroactive continuity abounds. Whilst staying true to her past, Azzarello and Chiang have adapted Wonder Woman’s origin story, personality and supporting cast to build a new mythology for a character who was created over 70 years ago, instantly recognisable yet equally unfamiliar.

## EASTERJESUS PRODUCTIONS

Stine Omar and Max Boss

*Weird Country* (2012)

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*"EASTERJESUS PRODUCTIONS is the whale that Max Boss and Stine Omar ride to make brains meet and art slide. More than a nipple, more than a city, more than a game. Since 2005. WEIRD COUNTRY is an ode to fishing stories, to speedfreaks, to the people who get actual physical pain in the heart as effect of emotion, and to the Humboldtthain gardens of our hood."*

*Weird Country* is ambiguous in terms of time and place. As a viewer, one isn't fully aware of when or indeed where the video has been made - the grainy footage of cityscapes, the female voiceover and music references (Nine Inch Nails' "Hurt" (1994) and R. Kelly's "I Believe I Can Fly" (1996)) can assist in the placement of the work geographically and historically, but we are ultimately left ignorant as to where or what this uncanny "Weird Country" really is.

Furthermore, the synchronisation of EASTERJESUS's work as both musicians and artists, blurs and questions the boundaries between artists' video works and traditional music videos.

## SIMON FUJIWARA

*Artist's Book Club: Hakuruberry Fuin no Monogatari* (2010)

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Simon Fujiwara (b. London, 1982) spent his childhood between Japan, England, Spain and Africa. In dense dramas about personal relationships, family relations, politics, architecture and history, Fujiwara's work explores biographies and 'real-life' narratives through a combination of performance, video, installation and short stories. Often appearing within his works himself and assuming various guises – from anthropologist to erotic novelist – he also works with a cast of friends, family members and collaborators, presenting versions of themselves and their own biographies as characters within his drama. In linking fictional and real people, locations and events, Fujiwara explores the boundary between the real and the imagined, often revealing the very fiction of such distinction.

Fujiwara's works have been shown in solo and group exhibitions around the world including Tate St. Ives, MoMA, New York, the Venice Biennale and the Sao Paulo Biennale. He has published two books, *The Museum of Incest* and *1982*, and has been awarded the prestigious Ballois Art Prize (Art Basel) and the Cartier Award (Frieze Art Fair).

In Fujiwara's farcical television talkshow, *Artist's Book Club: Hakuruberry Fuin no Monogatari* (2010), the artist plays a caricature of himself as the featured guest, gushing about the character Jim. Explaining why *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been so influential to his work, the schoolboyish artist recounts – with an exaggerated Japanese accent and earnestness – tales of his personal and family history in relation to Japanese cultural repression. The novel, too, is full of characters who assume disguises and other acts of deception: at different points Huck disguises himself as a girl, pretends to be his brother, and stages his own death – not unlike Twain himself, who wrote his own fictitious obituary in 1902.

Here we see Fujiwara playing a version of himself which is not wholly inaccurate, with his often comical anecdotes and exaggerated accent making us cautious of his blurring of reality and storytelling. The artist is so present within the work, but we question the accuracy of the man who we are presented with, and Fujiwara ultimately remains enigmatic.

## CALLA HENKEL AND MAX PITEGOFF

*Marlous Postcard* (mailed from Berlin to Belfast) (2013)

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Calla Henkel (b. 1988) and Max Pitegoff (b. 1987) live and work in Berlin. Working collaboratively with photography, text and sculpture, they also ran the Berlin-based bar, Times (2011-12). Their recent solo exhibitions include Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2013); Tomorrow, Toronto (2012); and T293, Naples (2012). They have recently participated in group exhibitions, performances and talks at institutions including Kunsthalle Zurich (2013), Kunsthalle Bern (2012) and the Stedelijk Museum (2012). Henkel and Pitegoff are currently planning to open a theater space in Berlin in 2013.

*Marlous Postcard* was mailed by Henkel and Pitegoff from their studio in Berlin to Golden Thread Gallery in Belfast. The postcard acts as its own crate, the dinged edges and stamped corners bearing witness to the global traffic of artworks and art workers. The photograph depicts Dutch artist Marlous Borm sailing on a boat in the Hudson River with the Statue of Liberty behind her. Splitting her time between New York, Amsterdam and Berlin, Marlous Borm represents the body's shift towards the global, lifting her lamp beside the golden door.

Present in the image are the subtleties of Borm being a Dutch artist in New York (once New Amsterdam), and the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty as a beacon of the New World, a fresh start for those leaving Europe behind and representative of a promising new future (as described in Emma Lazarus's sonnet, *The New Colossus*, engraved on the Statue's pedestal). As Americans living in Berlin, the artists' personal histories also come into play here, examining the shifting relationship between Europe and America throughout history.

Furthermore, as artists photographing an artist, other routes for interpretation emerge as Borm is simultaneously an artist in her own right and a subject within Henkel and Pitegoff's own practice. Boundaries become blurred, both geographically and metaphorically.

## PIL AND GALIA KOLLECTIV

*The Future is Now* (2009)

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Pil and Galia Kollektiv are London-based artists, writers and curators working in collaboration. Their work addresses the legacy of modernism and explores avant-garde discourses of the twentieth century and the way they operate in the context of a changing landscape of creative work and instrumentalised leisure. They are interested in the relationship between art and politics and the role irony and belief play in its current articulation. Their films and performances often use choreographed movement and ritual as both an aesthetic and a thematic dimension, juxtaposing consumer rites and religious ceremonies. Solo exhibitions include: *The Future Trilogy*, Te Tuhi Center for the Arts, New Zealand; *Svetlana*, S1 Artspace, Sheffield, 2008; and *Asparagus: A Horticultural Ballet*, The Showroom Gallery, London, 2007. They have also presented live work at the 2nd Herzliya Biennial, the 5th Berlin Biennial and the 5th Montreal Biennial, as well as at Kunsthall Oslo; Arnolfini, Bristol; and the ICA, London. Pil and Galia are contributing editors at Art Papers, the directors of artist run project space xero, kline & coma, and work as lecturers in Fine Art at the University of Reading.

In November 2005, IKEA announced a new store opening in Edmonton to be accompanied by an offer of a significant price reduction on leather sofas. When 6000 people arrived to compete for the discount, a riot ensued, injuring 16 shoppers. *The Future Trilogy* takes this event as the starting point for a speculative history of a fictional future. *The Future for Less* (2006) imagines the consumer riot as the foundation of a new totalitarian state religion imposing the tenets of modernism on the masses. In *Better Future, Wolf-Shaped* (2008), a rural cult perverts this official creed through pagan rituals of architectural worship performed at Celtic burial sites in Cornwall. The final instalment, *The Future is Now* (2009), stages the triumphant conquest of the industrial wasteland surrounding IKEA Edmonton as a popular uprising, revisiting the original riot as a future reenactment.

In *The Future is Now*, a lone insurgent is pursued by a representative of the state as she tries to assemble the multitude for a post-soviet mass spectacle. Hunted through the concrete cityscape of a multistorey carpark and the brutalist architecture of the Barbican complex, she arrives at Edmonton with the motley crew of would be consumer revolutionaries, who come together to perform a choreography derived from footage of the original riot. Dressed in monochrome neo-constructivist Dada costumes, they form groupings, pushing boxes and gesticulating at fellow 'shoppers'. Their repetitive movements converge in an ultimate confrontation with the uniformed police, which ends with the triumph of the flatpack utopia as the opposing forces join in a tableau of frozen victory. Exploring the possibility of collective action emerging from the Capitalist relations inherent in the consumer riot, the film forms an epic finale for *The Future Trilogy*. Featuring music by Laibach, *The Future is Now* was commissioned by Collective Gallery, Edinburgh.

## BETH LAU

*Study on British Sign Language 1981* (2011)

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Beth Lau (b. Hong Kong 1989) graduated from Goldsmiths College, University of London, in 2012. She has worked across Europe in Helsinki, Paris and London, with recent exhibits including *Áit* (HackneyWick, London) and *Now I Can Live* (HFBK, Hamburg). Her practice engages with forms of perception and the non-accessibility of language in human communication.

Lau's *Study on British Sign Language 1981* series is appropriated from a publication, *Sign and Say*, which features illustrations of British Sign Language, published by The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) in 1981. Drawn towards racist jokes, particularly towards her own identity, Lau re-presents images that were seen as legitimate signs of cultural identity used by a certain community in the 1980s to evoke a strong reaction from audiences today.

To a contemporary audience, these images might be interpreted as politically incorrect or indeed racist, and we are forced to question how they would have been viewed or critiqued at the time to both British and international users. The "China" sign exhibited in *STRANGE LOOP* has since been changed to the right hand travelling from the signer's heart, across the chest horizontally, then down towards the hip, mimicking the tunic worn in China. The new sign, however, might not signify a representational denotation.

The way in which we respond to such signs, images and symbols is so dependent upon the context in which we are viewing and the context in which they were made. Lau's re-presentation of these images some thirty years after their initial publication creates an interesting dynamic between past and present, and society's shifting perceptions of what is acceptable and what is not.

## RYAN MOFFETT

*Ones who have been told the ancient things* (2013)

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Ryan Moffett (b. Belfast, 1987) has shown his work in numerous exhibitions both locally and internationally, most notably: *Inter alia*, PS<sup>2</sup>, Belfast; *Arrivals*, Ormeau Baths Gallery, Belfast; *Interplanetary*, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast; and *Futures*, Elephant Gallery, Los Angeles. Moffett graduated from the University of Ulster in 2009, where he is currently completing his MFA.

Moffett explores the topics of representation, authenticity and fiction within his art practice. By manipulating the aesthetic qualities found within different genres of photography and film-making his work investigates representations of *truth*.

He is currently producing a series of photographs which scrutinise the idealistic and sublime qualities found within natural history dioramas. These photographs often break the fourth wall, showing the methods of their own making with lighting rigs, tripods and other equipment visible. This creates an interplay between real and illusionistic space, drawing contexts with theatre and cinema.

Moffett will continue this series of fictional dioramas as Artist in Residence at the Ulster Museum, Belfast (Summer 2013).

## CURATORS

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**Ben Crothers** (b. Belfast, 1987) received a BA (Hons) in American Studies and Film Studies from the University of Essex in 2008, through which he also studied at the University of Miami, Florida. The following year, he remained at the University of Essex to complete his MA in Art History and Film Theory. Since returning to Belfast in September 2009, Ben has worked at a number of the city's leading galleries including Golden Thread Gallery, the third space gallery and The Naughton Gallery at Queen's.

Selected curatorial projects include *Interplanetary*, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast (2012); *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman*, PS<sup>2</sup>, Belfast (2012); and *The Girls: Alive for Your Pleasure*, The Naughton Gallery at Queen's, Belfast (2013). Ben has also been involved with international exhibitions in Poland and Taiwan, curated the *GRAPHIC GRRRLS* comic book programme for the 2012 Ulster Bank Belfast Festival at Queen's, and has worked at both London Art Fair and SCOPE Art Show, New York.

**Phillip McCrilly** (b. Dungannon, 1988) is a visual artist and writer currently based in Belfast. He graduated with First Class Honours in Fine and Applied Art from the University of Ulster in 2012. He has also studied at Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, Germany.

Phillip has exhibited locally and internationally in exhibitions including *Interplanetary Revolution*, Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast (2012); *VICINITY*, Catalyst Arts, Belfast (2012); *ALTAR*, Platform Arts, Belfast (2011); and as part of *Rundgang*, Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig (2011). He has also presented work collaboratively as part of Outburst Arts Festival (2011) and Household Art Festival (2012).

Phillip is currently a Co-Director of Catalyst Arts, Belfast.

## READING, LISTENING, VIEWING

*Selected by the artists and curators*

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### READING

Brian Azzarello and Cliff Chiang, *Wonder Woman: Blood* (2012)  
Philip K. Dick, *Time Out of Joint* (1959)  
Bret Easton Ellis, *The Rules of Attraction* (1987)  
James Ellroy, *My Dark Places* (1996)  
Simon Fujiwara, *The Museum of Incest* (2009), *1982* (2012)  
Douglas Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop* (2007)  
Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005)  
Jeff Lemire, *Essex County* (2009)  
Steven Millhauser, 'August Eschenburg', *In the Penny Arcade* (1985)  
David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas* (2004)  
Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (1987)  
Judith E. Stein, 'Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*' (1993)

### LISTENING

William Basinski, *The Disintegration Loops* (2002)  
EASTERJESUS PRODUCTIONS, *Ur A Great Babe* (2011), *The Softest Hard* (2012)  
Brian Eno, *Discreet Music* (1975)  
Oval, *Systemisch* (1994)  
Liz Phair, *Exile in Guyville* (1993)  
Various Artists, *No New York* (1978)

### VIEWING

Sofia Coppola, *Marie Antoinette* (2006)  
Sergei Eisenstein, *October* (1928)  
Michael Elliott, *The Year of the Sex Olympics* (1968)  
Marco Ferreri, *Touche pas à la femme blanche* (1974)  
Jean-Luc Godard, *Weekend* (1967)  
Jim Jarmusch, *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984)  
Stanley Kubrick, *The Shining* (1980)  
George Lucas, *Star Wars, Episodes IV - VI* (1977-83)  
Baz Luhrmann, *Romeo + Juliet* (1996)  
Chris Marker, *Sans Soleil* (1983)  
Tom Tykwer, *Run Lola Run* (1998)