

An Exploration of Georgia

Georgia Boniface:
postgraduate research
student

Biography

Georgia Boniface is an artist and has recently completed the MA by Research at the University of Huddersfield. She studied Fine Art and Sociology at Liverpool University (1990-93) with a specific interest in identity, individuality and subcultural groups. This interest and the combination of art practice with sociological theory, led to a development into clothing design and manufacture as an extension of ideas around adornment and embellishment. In 1994-2000, with a Prince's Youth Business Trust award, Georgia co-founded Laundry, a clothing and textile design and manufacturing partnership, exhibiting new collections bi-annually at Interseason, Business Design Centre, London, and selling to an international network of independent retailers.

In 2008, Georgia became a founding member of the artists' collective Temporary Art Group, who work together organising and curating exhibitions and publications without sponsorship

or funding, showcasing the work of contemporary artists. This unfunded ethos, born as much from impatience as political conviction, led to the opening of Temporary Art Space in 2009. Temporary Art Space was an unfunded, six month, artist-run gallery project situated in the Piece Hall, Halifax in collaboration with Calderdale Council. Temporary Art Group curated a series of six exhibitions and six 'changeover' interventions, featuring the work of international contemporary artists, from March to September 2009. In March 2010, Georgia exhibited *Radio Local*, a live collaborative performance with Edward Cotterill, at Limoncello Gallery, London.

Current Research

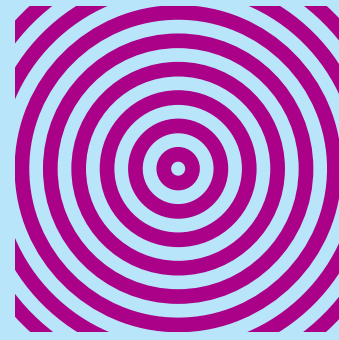
Georgia's MA research, 'An Exploration of the Self Within Contemporary Art (Within the Context of Everything Else)', returned to original interests in identity and the role of the individual in society. The research was undertaken alongside an examination of her approach to art practice,

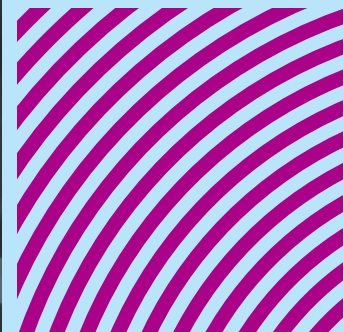
investigating the role of the subconscious self within it. Georgia takes the position that everything presented as research 'fact' is filtered through the self, and that these 'facts' are not necessarily universal, but one point of view in, and about the universe, and even this is in flux; the premise being, as Karl Popper summarises in *The Self and its Brain* (1977): "every time a man dies, a whole universe is destroyed. (One realizes this when one identifies oneself with that man.) Human beings are irreplaceable ... They are selves; they are ends in themselves".

In terms of studio practice, Georgia observed links between this argument and ideas presented by Zygmunt Bauman in *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (2004), in which is discussed the formation of national identity. It then became possible to discuss the innate human desire to create an identity for itself on a macro and micro level. The effects of the same human constructs, (taking into account what is inherited from generations of

history alongside invention, story-telling and myth-making), form the individual self as well as the collective consciousness of a whole nation or society, the personal and political as two separate elements, inextricably linked.

The culmination of this practice was an exhibition, *The Republic of Georgia*, at Central Art Gallery, Ashton-under-Lyne in 2010. In *The Republic of Georgia*, identity is explored as a 'floating' construct, within the context of a pseudo-ethnographic museum. Thus, using an obvious symbol of her own identity, the name Georgia becomes a vehicle through which to represent what has been established by the research. The installation is about locating oneself with the consideration of everything else, (incorporating the role of society, religion, geographical location, knowledge [what we know] and the Universe), then isolating and presenting certain 'facts' within the gallery context. The Republic of Georgia becomes a real place in which these objectives are explored through





a composition of eight elements: 'Flag', a declaration of identity, which symbolises the values and shared destiny of a cohesive whole. 'National Costume' represents the individual as a component of the whole, but conveys personal governance over one's multiple roles and voices. It is demonstrative of a consensus, a participation in the unity of the nation that can grant scope for forms of self-expression. 'Festive Street Bunting' adds embellishment, employing the theatrical conceit of scene-setting, creating the ambience in which participation is encouraged. 'Postcards' is a series of collages, evidence and physical documentation of a 'made-up' place, (as in 'of component parts', that are real and fictitious), creating a visual record of 'The Republic of Georgia'. 'Travel Posters' reinforce the concept of geographical location. They incorporate a play on the name Georgia as person and place (somewhere both east and west). In this context, acknowledging the capacity for comparison as well as the sense of unease,

there is anticipation of potential conflict and dislocation, or disorientation: east/west, capitalism/communism, the state vs the individual, and the perception of 'freedom'. 'Georgian Music' is a compilation of fourteen songs with the name Georgia in the title, including: 'Georgia On My Mind', 'Going Back to Georgia', 'Rainy Night In Georgia' and so on, piped into the installation in place of a national anthem. 'The Dressing Up Box' is an interactive performance, where gallery visitors are invited to dress up in the clothes on display, exploring ideas of self-representation, choice and performance, highlighting that this is 'what we do' on a universal scale that begins with the individual construct of the self. 'Artefacts' are objects relating to 'Five Georgian Folk Tales':
i) Albert Edward Garfoot (The Day He Left for the Homeland)
ii) The Lace Heirlooms (The Red Book, 'The End is Just the Beginning' and The Other Side)
iii) The Umbrella Stand (Catholics, Asthmatics and Stringed Instruments)

iv) The Rabbit and the Hen (The Amateur Taxidermist)
v) The Significance of Peacock Feathers
They are the myths, fairy stories, morality tales, invented from the 'facts' known about *The Republic of Georgia* that provide a sense of cohesion in a shared history. They represent the transmitting of a moral code and a consensus of belief. They deal with inherited 'truths' and how to negotiate them, containing and preserving a collective history. They characterize the nation's legendary heroes and heroines, models of citizenship and ideals. Although eccentric and out of date they cannot be dismissed or forgotten.

The Republic of Georgia highlights the human need to create and curate its own identity. It conveys the continual process of sculpting, modelling, displaying and re-working, as well as the merging of fact and fiction and the acceptance that truths are transient and appropriated to suit a meta purpose.