



*every thought there ever was*

*every thought there ever was*

**A new work commissioned with a Large Grant  
Award from the Wellcome Institute**

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
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### Biography

Lindsay Seers works and lives in London and Sheerness-on-Sea. She studied at two of Britain's most prestigious art colleges Slade School of Fine Art, University College London (BA Hons, Sculpture and Media 1991-94) and at Goldsmiths College, University of London (MA Fine Art 1999-2001), she has also worked as a lecturer and external examiner at The Slade and is currently a lecturer in MA Fine Art Goldsmiths. Her works are in a number of public and private collections including Tate collection, Arts Council collection, Artangel collection and the collection of MONA, Tasmania. She has won several prestigious grants and awards these include the Sharjah Art Foundation Production Award, UAE; Le Jeu de Paume production award for the Toulouse Festival, France; the Paul Hamlyn Award; and the Derek Jarman Award for innovative film makers; she has received a substantial AHRC award and awards from Henry Moore Foundation and a number of Arts Council and British Council Awards in support of her large works. She also received the Wingate Scholarship from The British School at Rome 2007/8.

Seers has shown internationally in museums and art centres such as SMK (National Gallery of Denmark); MONA (Tasmania); Hayward Gallery (London); Tate Britain (London); Kiasma (Helsinki); Bonniers Konsthall, (Sweden) and Venice Biennale.

*To experience Seers' work is to experience snapshots, rumours, doubtful information – fascinating fragments that refuse to add up to a neat, narratively satisfying whole. To experience one's memory of her work is something else entirely. Recall Extramission 6 on a Monday morning, and it's a story of childhood and exile. Recall it on a Tuesday night, and it's a meditation on Platonic optics and 19th-century methods of indexing and surveillance. Memory does its work, generating different readings, different histories, and different shapes for the viewer's future self to adopt. Tom Morton (Frieze 2009)*

What constitutes the artistic practice of Lindsay Seers is not mere storytelling, but a matrix where there is no formal separation between the conceptual investigation of the act of photography, the camera as apparatus, the common desire for film and photography to act as evidence of events, and the complex historical and personal synchronicities of events themselves. What we are witnessing is not so much a detached systematic outline of these relationships, but the actual unfolding of a creative process, where the act of observation and understanding influences the outcome of events themselves. Through Seers' photographic explorations the past is constantly reconfigured, as if it contains an infinite virtual potential for different outcomes, which are all already embedded in one another. Instead of providing a neutral platform for the viewer, her installations place the film imagery within the structures most appropriate to the narrative constructs. These structures are both factual and theatrical, thereby embodying the dual aspect of the evidence and the artefact. It is impossible for the viewer to enter this emotional landscape without making their own identifications and associations, without being an implicated participant within the unfolding of history, its apparatuses and institutions as well as its human narratives. The personal and the collective are all but different features of the monstrous unfolding of the virtual event, a spectacle with no singular platform of observation.



Entangled II (Theatre 2)

*previous works*



In order to make clear the artist's working methods four projects of eight of Seers' episodic works are briefly described below.



*'Extramission'*, was developed from a number of performative events:

- The work evolved across time taking the concept human camera as its starting point.
- A journey to Mauritius to find a house with the artist's mother (which they never found).
- Performances on location in Holland and Mauritius using the mouth as a camera.
- Ventriloquist performances in theatres in Leicester, Blackpool and London.
- Performances as a projector at Ealing Studios.

Chris Frith informed the project with Bayesian theory and introception.

The work took personal biography and used it as an embodied experience of photography's development into film. The work was staged in a model of Edison's first film studio (Black Maria) as a temple to his Kinetograph. Funded by Arts Council London Arts and Humanities Research Council

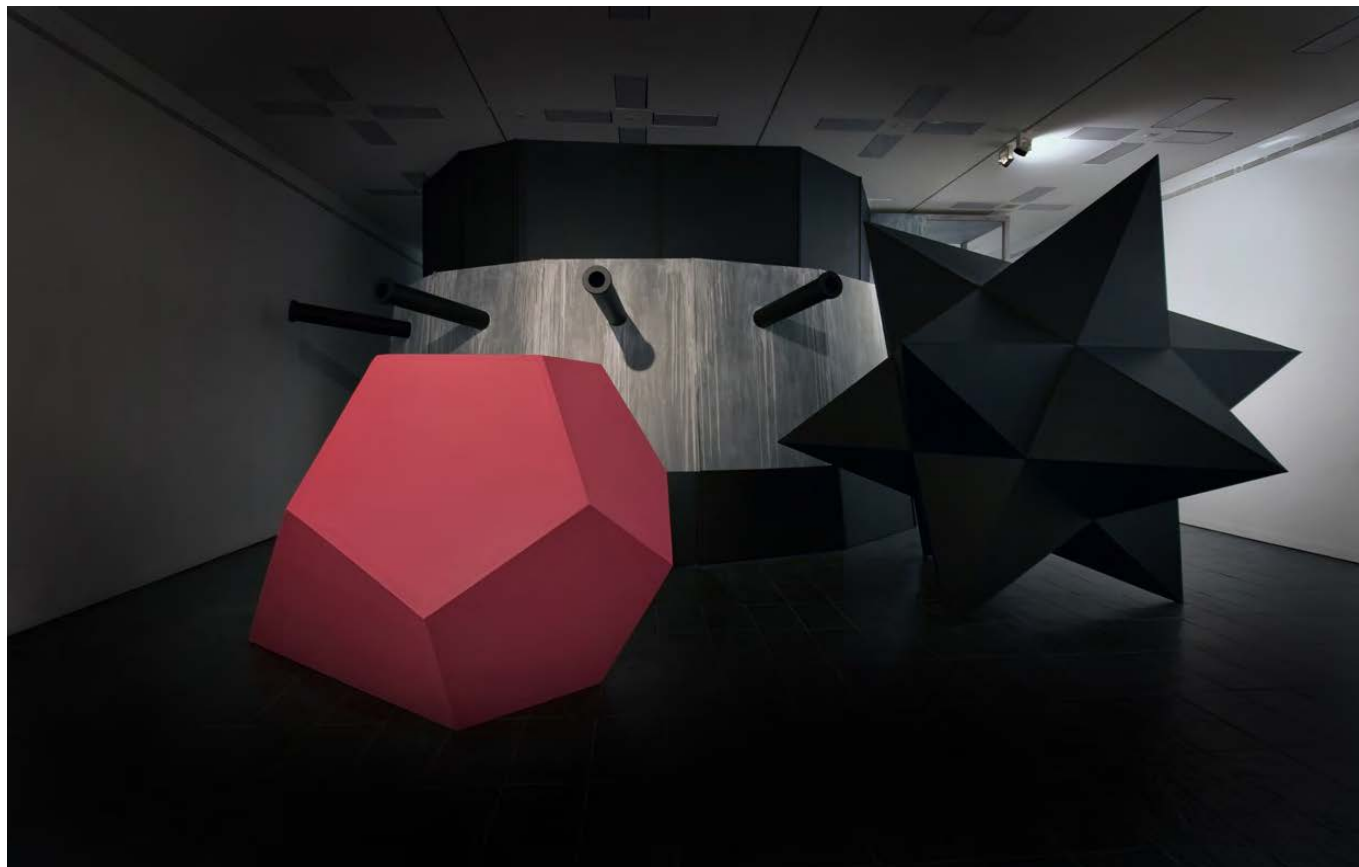
Produced by Gas Works (London); Smart Project Space (Amsterdam); Tate Britain; Bonniers Kunsthalle (Stockholm); Kiasma (Finland); Contemporary Art Society and Victoria and Albert Museum for Rugby City Art Gallery; Images Festival, Toronto.

*One of Many*

The commission evolved as a search into interlinked historical and contemporary events surrounding the venue L'Hôtel-Dieu Saint-Jacques. Performances and actions formed an archive. These included searching for Black Madonnas on the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage walk in France and Spain; finding 3000 scallop shells; delving into city archives in Toulouse regarding a flood in the building; the biography of two French protagonists with two differently coloured eyes; the 'all seeing eye' and the Masonic influence in Toulouse. The work took the form of a confessional divided between the priest – the virtual; and the penitent – the actual. Lens based images pervaded the penitent's narrative and digital animation the priest's perspective.

Produced by Toulouse Festival, Matt's Gallery and Lindsay Seers.





*It has to be this way*

The work comprised of performative actions, which constituted a search to relive the past.

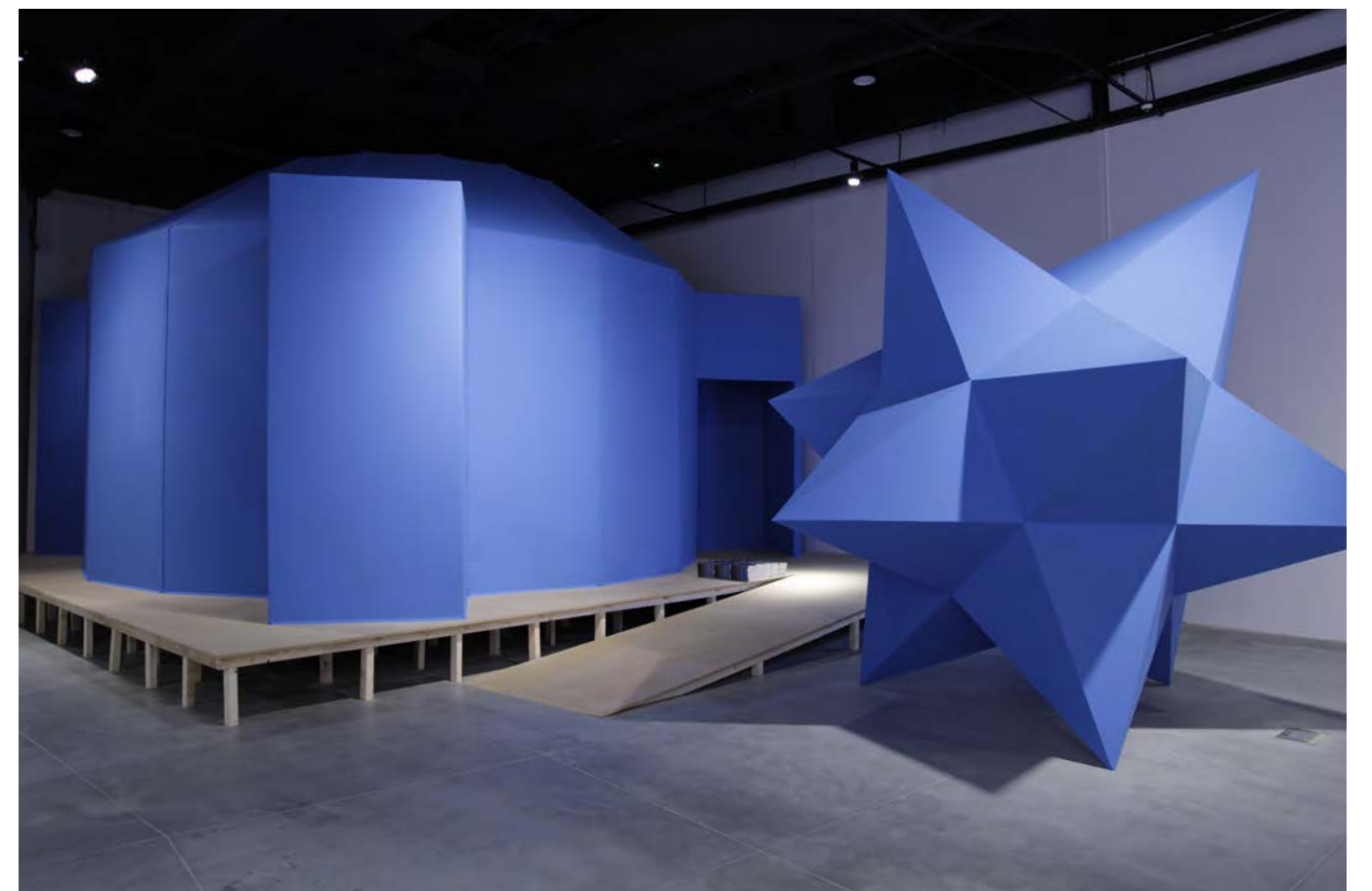
Framed around a re-enactments of Seers' step-sister's biography the work involved using a method based on Neo-Platonic philosophy.

The narrative related to this philosophical/alchemical system evolved through the stringing together of moments chosen by the chance finding of dead bees. Content included the life of Queen Christina of Sweden (the subject of Seers' step-sister's PhD and her obsession). It was shot on location in Rome, Stockholm and Bologna. Four writers of biographies of Queen Christina based in Sweden were also involved in the project. The work has two parts – one originally commissioned by Matt's Gallery and then also produced by Fact Liverpool; Nikolaj Art Centre, Copenhagen; Cricoteka, Warsaw; Aspex, Portsmouth.



A new commission saw part two produced by SMK (National Gallery of Denmark) with The Baltic and Mead Gallery as co-commissioners.

The work included large-scale sculptural elements, three monitor works and a novella reworked for each venue.





*previous works*

### *Nowhere Less Now*

This episodic work is based on a photograph of a relative with heterochromia (an able seaman on Royal Naval ship). The image unfurls across time and location, the final version ends in Oman. The method took the typical process of searching for narrative by re-enacting, acting and travelling to significant places. The work was not defined in advance of the commission except that it would be in the Tin Tabernacle. The original work evolved over a two year period and was produced by Artangel.

Matt's Gallery assisted production for its four manifestations.



*previous works*



Nowhere less now <sup>1</sup>







No where less now <sup>4</sup>

No where less now <sup>2</sup>



Monocular 2

Monocular 4





previous works



Extramission 2

Monocular 4



previous works

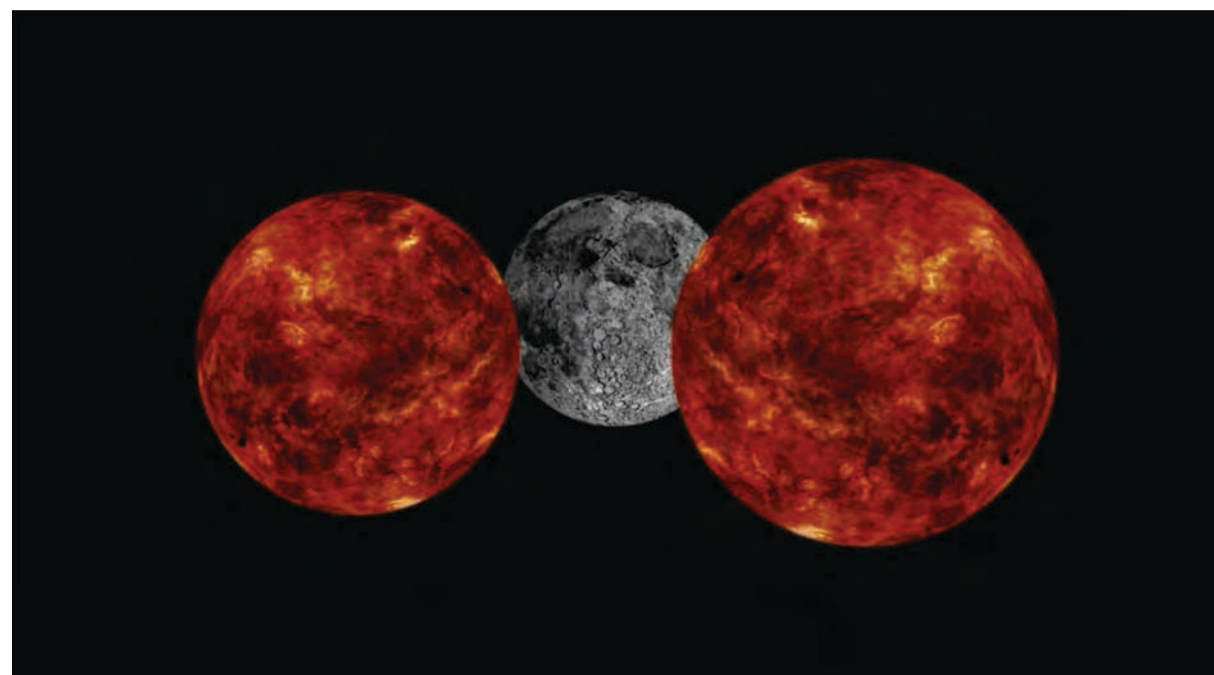
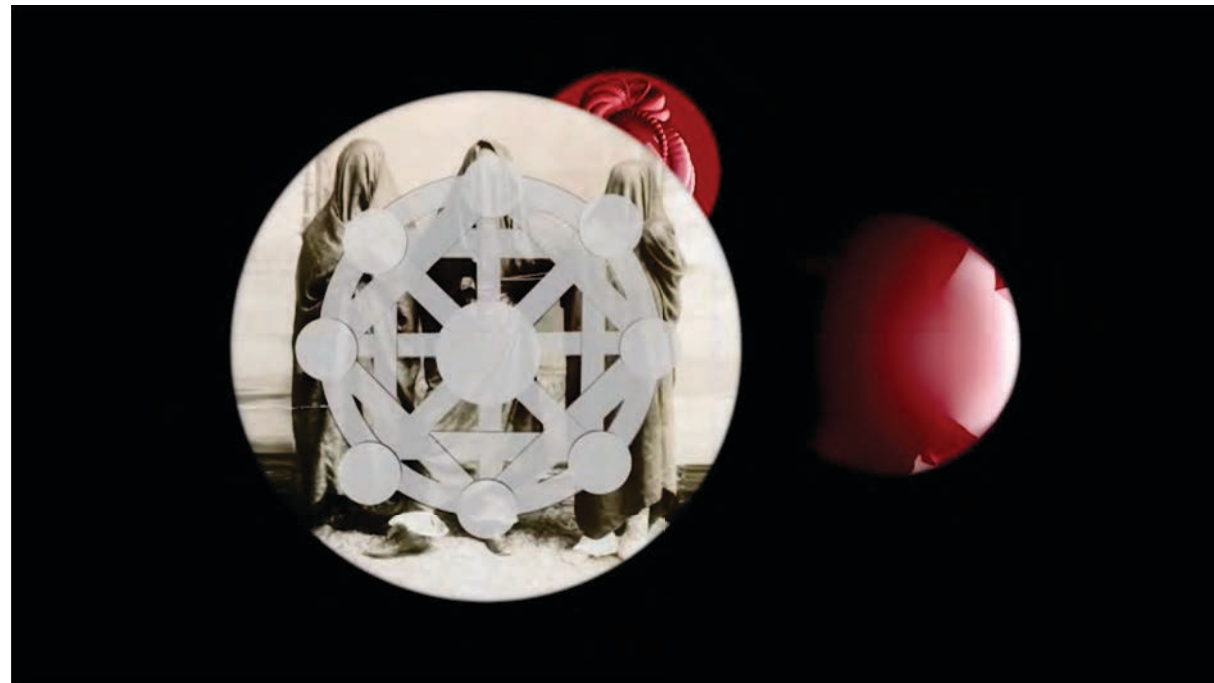


Monocular 1





*every thought there ever was*



### **Description of the new work**

‘Every Thought There Ever Was’ is a moving-image installation to be staged in a constructed space (seating bank and light traps) over three moving projection screens, they are robotically controlled, tilting to receive and reject imagery, patterns and colours.

The work requires blackout with low level LED lighting to allow ease of access to a seating bank. The sound is delivered by both directional speakers for voices and through 7.1 surround sound. The work will be 20 minutes in duration and play twice an hour on a timed system.

The imagery that is projected onto the screens concerns human consciousness and its relationship to artificial intelligence. The coming together and breaking apart of conscious perceptions of the world and the self is a recurring motif for Seers’ artwork. The piece reflects these shifting, fluctuating natures of our perceptions of reality.

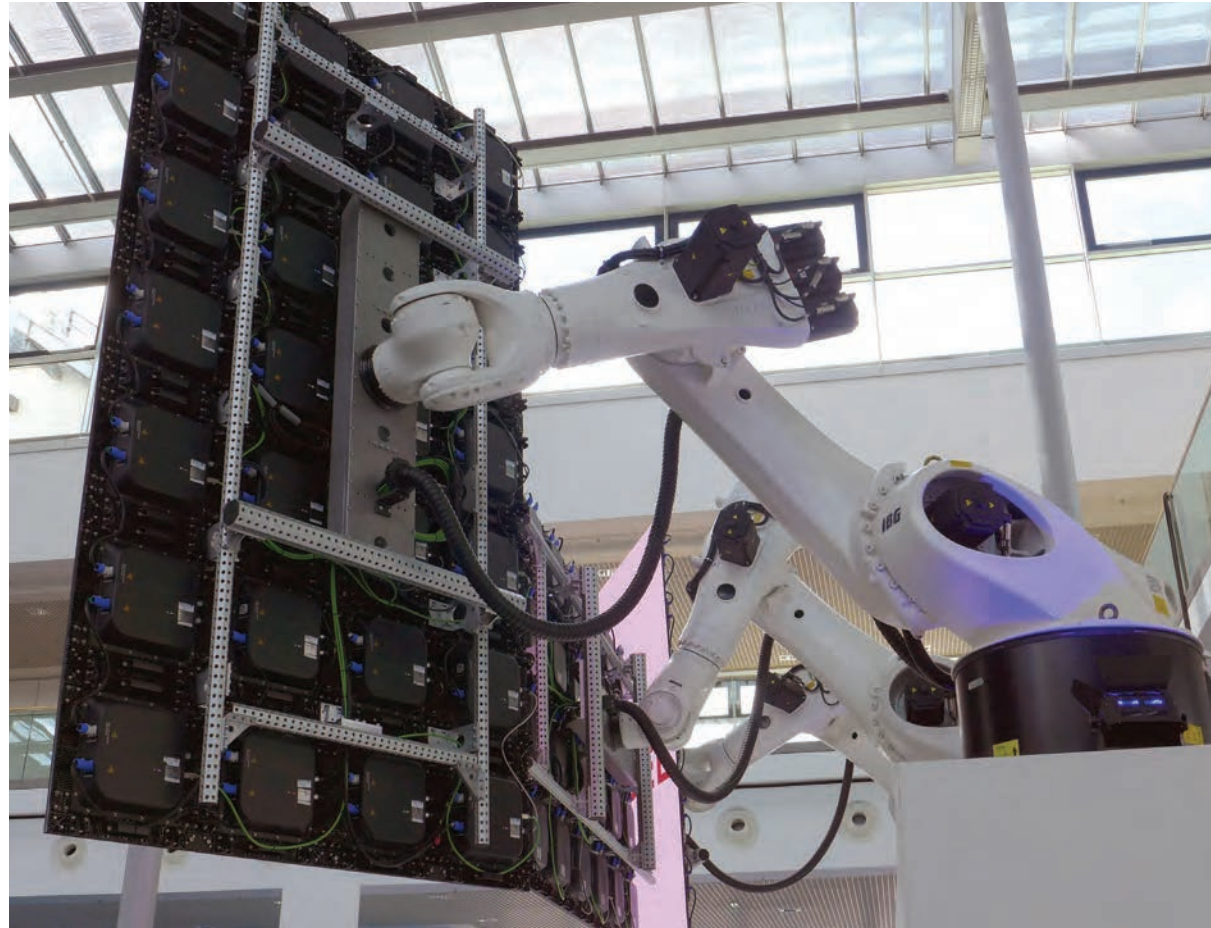
The work draws on philosophical ideas and contemporary scientific findings. A particular focus is on current and historical perceptions/representations of conditions defined by extraordinary brain functioning, in literature, philosophy and science. The light that neuroscientific study shines on the elusive, variable nature of consciousness in general is an important element of the research for the work.

The work has evolved from a number of collaborations. At the Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science, Professor Anil Seth examines the effect of exposure to virtual reality on our sense of self, our perception of our body and our experience of subjective ‘reality’. Work at the Sackler Centre is focused on unravelling the biological basis of consciousness itself.

Taking ideas of robot consciousness into account the screens move in the space and seem to react to sound, light and ideas. Images fall on them and across them. Doubling, (often present in Seer’s works) emerges on the three screens. They screens, like a skin stand as a membrane between inner and outer data. The implication of a computational brain/a robot brain is also part of this doubling or reproducibility. The robot pictured in the film can learn and has specific individual qualities, although its mind comes from a common structure biological elements allow it subtle differences amongst the masses.



every thought there ever was



every thought there ever was

## Robots

Beyond the presence of robots working as screens in this new work an avatar/robot is also featured in the film. This character (called James Miranda Barry) addresses the questions of its own consciousness through their thoughts/narration. (NB The historic Barry disguised herself as a man and served in the British Army in medical roles. No-one knew she was a woman until her death.)

## The content/subject of Barry/narrative/story

*There are three Barry characters in the work (relating to the three screens):*

- *The historic Barry, Inspector General of Hospitals disguises as a man,*
- *The child born of Barry's Caesarean in South Africa and the generations that have taken the name JM Barry to this day*
- *The future avatar/robot of Barry*

## Historic Barry

Documents on Barry at the Wellcome Library indicate that it is not at all certain that Barry was female (although this has been a commonly held belief) – she/he may have been hermaphrodite. Her body was never seen by a medical professional.

As Inspector General of Hospitals one of his/her principle concerns was what were then referred to as 'lunatic asylums'. Barry is reported to have had an unusually humanitarian approach to patients and understood that conditions were responsible for some of the mental states of these patients. Treatment took the form of punitive incarceration in cells where patients were beaten and chained.

## Caesarean Barry

The designer of the Barry Avatars in the film traces the DNA line back to the baby cut from the womb and discovers many important facts that had been lost about belief and practices from that time.

## Future Barry

She/he is set in a genderless future world that has been manufactured - a world beyond differentiation and beyond racial definitions, the avatar muses on what mistakes were made in the past before we understood the brain, consciousness and reproduction. The robotic screens are part of the Barry avatar - the screens are 'characters' in the work.



### **Fabrication details of screens**

The 3 flat circular screens, 2 of which will be approx 2m in diameter and the central screen 3m in diameter. The side screens pan and move along a horizontal axis, always at the same height. The larger central screen moves up and down on a vertical access and backwards and forwards from a central fixed point. The screens are programmed to be synchronised in their movements. The wide angle, projectors will be fixed to the mechanism/screens for back projection.

In terms of imagery that the projectors will process there is a requirement for a good contrast ratio and significant luminosity as well as an ability to render movement smoothly. There will be patterns, symbols, insides of the body/brain, robotic mechanisms and lens based filmic and photographic imagery in this work in many forms. This will be projected onto these physically animated screens. The two brain hemispheres and their different ways of processing the same information is an influence on this work. Split brain studies have been very influential on medical science and understanding the brain.

### **Screen Movement List:**

Left Screen.

1. Move 2.4m from a central position left and right in y co-ordinate. .
2. Vertical rotation of screen 90 degrees inward, (i.e front facing screen turns 90 degrees to z)
3. Move forward and back in z co-ordinate minimum 2.4m (potential 3.6m if possible )

Right screen mirrors left screen actions.

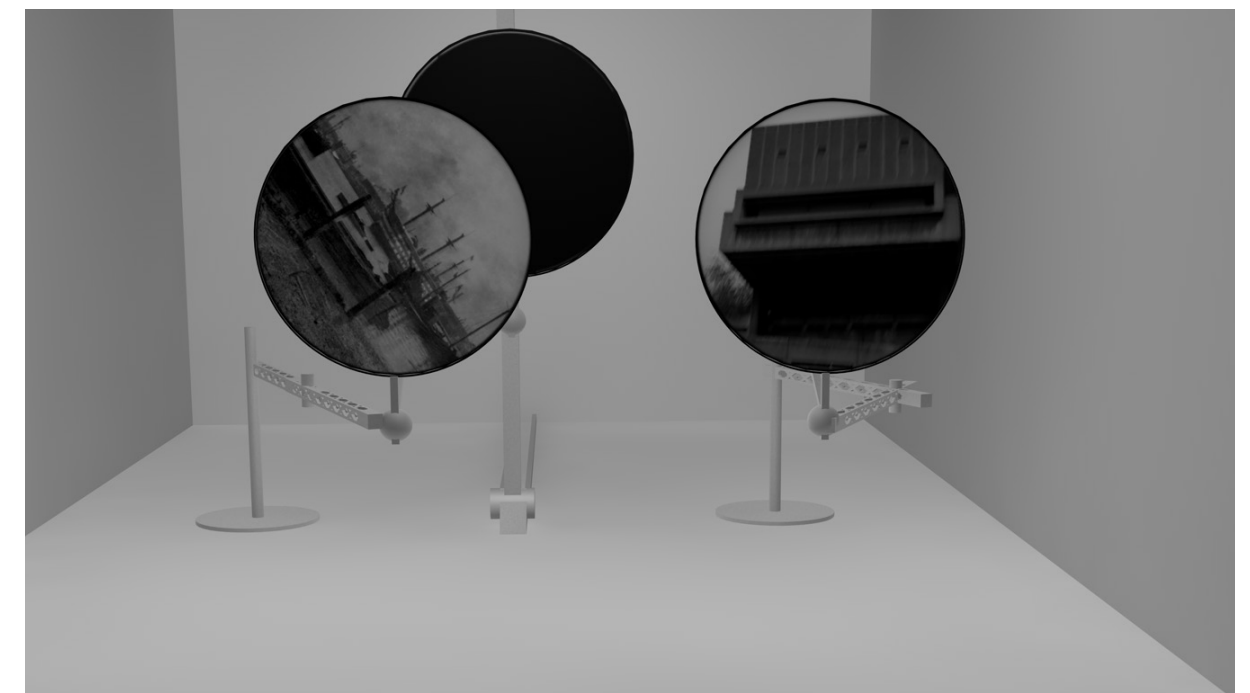
Left and right screen will eclipse one another. Therefore there needs to be a distance between them when intersecting to allow for the projector arm.

Back Screen

1. Rise in y co-ordinate from a 2m level to 2.4m (or potential for 3.6m)
2. Move forward in z co-ordinate
3. Tilt 90 degrees to a horizontal position (screen facing up in y co-ordinate).

Other requirements

A seating bank. A wall/barrier to block view of screens on entry into the gallery. A barrier to protect screen area.





## More Detail on Methods and Concepts

*The Philosophy of the practice and its relationship to neuroscience. The use of heterogeneity as a method. The integration of heterogeneity without juxtaposition in all aspects, The question of simultaneity as a creative method.*

Lindsay Seers' works evolve holistically so that every part emerges simultaneously. The work does not follow a method of scripting, visualising and enacting but takes a dynamic attitude towards events. This follows both the philosophy of Henri Bergson and the findings of neuroscience in relation to heterogeneity.

*"For Bergson, we must understand the duration as a qualitative multiplicity — as opposed to a quantitative multiplicity. As the name suggests, a quantitative multiplicity enumerates things or states of consciousness by means of externalizing one from another in a homogeneous space. In contrast, a qualitative multiplicity consists in a temporal heterogeneity, in which "several conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another, [and] gradually gain a richer content" (Time and Free Will, p. 122). Bergson even insists that the word 'several' is inappropriate to qualitative multiplicity because it suggests numbering. In Time and Free Will, Bergson provides examples of a quantitative multiplicity; the example of a flock of sheep is perhaps the easiest to grasp (Time and Free Will, pp. 76–77). When we look at a flock of sheep, what we notice is that they all look alike. We sense no qualitative change as we move from one to another. We also notice that we can enumerate the sheep. We are able to enumerate them because each sheep is spatially separated from or juxtaposed to the others; in other words, each occupies a discernable spatial location. Therefore, quantitative multiplicities, as Bergson says, are homogeneous and spatial. Moreover, because a quantitative multiplicity is homogeneous, we can represent it with a symbol, for instance, a sum:25.*

*Normally, we would think that if there is heterogeneity, there has to be juxtaposition. But, in qualitative multiplicities, there is heterogeneity and no juxtaposition. Qualitative multiplicities are temporal; qualitative multiplicity defines the duration." (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*

*"Schizophrenia may not be a unitary concept and therefore might not apply to a single disease. Heterogeneity in clinical aspects can be accounted by the implication of different neural circuits and by psychosocial/pragmatic sources of noise. Since Kraepelin, schizophrenic clinical picture is supposed to spare consciousness, unlike other organic psychoses. But, what if schizophrenics and other psychotic patients have precisely a disturbed capacity to monitor and describe their mental states and thus their reported content of consciousness is partly or totally the expression of an altered consciousness, rather than a conscious report of alterations somewhere else? This idea was already postulated by French alienists*

*and continued by Continental psychiatry but not by Anglo-Saxon one. Whereas the latter used a metaphor to describe consciousness as a torchlight that illuminates psychic life, the former envisaged consciousness as the part of the psychic apparatus concerned with experience. In the last decades, however, through the impact of recent neurocognitive research, consciousness has been paid heed again and its role in the psychopathology of different symptoms of schizophrenia (involving functions such as memory, agency, self, etc) has gained relevance.” (Consciousness Disorders in Schizophrenia: a Forgotten Land for Psychopathology)*

Hence the making of the work involves setting up heterogeneous methods and engagements of all parts from the outset. Each element of the work is modified and extended in relation to a flux of form and content. This has been a tried and tested methodology and has produced successful results.

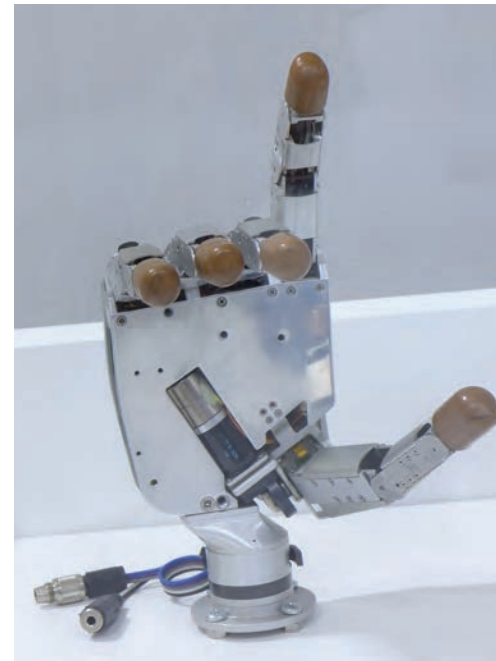
This text by Ole Hagen elucidates this methodology:

*What constitutes the artistic practice of Lindsay Seers is not mere storytelling, but a matrix where there is no formal separation between the conceptual investigation of the act of photography/filming, the camera as apparatus, the common desire for film and photography to act as evidence of events, and the complex historical and personal synchronicities of events themselves. What we are witnessing is not so much a detached systematic outline of these relationships, but the actual unfolding of a creative process, where the act of observation and understanding influences the outcome of events themselves. Through Seers’ photographic explorations the past is constantly reconfigured, as if it contains an infinite virtual potential for different outcomes, which are all already embedded in one another. Instead of providing a neutral platform for the viewer, her installations place the film imagery within the structures most appropriate to the narrative constructs. These structures are both factual and theatrical, thereby embodying the dual aspect of the evidence and the artefact. It is impossible for the viewer to enter this emotional landscape without making their own identifications and associations, without being an implicated participant within the unfolding of history, its apparatuses and institutions as well as its human narratives. The personal and the collective are all but different features of the monstrous unfolding of the virtual event, a spectacle with no singular platform of observation.*



Nowhere less now <sup>5</sup> screens, Turner Contemporary





### The philosophical question of perception:

The question of breaking down the interiority of the subject and the seeming exteriority of the world has been long considered and made porous by philosophy but has in some senses remained stagnant in our experience of theatre and cinema – in which the sensation of the passive observation of an unfolding spectral world leaves us in an undeniably Cartesian space. Merleau-Ponty uses the term *dehiscence*, its use in biology refers to the splitting apart of fruit, seedpods or organs to bring forth a flesh, which differs from but is of their flesh. It is this collapse of an inner and outer dichotomy of the structure of mind that seems essential - to go beyond the binary.

There is an interiority or depth of being within flesh that comes to the surface in the chiasm, as an opening of the perceivable world. The arising of sense is a fleshing out of embodied existence, with flesh disclosing its (in)coherence or carnal meaning in its differentiation of itself.

Like Bergson, Merleau-Ponty draws on the sensation of a person's hand touching the other hand as defining a kind of mobius strip of interiority and exteriority in which the sense of a continuous surface breaks down the dichotomy of subject and object. How to bring this collapse to the screen?

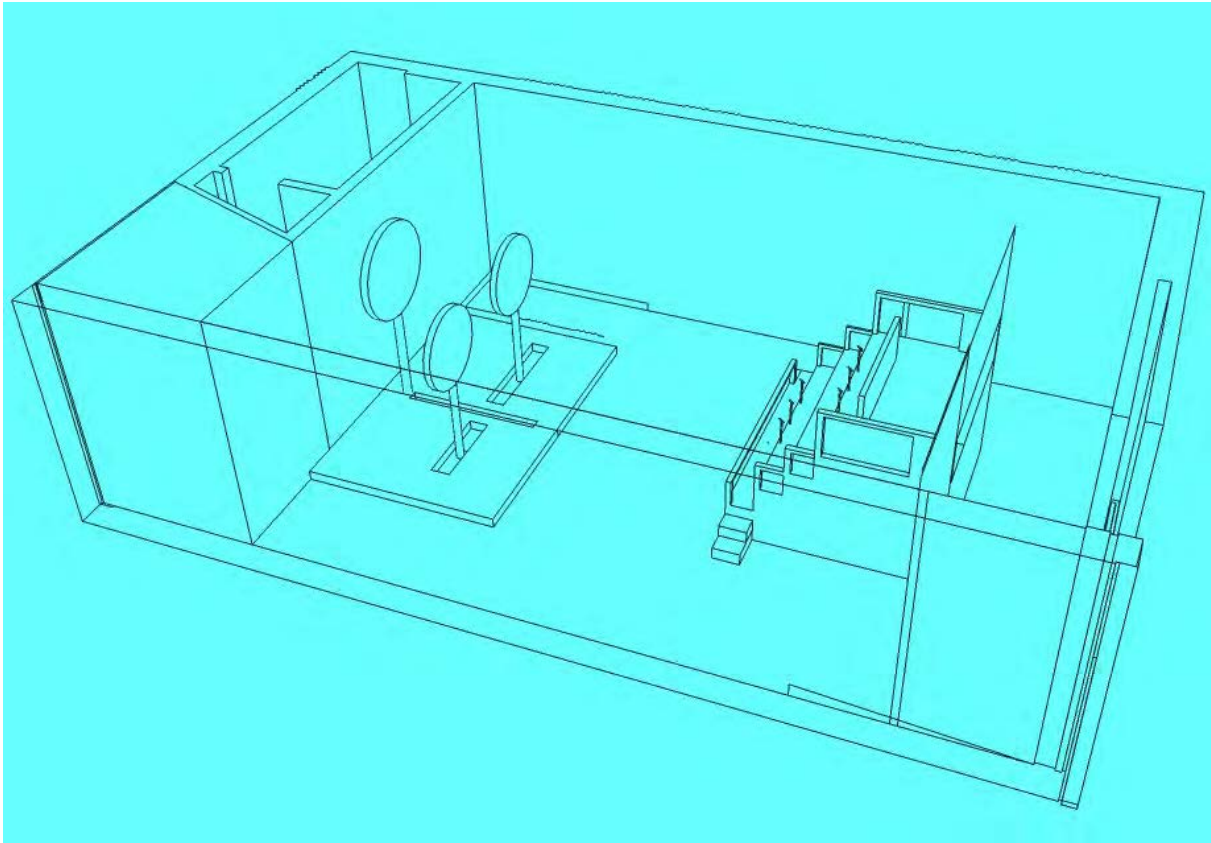
Anil Seth's work questions how we know what is spatially and temporally real from what is imagined. Could we accept that everything is potentially equivalent in the perception of what is imagined and what is seen? Is it mere Cartesian thinking to divide time and space, (or form and content) up into what is spectral, and what is spatial and concrete. Given that real space time is always overlaid with virtual images (i.e. from our own past experiences) where are we then with reality and consciousness? Perhaps more specifically where are we with self-awareness and self-consciousness. The future will most probably find out, especially as more and more objects will have the semblance of a very basic consciousness - smart objects.

What is important about these concepts is that they meet science and how they find themselves realised ontologically and physically in space - that they find a narrative, an embodied form which evokes thought. The journey into the work evolves from these ideas – like a painter who tries to paint what is ineffable it is the act of doing it that brings it into existence and that is a struggle until the end.

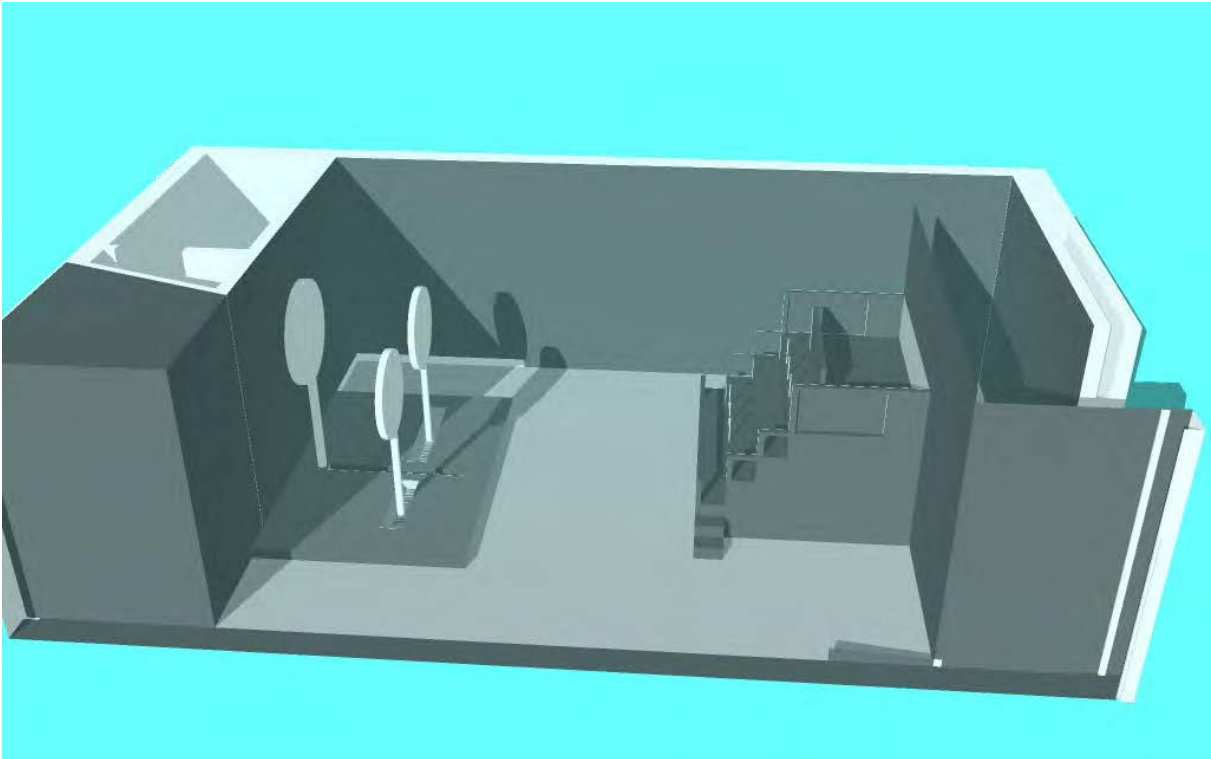




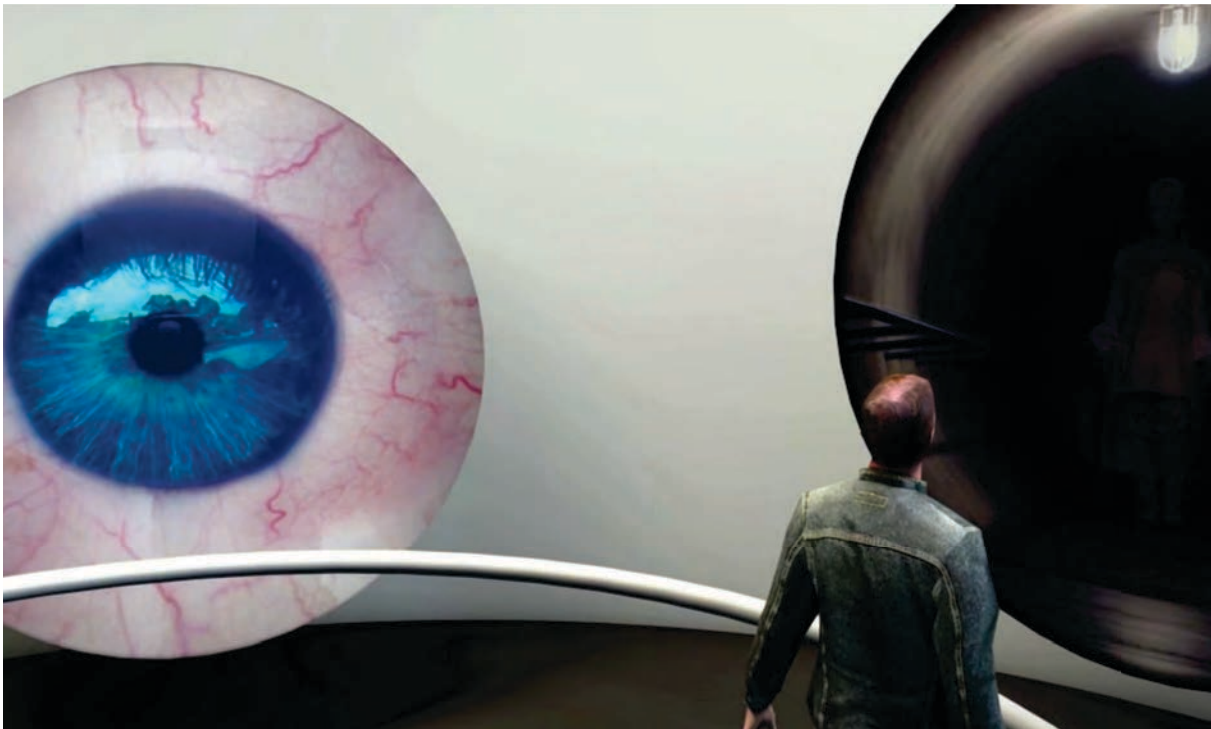
*every thought there ever was*



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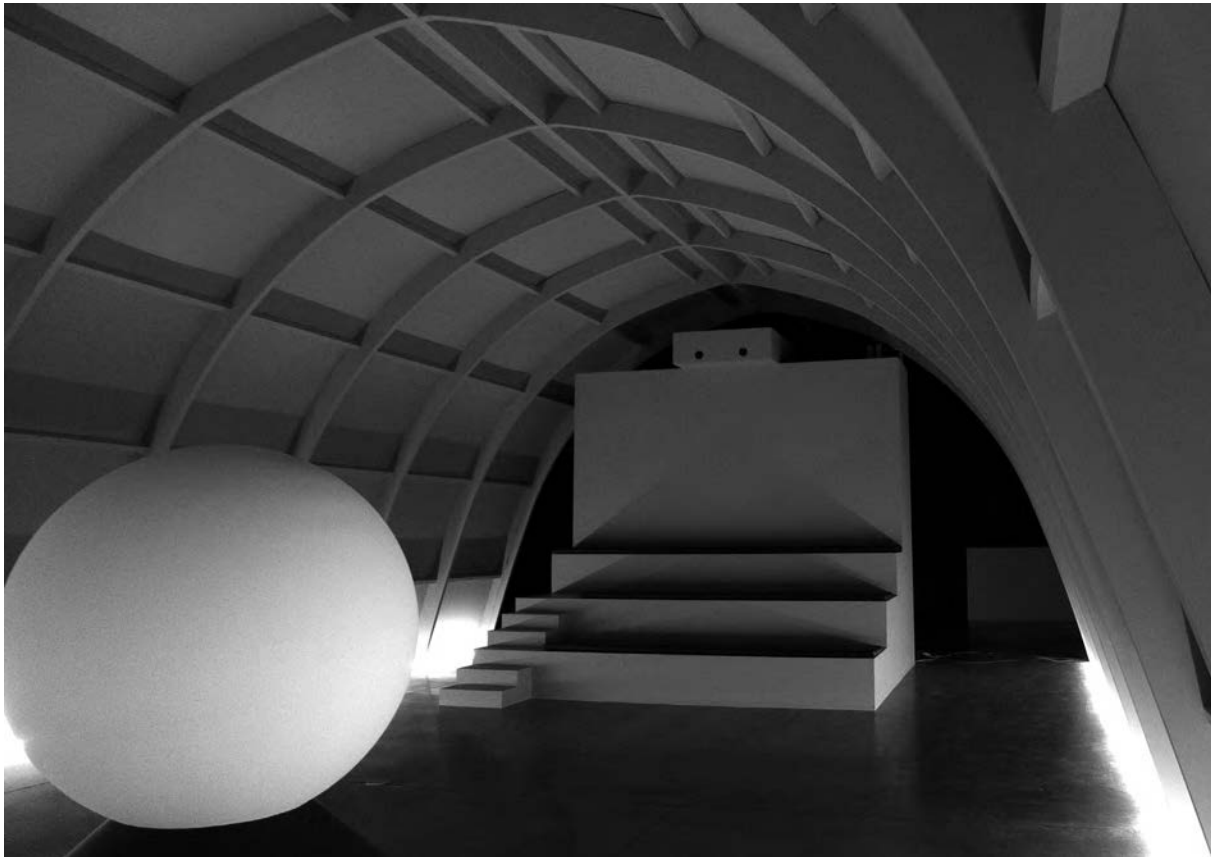
*previous seating bank*



*every thought there ever was*

*previous seating banks*

Nowherelessnow <sup>2</sup>



Nowherelessnow <sup>4</sup>

Nowherelessnow <sup>1</sup>





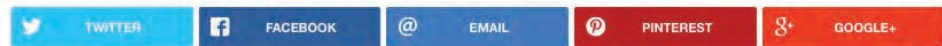


London

## Artist Profile: Lindsay Seers



Title : Extramission 6 Tate Triennial o86 copy



## Artist Profile by Beverley Knowles

Artangel are celebrated for many things, not least the ingenious eccentricity of their one-off locations: a council house in Elephant & Castle, a disused Fire Station, and the V&A's reserve collection storage unit to name a few. Their latest triumph, Lindsay Seers' 'Nowhere Less Now,' takes place in a nineteenth-century Grade II listed church just off the Kilburn High Road. The Tin Tabernacle, as it's colloquially known, was built on a shoe string from corrugated iron in the 1860s. Its roof is now full of holes and rust seems to pour from every tumbledown wall. Even more extraordinarily, its interior was converted to take the form of a naval ship by the Willesden & St Marylebone Sea Cadets when they originally took it as their home in 1947. As I wander around agape with awe at the peculiarity of it all, I'm reminded of Ms Seers' words: 'site-specificity,' she told me with a nervous blink, 'is highly problematic as an art form.'

Over the last few years Lindsay Seers has emerged as one of the most distinctive voices in the new generation of post-YBA British artists. Simultaneous with her first solo show at Matt's Gallery 'It has to be this Way' in January 2009, her captivating immersive installation 'Extramission 6 (Black Maria)' was one of the high points of Nicholas Bourriaud's not uncontroversial Tate Triennial, 'Altermodern.' This was followed by solo exhibitions at BALTIC Gateshead, Mead Gallery Warwick, National Gallery of Denmark and Gallery TPW in Toronto, as well as a roster of illustrious group shows and a handful of prestigious awards. Ms Seers' star is on the rise. The object of primary interest in Seers' practice is the camera. The camera, the image, the body and the question of how these three relate to one another in a lived sense. More than providing answers, Seers' work poses questions. What roles do the camera and the image play in our society? Is the camera a tool for capturing history or for creating it? Is truth something that can be told or is it a series of ephemeral and infinitely interconnected moments experienced intuitively by the body as it moves through space?

Seers poses these questions via complex and profoundly inconclusive narratives drawn from her personal histories and those of her family, which she then weaves, by way of dense research and intense image making, into a wider, and not necessarily directly related, social, political and psycho-geographic context. From one work to the next a web of intricate tales is spun, apparently autobiographical but always bafflingly inconsistent. Beginning with her upbringing on the island of Mauritius, we learn of the artist's speechlessness as a child that resulted from a photographic memory so vivid it abnegated the need for the vocalisation of words. When she spoke for the first time at the age of eight, her photographic memory faded, the traumatic loss of which led her to attempt to turn herself into a camera by placing photo sensitive paper inside her mouth. Other stories tell of a step-sister, Christine, who suffered memory loss following a moped accident in Rome and then mysteriously disappeared.

These strange narratives of personal trauma and ancestral psychodrama wind their way through Seers' work, bound together with hints of the psycho-physiological, the paranormal and the occult. It's a gripping matrix to which there is no neat, satisfying resolution.

The key, I eventually realise, is to avoid getting drawn into overly simplistic debates relating to the credibility or otherwise of these curious overlapping stories, wildly tempting as that may at first be. There is no resolution to the narrative and the search to find one is pointless. What the viewer is being engaged in is a Brechtian theatrical event of a highly constructed nature, a performative maze with no exit, around which the inattentive viewer could meander for indefinite ages unaware that they are going nowhere. Which is a delicious metaphor for life. Nothing is as it seems.

Rather, the autobiographical is engaged by Seers as a trope, a stand-in for selfhood. The work is ontological; it is about being in the world. It is about you and it is about me, but it is not personal. In fact, the stories are largely irrelevant. They are about human experience, that's all. As Seers puts it with a gentle smile, 'any story would do.' The important question is what effect these stories have on consciousness and on how we live our lives. And this question Seers addresses through an investigation of her, and our, relationship to image: image as the still or moving object captured by the camera and image as the relationship of the individual to her apparent surroundings, or as Bergson expressed it in Matter and Memory, 'a system of images which I term my perception of the universe and which may be entirely altered by a very slight change in a certain privileged position - my body.'

For Seers the camera is a motivator, a method for living by. She begins work at 7am and finishes, usually, around midnight. 'I'm spending all of my time with this stuff,' she says, 'so it becomes lived.' The camera is at the heart of this artist's personal ontology.

To date Seers' work has focused on the female side of her family tree. 'Nowhere less Now' makes the shift into the male side, taking as its departure point her father's long career with the sea cadets that began in the 1940s and a family photograph of her great great uncle, George Edwards, taken aboard the HMS Kingfisher at the end of the nineteenth century. Research for the project has had the artist journeying to the archipelago of Zanzibar, the seat of East African witchcraft. Into the mix comes artist and occultist Mina Bergson, who was born on 28 February 1865. Mina Bergson and Lindsay Seers share a birthday, one hundred years apart, and both studied at the Slade. Bergson was the sister of Henri Bergson and wife of Samuel Mathers who founded the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, one of the most influential organisations in the Western Mystery Tradition. 'Nowhere less Now' is also the first time that Seers will be projecting her stories into the future; a future, fascinatingly, in which the photographic image is no longer a legal entity.

This time with the support of the inventive team behind Artangel, Seers' idiosyncratic cocktail of photography, film, performance, animation and installation proves fascinating. As the elusive truths begin to slip simultaneously through the lens and the viewers' metaphorical fingers, the deeper truths surface. 'Nowhere Less Now' is a goose-bump inducing aesthetic and intellectual roller coaster, from one of the most promising artists working in Britain today. If there's one thing not to miss this year, it's this.

Lindsay Seers: Nowhere Less Now runs 8 September - 21 October 2012

The Tin Tabernacle  
12-16 Cambridge Avenue  
Kilburn  
London NW6 5BA

Open Wed - Sun



## WHAT ELSE IS NEW...

### EXHIBITION

#### LINDSAY SEERS: NOWHERE LESS NOW

The Tin Tabernacle, NW6  
★★★★★

#### THEASTER GATES: MY LABOR IS MY PROTEST

White Cube, SE1  
★★★★☆

BEN LUKE

COUNTLESS corrugated iron churches – “tin tabernacles” – were built as the population soared in Victorian Britain. In Kilburn stands a rare surviving example, which is the unlikely setting for one of the most spellbinding shows of the year.

With help from art commissioners Artangel, Lindsay Seers has occupied the forlorn-looking former church, now the local sea cadets' HQ, with a breathtaking multimedia installation.

The quirky interior, decked out like a ship, is a springboard for Seers's intricate story, beginning with her family's naval history. Shown on two screens, her video leads us on a journey that leaps between past, present and future.

Often dressed in seafaring garb, she traces the story of her great-great-uncle George, a naval officer in Zanzibar, but she also takes us into animated visions of a future where

still photographs no longer exist. She draws in colonialism, witchcraft, freemasonry, the eye condition heterochromia and much else along the way. It is complex stuff but she pulls together her material deftly. I left the Tin Tabernacle feeling utterly exhilarated.

Theaster Gates, a Chicago-based artist, also weaves his personal history into broader themes. A fire truck greets you in White Cube's courtyard but it has been daubed with splats of tar. A video inside explains all – Gates's father was tarring roofs as the 1968 riots raged in Chicago, and fire hoses were infamously turned on black civil rights demonstrators in Alabama in 1963. His father's work, he says, was a quiet protest.

**Ship ahoy:**  
Lindsay Seers' exhilarating installation begins with her family's naval history



Ship shape: Lindsay Seers's film fills porthole shapes in the upturned hull of the Tin Tabernacle. Elsewhere (right) Seers makes uncanny additions to the grade II listed building. Photographs by Karen Robinson for the Observer

# All at sea on Kilburn High Road

The transformation of a quirky chapel into the setting for a disorienting film about a sailor has magical results



Rachel Cooke

#### Lindsay Seers: Nowhere Less Now

Tin Tabernacle, London NW6; from Saturday until 21 Oct

Last Thursday I had a small adventure, the kind of thrill a big city can often throw up, if only you put in a little forward planning. It wasn't a promising morning: a soft rain was falling, and the sky was old-knicker grey. Nor was my destination exotic: Kilburn High Road, a relentless drag of kebab shops and charity shops. When I arrived at the precise spot, a dilapidated construction known as the Tin Tabernacle, I could find no way inside. But then... salvation! Someone showed me a bell, high above my head, and soon after ringing it, I walked into one of the most marvellous spaces I've seen in a long time. For me, this was love at first sight.

The Tin Tabernacle was built in 1863 by a developer called James Bailey. I say “built”, but this is pushing it, really. Unlike Bailey's other projects – he specialised in the terraced houses

you can still see in this part of north-west London today – this one came straight from the pages of a catalogue. Made of corrugated iron, it was a flat-pack church of the same ilk as the sweaty “God boxes” that were delivered to distant outposts of the Empire. It cost less than £1,000 and was intended only to be temporary. In the fullness of time, or so Bailey believed, the local Congregationalists would raise enough money to build a chapel all of their own.

In the end, though, this never happened, and the tabernacle lived on. In 1947 it was taken over by the Willesden & St Marylebone Sea Cadets, the charity that remains its custodian; the building is now grade II listed. This applies only to the exterior, which is a pity, for it's the interior that makes the eyes pop. In the 1950s the inside of the tabernacle was transformed by a group of local men so as to resemble the inside of a Royal Navy ship. There are portholes and rigging, a boatswain's store and a wardroom, and a proper bridge, complete with wheel and a full set of engine order telegraphs. Also, smack in the middle of the main deck, is a 1943 anti-aircraft gun.

Not that I knew any of this at first. For the next few weeks the Tin Tabernacle is home to an installation by the artist Lindsay Seers (a commission by Artangel, the remarkable charity which seeks to take art out of the gallery and into the world), and it's part of her design that visitors find out the peculiar nature of the building little by little. In the beginning I saw only the wardroom, with its tiny bar and a sign that urges officers to check they are correctly dressed. This is where you wait before the show begins, and it's adorable.

Seers works in film, constructing complex narratives that are mostly fiction but which have their roots in autobiography. When she started talking to the people at Artangel they took her to the tabernacle on a kind of blind date, and I'm guessing that, like me, she fell hard in love. For her, though, the building has an extra resonance. Seers's great great uncle, George Edwards, who was

born in 1866, was a sea cadet who joined the merchant navy and sailed to Zanzibar, where he was involved in British efforts to dismantle the local slave trade. Look at the walls of the tabernacle's wardroom and it's possible you will find a photograph of George. You can't miss him. He has a distinctive appearance. His eyes were different colours.

Seers's film, *Nowhere Less Now*, is shown on two screens, one flat and round, the other spherical. In the flickering gloom you think, of course, of lenses, of George's eyes. But these screens also put you in mind of human eggs (his condition, heterochromia, was genetic), and of portholes. The narrative is multilayered, and stable as quicksand. It looks back to George's life onboard HMS Dragon, but also forward to a future in which

**As the lights come up, you're still puzzling things out (a feeling that will last for days, and probably for ever)**

photographs have been banned (those lucky enough to be in possession of a photograph must gaze on it in secret, gathering with others in a temporary structure not unlike the tabernacle). Seers also travels to Zanzibar, where George eventually drowned, and to Dar es Salaam, where she finds another church of corrugated iron. Unanswered questions hang heavy in the air. What compelled George's wife, Georgina, to wear a dress of such strange, Masonic design? (Seers films herself in something similar, with macabre results.) What happened to Seers's stepsister, who went missing as a child? And was it her uncle who carved his name on a huge baobab tree on Cemetery Island, or some other sailor called George?

After 20 minutes the film ends. Too soon. As the lights come up, you're still puzzling things out (a feeling that will last for days, and probably for ever).

It takes a moment, then, to notice what the dark previously concealed: that Seers has made her own additions to the folk-art interior of the tabernacle, and that you're sitting in what appears to be the upturned hull of a ship. Knock its sides with a knuckle and you will hear the stark clank of metal. The disorientation doesn't end here. Afterwards, free to explore, I wandered into a tiny side chapel. It has a medieval altar and a lectern whose base is – wait for it – a

cloven hoof. The effect was uncanny. Outside, the traffic rumbled; Kilburn could not be more landlocked if it tried. But in the strange quiet of the Tin Tabernacle I was lost at sea, overwhelmed by a briny wave of doubt and confusion.

Laura Cumming is away

Lindsay Seers, *Nowhere Less Now*, 8 Sept to 21 Oct; £7/£5. Tickets must be booked in advance at [artangel.org.uk](http://artangel.org.uk)

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND



# Dream voyage on a ghost ship

Multimedia event mesmerises; teenage sociopath disturbs; Leonard Cohen seduces

INSTALLATION  
**Lindsay Seers:  
Nowhere Less Now**  
The Tin Tabernacle, London

Richard Cork

Escaping from London's traffic-torn Kilburn High Road, I walk down Cambridge Avenue towards one of the strangest buildings in the city. Although constructed as a chapel during the 1860s, this uncompromising edifice now provides a home for the Willesden & St Marylebone Sea Cadets. But everyone in the neighbourhood calls it The Tin Tabernacle, and I can understand why. The whole building has been smothered in grimy sheets of corrugated iron, so that it looks like the battered survivor of a war zone. But the Sea Cadets' rousing motto is emblazoned on the front door: "Ready Aye Ready." Announcing a gung-ho determination to sail off anywhere, it prepares me for the extraordinary journey on which visitors to The Tin Tabernacle can now embark.

Lindsay Seers was commissioned to produce *Nowhere Less Now* by Artangel, an organisation that encourages artists to present their most ambitious and unlikely projects in surprising locations, and she has transformed the interior of The Tin Tabernacle into an upside-down ship. After entering the space and taking my seat on some hard wooden stairs, I am greeted by the remains of a Bofors anti-aircraft gun rearing beside me. Putting on a headset, I realise that two enormous circular screens – one concave, the other convex – dominate my vision. The lights go down, and Seers proceeds to unleash a multimedia tour de force that uses sound, video, photography, performance and animation.

A voice confesses: "I always felt like I was looking for something." Someone else asserts that "The sea has a memory," and that "The dead live with us." The starting point for Seers' epic expedition seems to have been her discovery that she was born

precisely 100 years after the birth of her great-great uncle George Edwards. But nothing is at all straightforward in this perpetually mystifying installation. She shows a photograph of Edwards taken on board a ship while he was serving with the British merchant navy in Zanzibar. He tried to liberate slaves, and ended up drowning. Some of the sailors in subsequent images are black, and Seers ensures that they play significant roles in the photographic material, together with animated figures on the move in a fast-changing African society.

She cannot, however, be pinned down to a single set of concerns. In one close-up shot, Edwards gazes towards the future with two different coloured eyes. Perhaps the two screens Seers uses in this mesmeric show reflect her belief that Edwards' unusual ocular condition has something to do with an unborn twin. His eyes were probably the starting point for many of the abstract images now appearing on the screens. Yet these forms are also redolent of planets suspended in the cosmos, and Seers plays with ideas of a world darting restlessly between past, present and future.

At one crucial point she decides to visit Zanzibar and find out more. Archives preserved there yield further photographs of the context that Edwards inhabited, and Seers shares them with us. Even so, *Nowhere Less Now* lives up to its confusing, disconsolate title. The more she unearths, the less she comprehends.

Eventually, reality and fantasy become as hard to separate as past and future. The vessel constructed here in The Tin Tabernacle grows more and more like a ghost ship. A voice murmurs: "It's like the end of the world." Quiet descends before the lights are switched back on. Re-emerging from the chapel, I realise that Seers has dramatised her multi-layered journey to haunt her audience like a macabre, unforgettable dream.

Until October 21, [www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk)



## Lindsay Seers

SEERS, 42, apparently uses her extraordinary life-story as the inspiration for her art. Watched from inside a replica of Thomas Edison's first film studio, which was called Black Maria (*above*), her semi-autobiographical and dreamlike film

*Extramission* – which includes talking heads from people purporting to be her mother and her psychologist – has her describing her childhood inability to speak and her adolescent desire to become a camera and a projector. Super strange, but certainly one of the must-see pieces in the exhibition.



STATE OF MIND



▲ *Lindsay Seers: It has to be this way?* 2010. Photo: Colin Davies. Co-commissioned by Maud Gallery and National Gallery of Denmark. © and courtesy the artist, Matt's Gallery, London and BALITIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead



▲ Film still from *Three Minute Wonder*, Channel 4 commission

# IT HAS TO BE THIS WAY<sup>2</sup>

At the ambitious mega-show called *Altermodern* at Tate Britain in 2009, one work stood out. It was Lindsay Seers' video installation *Black Maria*. Later that year, she'd win the Derek Jarman Award and it came with a Channel 4 commission to make four short films for their *Three Minute Wonder* series, opening her work to a significantly wider audience. In these films, Seers reworked and extended themes from previous works, such as *Black Maria* and *It has to be this way*. IMAGES: LINDSAY SEERS | TEXT: MICHAELA FREEMAN

AS A CHILD, Seers suffered with eidetic (extremely photographic) memory. Overwhelmed with the visual intake, she didn't talk at all until the age of 8. *Black Maria* installation was about dealing with this experience and also how early on in her artistic career, Seers carried out a series of extraordinary experiments by reversing her senses. She turned her eyes into a projector and her mouth into a camera, by holding a piece of photographic paper inside and exposing it for a limited amount of time.

*It has to be this way*, on the other hand, turned the attention on her step-sister, Christine, who went missing in Rome in 2001. An extended version of this project, *It has to be this way*<sup>2</sup>, was introduced last year at Matt's Gallery and is currently on show at the Baltic in Gateshead. It delves deeper into the case, interweaving memories and documents in order to uncover what happened to Christine. The exhibition is accompanied by a book, edited by M. Anthony Penwill, which includes the diary of S. (a mysterious – and also missing –



**MF:** How much is the *It has to be this way* series based on true life?

**LS:** It is completely based on true life. Truth is one of my favourite words.

boyfriend of Christine, only known and referred to by his initial, whose files were later found abandoned in Finland). Christine's research files, letters by Lindsay's mother, and other documents. All connected by Lindsay's own text and annotations and notes from a journey she undertook to Italy and Sweden, following her step-sister's footsteps. These fragments seem to fit together like a puzzle but it appears obvious that many pieces are still missing.

We learn that when Christine and Lindsay's parents got married, they each brought one daughter into the equation. They later decided to live in West Africa, leaving the children behind with Seers' father. As it turned out, they made their living there by participating in illegal diamond smuggling. A rare pink diamond ring, that Seers' mother had kept from that period, appears as part of the installation, embodying the feeling of abandonment felt by the daughters.

They both went on to study art – Lindsay at the Slade and Christine, art history at the Courtauld. Christine often

featured in Lindsay's early photographs and videos and because of their similar features, they would get mistaken for each other. Christine did a PhD in Oxford on Queen Christina of Sweden and, in 1997, moved to Rome to continue her research at The British School, whilst dipping into Neo-Platonism and occult practices. Two years later she had a motorbike accident, which left her with severe memory loss, then in 2001, disappeared without trace. The S. diary describes how he became obsessed with Christine after the accident, taking advantage of her and being pervently fascinated by observing her attempts to regain some memory. She would spend most of the time going through her collection of photographs trying to make sense of them – an impossible task as the box also included photographs that were not related to her life directly, but once had some significance.


This searching for sense and the critique of the function of photography (and our reliance on it) is really what *It has to be this way*<sup>2</sup> is about. Christine, in her attempts to understand her photographs, arranges and treats them as Tarot cards, sensing rather than reading them. Clearly an impossible task due to her memory loss, it only leads us to question whether a photograph can ever be equal to a memory, something we've all been seduced into believing. In fact, reversely – we often base our memories and understanding of history on the photograph we consider to be 'a fact', thus fabricating it.



▲ *Lindsay Seers: It has to be this way?* 2010. Photo: Colin Davies. Co-commissioned by Maud Gallery and National Gallery of Denmark. © and courtesy the artist, Matt's Gallery, London and BALITIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead

# SOURCE

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC REVIEW  
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## Who is The Photographer?





#### Having the Last Word

When I first learned about Lindsay Seers's work I was struck by a detail in her biography, that she didn't speak for the first eight years of her life. It seemed like an extraordinary throwback to a time when people could be more eccentric than they are now, or at least when difference wasn't quickly subjected to a logic of medicine or psychology. It also triggered a memory that in retrospect I am amazed I regularly forget: when I was a child there was a period of a whole year when I stopped talking. My parents attributed it to a bad school; in my mother's recuperative account, it was when she made a decision in favour of her child over the social pressure of keeping me there. For years afterward I spoke relatively little, certainly infrequently in public. Until my twenties I would have described myself as shy. In the family lore, my silences

were linked to a streak of independence rather than a trauma or disability. Along these same lines, at least here, I'm less interested in analysing myself or Seers psychologically, and this would be a crucial error in the case of her work where fact and fiction are regularly mixed. But the question of refusing speech remains intriguing. It's a given now to understand experience as fundamentally conditioned by language (via Lacan, for example), and writing and speech being performative rather than straightforwardly representational (via Barthes), but we also still conceive of some things as being unspeakable and unrepresentable, and Seers's work is often described in such terms.

To the work now before us: the series of photographs, *Two Differently Coloured Eyes*, 2013. These depict a long-standing theme in Seers's work, heterochromia, the rare condition of having eyes of different colours.

In the photographs Seers depicts her subjects directly with even lighting and mostly abstract white backgrounds. Poised somewhere between casual and formal, these portraits show people confronting the camera with open gazes. It's all about the eyes and the faces that hold them. The framing Seers uses is straightforward compared with her usually elaborate scenarios, viewing apparatus, and the notable number of figures in her imagery that have their faces obscured or turned away. We might consider these pictures to be research, as she describes ideas for installations being 'seeded' in photographs. They also recall, to me, the memorable opening statement of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.' Eyes in this respect, along with the camera that takes their picture, are devices for recording. For Barthes they offer the possibility of time travel, a prevalent theme in

Installation image from  
*Entangled* (Theatre II) 2013



Seers's work. But what happens when you see them? Barthes doesn't say exactly – seeing the photographed eyes of a person who saw Napoleon is a pretext for a different memory trip, but so these people may be for Seers. I suspect they may be auditioning for a role in a future film.

Heterochromia apparently runs in Seers's family. It's woven into the storylines of installations from the last few years such as *Monocular 4*, *One of Many*, *Nowhere Less Now*, and *Entangled 2* (Theatre II). It has been a feature of particular characters in these works, such as her great-great uncle George or an unnamed Scandinavian man. It makes them stand out and seems to be an alibi in certain narrative threads. Seers tells us that the condition is a result of the conjoining of two embryos at a very early stage of gestation. Whilst this is not strictly true (it's more often a result of a mutation) this fact steers us where Seers wishes us to go. Even more

startlingly, she describes heterochromia as resulting from the absorption of a twin (again this is more suggestive than scientific). Heterochromia thus is a metaphor for a fundamental heterogeneity of identity, here made manifest – like a two-toned picture – on some people's faces. It also points to the field of genetic research and what stories of diversity it can tell of race and migration, for example, as precipitated by the crossings of human beings over globe in the past 500 years.

Eyes appear frequently in Seers's work, whether in the form of a pair of orb-shaped screens in various installations, apertures, or a focus on seeing as a form of communication, as when Seers took pictures with a camera inside her mouth. Doubling is another theme, as with twins, sisters, characters who switch gender identity, and others who hold dummies. Seers's films are often split, sometimes representing different points of

view of different characters or designed to be seen as pairs of images. She also controls the experience of her films, such that you might be compelled to watch one from start to finish sitting and wearing headphones or looking through a porthole. In one installation you watch with another person, but it turns out you're watching different films. These themes in Seers's work, and the disruptions and complexities they perform, put a critical pressure on ordinary types of representation. She uses art to both retreat from common sense and frame intransigent questions about what makes meaning and how it can either be caught up in, or slip away from, attempts to render it sensible.

But there is more to say, and I think it's worth going further. Aspects of Seers's work resonate strongly with some of the concerns French philosopher Jacques Rancière has explored in his 2007 book, *The Future of the Image*. Rancière is known for resisting

Installation image *Nowhere less now* (the Red Queen) 2012





Installation image *Sailors Bill*  
2006



postmodernist theories of signs, and in this book he reconsiders 'the image' through philosophy as brought to bear on a range of artistic forms, from exhibitions to films to novels to poetry. His thesis is that contemporary experience is marked by two working assumptions: firstly that reality is inchoate and overwhelming, and secondly (paradoxically) that images are self-sufficient and self-referential. He sees three 'types' of images: ones that testify to something that happened, ones that assert sheer presence (as art usually), and ones that relay critically within a reflexive understanding of sign-systems. It is instructive for a discussion of what Seers does in her work that he focuses on the fragment in nineteenth-century realist novels – such as by Gustave Flaubert – where

meaning is relocated from an objective overview to disparate details, Rancière calls it the 'wordless immediacy of the visible'. Charles Bovary's ugly hat, for example, suggests the identity of its owner, but only suggests it. 'This, 'the silent speech of things', retains the power to signify but does so incompletely.

The fragmentary is a trope of modern art, but Rancière argues that it now functions across all representative forms including ones tasked with telling truths. What has become an 'aesthetic of incommensurability' contributes to a culture of not being able to think *beyond representation*. Taking the Holocaust as an example, Rancière makes a compelling reading of several accounts of that event in exhibitions, films and non-fiction.

The enormity of the violence and inhumanity is expressed, across all these formats, through the telling of realist details rather than describing the event itself. It is as if life needs to imitate art in order to proceed in the face of extreme shock. But Rancière aims to critique those who say 'it can't be represented', and show how in fact it is, albeit through various displacements. Those who say that inhumanity is beyond thought, he argues, wish to eliminate the original unthinking responsible for the inhumanity. His ethics is to return dialectical thinking to what he calls the 'aesthetic regime of the fragment'.

What Rancière describes as 'symbolist mysteries' might well serve to elucidate what's at work for Seers, what might be at stake in

Installation image from  
*Monocular*, (incorporating *Two*  
*Differently Coloured Eyes*)  
Kunstverein Freiburg, Germany  
2013





her research, her stories and her installations. A mystery is 'a little theatrical machine that manufactures analogy, which makes it possible to recognise the poet's thought in the feet of a dancer, the fold of a stole, the sparkle of a chandelier, or the unexpected movement of a standing bear.' Rancière doesn't reject the aesthetic of the fragment, but wants to attend to the quality of how fragments together create provisional meanings – Rancière calls it 'making something common'. Common meaning 'provides the term of measurement for the incommensurables'.

Returning to Seers's *Two Differently Coloured Eyes* photographs, it's worth discussing what they tell us or don't tell us. They communicate little about genetics (the sample is too small!) and little about the

social or psychological experience of the individuals pictured (any ideas about an effect of a 'vanished twin' is our own projection). As I suggested before, they seem to be a casting call, or perhaps inspiration for a storyline. There is a play here, though, with how meaning is conveyed, and it recalls the distinction made by Allan Sekula in his great essay 'The Body and the Archive', between 'honorific' and 'repressive' images. Some of the subjects in Seers's photographs appear to be lying down. It's an odd thing, isn't it? But look: in one image this perspective makes the subject seem comely but another one looks stoical. What could be described here as Seers's attention to the mechanics and changeability of representation, whether in a detail or on the level of epic drama, is what

makes her work so compelling. For one, it seems to collapse Sekula's opposition (these aren't mug shots and they're not portraits exactly). Seers seems to take us to a place where images can be signs and symbols, to the end of provoking thought about what they are and what they do.

*Alison Green*

*Images courtesy of Matts Gallery*

Human Camera (On becoming a camera) 1996

Lindsay Seers will be part of 'Less Now' in MIRRORCITY: 23 London artists, Hayward Gallery, London 14th October 2014 - 4th January 2015





WIDE ANGLE ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

MEMORIES ARE MADE OF THIS

In films that are dense, ungraspable networks of reference, Lindsay Seers comes close to duplicating the experience of thought

By Charlie Fox

Among the new astonishments collected at the Hayward Gallery's *Mirrorcity* show this winter was Lindsay Seers's 25-minute film *Nowhere Less Now*, by then in its fourth incarnation. The exhibition's slick rubric, about bringing together contemporary artists responding to the Ballardian funhouse of modern London, led to a hallucinatory assortment of enigmatic assemblages, often found in the middle of some convulsive malfunction. Looming at the edge of this magical junkyard was the huge upturned silver ship in which Seers's latest film was screened.

Seers's films are difficult to see, made with a particular location in mind – so that, for example, the version of *Monocular* (2012) she prepared for a gallery in Finland differs from the version at Margate – and shown only inside site-specific sculptural environments that reconstruct some potent symbol from the film, such as a church or a circus tent. Watching their wild associative spirals unfurl can make you feel as if you've fallen into an especially rich kind of fever.

In the course of nearly a decade's compulsive filmmaking, Seers has created a mammoth project that juxtaposes bewildering personal mythology with reveries on the sinister recesses of the past. In *Extramission 6* (*Black Maria*) (2009) the story is frequently repeated of how Seers didn't speak until she was eight years old: she was jolted into speech by discovering a photograph of herself, asking her mother, "Is that me?" Her films are also haunted by unfamiliar selves. As a child she had an eidetic memory, recalling images with photographic clarity, plus noises and textures; but this faculty began to fade as soon as she started to speak. In mourning for her previously flawless memory, she transformed herself into a human camera, stowing photographic paper in her mouth and using her mouth as an aperture, making a collection of Gothic snapshots soaked with her blood and the imprints of her teeth. Nothing else quite matches the spectral thrill of watching Seers reconstruct these experiments in *Extramission 6*, stalking through a field at night with her head in a black sack and her mouth aglow. Fuzzily caught on videotape, this looks like hoax footage of a magical creature, which perhaps is what she was. But there's no telling what's real and what isn't. Watching these films in pursuit of a flesh-and-blood figure is like attempting to find factual verification for a ghost story. Doubles abound; psychiatrists speculate on Seers's disconcerting talents and speak of her as if she recently vanished. She reappears as a vampire, a vaudevillian, or alone on stage like a boyish mannequin in *Entangled* (2012) – but perhaps that was an actor? – or else she's nowhere to be found, transforming what seemed to be self-portraits into a collection of ominous case studies. What might have been a toxic proposition, awkwardly attempting a spooky fracturing of



Hello sailor: *Nowhere Less Now* as seen in 2012


the self, complete with the ghoulish mannequin understudies once favoured by Cindy Sherman, becomes the stuff of creepily fascinating art. This is not a career in any commonsensical form at all, but a daring performance in which she assumes the roles of occultist, psychogeographer, ventriloquist and historian.

When I meet Seers at her studio in North London, she draws a parallel between her works and novels such as *Robinson Crusoe*, which purport to be factual recollections but spring from an utterly imaginary figure. As another formal ancestor, she invokes the deranged monologue of the solitary walker in Georg Büchner's literary fragment *Lenz*, which is often read as an early evocation of schizophrenia. Even at its most diaristic, her work demands a huge quantity of research. Occult signals are collected and peculiar regional histories are studied. Interviews are conducted – sometimes under hypnosis – with carefully chosen participants whose speech is recorded and fed back into the soundtrack of the films. Then Seers trawls her enormous archive of footage in hope of catching stray or suddenly arresting material that might provide another skein of suggestions for this new work. She insists that she isn't a filmmaker but an artist: indeed, her recent works don't often lapse into familiar territories of filmmaking but take a recondite personal form that remains gamely resistant to anything like full comprehension, even after multiple viewings.

The audience for *Nowhere Less Now* is led into the dark and required to block the sounds of the outside world with headphones, become enveloped in the dense mesh of its score and

*Lindsay Seers's recent works remain gamely resistant to anything like full comprehension, even after multiple viewings*

submit to the flood of images transmitted upon two spherical screens. The film is a fantastical survey of Heligoland (a pair of islands in the North Sea which were long the object of imperial skirmishes before being formally ceded by Britain to Germany in 1890), its contents thoroughly shattered into kaleidoscopic fragments. The footage seems to have been artfully decayed or carefully unearthed. Examination of the main island is interleaved with a bewitching history of Circassian beauties, the mythic native women of the Northern Caucasus, famed for their luminous complexions and in the 19th century the inspiration for a peculiar sideshow in P.T. Barnum's circus. This leads to contemplation of Seers's father, a sailor. A wild-eyed figure stares out from a maritime photograph turned gold with age. The narrator claims that's him, but Seers tells me later that he's hidden among the crew in the rest of the photograph. Lulls and shifts in the film's texture suggest tidal logic at work – the Thames, which rumbles past the gallery, also traces a glittering route through the film. Ghosting through it is footage of a dancer on the rocks at Heligoland shot by Leni Riefenstahl, official film-maker of the Third Reich. All the cryptic associations between the images, Seers told me, come slowly; everything in this film is "spun out of the dance". Its melancholy coda jettisons all this manic energy, sending the audience down into a darkness suggestive all at once of sleep, the womb or the seabed to a haunting lull of ecstatic voices.

Seers unravelled the film for me frame by frame with remarkable lucidity, showing that what sometimes appears to be a stream-of-consciousness flow is in fact meticulously ordered and almost opaque with private meaning. With its associative swoops, sudden drifts and refractions, Seers's work approximates the unaccountable experience of thinking itself: she has abandoned the familiar world of filmmaking in order to capture the wild terrain of the mind. 

14.10.14

ARTNEWS

THE FANTASTICAL WORLD OF LINDSAY SEERS

Fact and fiction blur in the artist's diverse work

British artist [Lindsay Seers](#) endows her work with a touch of magic. Her video installations transport the viewer to a cacophonous wonderland inhabited by shamans, fortune-tellers, transgender ventriloquists, and people with strange medical conditions, where multiple narrative voices and film projections dissolve all sense of anchorage. In her 2012 work *Nowhere Less Now*, a historical photograph of Seers's seafaring great-great-uncle George triggers an odyssey across generations and geographies, featuring blood sacrifice, Zanzibari slave trade, and Victorian secret societies, interwoven with themes of identity, memory, and veracity. "It's as if a whole universe could unfold from a photograph," says Seers in her North London studio. "It was this idea of the mythology of a photograph."



Lindsay Seers, *Nowhere Less Now*, 2012. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MATT'S GALLERY, LONDON

A version of *Nowhere Less Now* is part of the group exhibition "MIRRORCITY: 20 London Artists," opening at the **Hayward Gallery** on October 14. Seers also has shows scheduled for later this year at the [Sharjah Art Foundation](#) and the [Cricoteka museum](#) in Krakow. Her photographs sell for upward of £6,000 and her installations fetch up to £50,000.

The artist photographs, films, and self-critiques her multilayered works, which are packed with philosophy, art theory, theology, and science. "The work is so dense, it tells you about itself, and I try to leave no gaps to be filled in by another—by an author, by a critic, by a reviewer," says Seers, who trained in fine art at the [Slade](#) and at [Goldsmiths College](#) in London.

Prior to creating her elaborate installations, Seers transformed herself into a "human camera." Placing photographic paper in her mouth, she exposed it using her lips as an aperture to produce oddly compelling images. Her installations retain that sense of performance, set in locations such as an inverted battleship in a former church, a Norwegian boat hut, and a peep show-style booth.





Lindsay Seers, *Lost House (Tree)*, 2011, a diptych from "The Lost Room" series.  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MATT'S GALLERY, LONDON

"I like to think of the audience member as one of the protagonists within the piece. By entering onto the stage, with them immersed, they become implicated somehow," she explains.

That collusion in Seers's poetic universe is vital to appreciating her work. Her vision of the world, influenced by the French philosopher and mystic Henri Bergson, is one of interconnectivity, blurred reality and fantasy, and shifting concepts of self, time, and consciousness.



Lindsay Seers, *Heterochromia (Sounil)*, 2013, a portrait from her series showing people with genetic mosaicism.  
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND MATT'S GALLERY, LONDON

It is futile, then, to wonder if, as claimed in her works, Seers really was mute until she was eight, grew up in Mauritius, and had a step-sister named Christine who went missing after losing her memory in a moped accident. Autobiography becomes a vehicle for exploring authorship, the unreliability of photography, memory, and perception as documentary tools, and the uncanny coincidences of existence.

"I'm staging the pieces as full of artifice but I want you to feel the truth behind the artifice, and so the idea that the voices and the stories are really people's stories," she says. "Something of the flux between what is metaphor, what is created, and what is actual is where I think the pivotal points of the work lie."

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# Digital Realities

## Mirrorcity

A NEW GROUP EXHIBITION AT THE HAYWARD GALLERY EXPLORES THE DILEMMAS, CONSEQUENCES AND REALITIES OF LONDON IN THE DIGITAL AGE THROUGH A STAGGERING ARRAY OF MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WORKS.

J.G. Ballard was an English writer associated with new wave science fiction, although he, himself, despised the term and preferred to categorise his work as "apocalyptic." Behind Ballard's bohemian appearance was an obsession with psychosis, assassination and violence, and a complex past in part explained by his novel *Empire of the Sun* (1984), which was adapted for the screen by Steven Spielberg. Ballard was born in Shanghai, and following the Japanese seizure of the city was interned in Lunghua Camp with his family as a young boy. Moving from a "cruel city" to a camp where food supplies were so low that he and his fellow inmates resorted to eating weevils for protein, Ballard had an understanding of dystopia even before reaching adulthood. Returning to England in 1946, Ballard spent brief stints at medical school and in the RAF, before publishing his first novel in 1961, *The Drowned World*, in which he argued, quite rightly, that global warming could ultimately cause the flooding a number of the world's major cities.

Ballard's work is so distinct that his name has given rise to the adjective Ballardian, which references "dystopian modernity, bleak man-made landscapes and the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments." Amongst many of the films, books and artworks emerging in our current climate, there is a strong Ballardian theme – something which chief curator Stephanie Rosenthal has tapped into when planning the Hayward Gallery's autumn 2014 exhibition, later given the title *Mirrorcity*.

Rather than exhibit artworks that study the past or imagine the future, Rosenthal made the initial decision to create an exhibition that allows viewers to "just be aware of where we are now." To do this, she spent 2013 visiting over 100 studios across London – a part of the world that she outlines as "a point of artistic culmination" – to source the final 23 exhibiting artists. After speaking to just 60 people, Rosenthal discovered that Ballard was cited as

an influence by almost everyone – less for his bleak world view, but more his convention of building an imaginary utopian world in the minds of his characters, their past or future, which interrupts the physical world.

She explains that this idea has such a vivid relevance for artists working in London, a capital of finance and "point of culmination" to Rosenthal, as the population of contemporary cities are always connected via screens and the internet both to a "virtual utopian world and the existing rational world." This modern condition, where the virtual and physical exist simultaneously and yet are at odds, was of particular significance to Rosenthal, who believed it crucial that the work explore "the now." Therefore, the exhibition reflects the dynamism and "copy and paste aspect" of London: dramatic steel constructions stand alongside delicate canvas pieces, just like the silver skyscrapers and sandstone buildings which make up The City.

*Mirrorcity* is a combination of recent pieces and site-specific commissions produced by both emerging and established artists, all of whom examine the way in which the digital and the physical space now cross over and fold into one another. While the artworks themselves range from film to installation, performance to sculpture, and painting to text pieces, all ask similar questions: what is the effect of advanced technologies on our lives? How do we navigate between the virtual and physical worlds? How do we experience reality? And what are the conditions of our existence today?

The 23 exhibiting artists are Turner Prize winner Laure Prouvost; Mohammed Qasim Ashfaq; Susan Hiller; Michael Dean; Tim Etchells; Anne Hardy; Helen Marten; Ursula Mayer; Emma McNally; Karen Mirza and Brad Butler; Katrina Palmer; Aura Satz; Lindsay Seers; Tai Shani; Daniel Sinsel; John Stezaker; Lynette Yiadom-Boakye and collectives Lloyd Corporation; Pil and Galia Kollektiv; LuckyPDF and Volumes Project (Frank Bock, Nicola



## Chloe Hodge, Aesthetica



Lindsay Seers, (detail) *Nowhere Less Now 4*, 2012. Commissioned by Ararat, Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), Hobart, Australia. Surplus Art Foundation, Surplus, UAE. Courtesy the artist and Meant's Gallery, London.

Conibere and Martin Hargreaves). The broad range of creative contributors mirror Rosenthal's fairly open brief: artists who address and explore the implications of the conditions existing right now, whose work is not intended to be visionary or futuristic. The curator explains that she "wanted artists from all generations and all media" and that although each work should deal with "the challenges of the digital age", they "don't have to be forcibly expressed in a digital way." Therefore alongside a heavy use of film, which Rosenthal highlights as "a good medium to cross the border between fiction, fact and documentary" there is a great deal of performance – be this in the form of single musical events or ongoing actions – and analogue media as well.

Some works are less overt in their examination of our current climate; Lindsay Seers's (b. 1966) immersive installation *Nowhere Less Now 4* (2014), for example – an upturned ship which houses a film, and which was originally

generations to come for the issues which he expected them to have to deal with in the future. Stezaker is described by Rosenthal as something of a trailblazer in thinking about "what it means to overlay different stories and realities" and he is an artist whose work, new and old, is consistently relevant to the conditions of our current digital age.

Not surprising for an exhibition that discusses our various ways of "being", several people in addition to Seers have constructed life-sized, experiential installations. Anne Hardy (b. 1970) brings *Two Joined Fields* (2013), which for the first time allows viewers to physically enter the intricate sculptural installations that she usually captures only in photographs; and Susan Hiller (b. 1940) presents a new film *Resounding (Infrared)* (2014) which is an assault on the senses, combining sound frequencies and visual patterns that have been translated from radio waves originally emitted by the Big Bang. Displayed as

a large installation, this 30-minute piece is also accompanied by a series of eye-witness accounts of extra-terrestrial phenomena and experiences and therefore conjures up an eerie yet hypnotic world filled with magic and possibility.

Meanwhile, the 29<sup>th</sup> Turner Prize winner Laure Prouvost (b. 1978) presents *The Artist* (2010), which invites the viewer into an information overload: a chaotic rendering of her studio which, itself, is depicted in the film show inside. French artist Prouvost is of course best known for her 2013 Turner Prize-winning video, *Wantee*, which offers a witty tribute to a fictional grandfather. The name, Wantee, was the nickname given by European Modernist Kurt Schwitters to his partner, who liked to offer him frequent tea and so was displayed as part of Tate Britain's *Schwitters in Britain* exhibition in 2013. Shown inside an immersive installation of her grandfather's dated house, the set up can be seen as paving the way for Prouvost's *The Artist* – which, like much of her work, features her fictional grandfather once again.

Another notable artist of the pick is Helen Marten (b. 1985), a young experimental sculptor who presents hyperreal sculptures to test the

conceived for The Tin Tabernacle 19<sup>th</sup> century chapel in Kilburn. Although inspired by a photograph of her great, great-uncle who was a sailor, and therefore autobiographical, the piece creates a new, imagined actuality based upon memory and henceforth studies the space between reality and fiction. As Rosenthal asserts: "Seers's interest is mainly in blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, and from her perspective there is no difference between the two; it's all part of what we experience as our reality."

Meanwhile John Stezaker (b. 1949) presents collaged analogue photographs and hand-printed silk screens, many of which are new for *Mirrorcity*, and which at first glance are dissimilar from the majority of the exhibition. However, Stezaker is, in fact, an inspiration for many of the exhibitors; like Ballard, the English conceptual artist spent the 1970s and 1980s looking forward to what is our current "now" and made work which almost prepared

## Chloe Hodge, Aesthetica

boundaries between nature and commodity; she explains "we are generally obsessed with the 'skins' of objects" without unpacking what they actually mean to us. Although her work has been known to combine frivolous items such as doughnuts, empty bottles, pyjamas and fruit stickers, the themes she works with are in fact deeply considered: addressing our consumption of images, and our underlying reasons for attaching value to them.

The works presented here from emerging artists are equally experimental: Volumes Project, for example, with their performance art that sees one artist running around the Hayward in a circle before suddenly exiting. This is a commissioned work, conducted by a choreographer, theorist and artist, and whose brief, according to the curator, was "to show how one can transform that idea of crossing [the virtual and physical worlds] or living between these spaces." Collaboration within *Mirrorcity* is key to this exhibition: between the artists, the works, and between the works and the space they are housed in, as many new commissions have been created less for the sake of making a new artwork than of building an exhibition which works cohesively within the Hayward – something of a maze of rooms across several levels.

This is somewhat appropriate for an exhibition which strives to reflect our experience of the contemporary metropolis, and whose name derives from Michel Foucault's essay *Of Other Spaces* (1967). Foucault discusses utopia and heterotopia, the former being an ideal state and the latter being "places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society." He goes on to state that "between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror."

As Rosenthal argues, we now constantly live in this mirror: London is a "mirror city" in that its inhabitants are always surrounded by heterotopias and utopias, and their reality is somewhere in between the two. She explains: "At times we are living in a new space, this mirror that Foucault describes as a thin thing that we see ourselves in but don't live in. My idea for the show and the works is that we now live our lives between – the virtual and physical world."

She continues: "Nowadays we are constantly connected to the internet, so

we are aware of what's going on all over the world and linked to it through social media; we are very nearly occupying a new type of reality." The works speak about this new condition, this new method of living between the physical world and the virtual and digital space.

*Mirrorcity* is, thankfully, not simply Ballardian in tone, although the influence of new-wave science fiction is tangible in its examination of confused realities, hyper-reality, high-tech and low-tech operations. Rather, the works embrace the urgency and the multi-layered state of contemporary London, whereby individual experience becomes only a small part of a living metropolis. To continue this otherworldly experience, author Tom McCarthy (b. 1969) has conceived an "alternative" newspaper especially for *Mirrorcity* that includes a diverse and distinctive array of texts and pictures which have been provided by the exhibiting artists, providing this startling and comprehensive reconstruction of the "now" with a past and a future.

*Mirrorcity* is one of three exhibitions which will run in the lead-up to the two-year closing of the Hayward Gallery, during which time it will be fully refurbished. Following *Mirrorcity* will be the first ever UK retrospective of Belgian artist Carsten Höller, taking place during summer 2015, and a group exhibition involving six individual artists. For this final exhibition, Richard Wentworth, John Akomfrah, Jane and Louise Wilson, Hannah Starkey, Roger Hiorns and Simon Fujiwara will each curate a "chapter," using objects, artefacts and artworks that they feel reflect an important moment in history since 1945. The issues explored will range from the emergence of key social institutions and consumerism to mad cow disease and the origins of the surveillance state – looking back at the causes and catalysts of British politics, psychology and sociology as it is today, and which underlie contemporary British art as it is represented in *Mirrorcity*.

*Mirrorcity* runs at the Hayward Gallery, London, 14 October – 4 January. Further information can be found online at [www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk).

Chloe Hodge



NEW YORK

“The Book Lovers”

The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts Project Space // January 25–March 9

VISUAL ARTISTS HAVE long flirted with the written word: Consider the phenomena of the artist-as-critic, book-as-object, and document-as-artwork. In “The Book Lovers,” curators David Maroto and Joanna Zielinska—an artist and art historian, respectively—define the “artist novel” as a distinct literary form. Far from a nostalgic meditation on the changing nature of publishing, this exploratory exhibition frames the novel as a contemporary extension of social practice and research-based art. Compact and infinitely reproducible, the artist novel

challenges traditional forms of visual “authorship” in the same manner that the printed multiple, video, and photography have done. But while the market has more or less absorbed those forms, “The Book Lovers” asserts that the category of artist novel retains a slipperiness and contingency ripe for examination.

Maroto and Zielinska construct the exhibition around a growing body of evidence—a curated selection of more than 130 artist novels displayed on tables in the center of the space. This book collection, recently acquired by M HKA, in Antwerp,

is available for perusal; readers may also consult an online database—a practical, though less seductive, option. The books range from *a, A Novel*, 1968, Andy Warhol’s transcript of his daily conversations, to recent narrative experiments like the science fiction novel *Philip*, 2007, collectively written by a group of eight artists, and curated by Mai Abu ElDahab. Spanning artistic generations and geographies, the archive contains books by authors like Yayoi Kusama, Stewart Home, Sophie Calle, Pablo Helguera, and Maroto.

Eight installations by

RIGHT: **Rosee Rosen**  
A page from *The Slained Portfolio*, 1927–28, by fictional artist Justine Frank. Gouache and pencil on paper, 13 x 15 in.

OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT: **Lindsay Seers**  
*It has to be this way (Tarot)*, 2012. Nine photographic prints displayed in a wood and Perspex vitrine, each 6 x 4 in.



contemporary artist-authors fill the rest of the space. These works fall into roughly three subcategories: the novel as project documentation, research object, or complement to traditional art objects. Jill Magid’s *Becoming Tarden*, 2009, and Julia Weist’s *Sexy Librarian*, 2008, document performative practices that frame the author as an unlikely femme fatale, whereby the novel serves as an empowering tool to avoid self-objectification. A selection of prints accompanies Magid’s redacted account of her infiltration of the Dutch secret service as a commissioned artist. Weist’s humorous collection of discarded library books—some shaven down to piles of dust—refers to her double life as librarian and artist. Goldin+Senneby’s *Looking for Headless*, 2010—ongoing, began as a research-based investigation of offshore tax havens but has become a premise for staging scenarios during exhibition runs and launch parties (including for “The Book Lovers”) in off-site spaces, that are then narrated in subsequent chapters. More conventional novelistic premises provide the creative backstory to standalone objects like Lindsay Seers’s humorous tarot cards, 2012, and Tom Gidley’s ceramic *Masks*, 2010–13.

Rosee Rosen’s project, a body of work attributed to the fictional Jewish-Belgian protofeminist Surrealist pornographer Justine Frank, best synthesizes these three tendencies. The complex output

Frank, as well as a monograph and related criticism of her work. A searing critique of art history’s blind spots, the work exposes the unspoken and thoroughly gendered criteria that elevate certain artists while marginalizing others. In this exhibition, video testimony by the translator of Frank’s monograph (*Rosen in drag*) denigrates Rosen’s practice, accusing him of appropriating Frank’s subversive visual lexicon, which fuses Jewish iconography and pornographic tropes, in his nonfictional (and much maligned) installation *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, 1995–97.

Ambitious but not exhaustive, “The Book Lovers” raises important questions, as yet unanswered, about the production and circulation of artist books. Some artists have distributed their books for free or at low cost via print-on-demand services, online, or through independent publishing means. Other books are published in limited editions or at exorbitant prices. Rather than being an untroubled category, artist novels highlight the growing economic precariousness of artistic labor and the willful fetishization of the book object at the moment of its obsolescence—a reification all too familiar to artistic practice. Situated between the mass-produced object and high art work, the artist novel is neither easily assimilable to literary publishing houses or the machinations of art discourse—a difficult position,





## Voyage of discovery

Lindsay Seers's atmospheric new film installation takes in a seafaring uncle, female freemasons and time travel.

**Helen Sumpter** unravels the tale

From the outside, Kilburn's Tin Tabernacle is a rather rusty and dilapidated corrugated-iron church, of a type that the Victorians commonly shipped out to the colonies in the late nineteenth century to spread the word of God. Step inside now, however, and you're no longer in the Lord's house but below deck on an old battleship, complete with bridge and steering wheel, cabins and galley, all decorated with ropes, flags and other nautical memorabilia. This interior transformation took place in the 1950s, when the church was deconsecrated and handed over to the local sea cadets; since then it has been used as their meeting and training venue. Working in conjunction with Artangel, artist Lindsay Seers will be bringing all these

elements of the building's history together – and adding another layer of her own – when the chapel becomes the venue for her latest multimedia film installation, 'Nowhere Less Now'. Incorporating film, photography, sculpture and writing, as well as philosophical ideas, Seers's projects are known for their complex and seamless interweaving of historical research, autobiography and storytelling in an exploration of what creates our perception of truth.

The starting point for all of Seers's work is a personal family connection, and for 'Nowhere Less Now' it's an old photograph of Seers's great-great-uncle George, himself a sailor, as was Seers's father. The photograph was taken in 1890, when George was 24,

on a ship called The Kingfisher. 'As soon as I began looking into George's story, I uncovered lots of uncanny facts,' Seers explains from her north London studio. 'The first being that George and I share the same birthday, September 27, and that we were born exactly 100 years apart – he in 1866 and myself in 1966.' Seers's research for the project took her to Zanzibar in Tanzania, East Africa, which still has its own prefabricated iron church, and is one of the destinations that The Kingfisher sailed to. While she was there she also came across a collection of photographs taken by an AC Gomes, one of the few photographers working in the area at the time, and who may have taken Seers's own picture of her great-great-uncle. 'There aren't many photographs still in existence from that period,' Seers continues. 'After the British left in 1963, a communist government took over and carried out a brutal massacre that also involved destroying most documentation, including images, of the British being there. It's really interesting how contentious a photograph can be.'

Another photograph Seers drew on for this project was of an early female freemason, possibly George's wife, Georgina. 'George was a mason, like many naval men,' she says. 'I'm very influenced by the ideas of French philosopher and mystic Henri Bergson (1859-1941), whose sister, Moina Mathers, was married to one of the founders of esoteric organisation Golden Dawn, based on freemason practices,' Seers explains. 'This was also one of the first of such groups

to admit female members.' Mathers studied at the Slade School of Art, as did Seers. When she tried to find out what records they had of Mathers, all that came up was a card saying that during that time she was living in Kilburn. 'Moina was born in 1865, George in 1866 and the Kilburn church was built between 1863 and 1866, so everything meets at this one point in time.'

**I work between imagination, experience and the faultiness of memory**

headphones) that will weave a narrative involving uncle George in the past and an African sailor, also named George, as well as a George in a distant future. 'One of the aims of my work is to explore an idea of narrative that exists way beyond itself,' Seers adds. 'Bergson didn't believe in the idea of polarities, like fact or fiction, and that's a process I try to work within, between imagination and experience, the faultiness of memory and the instability of the moments that we're in. The way that we experience life is through complicated connections that leap backwards and forwards, along with constant shifts in our sense of self, identity and emotional state. I hope "Nowhere Less Now" has a similar connectivity, to be as close as possible to our actual experience of "being".'

'Nowhere Less Now' is at The Tin Tabernacle **Sat Sept 8-Oct 21**. See [artangel.org.uk](http://artangel.org.uk) for booking details. [www.timeout.com/art](http://www.timeout.com/art)

## Telegraph, Richard Dorment

Lindsay Seers, *Nowhere Less Now*, Tin Tabernacle: Fantastic voyage into the unknown

A dilapidated London church is transformed into the hull of an upturned ship for a remarkable new show that whisks you towards pasts both real and imaginary. Richard Dorment is impressed

★★★★



*Nowhere Less Now*, Lindsay Seers, an Artangel commission

The Tin Tabernacle is a pre-fabricated chapel erected in 1860 on a quiet residential road just off Kilburn's busy high street. Enthusiastic Victorian Christians either shipped such inexpensive, easy-to-assemble places of worship to remote outposts of the British Empire – or, in this case, opted to set one up in a pocket of Irish papistry closer to home. That this much-loved local landmark was not pulled down years ago is due in large part to its long service as a meeting place of another imperial survival, the Willesden and St Marylebone Branch of Sea Cadets.

Fragile buildings that beat the odds like this are like ghostly reminders of a vanished past. And when up-and-coming British artist Lindsay Seers first saw the dilapidated structure in Kilburn, it set off a chain reaction of personal and poetic associations that resulted in the complex installation she has created for Artangel. It will open to the public on Saturday.

Born in Mauritius into a naval family, Seers had long had an obsessive interest in the life of her great-great uncle, a seafaring son of the Empire named George Edwards, and of his eccentric wife Georgina. With a touch of lateral thinking and the generous support of Artangel, she therefore decided to transform the interior of the corrugated tin building into a ship, and then use it as the setting for the baffling video installation, *Nowhere Less Now*, that I shall try to describe.

Here's what happens inside. Having booked your place in advance, you will be ushered into the meeting room of the Sea Cadets, a sepia-tinted time capsule in which the clocks stopped sometime around 1953. Framed black-and-white photographs of the young Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh hang amid early 20th-century group photos of eager young cadets, trophies, insignia, and a quaint sign asking, "Are you correctly dressed?" While you wait, you can peruse a battered copy of the Admiralty Manual of Navigation. But be warned: not everything you see around you was there before Seers's arrival. You may spot some of these photos and objects again as they flash by in the story that is about to unfold in the next room.

Ready? Equipped with headphones, we are led into what was once the chapel's nave, now transformed into the hull of an upturned ship. We sit on tiered benches facing two large white spheres that appear to float in space, one above the other. Then the lights go down, and we hear the artist's voice: "Place is a trigger for memory."

The strange, multi-layered monologue about Uncle George and Aunt Georgina that follows is synched to a densely woven visual phantasmagoria in which historical photographs are interwoven with fakes, abstract geometric designs, animation and sequences in which the artist appears dressed as the long-dead ancestors she is telling us about. As you watch, a swift stream of images flows in front of you while that soft, disembodied voice regales you with a tale of uncanny coincidences and blind chance.

At first, it's all believable, but before too long fact elides into fiction and we are told of magic symbols and fortune tellers, a secret society, a blood sacrifice, and of dreams, signs and forebodings. Instead of attempting to disentangle the real from the imaginary, my advice is to sit back and let this spectacular son et lumière wash over you. As you leave, you'll be given a book-length essay by Seers that may or may not help you to make sense of what you've just seen.

Call me a phillistine, but I count any work of visual art that requires a 190-page book to be fully understood as flawed, though I'm sure Seers has given future generations of graduate students some meaty topics for their PhDs.

As for me, I am confident that Seers is telling two stories: the first is about real things that happened to real people, the second is her fantastically embroidered riff on those things and those people. The first (true) story begins with photographs of the two ancestors she knew nothing about. One showed great-great uncle George as a sailor on the deck of HMS Kingfisher, the other his wife got up in full Masonic ceremonial gear. These clues led Seers to an island off the coast of Zanzibar where – amazingly – she found a tree on which George had carved his name and the name of his ship.

Seers further learnt that she herself had been born 100 years to the day after her great-great uncle's birth, and that he had died at the age of 48 – uncomfortably close to the age she is now. About Georgina, she knew even less. Obviously, she was a keen Mason at a time when it was unusual for women to be admitted into the secret society, but that's about it. Except for having a mildly interesting idiosyncrasy – each eye was a different colour – George appears to have been a complete nonentity.

Yet, on this slender foundation, the artist proceeds to erect a baroque fantasy in which the Tin Tabernacle serves as a sort of Tardis, allowing her to travel in her imagination back and forth in time, taking on the personas of both George and Georgina.

We meet a large cast of characters including a man named Edward George, whose father had been a liberated slave in Zanzibar who may have known George Edwards. If I sound doubtful, it is because the story grows ever more convoluted, and by now I didn't trust Seer, who, to say the least, is not a reliable narrator. There is a lot of flimflam about twins and aliens, and about death, destiny and memory. But as all of this rushes past, you begin to realise that what did or did not happen to Uncle George is beside the point.

What matters is that someone went in search of him, and in doing so caused him to live again in memory. And, Seers concludes, it is in memory that we come to know who we are. How do we find a meaning in our lives? Where do we start to search for it?

For the people who first worshipped in the Tin Tabernacle, the answer to both questions was: in the word of God. But in a post-Christian era, we must seek the truth about our deepest selves in other ways. If we are not to become trapped in an eternal present, we must keep the past alive by treating its traces – old photos, objects and documents – with the respect such accorded to such relics in more primitive societies.

At times, Seers is so maddeningly fey that you long for her to say what she means in plain English. And yet, after all the flimsy one-liner art I see, I instinctively know when I'm in the presence of an important work by an artist of stature. That is the case here and, as always, Artangel has done her proud.

Sept 8-Oct 21, 12-16 Cambridge Avenue, London NW6. Details and tickets: [artanael.org.uk](http://artanael.org.uk)





# Dream voyage on a ghost ship

Multimedia event mesmerises; teenage sociopath disturbs; Leonard Cohen seduces

INSTALLATION  
**Lindsay Seers:  
Nowhere Less Now**  
The Tin Tabernacle, London  
**Richard Cork**

Escaping from London's traffic-torn Kilburn High Road, I walk down Cambridge Avenue towards one of the strangest buildings in the city. Although constructed as a chapel during the 1860s, this uncompromising edifice now provides a home for the Willesden & St Marylebone Sea Cadets. But everyone in the neighbourhood calls it The Tin Tabernacle, and I can understand why. The whole building has been smothered in grimy sheets of corrugated iron, so that it looks like the battered survivor of a war zone. But the Sea Cadets' rousing motto is emblazoned on the front door: "Ready Aye Ready." Announcing a gung-ho determination to sail off anywhere, it prepares me for the extraordinary journey on which visitors to The Tin Tabernacle can now embark.

Lindsay Seers was commissioned to produce *Nowhere Less Now* by Artangel, an organisation that encourages artists to present their most ambitious and unlikely projects in surprising locations, and she has transformed the interior of The Tin Tabernacle into an upside-down ship. After entering the space and taking my seat on some hard wooden stairs, I am greeted by the remains of a Bofors anti-aircraft gun rearing beside me. Putting on a headset, I realise that two enormous circular screens – one concave, the other convex – dominate my vision. The lights go down, and Seers proceeds to unleash a multimedia tour de force that uses sound, video, photography, performance and animation.

A voice confesses: "I always felt like I was looking for something." Someone else asserts that "The sea has a memory," and that "The dead live with us." The starting point for Seers' epic expedition seems to have been her discovery that she was born

precisely 100 years after the birth of her great-great uncle George Edwards. But nothing is at all straightforward in this perpetually mystifying installation. She shows a photograph of Edwards taken on board a ship while he was serving with the British merchant navy in Zanzibar. He tried to liberate slaves, and ended up drowning. Some of the sailors in subsequent images are black, and Seers ensures that they play significant roles in the photographic material, together with animated figures on the move in a fast-changing African society.

She cannot, however, be pinned down to a single set of concerns. In one close-up shot, Edwards gazes towards the future with two different coloured eyes. Perhaps the two screens Seers uses in this mesmeric show reflect her belief that Edwards' unusual ocular condition has something to do with an unborn twin. His eyes were probably the starting point for many of the abstract images now appearing on the screens. Yet these forms are also redolent of planets suspended in the cosmos, and Seers plays with ideas of a world darting restlessly between past, present and future.

At one crucial point she decides to visit Zanzibar and find out more. Archives preserved there yield further photographs of the context that Edwards inhabited, and Seers shares them with us. Even so, *Nowhere Less Now* lives up to its confusing, disconsolate title. The more she unearths, the less she comprehends.

Eventually, reality and fantasy become as hard to separate as past and future. The vessel constructed here in The Tin Tabernacle grows more and more like a ghost ship. A voice murmurs: "It's like the end of the world." Quiet descends before the lights are switched back on. Re-emerging from the chapel, I realise that Seers has dramatised her multi-layered journey to haunt her audience like a macabre, unforgettable dream.

Until October 21, [www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk)



**Divine interventions**  
For 20 years Artangel – part 'curator', part 'babysitter' – has helped transform public art in Britain, collaborating with almost 100 artists in extraordinary locations.  
By Georgia Dehn. Photographs by Nigel Shafren

On a residential Victorian street in north-west London sits an incongruous building constructed from corrugated iron. Cambridge Hall, or the 'Tin Tabernacle', as it is fondly known in Kilburn, was built in 1863 and is now Grade II listed. It was a place of Christian worship until the 1920s, and since the 1960s it has been occupied by the Willesden and St Marylebone Sea Cadet Corps. The interior has been transformed to resemble a ship, and the sailors carry out training there.

For six weeks from September, Artangel, a charitable trust that for 20 years has commissioned and produced spectacular works of art in extraordinary spaces, will become part of this peculiar property's life story. A new installation by the British artist Lindsay Seers, whose work encompasses film, photography and set-building, will be unveiled inside the Tabernacle. *Nowhere Less Now* will explore image-making, seafaring and migration, connecting the stories of her great-great-uncle George Edwards, a naval officer; the birth of Miss Bagnon, an artist and the sister of the French philosopher Henri Bergson; and Seers's own birth exactly 100 years later to the day. Artangel promises that Seers "will take us on a journey across time."

Right: James Lingwood left and Michael Morris of Artangel, with the artist Lindsay Seers. Top: The Tin Tabernacle. Above: part of the installation *Nowhere Less Now*



entangling global histories with intimate stories'.  
Artangel's co-directors, Michael Morris and James Lingwood, are sitting in a small boardroom tucked away behind the makeshift stern at the back of the Tin Tabernacle. Lingwood, who lives nearby, explains that two years ago, when Artangel first investigated using the venue, the premises were under threat of closure, mainly because of fears that the wiring was unsafe. Artangel, which is funded by the Arts Council and private patrons (Art Angels) who pay an annual subscription, struck a deal with the building's governors to use the space – in return, Lingwood says, they 'agreed to fit the electrics and undertake asbestos testing to check it was in order'.  
For Lingwood and Morris, rewiring, risk assessment and behind-the-scenes negotiation is like 'priming the canvas' ready for an artist to start work. Seers says they have been a huge support. "It is difficult and frightening making a large public piece," she says. "They have contributed a lot of ideas and have worked closely with me through the whole process of getting the space ready."  
"Artists are a complex mixture of conviction, drive and doubt as they are developing a work," Lingwood, 53, says. "One of our responsibilities is to construct some kind of shelter, so they can focus on the ideas while we deal with the negotiations about buildings... with health and safety officers, local politicians and so on."  
Shielding creative minds from bureaucracy doesn't begin to describe what Artangel does. The organisation has been described as 'curator', 'facilitator', 'enabler' and 'babysitter' to artists. Morris, 54, sums up what it does as 'showing what is possible if you give artists the freedom to imagine something on a different scale – usually something very ambitious.' Projects range from sculpture and film to installation and performance. Highlights include Rachel Whiteread's concrete cast of the interior of a terrace house in Bow, east London; Michael Landy's anti-consumerist *Break Down*, in which he catalogued and destroyed every one of his possessions; and Living Architecture's



exploring to the local community what was taking place behind the front door of 157 Harper Road, near the Elephant and Castle in south London. "We were playing with a lot of overtones," Morris says. "You wouldn't want someone just turning up with a truckload of this material outside your house." Secure, unusually for an Artangel project, will re-emerge in a new location. The sculpture was extracted from the flat whole and is currently in storage; next summer it will be on display at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park. "Huge numbers of people were enthusiastic about the work surviving," Morris says. "It was lovely to see people come together over an artwork."

**Living Architecture, David Kohn Architects and Pierre Banner, 'A Room for London' (2012)**  
The writer and philosopher Alain de Botton, the driving force of Living Architecture, which introduces new architecture to a wide public in an unexpected way, found in natural synergy with an organisation that, he felt, was doing the same for art. He had met Lingwood and Morris on a handful of occasions. "I knew Artangel as an organisation ready for the impossible," he says – and together they cooked up the idea for *A Room for London* in early 2010. "We wanted to create a one-bedroom habitable space that would utterly up-end



conceptions of what a night away from home might be like. It's phenomenal. The space is beautiful and comfortable, as well as entirely playing with your senses. You're on a boat but you're high up, you're in London but you've never seen such a view before." De Botton says he would describe Artangel as "consummate problem solvers. Any time we hit an issue – and it happened often – they would smooth it away, know who to call and, most of all, stay calm." *A Room for London* was designed by David Kohn Architects in collaboration with the artist Pierre Banner and has been available to rent through 2012. Artangel has welcomed a number of leading writers, musicians and artists to occupy the space. Jarvis Cocker will be broadcasting his BBC Radio 6 Music Sunday Service from the installation on September 30.

**Michael Landy, 'Break Down' (2001)**  
Sometimes the ideal can be very simple. Morris says, in Landy's case, it was, "Let's amass all the possessions I have and destroy them somewhere." It is a straightforward vision, but hugely complex to orchestrate. Inside the old CIA flying saucer store on Oxford Street tens of thousands of people witnessed the display and then destruction of Landy's personal possessions in 2001. Landy made an inventory of every



one of his belongings, 7,227 in total – from socks to his Saab 900 car and his dad's old sheepskin coat, which was the last thing to go. Every item was placed on the conveyor belt of a specially commissioned light industrial machine and destroyed by 10 assistants. When it was over, people applauded. Landy said earlier this year that *Break Down* was the best two weeks of his life – "satisfying" – but understandably some observers were horrified. "People were troubled by the destruction of the most personal things," Lingwood admits. For Artangel, there wasn't time to worry about the concept – the machine only started working properly three minutes before *Break Down* opened.

**Rachel Whiteread, 'House' (1993-04)**  
One of the defining moments in modern British art (which is gratifying), Lingwood says, Rachel Whiteread's *House* won the Turner Prize in 1993. But the work sparked opinion. On the same evening that she was presented with the Turner Prize, she was also awarded the K Foundation's prize for worst artist of the year. Controversy surrounded *House* during its brief life, and it established Artangel's reputation for working on provocative projects. "It became a lightning conductor for all sorts of debates," Lingwood says. "Whether it should stay, what was it saying about housing – the atmosphere was charged." *House* also typifies the temporary nature of Artangel commissions: one water observer said that its output is not suitable for storage in Saatchi's basement, although Morris says there were various patterns to make *House* a permanent fixture in the East End of London. "We don't instigate them though," he says. "At a certain point a public art project takes on a momentum and it is no longer under your control." From the outset, it was part of Artangel's agreement with Tower Hamlets Council that *House* would be a temporary fixture. The council was demolishing a once tenacious of houses – "They wanted it to be parkland," Lingwood says – and Artangel negotiated for one room to remain to allow Whiteread's work to be produced. Ironically, there have been talks since the demolition of *House* in January 2004 to turn the ruin and on which it stood into a sculpture park.

*A Room for London*, a box-like structure on top of Queen Elizabeth Hall at the Southbank Centre, a unique one-bedroom holiday let.  
In 2001 Jeremy Deller, who won the 2004 Turner Prize, collaborated with Artangel on *The Battle of Orgreave*, a full-scale re-enactment of the confrontation between the mining community and the police in South Yorkshire during the 1984 strike. Lingwood and Morris were Deller's, the only people in Britain who were going to do that and the only people capable of doing it.  
In two decades Artangel has worked with almost 100 artists and, apart from three projects at the Camden Roundhouse when it was on the brink of being bulldozed in 1997 (one included a giant bouncy castle), Artangel has never used a space more than once. Most of its projects exist fleetingly; the work and the setting are intertwined.  
Lingwood and Morris's relationship predates Artangel. They attended Oundle School near Peterborough together. They both went to Oxford and then worked at the ICA together in the 1980s – Morris was the director of performing arts, Lingwood the curator of exhibitions. They took over as co-directors of Artangel in 1991. Founded in 1985, with the aim of bringing art to urban spaces, the organisation began as a fairly low-key charity, with a social and political agenda; the result was mainly billboard art in direct contrast. Lingwood and Morris applied jointly for the directorship, and reinstated Artangel on the ground up. "We had to grow a board of trustees and get the confidence of the Arts Council," Morris explains. "We spent the first nine months setting whether what we wanted to do was viable." The pair had a broad notion that they wanted to offer artists the opportunity to make works outside gallery spaces, "but nothing was clearly mapped out," Lingwood says. "We didn't have a major game plan. Artangel now employs 15 people, based in an open-plan office in Chiswick."  
The cultural landscape in Britain has changed drastically since Lingwood and Morris joined Artangel, in the days when Tate Modern was still a disused power station. "Art has become part of the national conversation," Deller says. "It is the news a lot, people don't feel threatened by art. Audience expectations have changed massively." He adds that Artangel provides "a safe home for big ideas. They are not freaked out by challenges in a way that a lot of museums and galleries are."  
Lingwood and Morris approached Lindsay Seers after *Extremism*, her quasi-documentary on her life as an artist, at the Tate Triennial in 2009. They usually approach an artist, Morris says, following "rumours and recommendations. Sometimes you hear the same name two or three times in the space of a short time. We follow our instincts." Lingwood says Seers is "an artist whose time is coming. She is a brilliant artist known by some, but not by as many as should know her." As for future projects, they are keeping their cards close to their chest, though they will no doubt be fraught with bureaucratic and technical challenges. "We always look forward to being caught up in the next challenge," Morris says.  
*'Nowhere Less Now' is at The Tin Tabernacle, London W9 3PP, September 8-October 21. Booking essential ([artangel.org.uk](http://artangel.org.uk))*





Lindsay Seers, *Nowhere Less Now*, 2012. An Artangel commission, courtesy of the artist.

Lindsay Seers: *Nowhere Less Now*  
The Tin Tabernacle, London  
September 8th - October 21, 2012

I started to gradually delve into the work of Lindsay Seers back in 2009, slowly peeling back the leaves as they were eloquently unwrapped before my eyes. The tale of the *Black Maria: the human camera*, her step-sister Christine's disappearance in 2001. Nothing ever adds up, the trajectories always skewed, history as fiction, or was that fiction as fact? I believed it all, and still do. Seers has forever imagined for the viewer a stream of references framed inside and out, playing gate keeper to both the past and the future, un-solving in her wake the very franchise of history. The tales interspersed with such bold clarity, the work is that of an artist that is so psychopathically linked to the design of history that we are unable to see if we're being played as fools or a-drift upon a remarkable ontological raconteur of the past.

Here in the enclaves of Kilburn, London within the dust of a falling-down grade II listed building which goes by the name of The Tin Tabernacle the story of Lindsay Seers begins again. Within the Tabernacle Seers has built an upturned ship which works as part-performance / part-cinema, equipped with headphones for the viewers, two circular screens are set in the centre of the main room; one flat and one spherical a potential ode to a lapse between a 'then' and 'now' glitch in time. *Nowhere Less Now* is an Artangel produced site-specific investigation into the life and times of Seers' Great Great Uncle George Edwards and his mystically dressed wife Georgina.

It is the act of intimacy which Seers plays upon within her work, in essence abusing the trust made between artist and viewer by enabling such access to the details of her own histories and family - hall-marking the work as ever more personable especially in light of the audio narration which mainly spoken by a women that we can only presume to be Seers herself. The viewer is individually invited to bear witness to the unfolding of a remarkable encounter. We are told that in her possession Seers has a photograph, this documentation acts as a lynch for a project of time which *Nowhere Less Now* attempts to conduct. The image of George Edwards on board HMS Kingfisher acts as a unique insight which, up until now has remained in a brown envelope in Seers' possession. George a nail maker by trade served on HMS Kingfisher from 1888 - 1891, the fact that Seers' own father worked as a radio operator for the Royal Navy brings the artist ever closer to her Great Great Uncle, the discovery of his birth date as the same as her own but 100 years prior makes the tale even more conspicuous. Born with heterochromia rendering him with different coloured pupils - this distinction and George's wife Georgina's frightening masonic outfit come to bear as visual moments which don't unite Seers to her ancestors but empty out the connection, rendering the past ever more abject and mysterious.



Lindsay Seers, *Nowhere Less Now*, 2012. An Artangel commission, courtesy of the artist.

Upon this photographic encounter Seers leaves for Zanizibar, a place where George had been as part of his HMS Kingfisher tour liberating African slaves. The bewildering notion of the tale spins on an axis of ritual and tradition, questions unanswered. Seers amongst her meticulous foray comes face to face with the scrawl of her Great Great Uncle emblazoned on a baobab tree on the island of Misali 'GE' and the word 'Kingfisher', this at first a dream becomes reality thus re-spinning the axis a-new.

As the investigation is laid out, the table of the present shifts, the map too large to be held by the structures enforced to keep it in place. Seers ideologies question how far we can account for the demands or confines of categorising something as 'past' 'present' or indeed 'future'. A future voice bends into the viewers headphones and side steps from the female narrative. Also called George - the tones are neither male nor female, the voice speaks of a time when photography is extinct misanthropically reminding the viewer of the precious relationship we have to documentation. In one dimensions the voice halts Seers in her tracks and strips George Edwards and his wife of their mystique, in others the voice awards them for their ability to still conduct the artist now from the graves of the past. Seers historical accounts are always illustrious and opulent with knowledge, links of surprising connectivity reminding the viewer of the claustrophobia of the past, yet the viewer comes away feeling those aching gaps that only history and the unknown of the future can render, gaps which try as we may time will always control.





## Spoonfed, Gioriana Riggioni

Gloriana Riggioni reviews a mind-bending, absorbing exhibition by Lindsay Seers who places her somewhere in the Never Ending Story.



*Stories are bigger than humans. It is like the humans live in stories... When you are part of a story, and you think of it that way, it is as if you are stepping outside of yourself when you hear it.*

*Magicians are dangerous manipulators. Maybe she was making these stories come to life by exploring them! –George Edwards.*

If the prosaic concept of linear time was still at large, the year would be 3066. The world consists of an unrelenting stream of hologramatic projections onto the Hyperdensity, a kind of software that merges with the fabric of reality to facilitate the communication of image and sound, while at the same time ensuring the impossibility of their recording or reproduction. The reason: records of any kind would only perpetrate the delusion of a chronological order. It has been philosophically and scientifically ascertained that there is no past or future, only different dimensions of a single contemporaneity. Everything happens NOW, and continues to happen perpetually; to cling to the static record of an occurrence would therefore be dangerously unsettling, like the glimpse of an abyss.

'*Nowhere Less Now*' is a portal into this multidimensional contemporaneity: a notion as liberating as it is unsettling. Seers, a self-professed perpetrator of our culture's obsession with experiencing life through a lens by recording, cataloguing and then revisiting every single instant of our lives, leads us through archival and ancestral sources in an investigation of her paternal blood line.

The story of one George Edwards, naval officer at the turn of the 20th Century and the artist's great great uncle, triggers the discovery of a long line of Georges and non-Georges with seemingly interconnected fates. Amongst them is the artist herself, and a certain George Edwards who claims to have transcended the inter-dimensional divide and to come from what we know as 'the future', to reveal that we shall be delivered from our consuming fixation.

Paradoxically, the narrative that emerges is meticulously recorded. Within the conceptual framework, this is a deliberate act of 'stepping out of' and objectifying her own story, so that in every sense it comes to represent as much a historical document as it does a fictional tale. Where one ends and the other begins is anyone's guess, and depends on how much stock the viewer puts in the speculative strands of the story which are based on a series of uncanny and thoroughly absorbing coincidences.

Absorbing, that is, because they weave in and out of the viewer's immediate reality, forming connections between the most far-fetched magical rituals, exotic lands, secret societies, and the very building the installation and the viewer inhabit. One has the notion of becoming part of something like the Never Ending Story, where a line of events, people, places and images whose connections to each other which, at first seems arbitrary, become irrevocably part of an overarching fabric that encompasses all things, including you and me. From this context, Seers' story emerges as a strand that meanders freely through the fabric, pointing to larger existential and ontological realities by its mere presence.

Aptly enough, the installation consists of a large pair of lenses mounted one above the other, one convex one concave, onto which the fragmented story which Seers 'steps out of' is projected. Tales of seafaring folk with strangely multicoloured eyes and a corrugated iron church in Zanzibar, stride out of the screens and onto the more than half a century old upside down hull of a ship that decorates the inside of the Tin Tabernacle – another corrugated iron chapel, the presence of which in North London is as striking as it is unlikely.

Equally unlikely are the scientific theories that underline some of these connections: The notion that Heterochromia, the condition that causes a person to be born with eyes of different colours, can be caused by a strand of alien DNA in the body absorbed during gestation when one fraternal twin fuses into the other, seems like the stuff of science fiction, yet is, as it happens, true. So is the fact, one presumes, that the artist was led to some of the key evidence in her investigation by a fortune teller who told her to visit one of a pair of islands near Zanzibar known as 'The Twins'.

A decidedly unique and immersive experience, 'Nowhere Less Now' challenges the sceptical mind to become open to the notion that human beings do not hold reality in the palm of their hands; that there are unseen machinations at large which only obtuse conservatism and lack of perception prevent them from observing.

*Nowhere Less Now* by Lindsay Seers and commissioned by *Artangel* runs at *The Tin Tabernacle* until 21st October

## Metro

### ART

#### Lindsay Seers: Nowhere Less Now

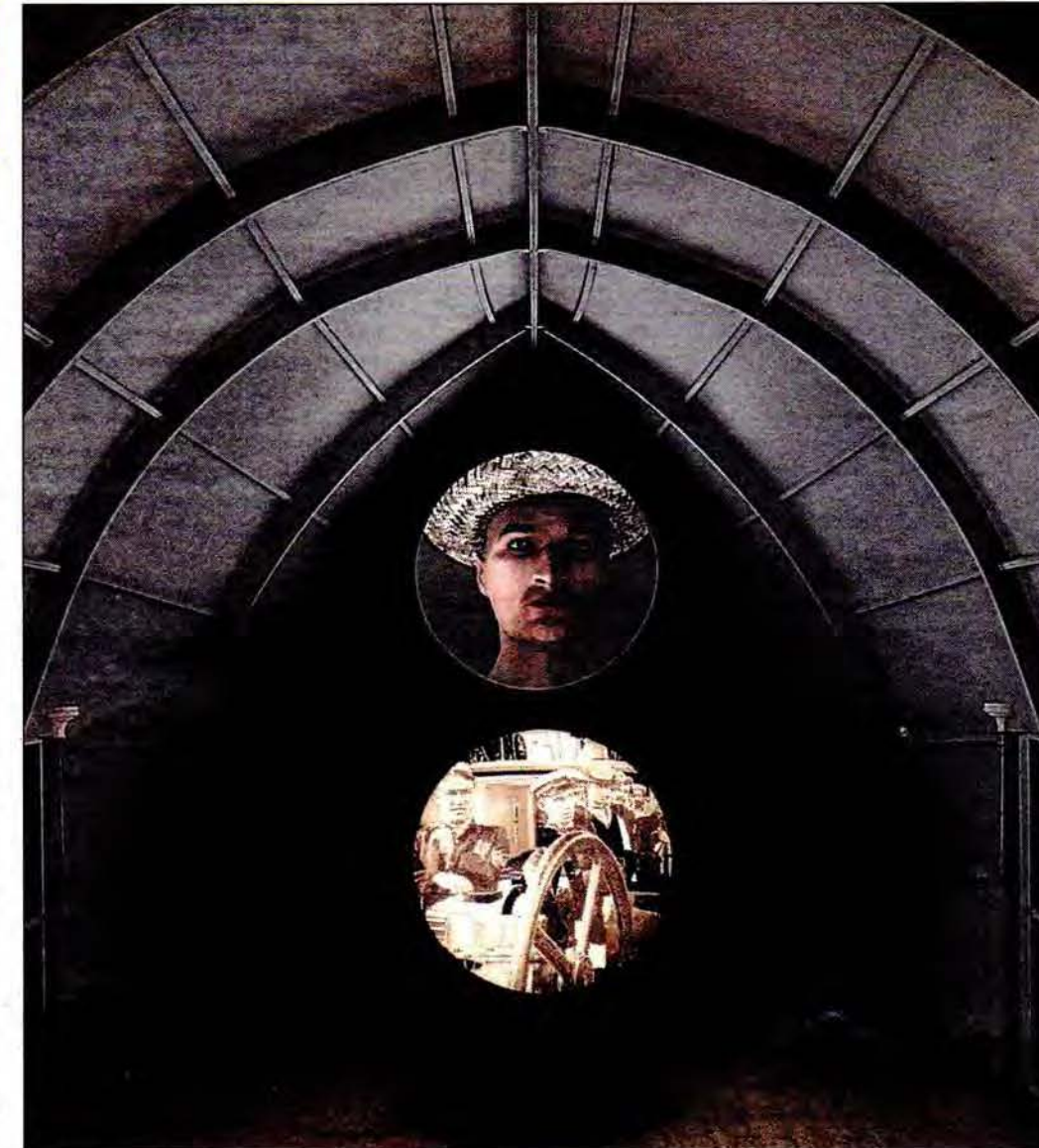
FROM a high-wire walk between two Glasgow tower blocks to a total re-enactment of a massive 1984 miner's strike conflict: any project from Artangel, the organisation that enables artists to produce ambitious site-specific installations away from the confines of traditional galleries, is guaranteed to offer something special.

Up-and-coming British film artist Lindsay Seers, whose mysterious *Nowhere Less Now* is the latest addition to the Artangel portfolio, agrees; 'Some of the best things I've seen have been produced by Artangel, she says.'

Seers's new piece invites us to enter Kilburn's hidden gem, *The Tin Tabernacle*, a prefabricated corrugated iron church that was erected in 1860 and decked out in naval regalia by long-term residents, the Sea Cadets, then further altered by Seers so the nave resembles the hull of an upturned ship.

Once inside, the audience dons headphones to watch a visual phantasmagoria that mingles vintage photos, abstract graphics, computer reconstructions and audio clips to tell a story inspired by Seers's investigation into the life of her seafaring great uncle; leading us across the globe and through the past, present and into a projected future.

The film is projected on two globular screens, one concave and one convex, which seem to hang in mid-air through the gloom. Seers, who has previously created pieces based on other personal stories (such as the disappearance of her stepsister and her refusal to speak as a young child) explained the genesis of her complex, multi-layered narrative. 'All my works



**Eye-catching:** Film is projected on two screens to give the impression of hanging mid-air in the gloom

tends to be part of an "uber work" and they spawn and grow from one another,' she says. 'This time I wanted to think about the male side of my family, because I'd already worked quite a lot with the female.'

She adds: 'My use of autobiography is more like a trope – to do with subjectivity, the relationship between an individual history as opposed to a kind of global, total history. How do we fit

into the huge matrix – we're all trying to relate to the totality.'

Featuring masonic costume, ritual sacrifice and uncanny coincidence, it becomes difficult to untangle the real from the invented in Seers's film. However, this is again an ambiguity that Seers encourages audiences to embrace. 'I don't want to draw any distinction between fiction and fact,' she says. 'When you're making a film you're already in a

world of the constructed, the created – so everything is true and everything is also false.'

A piece better served by experience than explanation, *Nowhere Less Now* turns a tin church in a Tardis-like portal to mirror expansion: not bad for a building that was never intended to last.

**Amy Dawson**

*Tomorrow until Oct 21, The Tin Tabernacle.*  
[www.artangel.org.uk](http://www.artangel.org.uk)



## Art Review, Issue 50

LINDSAY SEERS



With her organised jumble of fact and fiction, medium and message, subjectivity and objectivity **Lindsay Seers** plays fast and loose with our preconceived ideas about representation

## Art Review, Issue 50

LINDSAY SEERS has made a sequel to *It Has to Be This Way*, her multifaceted 2009 work in which she investigated the strange circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a stepsister named Christine, who vanished following a moped accident which resulted in an unusual form of amnesia. The sense that Christine is an enigma is further compounded by the fact that this chain of events is narrated, in a film that forms that work's centerpiece, by Christine's anonymous lover. This new work, titled *It Has to Be This Way*<sup>2</sup> (2010) – which, like its precursor, comprises a film projected in a large-scale architectural installation, a series of documentary interviews and an essayistic book – apparently centres around Christine's obsessive academic research into the life of Queen Christina of Sweden, a much-mythologised monarch who reigned in the seventeenth century. Seers's follow-up investigations take her to modern-day Ghana, where she traces the country's colonial past under Christina's rule, a trip she undertakes while dressed in a version of the historic uniform that was worn by the then occupying infantry. The point-of-view footage, shot from a camera mounted in the helmet of this outmoded outfit, edited together with still photography and overlaid with quasi-mystical animated symbols, is projected as a circular pool that the viewer looks down upon from a raised platform within the installation. It makes for beguiling viewing, in which one is immersed in Seers's narrative and simultaneously flummoxed by its supposedly biographical nature.

In the film, Seers seeks out the forts that testify to Ghana's subjugation under Queen Christina. Yet what appears at first to be some sort of abstract-travelogue-cum-history-doc is framed as a far more personal exercise when coupled with its two voiceovers,

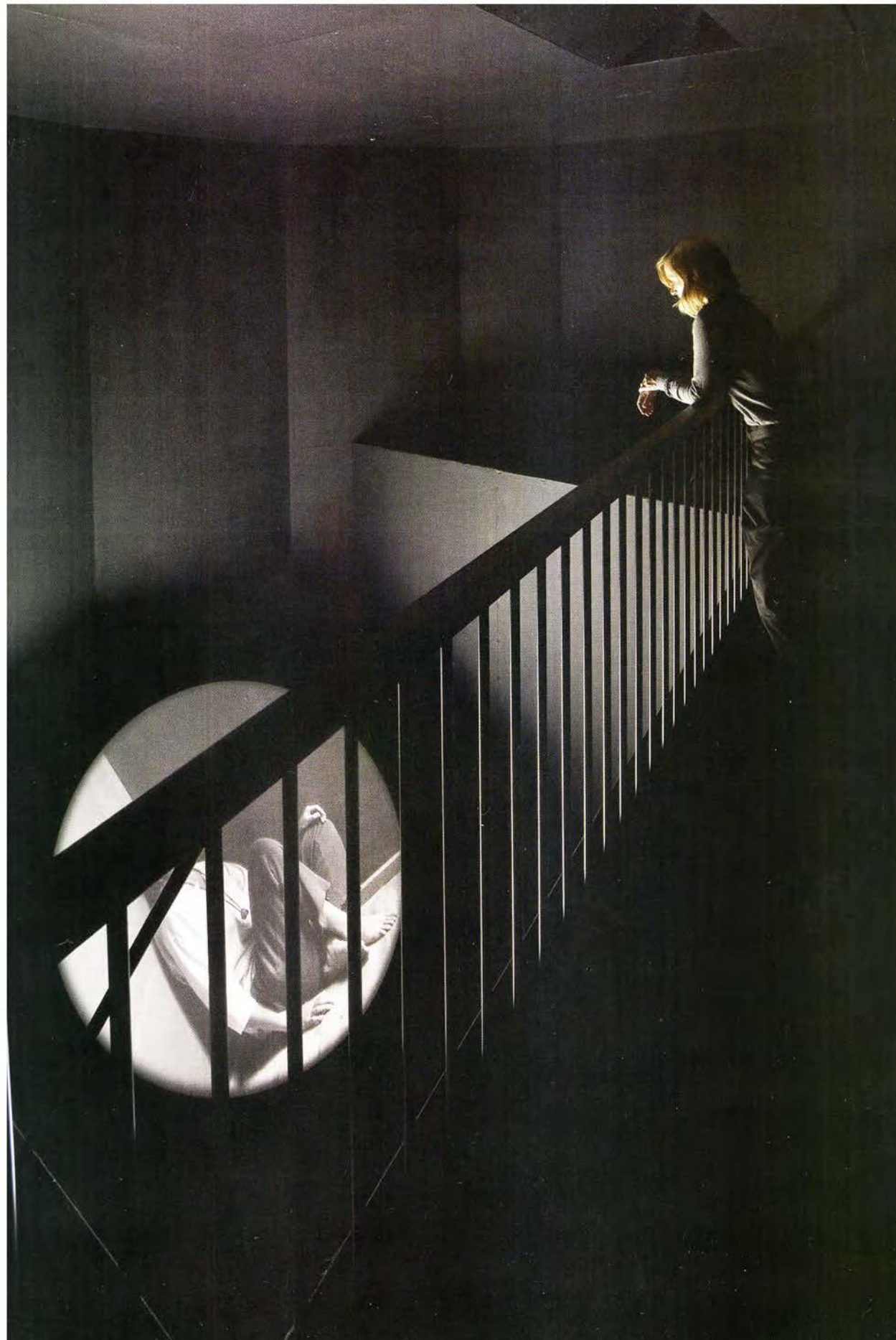
both spoken by the artist's mother, one while under hypnosis. The opening lines of the compos mentis interview typify this striking personal monologue: "I was her mother, but she [Christine] was never my daughter, and now she has gone missing I can honestly say that I never loved her".

Speaking about *It Has to Be This Way*<sup>2</sup>, exhibited at the Baltic, Gateshead (where it arrived after showings at the Me Gallery, Warwick, and the National Gallery of Denmark), Seers explains, "I wanted to go into a very personal narrative about my mother leaving us and going to live in West Africa. Leaving your children is considered to be a very unnatural, traumatic thing to do. I wanted to offset that family trauma against Ghana's colonial trauma." This rather liberal clash of the personal and the universal is typical of the artist's work. "It's a dissection of where one's past exists", she continues. "Does it exist in historical memory or personal memory? So, when walking around in Africa, thinking about my sister and her relations to my mother and mother's relationship to Africa. So the whole thing unravels bit by bit through time."

Significant in much of Seers's recent work is an emphasis on the formal design of the environment in which the films are seen. In this new work the architecture mimics a fortlike structure which the viewer enters via a set of steps. As well as the obvious reference to the forts of the film, this construction foregrounds sensations of invasion and protection in the context of the viewer's access to what might be termed the skeletons in the Seers family closet. Ultimately the viewer is left in a curious position of both activity (mounting the 'stage') and passivity (a viewer of the act 'onscreen'). "It's an interplay between the power structures







in a game that is being played out beyond their control. Their choices are driven by things external to them."

Seers's approach, both to storytelling and photography, is firmly wrapped up in the artist's interest in and ongoing dissection of Henri Bergson – in particular his conception, set out in *Matter and Memory* (1896), of the world as mere representation, and of the individual subject as some sort of discrete, machinic aggregator of representational images. It is a dense, metaphysical concept to describe, but the language used can just as happily be applied to the making of photographs. Seers has consistently sought to embody picture-taking as theatrical action. The artist most notably performs this Bergsonian vision of the individual as empty, mechanical processor when she uses her own body as a camera: when she encloses herself in a black sack, inserts light-sensitive photographic paper into her mouth, emerges briefly into daylight and uses her lips as aperture and shutter to make the exposure, before pulling the cloth – a makeshift darkroom – back over her head to develop the print. The result of all this is a work such as *Lost Room* (2005/2010), a diptych that juxtaposes a photograph of the artist's hand captured in this way alongside a documentary image of its production. Seers's mechanisation of the body is evident too in *I Saw the Light* (2005), which features a series of staged self-portraits depicting the artist with a projector mounted on her head. In placing the camera in her hat for the production of *It has to be this way*<sup>2</sup>, Seers seems to embody the final tool of the photographer's kit, the tripod. "I was becoming an anthropomorphic camera", she says. "The act itself causes me to become a specific thing in relation to the medium of photography. It creates a theatrical shift in my personality."

Unlike many an artist's work, onto which theory is retrospectively grafted by critics and curators, Seers's ongoing autobiographical practice – this multifaceted exploration of her life and family history – consciously deploys theory as an escape route from both notional historical constructs and family narratives. "I don't think fact and fiction are useful definitions", the artist explains. "It's an ultimate question as to where 'truth' lies in these mediums. They [photography and film] are constantly producing their own truth." Seers's work seems to set up its own hierarchy in relation to the notion of empirical truth: while the



narratives the artist weaves are presented as straight autobiography and historical documentary, there nonetheless remains nagging suspicions about their veracity. These are grievances Seers isn't willing to be drawn on. "I think Bergson would say that truth and falsehood are differences in kind, not of degree. Fiction is not an inverse of fact; they're completely different things. In a sense you'd say all films, documentary or otherwise, are fiction, or all fact. One or the other, not both."

Seers's work demonstrates this point of view admirably: the fictions, if that's what they are, are maintained beyond the framework of the formal artwork itself, insisted upon in such arenas as the press release and the interview between artist and critic. This permeation of the boundaries between art and real life draws studious links between art as means of representation, and the Bergsonian understanding of the world as merely representational construct. For Seers this translates as an impossibility of separation between art making and life-living, in which the artist embodies both the work's subject matter and its means of production, to captivating ambiguity. •

Lindsay Seers's *It Has to Be This Way*<sup>2</sup> is on view at the Baltic, Gateshead, through 12 June



#### WORKS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

*Extramission 6*, 2009, video still.  
Tate Collection, London.

*It has to be this way*<sup>2</sup>, 2010, installation view.  
Co-commissioned by Mead Gallery and National Gallery of Denmark

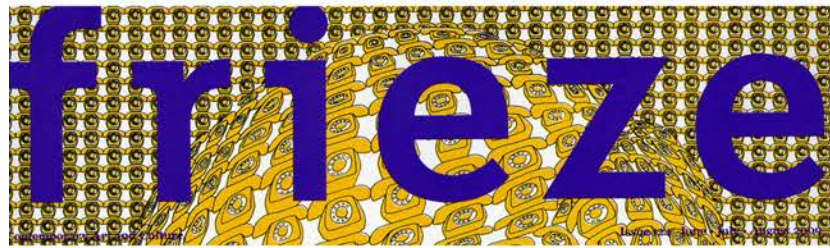
*It has to be this way*<sup>2</sup>, 2010, film still.  
Co-commissioned by Mead Gallery and National Gallery of Denmark

*It has to be this way*<sup>2</sup>, 2010, film still.  
Co-commissioned by Mead Gallery and National Gallery of Denmark

*Lost Room*, 2003/2010, photograph, 40 x 25 x 6.5cm

*all works*  
Courtesy the artist and Matt's Gallery, London





# Remember Me

Human cameras, fortune tellers, fake archives, unreliable memories – in **Lindsay Seers'** films and installations, the truth is not what it seems  
by *Tom Morton*



Left and opposite:  
*It has to be this way*  
2009  
Mixed media  
Installation views,  
Matt's Gallery, London

**To experience Lindsay Seers' work is to experience snapshots, rumours, doubtful information. This is not art that insists on its own inviolable truth.**

before deciding to transform herself into a camera, throwing a black sack over her head, inserting a piece of light-sensitive paper into her mouth, emerging to make the exposure through the aperture of her lips, and then returning to the sack to develop it. The results of these ingestions are bloody, veiny, spittle-flecked and decidedly amniotic images of the inside of Seers' mouth, printed on small circles of paper that resemble communion wafers (what's transubstantiated, here, is the cool machinery of the photographic process into something warmly biological). They also had the effect of pissing off those who knew her. As an art dealer recounts 'it was very difficult to have a solid relationship with her as a friend [...] Her work was a compulsion'.

Returning as an adult to Mauritius with her mother, Seers seeks out her childhood home – a place she could not remember, but felt was somehow associated with her 'blockage'. The island, though, has undergone drastic change since she left it, and her mother is unable to identify the house in which they once lived, a fact that leads Seers to swap her attempt to become a camera for an attempt to become a projector. Influenced, perhaps, by Plato's extromission theory of vision, in which 'fire' emitted from the eyes illuminates objects, she straps a light to

her forehead, and lets its beam fall on the world, a 'healthy escape', as the art dealer has it, from 'the passivity and melancholia associated with being a camera'. The film ends with an image of Seers' eyes burning with white luminescence, as her mother's voiceover hopes, a little against hope, that 'for Lindsay now things will be more positive and she can look forward instead of dwelling in the past and the unhappiness some periods in her life had'.

Although much of *Extramission 6* is filmed in the manner of a documentary, it constantly calls its own veracity into doubt, whether through the omission of information (the 'art dealer' is never named), or simple misinformation (surely Tusse Silberg is not a 'Psychosynthesis Practitioner' but rather the star of the 1984 film *The Company of Wolves*, an adaptation of a 1979 Angela Carter short story in which metamorphosis figures heavily?). Seers' point is not to relate the past as-it-was, but rather to create a representation of somebody who, having lost a sense of the oneness of time, space and everything they contain, attempts to recover it through the very act of representation. The double trauma of birth and the loss of eidetic memory are re-enacted, along Freudian lines, in the act of becoming a camera,

a device that insists on the cleaving of one thing from another, and is then seemingly eased by that of becoming a projector. If the eyes, as Plato has it, set fire to the world, then surely everything that flames, including the eyes themselves, are one and the same? I don't know how much, if any, of *Extramission 6* reflects Seers' actual lived experience (did she really remain silent all those years? did she ever set foot on Mauritian sands?) but the film has a richness and a truth that far exceeds the image-making of the type practiced by Ferdinand Wöhrnitz, the film's historical spectre, in which the lens neither recorded the interior self, nor illuminated the world, but rather functioned as an instrument of separation and control.

Early on in W.G. Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* (2001), the narrator, an architectural historian and childhood refugee to Wales from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia in the process of discovering his Jewish parents' past, contemplates 'how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on'. Seers' recent exhibition at Matt's Gallery, London, 'It has to be this way', took this draining as its subject, telling the tale of the memory loss and disappearance of the artist's (possibly fictional) stepsister, Christine, a scholar and emulator of the 17th-century Queen Christina of Sweden, through (again, possibly fictional) archive material arranged into three films and a publication, edited by one M. Anthony Penwill, an (once more, possibly fictional) individual who also contributed to Seers'



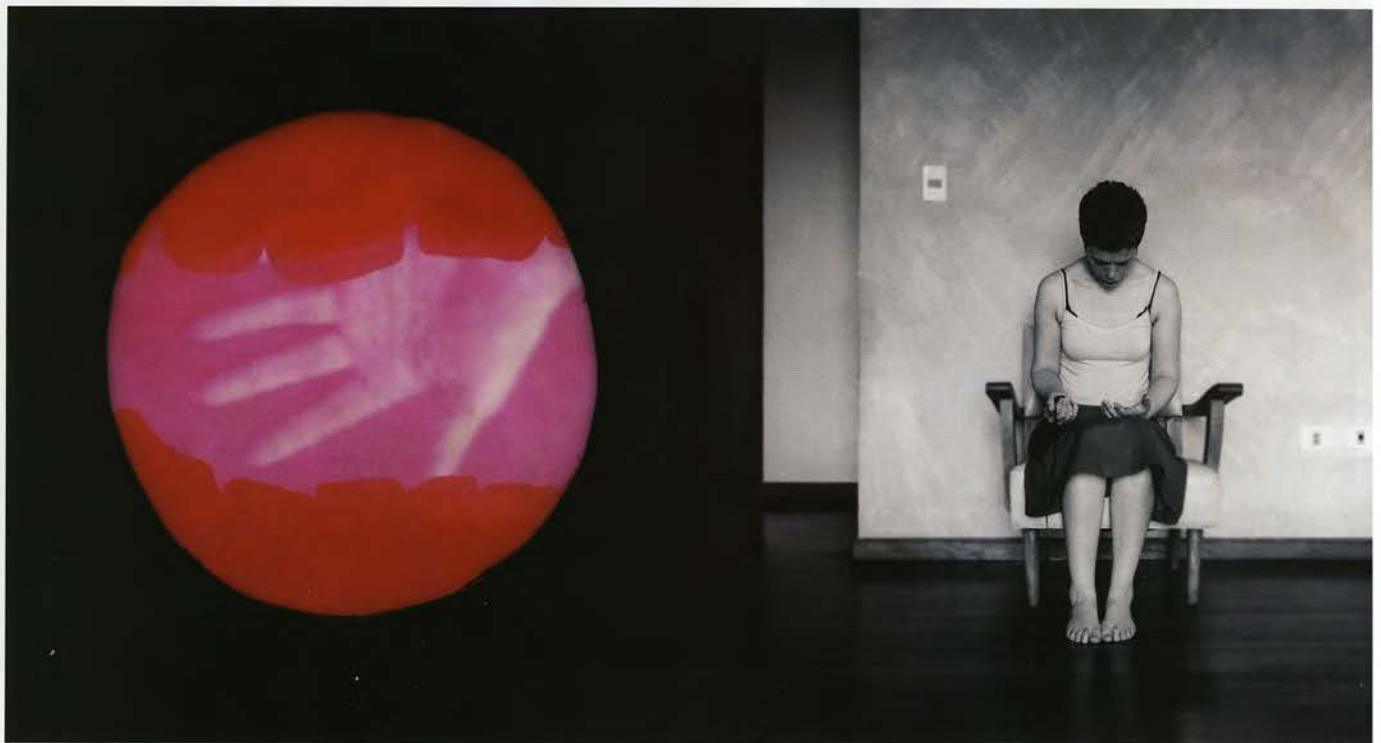


shall find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously, in which case none of what history tells us would be true, past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment we think of them, although that, of course, opens up the bleak prospect of ever-lasting misery and never-ending anguish'. Their different temporal origins flattened out on the plane of her hospital sheets, Christine's photos are always in play. The Empress. The Lovers. Death. Then. Now. Forever.

To experience Seers' work is to experience snapshots, rumours, doubtful information – fascinating fragments that refuse to add up to a neat, narratively satisfying whole. To experience one's memory of her work is something else entirely. Recall *Extramission 6* on a Monday morning, and it's a story of childhood and exile. Recall it on a Tuesday night, and it's a meditation on Platonic optics and 19th-century methods of indexing and surveillance. Memory does its work, generating different readings, different histories, and different shapes for the viewer's future self to adopt. This is not art that insists on its own inviolable truth. Seers deals the cards, and lets them fall where they may.

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*Human Camera*. In what is perhaps the central event in this fractured, sometimes self-contradictory narrative, Seers' mother visits Christine in hospital following the scooter crash with her lover which caused her amnesia, bringing with her a box of photographs in an attempt to reconnect her stepdaughter with her personal history. Not recognizing any of these images, Christine

transforms them into a makeshift tarot, employing visual mementoes of the past as an instrument with which to divine the future, or rather multiple possible futures – a tarot deck, after all, will give a different reading with each shuffle. Later in *Austerlitz* (a novel in which a set of mysterious, uncaptioned photographs are scattered throughout the text), Sebald's protagonist remarks that 'I

*Lost Room (Empty)*  
2003  
Photograph  
50x100 cm