

from which to extract money, an object of exchange value – in a way, like the exhibition's scaffolding, which offers ever-evolving spatial, temporal and conceptual meaning to a series of complex interacting systems. ■

Henry Broome is a writer and critic.

Ravioli Me Away: The View from Behind the Futuristic Rose Trellis

Wysing Arts Centre Cambridge

9 February to 14 April

Announcing this new work, Ravioli Me Away opened their Instagram account with: 'You may well ask: What is the Opera about?' After two hours trapped in a tailspin of genre-bending, feverish flights of audio-visual fancy, many of those set free, staggering from the wreckage and past the rose trellis, appeared to be asking themselves just that.

The View from Behind the Futuristic Rose Trellis, initially experienced as a live work, is repackaged both as a three-screen video installation that inhabits the resulting props and costumes and as a double vinyl album. It feels expansive in form yet specific in approach. Ravioli Me Away are Sian Dorrer, Rosie Ridgway and Alice Theobald, but the various facets of the work are ultimately realised with a long list of collaborators. Performers, musicians, animators, technicians, designers and an opera singer contribute to a collective spirit, where this collaboration is inherent to the work and not simply a means to produce it. In this travelling operatic troupe identities are not fixed, people constantly alternate roles, switch characters and meet themselves in other lives.

The use of the term opera implies the bringing together of multiple artistic forms. More specifically, this comic opera, in the tradition of an English ballad or German *singspiele*, features solo odes, songs, ensembles, chorus and drama, interspersed with spoken dialogue. Whilst often mistaken for buffoonery, the comic opera allows space for both political and social commentary. It can also be understood to undermine

the high form of *opera seria*, not only through the introduction of spoken dialogue but also by utilising popular music and common-life characters. This is art that brings the subjects down to earth and engages with the everyday.

Across 16 scenes we encounter characters, including Fresh Eyes, Post-it and Caravan Pam, performing a song-and-dance routine that charts a course from an animated-duck singing soprano, via a country-and-western road trip, before climaxing with a 'Naked Or Fake Naked' gameshow. In this purposefully wayward narrative, The Protagonist is the lost 'soul of humanity', seeking out a body, any body that might provide room for self-actualisation. The ethereal presence of The Protagonist's soul on screen is in stark contrast to its physical dummy body, with baguettes for legs, crisps and Mini Babybells for guts, and a melon for a head – all laid out atop a pasting table in the centre of the room. A therapist to The Protagonist poses the question of belonging, to which her response is marked by existential angst. Returning to Ravioli Me Away's social media, the group added, 'We say: Ask yourself the same question.' What am I about?

Individual introspection cuts through the work. The therapeutic analyst/analysand exchange demonstrates that something is lacking, a piece of you is missing – something that must be found in order to improve your existence. After all, what does it mean to be whole, what makes you you? And what makes me me? Aside from the metaphysics of identity, there is a sense of collective aspiration. As the song 'Dy-Na-Mi-Tee' plays in a scene in a coffee shop, The Barista fantasises about his own pop-star ambitions, while the same performer, in his role of The Barrister, daydreams about rock stardom. If, as Caravan Pam exclaims to her young daughter, 'You could be anybody baby!', what is it that is holding us back? The analyst-turned-healer believes we are being suffocated by our lifestyle ambitions so performs a sing-song exorcism to remove the 'parasitical cultural harness' from within: 'Out! Fruitarian retreat. Out! Holiday in Crete ...'

The musical numbers keep coming, from the tragicomic 'Pam's Parental Problems' – reminiscent of the strangely mundane dancing ghosts in Mike Smith's 1980s video *Secret Horror* – to the nightmarish Wood B Cute slinking out from underneath The Protagonist's bed to serenade and ultimately seduce a chalkboard outline of The Billy Bookcase. Even in



Ravioli Me Away
The View from Behind the Futuristic Rose Trellis 2019 performance

Morag Keil
installation view



this wood-veneer horror there is a constant pull back to the everyday – Wood B Cute deeply desires her ‘vanilla alternative’, this ubiquitous piece of Swedish flat-pack furniture.

Everywhere you look in the work, there is this extrapolation from the mundane to the extraordinary. The crazy paving floor is encrusted with crumpled images of a takeaway Costa cup, Monster Energy drinks and Marlboro cigarette packets. Bin bags become our seats as this world swirls around us, we slip in and out of other people’s dreams and desires, and experience their daily grind. But we are not simply looking in, we are also looking out. The chorus declares boldly that we are all the main character in our lives. We must tentatively take our first syncopated steps out into this world, join the shindig, and find the things that make life worth living. ■

Niki Russell is director of Primary.

Morag Keil: Moarg Kiel

Institute of Contemporary Arts London

20 January to 14 April

The works included in this exhibition are uniformly crappy, dilapidated and secondhand in style, from the amateurish paintings of eyes to the shoes that replace numbers on a large clock in the first room. Gold Chuck Taylors stand in for six o’clock, velvet mules with silver studs for five, platform trainers with frayed shoelaces for 11. Despite their aspirations towards glamour, all these shoes have a bargain-basement look, like they come from a discount shop or market stall. They evoke the sensory quality of the cheap and poorly made: a snapped heel, or a feeling of damp and cold that might seep through their fabric in a matter of weeks after purchase.

This look of privation also pervades the selection of black bags that form part of the installation *Dizzy*, 2019. Record bags, backpacks and duffel bags rest on and adjacent to a line of four old tube seats. Covered in a glue-like substance, the bags conjure up Ed Kienholz’s technique of finishing his frequently similarly junk-laden sculptures with a gluey glaze. Papers, plastic bags, bits of wooden board with shells, make-up, plastic bottles and takeaway coffee cups are visible inside them, culminating in a collection that evokes the objects left behind after a car-boot sale is over. Next to the tube seats, a pair of office-wear high heels sits on top of a papier-

mâché model house with fake moss and painted bricks. Cheap digital cameras are glued flush to the exterior of the model, so one imagines the lenses protruding into the bedroom or bathroom. The tube seats are turned away from a projection of a video shot inside a shopping centre: girls roam cheap clothing shops with cameras, their movements mimicking a lens swivelling around, trained on an elusive moving target. On the other side of the seats from the model house sits a ‘sex machine’ entitled *Closer*, a rudimentary mechanism that like the clock and the girls roaming the shops, moves round and round. When you stand before the tube seats and look past them to the video, the combination of these motions suddenly approximates the repetitive, shuddering, poor-quality surveillance images found on the top deck of London buses.

Elsewhere in the show there are repeated, affectionate references to friendship and groups, as well as the spaces such relationships are formed in. Shots of kitchens and desks, and mattresses on the floor appear in *Potpourri*, 2013, and *Questionnaire*, 2017, as well as familiar environments like Tesco. In the painting *Georgia’s Computer I* recognise the green-blue leathery top of a British Library desk, the plug outlets, and dos and don’ts of using the reading rooms. In combining cheapness with referential, contemporary snapshots from a London artist’s life, ‘Moarg Kiel’ runs the risk of aestheticising or romanticising post-financial crisis, millennial precarity. This is countered, however, in those works that evoke the conditions which compel production to sit alongside privacy, work alongside leisure. As the extensive text by Keil presented as a leaflet and audio guide explains, she is interested in celebrating ‘the romance of those personal actions, the kinds of things you do in your bedroom – staying at home and building something alone, or masturbating’. As well as the sex machine approximating this aspect, works like the painting of drawers with wires threaded through suggest a bedroom studio. However, like the sensory quality conjured by the shoe-clock, the sense of materiality here (the drawers look poorly made, like the fittings found in a house rented out by the most miserly of landlords) pushes away from a twee, DIY domestic-production space and towards the current impossibility of affording a studio and a home in London for anyone other than the wealthy.

Questionnaire, 2017, moves much further away from picturing an individualised (and potentially romanticised) penury, and voices an array of experiences. Produced in collaboration with Georgie Nettell, this was originally a multi-screen project and has here been cut into a 56-minute video that screens daily in the ICA cinema. The video shifts between an image of a purple and black