Elephant
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ELEPHANT

THIS ARTWORK CHANGED MY LIFE

Susan Hiller's Dream Mapping Awoke Me From the Solitary Terror of My Nightmares

The British artist's "paraconceptual" investigation into the subconscious, featuring fairy rings and collective sleeping, offered guidance to Helen Charman during a period of bad dreams and insomnia.

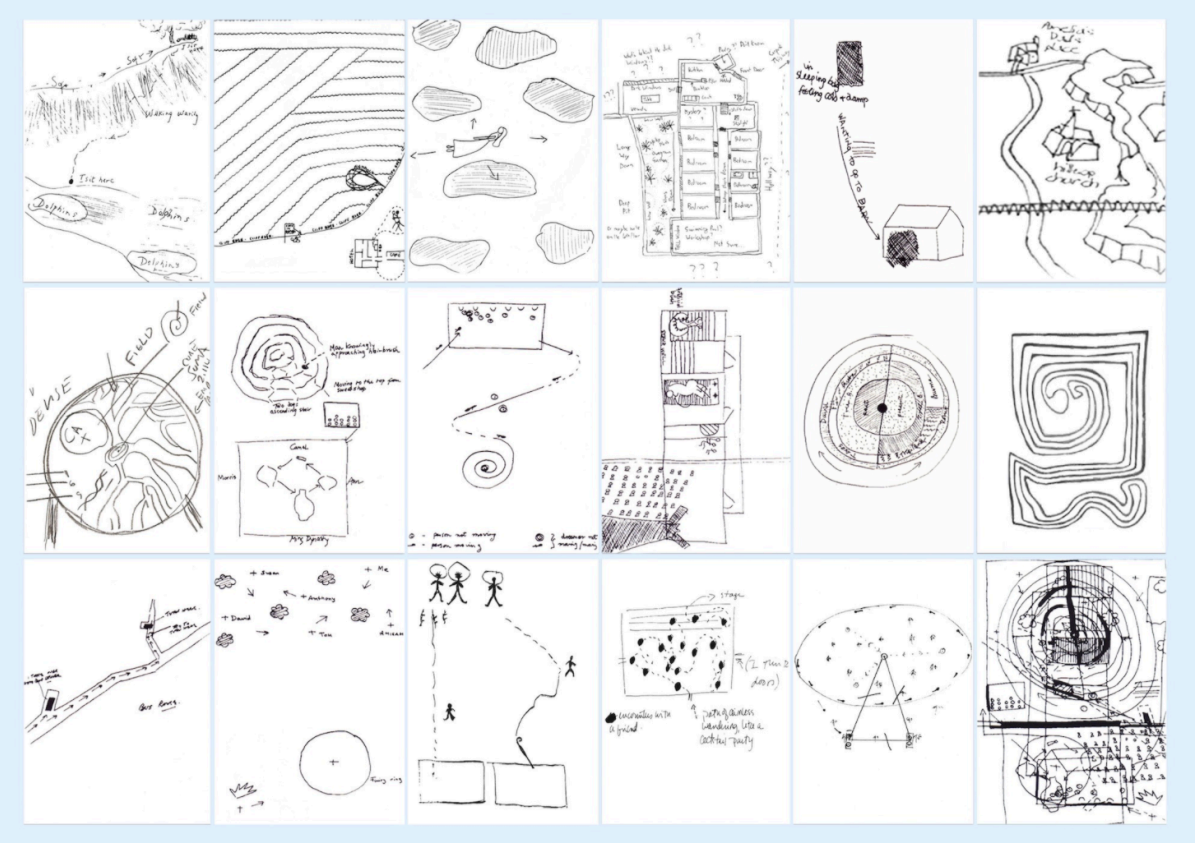
Susan Hiller, Dream Mapping, 1974. Participants sleeping in a field at Purdies Farm, Hampshire © The Estate of Susan Hiller

Elephant and Artsy have come together to present This Artwork Changed My Life, a creative collaboration that shares the stories of life-changing encounters with art. A new piece will be published every two weeks on both Elephant and Artsy. Together, our publications want to celebrate the personal and transformative power of art.

Out today on Artsy is Francis M. Naumann on Marcel Duchamp's Bicycle Wheel.

A sensation of being crushed. An inability to breathe due to the invisible creature sitting on your chest. Jerking awake as you slap thousands of spiders away from your body. Running through the corridors of your secondary school chased by a nameless, unseen horror. A face appearing in the rear view mirror of your car as you drive along alone. Throughout my late teens and early twenties I frequently experienced some variation of these and other nightmares: not every night, but often enough that the anticipatory fear of them soon developed into chronic insomnia. Too scared to sleep in case an evil dream came, I spent night after night in a tense vigil, afraid even to relax my muscles in case something "bad" seized the opportunity to take me by surprise.

It was around this time that I started to become interested in dreams—and nightmares—as a subject in their own right. As a literature student, it didn't take me long to come across, in a clumsy teenage way, Freud's Interpretation of Dreams. With no understanding of what psychoanalysis was, I read—or tried to read—the book as a kind of manual: I read it like a GCSE Biology textbook. Although nightmares aren't treated fully as a subject in their own right, for Freud they function along the same basic principle as dreams themselves: if all dreams are a form of wish fulfilment, then nightmares are their masochistic shadow.



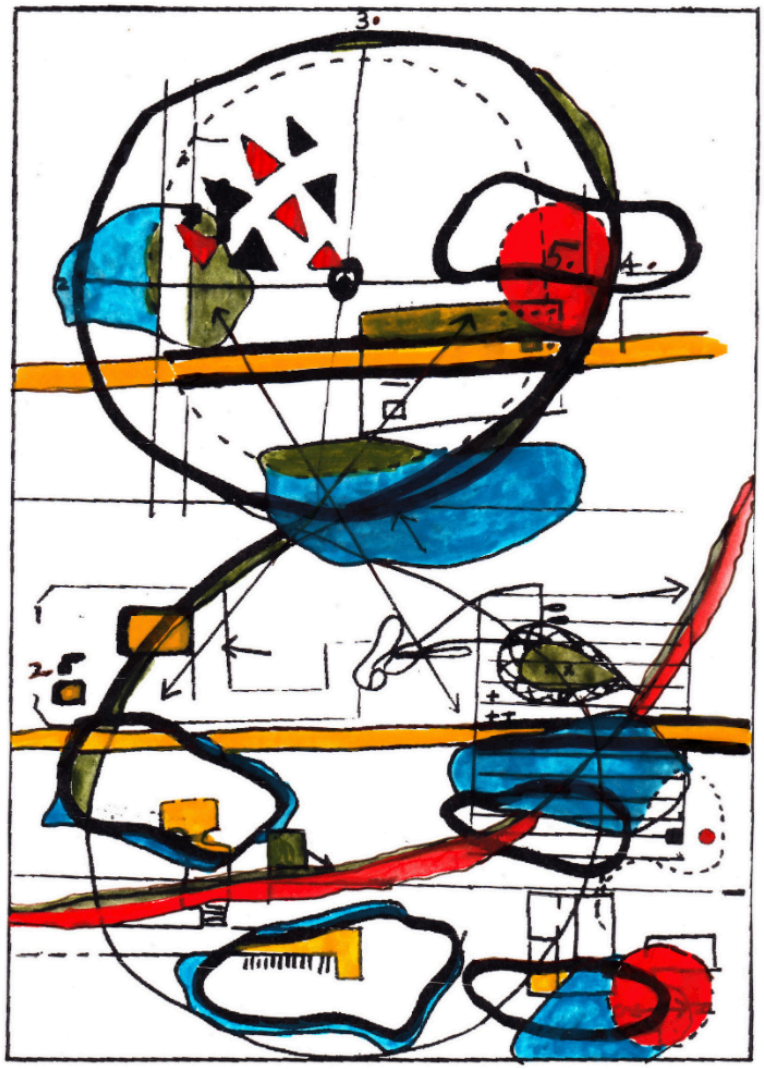
In 2011, the year I turned eighteen, Tate Britain staged a landmark retrospective of the artist Susan Hiller's work. One of the most prolific conceptual artists of the twentieth century, Hiller defined her own practice as "paraconceptual". Her work, which encompasses and complicates the boundaries between video installation, performance art, photography, and writing, pushes against "rational" and "scientific" categories of truth and fiction. Her refusal to acknowledge divisions between "real" and "false" experiences roots her work in the paranormal and the psychoanalytic.

For Hiller, the entire framework of reality is built on productively permeable foundations. For the teenage version of myself that went to see the Tate Britain exhibition in 2011, it was Hiller's explicit engagement with the subconscious mind that drew me to her work. It was a strong enough pull to entice me to spend a day's worth of earnings from my waitressing job, and get the train into the city from its furthest rural suburbs.

“I developed a heightened fear of my own subconscious, and a sense of my sleeping self as the enemy within”

Hiller’s From the Freud Museum (1991-1997) was the work I was most interested in: a display comprising of fifty archive boxes, filled with small and intriguing objects like herbs and holy water, originally installed at the Freud Museum in 1994. I was keen, too, to see her automatic writing, interested in anything that imposed some kind of order on the chaos of the psyche, but it was in another room—arguably one of the least visually exciting—that I realized what I had been looking for all along.

Dream Mapping (1974) came out of Hiller’s previous “group investigation”, The Dream Seminar (1973). Attendees of the seminar met weekly to discuss their dreams, a way of turning individual subconscious experiences into a collective project. The dream work of the following year was more ambitious: a cross between a performance, an event and an experiment. Seven dreamers slept for three August nights inside “fairy rings” made of Marasmius oreades (also known as “Scotch bonnet” mushrooms) that naturally occur in a field in Hampshire. The participants then recorded their dreams each morning in words, drawings and diagrams, which were later copied onto transparent paper and superimposed on each other, producing composite collective dream maps.



Susan Hiller, Dream Mapping, 1974. Composite group dream map for the night of August 23-24, 1974 © The Estate of Susan Hiller

Fairy rings loom large in the folklore of Western Europe. Variously considered to be marks made by the dances of fairies, the rituals of witches, or the marks left by the Devil's milk churn, to enter them is considered to be a dangerous game, and the courting of ill fortune. Although familiar with the fields that made up the landscape of my adolescence, and no stranger to camping holidays, the idea horrified me. Alone out there in the field, in dangerous nightmare territory (for what could be more conducive to a night terror than entering a fairy ring?), Hiller's dreamers were exposed and vulnerable.

“Alone out there in the field, in dangerous nightmare territory, Hiller’s dreamers were exposed and vulnerable”

But, I realized, they were not alone. In fact, the project allowed for a way of being together even during sleep. In those layers of tracing paper, the elements of each sleeper’s subconscious mind ceased to be an individual horror, a composite monster of repressed violence waiting to pounce, but one point on a map that led to another, a feature in common with another person’s experiences.

Susan Hiller didn’t really “teach me” how to sleep, and it wouldn’t be completely honest to pretend that I don’t still sometimes struggle with nightmares, with the kind of fear that encourages me to forget to turn the bedside light off, but these insomniac interludes are increasingly few and far between. Psychoanalysis deserves some credit, too. What Dream Mapping did for me at eighteen, however, was show me that dreaming doesn’t have to be something associated entirely with private and individual experience. I learned that the mind is not a problem to be solved, and that collectivity is a mode of living that belongs to the night as well as the day.

BBC News
1st February 2019

Obituary: Susan Hiller, the artist of neglected memories

1 February 2019

By Ashitha Nagesh
BBC News

"Ghosts are invisible to most people, but visible to a few."

Susan Hiller said this in 2005 at a gallery in London where one of her video installations was being shown.

For the piece, J-Street Project, she had spent three years filming clips of different street names in Germany that referred to a lost Jewish presence, such as "Judenstrasse" and "Judenweg".

She then put them together in a quiet montage, punctured only by the occasional oblivious honk from a passing van, or a glimpse of a pedestrian walking idly by.

"These street names are ghosts of the past, haunting the present," she said of the piece. "The street signs in my images explicitly name what's missing from all these places."

Ghosts were visible to Hiller. Not in a literal sense, of course, but she could see the histories that others had collectively forgotten - and through her art, whether it revived neglected memorial plaques or documented dying languages, she gave the rest of us a glimpse of these ghosts too.

Following a short illness, Hiller died on Monday 28 January at the age of 78.

'Connection, empathy, identification'

Hiller was born in Tallahassee, Florida, in March 1940 and grew up there and in Cleveland, Ohio.

As a teenager she had dreamed of being an artist. She noticed things that others didn't, and was curious about everything she came across.

But this inquisitiveness led her down a different path - and after doing undergraduate degrees in film and photography, and then archaeology and linguistics, in New York, she was awarded a fellowship to do postgraduate work in anthropology in New Orleans.

She was at the start of a potentially successful career in the 1960s, carrying out fieldwork in Guatemala, Mexico and Belize - but it didn't take long for her to realise that, while she loved exploring new cultures and ideas, something about anthropology didn't really sit right with her.

Susan Hiller, pictured in 2014, originally trained as an anthropologist

What bothered her about anthropology, she would explain decades later, was the discipline's claim to be objective. It was during a lecture on African art that she had a revelation.

"In contrast [to anthropology], I felt art was, above all, irrational, mysterious, numinous," she wrote in the foreword to a book she edited, The Myth of Primitivism. She realised she wanted to "relinquish factuality for fantasy".

"Words 'about' the peoples represented by the marvellous sculpture seemed redundant; the more facts, analyses and theories I had learned, the further away I felt from any real connection with them, and what I wanted was connection, empathy, identification."

And so, with that, she abandoned her doctoral thesis to become an artist.

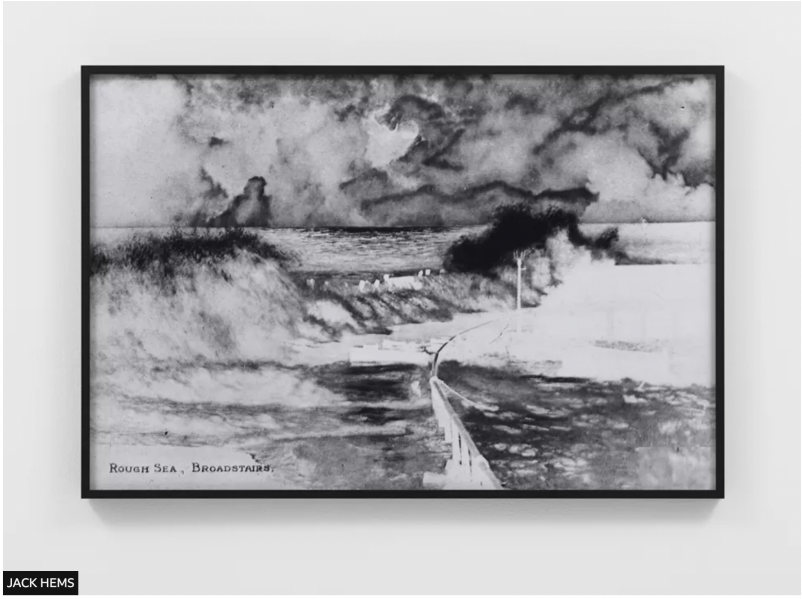
There's no denying that her love of travelling and her ability to read cultures was informed by her work as an anthropologist, too - although her son Gabriel Coxhead tells BBC News that constant references to her postgraduate training annoyed her.

"At the beginning of her career, some people felt that the sorts of overlooked or unusual phenomena she was investigating weren't suitable subjects for art," he says. "So sometimes her history as an anthropologist would get trotted out. I suppose it was meant to give her art legitimacy. But she knew her work didn't need justifying in this way."

Crashing waves

Hiller and her husband David then spent almost a decade living in different countries across the world - Morocco, India and France, to name a few - and even after moving to London in the early 1970s, they continued to travel and periodically live abroad.

On her first trip to the UK, visiting the seaside town of Weston-super-Mare, Hiller noticed something in all of the shops: postcards showing stormy waves crashing against various parts of the English coastline.

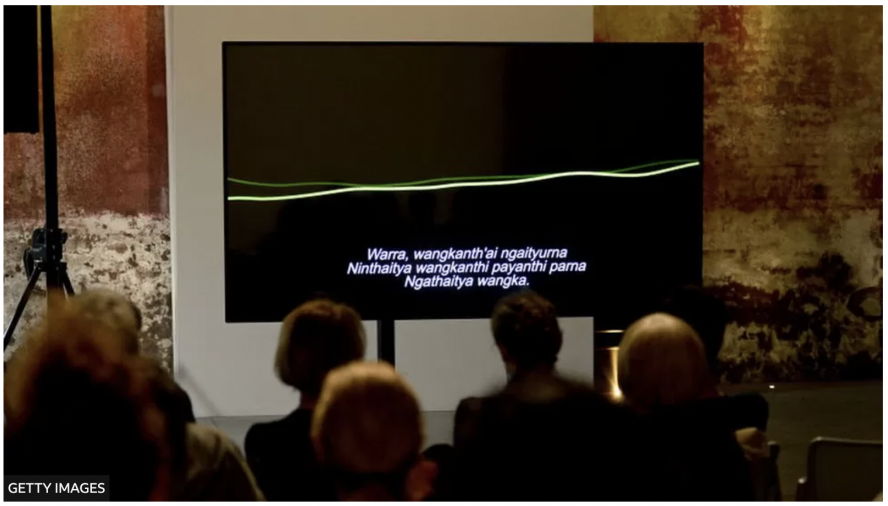


JACK HEMS

Susan Hiller spent years collecting seaside postcards of rough seas in England

Similar cards, she later noticed, were being sold in seaside towns all over England. None of the postcards named the photographers - but the images, she felt, said something profound about how the country was presenting itself to the rest of the world at that time. She spent the next four years buying the cards in every seaside shop she saw them.

Together, they became her first major artwork: Dedicated to the Unknown Artists.



People watch The Last Silent Movie, which revives extinct languages

About a decade later, she photographed a series of 41 memorial plaques dedicated to people who had died carrying out acts of heroism. A teenage girl who died saving a child from a stampeding horse, for example.

"What struck me was that [people] had sat in front of these perfectly visible objects for years and years," she is quoted as saying in a 2011 exhibition catalogue. "The objects had been, literally, invisible."

Years later, when Hiller was living in Germany in 2002, she noticed a street sign with the word "Jude" - Jewish - in it. For most people it blended into the background, but in that sign Hiller saw the lost memories of a community that had been tragically driven out of its home. So she spent three years documenting 303 of them for J-Street Project.

And in 2007, her video The Last Silent Movie resurrected haunting archive footage of the last speakers of languages that are now extinct.

These were the ghosts that only a few people could see.

'A different kind of truth'

Hiller started off working firmly in the conceptualist tradition in the early 1970s, with performance pieces that included - among other things - getting a bunch of her friends to spend three nights sleeping in "fairy rings" in an English meadow and map out the dreams they'd had.

Later, though, she would become a pioneer of so-called "new media" work, experimenting with film and audio recordings in a way that was well ahead of her time.

Through using this media to look at alien abductions, life-after-death, religion and dreams, Hiller became known as an artist of the paranormal - or as she called it, "paraconceptual".

In Psi Girls, Hiller compiles clips showing paranormal activity and 'witchcraft' in popular culture

But really it was her insatiable curiosity that meant that she was simply fascinated by the experiences of outsiders - the things that people try to tell the world, but that fall on deaf ears.

Take Witness, a work she made in 2000 - around 400 small speakers dangle from the ceiling, each one playing a different person's account of being abducted by aliens. They spoke numerous different languages, but their conviction and belief were the same.

In another work, Channels, multiple TV screens show people talking about having life-after-death experiences after being legally declared dead. And a series of photos from 2008, Homage to Marcel Duchamp: Auras, is a collection of portraits which people believe show their auras.

Susan Hiller's Homage to Marcel Duchamp, 2008 - a collection of 'aura photographs'

Did Hiller really believe people were abducted by aliens or had out-of-body experiences after dying, or that you could genuinely see someone's aura in a photo?

Some thought so, but this would be taking her work at face-value.

"For her, it wasn't about believing or not believing in aliens,", Mr Coxhead says. "What she was interested in was the fact that people believed they were abducted by aliens."

"It's a social fact of the world that there are reports of aliens, reports of out-of-body experiences... whether or not the reports are *true* is another thing, but the reports themselves are what she was exploring, and what that says about people."

She saw people's visions of aliens as no different to people's religious visions - which is also why, from 1969 until she died, she collected holy water from sacred sites from Wales to the Ganges.

These other-worldly experiences weren't factual truths, strictly speaking. But for Hiller, they represented a different kind of truth.

The Guardian
1st February 2019

The Guardian

Art

Obituary

Susan Hiller obituary

Conceptual artist who explored alternative belief systems and cosmologies

Oliver Basciano

Fri 1 Feb 2019 12.02 GMT

On the Edge, 2015, by Susan Hiller, was developed from an earlier theme of postcards bearing images of rough seas. Photograph: Susan Hiller/Lisson Gallery

In 1965 Susan Hiller was in New Orleans, sitting through a lecture on African art, during the final year of her doctorate in anthropology, when it dawned on her that she could pursue all the things that had originally interested her about anthropology through art. “My previous inchoate thoughts and feelings about anthropology as a practice and about art as a practice seemed to fall into place, in one complex moment of admiration, empathy, longing and self-awareness.”

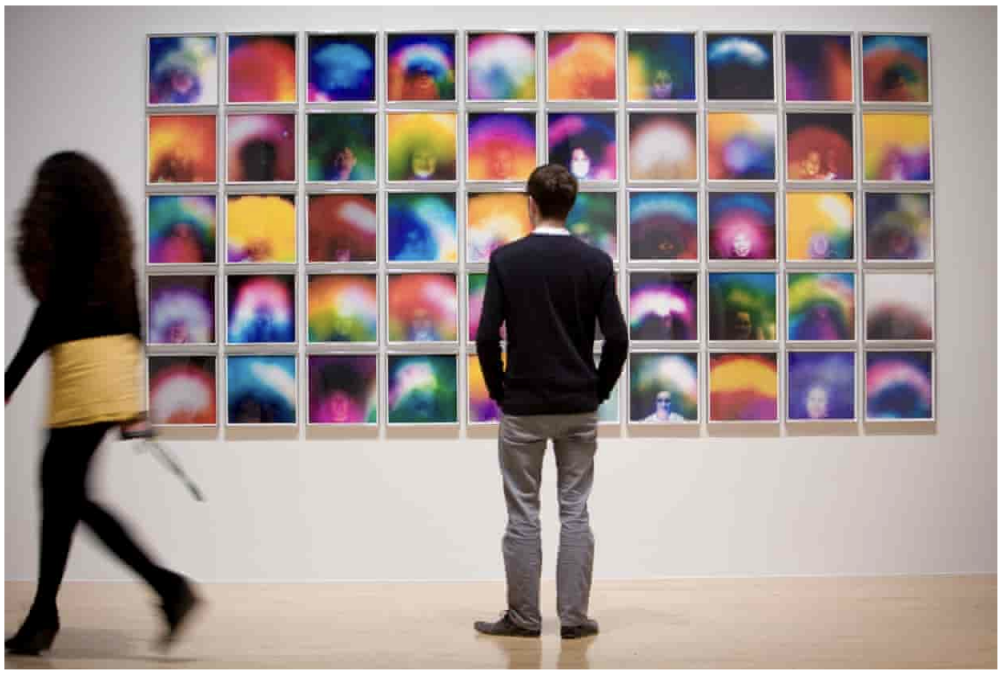
Although this revelation came quickly, Hiller’s celebrated career as a conceptual artist, which included investigations into auras, alien sightings and mystic rituals, and incorporated installation, film, painting, writing, sculpture and photography, did not start until she settled in London later that decade. There, initially flirting with the tail end of minimalism, and with nods to a burgeoning feminist art scene, Hiller began to channel the knowledge of alternative belief systems and cosmologies she had gained from her studies, and a restless passion for travel, into her art.

Hiller, who has died aged 78, staged her first exhibit in 1973, at Gallery House in London. There she showed an early version of Enquiries/Inquiries, an installation that incorporates two slide projectors displaying excerpts from American and British reference books. The supposedly objective information they contain reveals subtle cultural biases.

On an August night in 1974, Hiller organised a group of friends to sleep among the mushroom "fairy rings" of a field in Hampshire. Sharing their quarters with the farmer's horses, swaddled in blankets, some mothers wrapped up with children, the group were asked to record their dreams when they woke. The resulting notes and diagrams were meticulously transcribed into individual notebooks, which the artist incorporated into composite "dream maps" that were first exhibited at the Royal College of Art gallery later that year.

In 1976, in a solo exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, she showed Dedicated to the Unknown Artists, a collection of more than 300 seaside postcards arranged in grids, each bearing the caption "Rough Seas"; she developed the idea in the series Rough Seas from 1982 onwards and the 2015 work On the Edge.

She revisited the grid format frequently, as in 10 Months, originally shown at the Hayward Gallery in 1980, which documented her pregnancy with daily photographs of her body arranged in groups according to the lunar months.



Auras: Homage to Marcel Duchamp by Susan Hiller at Tate Britain, 2011. Photograph: Felix Clay/The Guardian

Throughout the 1970s Hiller experimented with “automatic writing”, a process by which, she claimed, numerous female spirits dictated letters through her. Each with different handwriting, these missives were shown framed and titled The Sisters of Menon. When Hiller’s husband tried to speak to them he was rebuffed; the sisters did not speak to men.

In 2016, Hiller was one of only three women featured in Tate Britain’s survey Conceptual Art in Britain 1964-1979. “I always wanted to be an artist,” she told Time Out magazine in 2015, in an interview to accompany an exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in London, “but by the time I was a teenager I became aware there were no women artists: none. Later, when I discovered some, they were always denigrated.”

Susan Hiller working on an installation in 2000. Photograph: Martin Argles/The Guardian

Hiller’s response was to tackle what she saw as conceptual material that already existed in common culture: her art projects also focused on recollections of near-death experiences and recordings of hauntings. “I’ve always been interested in the connection between the artist who is considered special, and celebrated as a genius, and ordinary people,” she said at the time of a 2011 retrospective of her work at Tate Britain.

Born in Tallahassee, Florida, to Paul Hiller, who ran a construction company, and his wife, Florence (nee Ehrich), Susan spent her early years in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1952, the family returned to Florida, Paul wishing to pursue a passion for driftwood sculpture. A natural introvert, with a love of reading, swimming and boating, Susan spent an uninhibited childhood in the town of Coral Gables. She obtained a driver’s licence at the age of 14 and, while at the town’s high school, encouraged by her father, entered and won an art competition, appearing on local television.

Susan Hiller in her studio in London, 2015. Photograph: Antonio Olmos/The Observer

In 1957, she went to Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts, to take a BA in American studies. On graduation in 1962, Hiller spent a year in New York, exploring her interest in film and photography at the Cooper Union, and archaeology and linguistics at Hunter College, before returning to study for a doctorate in anthropology in New Orleans and undertaking fieldwork in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize.

In 1961 she had met the British writer David Coxhead. They married the following year and embarked on a semi-nomadic life for several years, drifting between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Calcutta, Paris, Cornwall and Wales, before eventually settling in London. Hiller took odd jobs to support her art, including a secretarial position with the Skoda car company, though recognition was quick.

Throughout the 1980s she continued to exhibit regularly and internationally, and in 1988 was invited to lecture at California State University. She was a professor of art at the University of Ulster in Belfast from 1986 until 1991, and taught at the University of Newcastle from 1999 until 2002. She was ambivalent towards the lecture hall, however. “I felt I opened so many doors for people and they just ran through and trampled me,” she said in a characteristically blunt interview with the Guardian in 2005.

Her work, she said, was an attempt to “relinquish factuality for fantasy”, yet it was at times directly political too. At the Documenta art festival in Kassel, Germany, in 2013, she exhibited five jukeboxes situated in bars around the town, each loaded only with protest songs, and in 2017 showed The Last Silent Movie, a work from 2008, which features a blank screen accompanied by recordings of people speaking in dead or dying languages.

Hiller is survived by her husband and their son, Gabriel.

● Susan Hiller, artist, born 7 March 1940, died 28 January 2019

Art Monthly
November 2019

Susan Hiller, 'Ghost/TV', installation view

Susan Hiller: Ghost/TV

Matt's Gallery, London, 25 September to 27 October

In her 1977 essay 'Women, Language, Truth', Susan Hiller outlined the difficulties of making art in a culture that positioned her, as a female, as an other whose language made it difficult for her to speak. She summarised her essay in three points: '(1) all my ideas begin as part of the necessity for truth-telling in art practice; (2) not being entirely at home in the ordinary, dominant languages makes this less than simple. At the same time, it gives me a wide range of options; and (3) the greatest self-betrayal for an artist is not indulging in anarchic or careless opposition to rational politics, but in fashioning acceptable semblances of truth.' Although Hiller's practice would deviate from the explicit feminist frame under which she wrote this in the late 1970s, these concerns would occupy her practice for the ensuing decades as she inquired into that which mainstream culture considered irrational: the feminine, the near-extinct, the paranormal and the otherworldly.

Hiller's death at the beginning of this year (Obituary *AM*424) signalled the loss of an artist still creating vibrant work, but also presented a challenge: how to deal with the work of an artist whose practice was preoccupied with death after her own death? 'Ghost/TV', the first posthumous exhibition of Hiller's work at Matt's Gallery, takes on this question, exploring how traces of life filter into her work and processes in the aftermath of her death.

Perhaps the centrepiece of the show is the ten-minute video *Running on Empty*, 2017, filmed in 2015 but begun while Hiller was installing her installation *Channels* at Matt's Gallery in 2013. *Channels* featured more than a hundred TV monitors, flickering between standby blue screens and a green oscilloscope line, with voice-overs of humans recounting near-death experiences – characteristic of Hiller's interest in occurrences that fall into the realm of the irrational. *Running on Empty* records Hiller and Matt's Gallery founder Robin Klassnik tinkering with one analogue television found during the installation of *Channels*. Filmed in 2015, the pair manipulate the television displays, revealing the TV channels' names – '1. BBC; 2. BBC; 3. ITV' – before arriving at '7. FUCK' then '8. YOU' and, eventually, a message that fills the whole screen: 'WHO WOULD WANT TO LIVE FOREVER?' As the screen flickers colours, Hiller – heard but not seen – expresses fascination. This oddity feels more like a fragment of a process or a piece of one of her larger installations, but is nonetheless an all-too-perfect paranormal query from an installation about near-death experiences and also about Hiller's practice in general. In a 2015 interview about *Channels*, Hiller espoused her thoughts on the possibility of an afterlife: 'I think I'm completely neutral as far as death goes ... I give a lot of weight to the fact that quite possibly when you're dead you're dead.' The suggestion of something haunting in *Running on Empty* seems a fitting rebuke to her own statement. Hiller's death may be certain, but the prerogative of her questions about death and rationality remain with us, as do these traces of her.

Hiller's presence is summoned further in *Red Proofs*, a sequence of three of the artist's handprints on canvas from 1969. The painting is one of two surviving works from Hiller's 'Handpaintings' series, the rest burned and interred in other work as relics of sorts. *Red Proofs* is the sort of work that will appear in future Hiller retrospectives, creating a coherent narrative of her turn away from anthropology towards art, but here it feels charged with the potent aura of the artist's presence.

A third object recalls Hiller's 1990 installation at Matt's Gallery, *An Entertainment*. Technically advanced for its time, *An Entertainment* enlarged a 16mm recording of a Punch & Judy performance into a four-channel video projection, emphasising the sheer menace of Punch's abuse of Judy as a form of children's entertainment. In the years following the work, Hiller collected and made Punch & Judy puppets. Fittingly, in the last years of her life, she kept a handmade skull-faced ghost puppet – which haunts Punch for his misdeeds – on her home desk, which appears in the gallery. The ghost is decidedly not an artwork, but feels like it could fit in one of Hiller's larger constellations of material. This is perhaps the sharpness of 'Ghost/TV': in life, Hiller saw the cultural value in materials of misunderstanding, transforming them into art. In death, she leaves behind a whole set of materials, art or not-art, that ask us to continue that project.

The low-fi quality of 'Ghost/TV' counteracts the recent trend of Hiller's media-intensive installations, or even the sprawling scale of some of her earlier work. In its simplicity, it captures the thing that made Hiller's work so potent all along: a sensitivity to the strange artefacts of life that prove the exception to the dogmas of culture, cracking the semblances of truth about life, death and rationality that impose a chaotic order on the world.

Andrew Hibbard is a writer living in London.

Art Monthly
January 2019

ART Monthly

SUSAN HILLER 1940-2019

Susan Hiller was visiting Weston-super-Mare with her husband David Coxhead when she came across a postcard of some stormy waves with the text 'Rough Sea, Weston-super-Mare' on it. 'I thought: that's a very interesting description. So I bought a couple of them,' she said. 'And then, when we went to Brighton I found "Rough Sea, Brighton" – and then we endlessly discovered them everywhere.'

She started a collection. Each card was logged: by location, format – vertical or horizontal, its colour, the message on the back recorded. In 1976 *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists*, 1972-76, was exhibited; over 300 images of waves crashing into shores around Britain, systematically arranged in grids alongside the logs of data. The work not only brought into being a new set of cultural artefacts – the Rough Seas postcard – but also suggested that in some part of the collective imagination, the UK was surrounded by churning oceans, the coast assailed by wild forces that had only been documented by unknown artists – mainly women – working as hired hands.

The work was received well. It also caused a small scandal: it was considered unseemly, by some, that the austere and serious strategies of Conceptual Art should be employed on such kitsch, popular material. This was the first mature work of a series of powerful and profound works unfolding over a 43-year period, each dedicated to the exploration of possibilities and potentials though a focus on material dismissed, overlooked or considered marginal by mainstream culture.

Hiller was born in Tallahassee in 1940. She gained a BA in American Studies at Smith College, Massachusetts, then studied film and photography at Cooper Union, New York and archaeology and linguistics at Hunter College. She worked on a doctorate in anthropology, with fieldwork in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. In New York she met Coxhead, a writer, and, on her decision to abandon her doctoral thesis in favour of art, they moved to London.

Hiller described London then as open and exciting, bohemian, countercultural, with a focus on radical and non-object-based art practices. It also seemed to her a culture still shaped by men – famously her first London show in 1974 was compared to the contents of a handbag by one male critic. Her involvement in feminist debate and her own principled and uncompromising behaviour made her a significant figure both at the time and later for younger women artists.

Hiller believed passionately in the importance of art and in each project she brought her fierce intelligence to bear on a different arena of human experience. *Monument*, 1981, used documentation of Victorian memorial plaques in Postman's Park, dedicated to people who died saving the lives of others, in an installation about memory and representation. *An Entertainment*, shown at Matt's Gallery in 1990, used footage shot at Punch and Judy shows, some of it by her young son, in a large, immersive and terrifying video installation of looped cackling and brutal assault in a normalisation of violence. *Witness*, 2000, invited the visitor into a floating cloud of loudspeakers telling stories of individuals' experiences of extraterrestrial contact. *Channels*, 2013, at Matt's Gallery, went to the event horizon of consciousness, a bank of analogue TVs flickering with lights and voices talking about near-death experiences. The works aren't editorialised, they set up situations for the viewer to experience something and to come to their own conclusions.

Her practice was innovative in its use of technology: *An Entertainment* was the first synced multiscreen video projection work in Europe; *Dream Screens* in 1996 used the nascent world wide web as subject and platform. But more influential still is her understanding of technology as a site, a place where the deep human need for the numinous can play out, and where repressed forces might emerge. *Belshazzar's Feast*, 1981, is the image of a fire on a television combined with audio recordings of people's experiences of seeing alien faces on their domestic screen. *Magic Lantern*, 1987, focused on experiments by Latvian scientist Konstantīns Raudive, who thought that the voices of the dead might be heard encoded in the tape recordings of empty rooms. Hiller pioneered a serious interest in ideas and territories that are now shaping contemporary thinking as we try to understand a world of technology haunted by strange returns and desires.

One of the reasons that Hiller's work has such a magnetic pull on so many people is because it demonstrates resoundingly that contemporary art can engage with the fabric of what it is to be human, not through vast abstract statements of intention or hyperbole, but through an engagement with the material of life, of consciousness, its stuff, its matter. She proves that art is more than a commodity: it is an engine of possibility.

Richard Grayson

The Guardian
30 January 2019

The Guardian

Susan Hiller

Susan Hiller: an artist who chased ghosts – and took no prisoners

Her multimedia artworks dwelt on the persistence of the past and the phantoms of cultural anxiety, entertaining, challenging and terrifying viewers

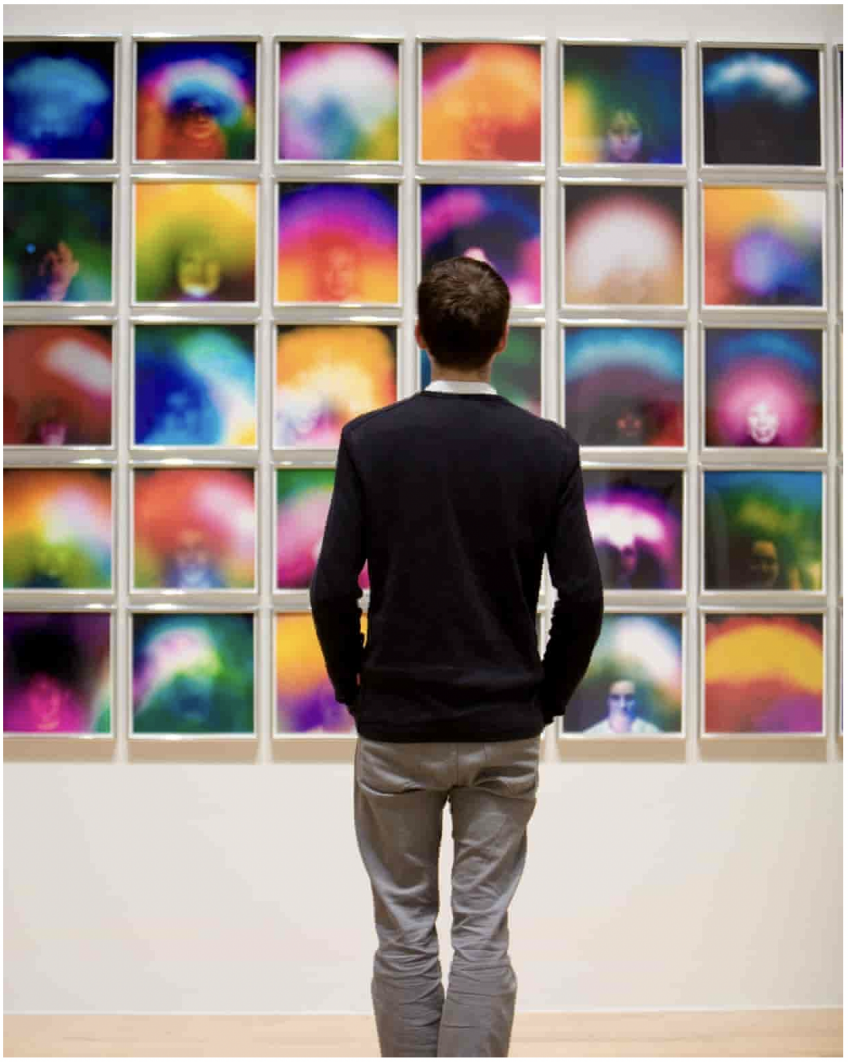
Adrian Searle
@SearleAdrian
Wed 30 Jan 2019 14.59 GMT

Artist Susan Hiller at her exhibition in the Bundestag parliament, in Berlin, in 2008. Photograph: Rainer Jensen/EPA

You never knew what Susan Hiller was going to do next, and I sometimes think neither did she. Experiments in automatic writing, burning all her paintings, creating a museum collection of detritus, communicating with the dead. Her art was not programmatic, but driven by curiosity and an alertness to her surroundings.

She recognised that what an artist does happens in the context of place, and society, and the culture in which she finds herself. Hiller's training as an anthropologist sharpened her view and provided something of her methodology, such as it was. She mistrusted objectivity. In her art, in her curating and in her teaching, she was full of curiosity, insight, integrity, humour and irony.

“Whatever catches my eye could be the starting point for a work,” she said, “and my commitment to the remaindered, rejected and overlooked things and ideas we collectively create, can and has been read metaphorically as a commitment to bringing into visibility marginalised social and political others.”



Susan Hiller’s Auras: Homage to Marcel Duchamp at Tate Britain. Photograph: Felix Clay/The Guardian

Hiller sometimes positioned herself as a “second wave conceptual artist”, and her art was always distanced from the dour, visual Puritanism and polemically narrow - as well as largely male - conceptual art world of the late 1960s and early 70s. But her appeal reached far beyond the hardcore fans of conceptual art - even though Ludovic Kennedy described her as being part of the “loony contingent” of video artists.

“To be a woman and an artist is a privileged position, not a negative one,” Hiller said. “When I speak of being a woman artist, I’m suggesting a position of marginality is privileged. If you are marginal, you know two languages, not just one. And you can translate and bring into language insights that have been previously unarticulated. So I consider, like being a foreigner, being a woman is a great advantage.” She never shied from complications.

Several works for me stand out. If I say they are memorable, they are themselves also acts of remembering, or re-enacting memory. In her 2007 The Last Silent Movie we watch a black screen. Subtitles provide the only image, the translation of recording of speakers of vanishing languages from all over the world. Hearing these last speakers of Manx, Ngarrindjeri, Potawatomi, Kora, Xokleng and dozens of other disappearing languages (some now lost entirely, apart from their preservation as archival sound recordings) is immeasurably sad. It tells us something about the narrowing of the world, about exclusion and extinction and the homogenisation of cultures.

Susan Hiller’s Monument at Tate Britain. Photograph: Felix Clay/The Guardian

The 2002-5 J Street Project began on her first visit to Germany on a DAAD scholarship, when she found herself on Jüdenstraße in Berlin. This led her to cross and recross Germany photographing and filming every street sign and location still prefixed by the word Juden (Jew). She located 303 Jüdenstraßes, Judengasses and Judenwegs, back alleys and country lanes, city streets and unmade paths.

Birds sing. Trucks rumble by, people go about their everyday lives. It rains, and there’s a gorgeous sunset. The camera keeps seeking out the street and road signs. The film, and attendant photographs and book, dwell on the persistence of the past. “Haunted,” I wrote after first seeing the work, “is the only word.” More than a coda to the Holocaust, it is a portrait of Germany in the early years of the 21st century, and to my mind one of the best works of the new century.

“All my work deals with ghosts,” Hiller once said. The ghosts were sometimes real, but mostly the phantoms of cultural anxiety. Hiller reworked the Punch and Judy show into a terrifying video installation, orchestrated commercial film footage of young girls with psychokinetic powers, and filled a room with dangling amplified speakers, like a swarm of flying saucers, each broadcasting first-hand stories of alien abductions. She worked with the experiments of Latvian psychologist Konstantīns Raudive, who believed that tape recorders left in soundproofed rooms could pick up the voices of the dead - including Winston Churchill and James Joyce.

Susan Hiller’s artwork Witness at the Chapel, London. Photograph: Sarah Lee/The Guardian

Hiller had a great touch with all this material, making all the conundrums vivid and intriguing. Rather than unmasking enigmas, she unhinged us, entertained and terrified us, and left us with questions. “The meaning of art is collaboratively formed in the relationship between viewers and works,” she once observed. “A major factor in all the work I’ve ever made, it seems to me, is the designation of spaces where viewers and readers can experience their own roles as active participants - collaborators, interpreters or detectives. Not editing out and not forcing strange juxtapositions or unanswered questions to conform to theory is an aspect of my style, almost a signature.”

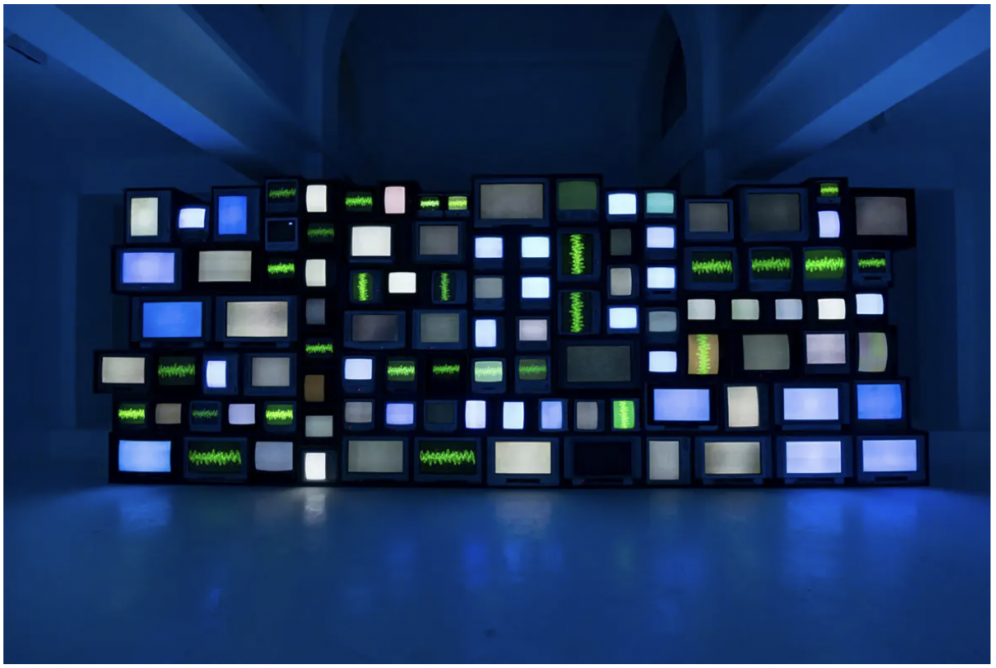
Hiller wrote brilliantly, acerbically, incisively, critically. She was also a great teacher, provocative and challenging. Briefly teaching beside her at the Slade in the late 1980s, I felt as much scrutinised as any student. In conversation and in public talks, she took no prisoners. On Tuesday, recalling Hiller, the artist Tai Shani tweeted that “I admired and was intimidated by her, and very, very much respected her work and her ways. Susan once very well advised me: ‘don’t be scared of being a monster.’”

Hiller cared very much about getting things right, and believed in art’s seriousness, without ever becoming pompous or humourless or inaccessible. She once confessed a long-standing wish to blend art and science, poetry and analysis in her work. She did all that, and a great deal more.

The New York Times
1st February 2019

The New York Times

Susan Hiller, 78, Maker of Dreamlike Conceptual Art, Dies



In Susan Hiller's installation "Channels" (2013), disembodied voices come from a wall of more than 100 television sets and tell their stories of near-death experiences, with the sound of each voice visualized in the electronic patterns created by an oscilloscope. O.H. Dancy, via Lisson Gallery

By Richard Sandomir
Feb. 1, 2019

Susan Hiller, a leading British conceptual artist whose video, audio and photographic installations ingeniously explored extinct languages, alien abductions, girls with psychic powers and the Holocaust, died on Jan. 28 in London. She was 78.

Her son, Gabriel Coxhead, said the cause was pancreatic cancer.

Ms. Hiller's mysterious and dreamlike art, which often made use of marginalized and forgotten artifacts of modern culture, played at the precipice between reality and the subconscious and often explored the paranormal.

"I consider that definitions of reality are always provisional, that we are all involved collectively in creating our notions of the 'real,' " she said in an interview for the catalog to an exhibition of her work at the Site Gallery in Sheffield, England, in 1999.

Born in the United States and educated as an anthropologist, Ms. Hiller was particularly adept at using video to look anew at reality. One vivid (and frightening) example of her ability to manipulate moving images is "An Entertainment" (1990), a video installation that uses traditional Punch-and-Judy puppet shows to expose the violence to which children are routinely exposed.

The artist Susan Hiller in 2014. "I consider that definitions of reality are always provisional," she once said, "that we are all involved collectively in creating our notions of the 'real.'" Carla Borel, via Lisson Gallery

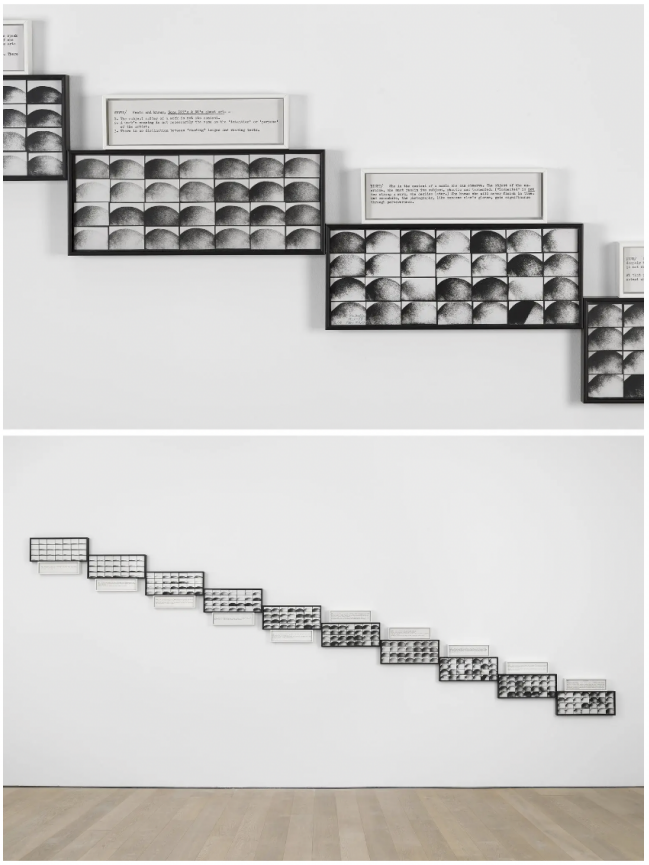
She traveled through England to film the puppet shows with a Super 8-millimeter camera, assisted by her son or her husband, David Coxhead. After intensifying its colors, magnifying its images and slowing down the action, she projected the grainy footage onto four giant screens that surrounded viewers with the heightened brutality. The effect was to make those watching feel as if they were in a box.

“I went to many puppet shows when my son was growing up, and I’d hear the littlest children crying and wanting to leave, and their parents saying, ‘Oh, look at Mr. Punch, isn’t he funny?’ or ‘Don’t be silly, there’s nothing frightening here,’ ” Ms. Hiller said in an interview with Sculpture magazine in 2012. “I realized that denial is a ritual in our society — we’re training to deny our own experiences and laugh at our fears.”

In “The Last Silent Movie” (2007), she used a single screen to tell the story of dying languages through archived recordings of people speaking them and subtitles.

In “Psi Girls” (1999), a color-drenched work about the breadth of female imagination, she edited, slowed, tinted and enlarged scenes from five films (including “Firestarter,” “The Fury” and “Matilda”) featuring girls with telekinetic or psychokinetic powers. She added rhythmic handclaps and nonverbal gospel singing, and projected the work simultaneously onto five large screens.

“Psychokinesis is subject matter,” she said in an interview in 2018 with The Quietus, a British digital music and pop culture magazine. “It’s not the content of the work. Everyone wants to know if I believe in ‘this stuff’ because it perplexes them; I provide them with something that they don’t want to think about, although it’s all actually just special effects.”



At top is a detail from Ms. Hiller's "10 Months" (1977-79), an arrangement of 10 black-and-white photographs, accompanied by excerpts from her journal, documenting her pregnancy. Below is the entire work. George Darrell, via Lisson Gallery

There were no screens, only voices, in "Witness," an eerie 2000 work in which people's accounts of encounters with aliens and U.F.O.s — taken from newspapers and other media and read by actors — are related through hundreds of tiny speakers dangling from a ceiling in a darkened space. At one point the jumble of voices narrows to a single one that comes from all the speakers.

The critic Richard Dorment of The Telegraph called the installation "breathtakingly beautiful" when it was exhibited at the Tate Britain museum in London in 2011. "Hiller's true subject was the human need to tell stories," he wrote, "to hold a listener spellbound and in so doing to join hands with Homer or the Brothers Grimm."

Disembodied voices are heard in Ms. Hiller's ghostly installation "Channels" (2013). They come from a wall of more than 100 analog television sets and tell their stories of near-death experiences, with the sound of each voice visualized in the electronic patterns created by an oscilloscope.

Susan Hiller was born on March 7, 1940, in Tallahassee, Fla., and grew up in Cleveland and Coral Gables, Fla. Her father, Paul, had pharmaceutical, construction and insurance businesses. Her mother, Florence (Ehrich) Hiller, was a psychometric tester, a job that involved measuring people's skills, personality traits and knowledge.

"I always wanted to be an artist," Ms. Hiller told The Guardian in 2015. "This was my fantasy as a child."

Ms. Hiller's "After Duchamp" (2016-17), part of a series of homages to other artists.
Jack Hems, via Lisson Gallery

A corner of her bedroom became her art studio, but she became discouraged by the lack of respect given to female artists. While in high school, she read a pamphlet by Margaret Mead that inspired her to become an anthropologist.

After graduating from Smith College in Massachusetts, she studied for her Ph.D. in anthropology at Tulane University in New Orleans and did fieldwork in Central America. But during a lecture on African art at Tulane, she was overwhelmed by the images in a slide show and decided to become an artist and not finish her doctorate.

“I felt art was, above all, irrational, mysterious, numinous: The images of African sculpture I was looking at stood as a sign for all this,” she wrote in the foreword to “The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art” (1991), an anthology that she compiled and edited.

She and Mr. Coxhead, a British writer she had married in 1962, traveled to Europe, Asia and Africa before they settled in England in the early 1970s. There she began creating conceptual art that was less austere than what other conceptual artists were doing at the time.

One of her early works, “Dedicated to the Unknown Artists,” developed from 1972 to 1976, exemplified her career-long approach to using ephemera or overlooked materials in her art.

In 14 framed panels, she collected more than 300 postcards showing sea waves crashing onto British shores — her homage to the artists who painted the pictures. In spirit, it is linked to “Monument,” a work from 1980 and 1981, in which she photographed 41 memorial plaques to local heroes that she had found in a park in London. She arranged the photographs in a diamond shape on a gallery wall; in front of the photographs she placed a park bench where visitors could put on headphones to listen to an audiocassette recording of Ms. Hiller speaking about memory and identity.

“It’s a private moment for you, but for other gallery visitors looking on, you’ve become part of this public monument,” her son said.

In addition to her son and her husband, Ms. Hiller is survived by a brother, Robert Hiller. She lived in London.

In 2002, Ms. Hiller was in Berlin when she was startled to see a sign for Judenstrasse — literally “Jews Street” — and wondered how many other paths, lanes and roads with similar names still existed in postwar Germany. After three years of travel, she found her answer: 303, among them Judendorf, Judenhof, Judenweg and Judgengasse. Some had been renamed during the Third Reich but had their names restored during denazification.

“Some of them were very ancient streets, going back to the Middle Ages; some still had Jews living on them when they were taken away by the Nazis,” she said in an interview at the Tate Liverpool museum in 2008 with its director at the time, Christoph Grunenberg.

The Telegraph
24th April 2019

The Telegraph

Susan Hiller, artist whose work explored the more mysterious aspects of human existence – obituary

By Telegraph Obituaries
24 April 2019 • 12:40pm

Susan Hiller at her exhibition 'Social Facts' in Turin in 2018 | CREDIT: Giorgio Perottino/Getty Images

Susan Hiller, who has died aged 78, was a conceptual artist who dealt in the mysterious and the numinous; she explored such elusive phemonena as auras, mystical rites, UFOs, near-death experiences and the act of remembering.

Her field of inquiry was the no-man's land between the rational and the irrational, between belief and disbelief, between the seen and the unseen. She had little truck with objectivity: "I consider that definitions of reality are always provisional," she once said.

Language in all its forms – including automatic writing, dead languages, endangered dialects – was central to her work. She worked in several forms, such as ethereal installations, sound pieces and photomontages, while some of her most evocative pieces were assemblages of found objects – Dedicated to the Unknown Artists 1972–76, for example, which collected into grids more than 300 old postcards depicting waves crashing on to British seashores.

'Monument 1980-1', which consists of plaques memorialising people who had died trying to save others' lives | CREDIT: Timothy Taylor Gallery

Her breakthrough piece, Monument 1980-1, consisted of 41 photographic enlargements of plaques she came across in Postman's Park near St Paul's Cathedral, each of them memorialising people who died trying to save others' lives. It was accompanied by a recording of Susan Hiller speaking about how the dead live on in our imagination.

One of her best-known pieces was From the Freud Museum, which harked back to her beginnings as an anthropologist, consisting of 50 archaeological storage boxes containing a random assortment of objects, some personal and ephemeral, others of historical significance – from vinyl singles and cow creamers, to ancient South American artefacts.

Her The Last Silent Movie, on disappearing languages, was widely seen as one of the high points of the 2007 Berlin Biennale: subtitles carried translations of passages in languages that included Manx.

Part of the 'Wild Talents' show: 'It's got awe,' said the critic Tom Lubbock | CREDIT: Nina Byrne Communications/

A typical Hiller piece was her installation Wild Talents, part of the three-handed show "ESP – Contemporary Artists Investigate the Paranormal" at the IKON in Birmingham. On two floor-to-ceiling screens she played snatches of film depicting children with paranormal powers, from films such as The Shining, Carrie and Poltergeist. The critic Tom Lubbock wrote: "What Wild Talents offers is a very persuasive simulation – far better than its source movies – of what it would feel like to have such powers. It's got awe."

Susan Hiller was born in Tallahassee, Florida, on March 7 1940, and was brought up initially near Cleveland, Ohio and then Coral Gables in Florida. Her father ran a building firm.

She was a keen artist from childhood – she won an art prize that led to an appearance on the local equivalent of Blue Peter – but she was put off as she grew older by the way female artists seemed to be relegated to the second division: "I always wanted to be an artist," she said in 2015, "but by the time I was a teenager I became aware there were no women artists: none. Later, when I discovered some, they were always denigrated."

Part of the 'Social Facts' exhibition | CREDIT: Giorgio Perottino/Getty Images

Instead, inspired by a pamphlet written by Margaret Mead which she came across in her school's careers office, she looked towards anthropology, eventually taking a PhD in the subject at Tulane University in New Orleans in 1965.

She carried out fieldwork in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize, but became disillusioned with academic anthropology – despite Mead's towering presence, the discipline was skewed towards the male experience of culture and society. While she was idly sketching during a slide lecture on African art she had a creative epiphany: art was to be her calling. She decided to "relinquish factuality for fantasy".

In 1962 she had married the British writer David Coxhead, and the couple spent several years travelling before ending up in Britain, where she remained, spending time in Cornwall, Wiltshire and Wales, but living mostly in London.

While establishing herself as an artist Susan Hiller took on various secretarial jobs, including a spell as a receptionist for Skoda, then had her first exhibition in 1973. She had regular solo and group shows from then on. She was a professor of art at the University of Ulster from 1986 to 1991, and as well as a spell at the Slade, taught at Newcastle University from 1999 to 2002.

Susan Hiller was protective of her private life, once remarking: "I may have had as many abortions as any other female artist, but I'm not going to make that part of my CV."

In 2011 she had a retrospective at Tate Britain. Though the principal thrust of her work came from the workings of the psyche, she was also capable of making powerful political statements. In 2013, for the Documenta art festival in Kassel, Germany, for example, she placed five jukeboxes in bars around the town, each loaded with protest songs.

Susan Hiller's husband survives her with their son, Gabriel, who writes about art and curates exhibitions.

Susan Hiller, born March 7 1940, died January 28 2019

Artforum
05 March 2019

ARTFORUM

SUSAN HILLER (1940–2019)

March 05, 2019 • Ann Gallagher

Susan Hiller in 2006. Photo: Nanda Lanfranco.

IN SUSAN HILLER'S EARLY VIDEO INSTALLATION *An Entertainment*, 1990, scaled-up images and the amplified sound of Punch and Judy performances transform popular children's entertainment into a terrifying spectacle. Aspects of our collective culture considered unworthy of serious attention—in this case, puppet shows she watched with her young son—repeatedly formed the starting point for a wide range of innovative artworks produced over the artist's remarkably productive five-decade career.

Susan's art often focused on the subconscious and the paranormal. Early experiments with automatic writing and her work *Dream Mapping*, 1974, were followed by monumental installations such as *Psi Girls*, 1999, an orchestrated sound and video installation of telekinetic actions, and *Witness*, 2000, an elaborate arrangement of hanging speakers, emitting oral testimony of alien and UFO sightings.

Spoken and written language appeared consistently throughout Susan's work, and she was the author, coauthor, and editor of several books. German street signs containing the prefix *Juden*, or Jew, were painstakingly researched for *The J Street Project*, 2002–05, while recordings of endangered or extinct languages were accompanied by projections of the sound waves they produced in *The Last Silent Movie*, 2007–08.

Artifacts were similarly accumulated. Postcards entitled "Rough Sea," from locations around the British coastline, are arranged in fourteen panels in *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists*, 1972–76, and numerous museum boxes filled with themed objects feature in the installation *From the Freud Museum*, 1991–96.

"I don't make singularities," Susan told *The Observer* in 2011. "I work in series. It's a political commitment. There's a non-hierarchical principle of organization in the work. I combine a Minimalist aesthetic with a Surrealist sensibility."

Her postgraduate studies in photography and film, archaeology, linguistics, and anthropology, as well as the years in the 1960s she spent traveling and living in different parts of the world with her partner, the writer David Coxhead, no doubt contributed to the very particular approach of this fiercely intelligent and endlessly curious artist. Susan was a youthful seventy-eight when she died this January. Though women of her generation struggled to achieve visibility and respect in their careers, her work featured regularly in international exhibitions alongside much younger artists in recent decades, and known and loved pieces from across the span of Susan's life were consistently visible in galleries and museums. For those fortunate enough to have known her, we will fondly remember her insight, integrity, irony, and generosity. Susan will be very much missed, but her work will live on.

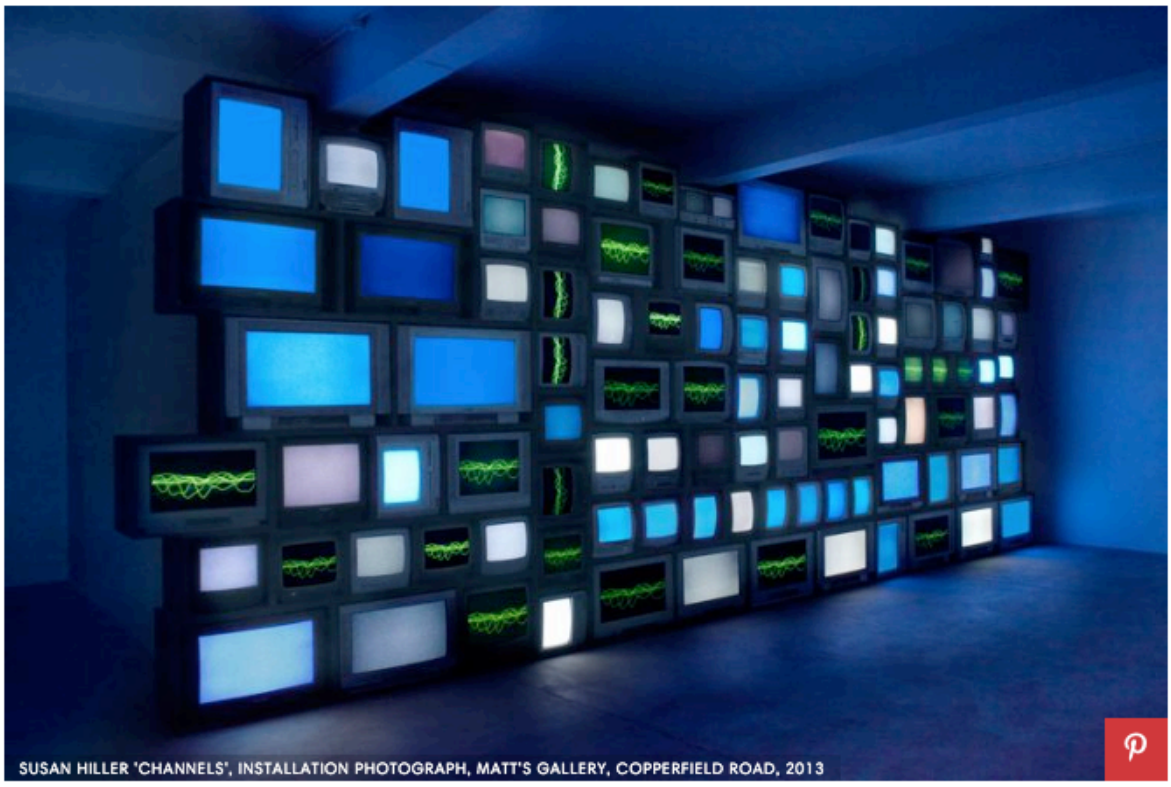
Ann Gallagher is director of collections, British art at Tate, and was curator of "Susan Hiller," a retrospective exhibition held at Tate Britain in 2011.

Harper's Bazaar
24 September 2019

Harper's BAZAAR

Discover the pioneering work of the conceptual artist Susan Hiller

Hiller, who died in January, will be the subject of exhibitions at Frieze Masters and Matt's Gallery



SUSAN HILLER 'CHANNELS', INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPH, MATT'S GALLERY, COPPERFIELD ROAD, 2013

"No one wants to be praised for being a 'woman artist'. Art is art," said the American-born artist Susan Hiller, speaking at a *Bazaar Art Week* event in October 2018, a few months before she passed away at the age of 78. This autumn, Hiller will receive the recognition she has always deserved – as a great artist who merely happens to be a woman – when she becomes the subject of tribute shows at both Frieze Masters and Matt's Gallery in Bermondsey.

OLIVER HOLMS

At Frieze Masters, Lisson Gallery will host a solo booth of Hiller's work, exploring themes of domesticity, family and gender roles. Some of the artist's earliest-known works will go on show for the first time, including *Small painting with long title* (1969), a pair of handprints in striking black and red acrylic that tell a very human story in an understated way.

Susan Hiller, *Small painting with long title*, 1969

Over in Bermondsey, the gallerist Robin Klassnik, who worked with Hiller for 45 years and was a close friend, will stage an exhibition in her honour at Matt's Gallery. Hiller had been about to begin planning the show – her fifth with the gallery – at the time of her death and it has since been developed in close collaboration with Klassnik and Hiller's son, Gabriel Coxhead.

"The works we have chosen for the show sit within the wider trajectory of Susan's career, which was all about articulating hidden messages and meanings that she would reflect back to the culture at large," says Coxhead of the two exhibits he and Klassnik have selected. The first, a video titled *Running on Empty* (2017), originated from the creation of her monumental audio-sculptural installation *Channels* (made from 102 cathode-ray tube television sets playing reports of near-death experiences). During its construction, Hiller and Klassnik discovered a television set that spontaneously emitted a haunting message of its own; the resulting video documents their unfolding attempts to capture the phenomenon on camera. The second exhibit, a hand puppet of a ghost or skeleton, has a macabre quality to it – Hiller kept it on her desk at home as a kind of talisman. "Both pieces are interesting because they bring into question their own status as art," says Coxhead.

Susan Hiller, The Last Silent Movie, 2007/2008

COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF SUSAN HILLER AND MATT'S GALLERY LONDON

Throughout her career, Hiller took an interest in numinous, otherworldly ideas, without ever subscribing to a particular ideology herself. “The work is about belief, but her own belief didn’t come into it,” says Coxhead. “She was interested in working with materials that were repressed or hidden.” This October, a new generation of audiences will have the opportunity to unearth some of the mysteries of her extraordinary art.

Susan Hiller unravelling the weave of a canvas for *Work In Progress*, Matt’s Gallery, Martello Street, 1980

COURTESY OF THE ESTATE OF SUSAN HILLER AND MATT'S GALLERY, LONDON. PHOTO: ROBIN KLASSNIK

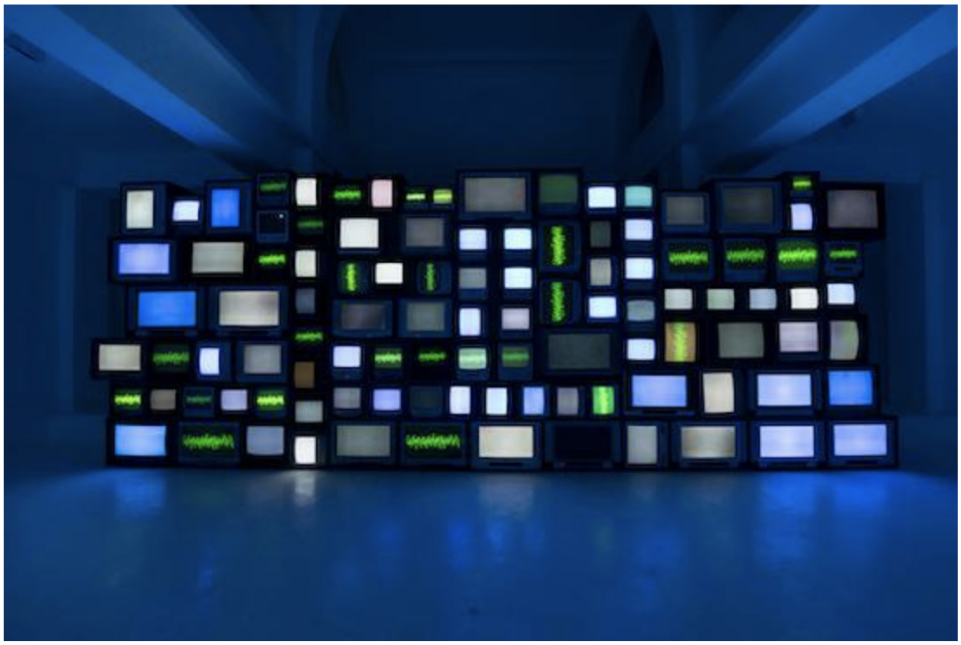
‘Susan Hiller: Ghost/TV’ will be at Matt’s Gallery, 92 Webster Road, London SE16, from 25 September to 27 October. Lisson Gallery will exhibit Susan Hiller’s work at Frieze Masters, which runs from 3 to 6 October.

The Quietus
11 November, 2018

Demons And Dancing Dinosaurs: Perceiving And Creating With Susan Hiller

—Allan Gardner , November 11th, 2018 10:53

A conversation with conceptual artist Susan Hiller, touching on the nature of viewership, the paranormal, and the marked changes in what it has meant to be a practicing artist over the last half century



Susan Hiller, Channels, 2013, Video installation with sound, Dimensions variable © Susan Hiller Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Susan Hiller could be regarded as one of the most important conceptual artists of the twentieth century. Her work has engaged with themes and subject matters long before their perceived importance within the art world and has done so in a thought-provoking, engaging manner.

Having relocated from Florida to London towards the tail-end of the 1960s, Hiller used the nature of otherness found in such a move as an inspiration that remains present in even her most recent works. The subject of a major retrospective at Tate Britain, her work has entered the conceptual art canon as she continues to research, make, and present new work at an enviable pace.

Her work continues to ask and present relevant questions, with the recent *Resounding* series tackling the limits of our understanding and perception in the face of an ever expanding universe.

In researching *Belshazzar's Feast, the Writing on Your Wall* [a multimedia installation from 1983-4 combining video, colour photography, drawing, sound and interior furnishings reimagined in 2015 as a 'Campfire version' consisting of a stack of television sets showing fire, soundtracked by Hiller's improvised singing, media reporting paranormal sightings and familial recordings], I was reminded of a story in which a child is taken camping by his father.

He's sat in the woods by the fire and he starts to believe he sees shapes in the flames. He tells the father and his father says that the shapes are demons, he has to stay up all night, staring into the fire with his eyes open until he fights the demons off. If he closes his eyes before this, the demons will drag him through the fire and into hell.

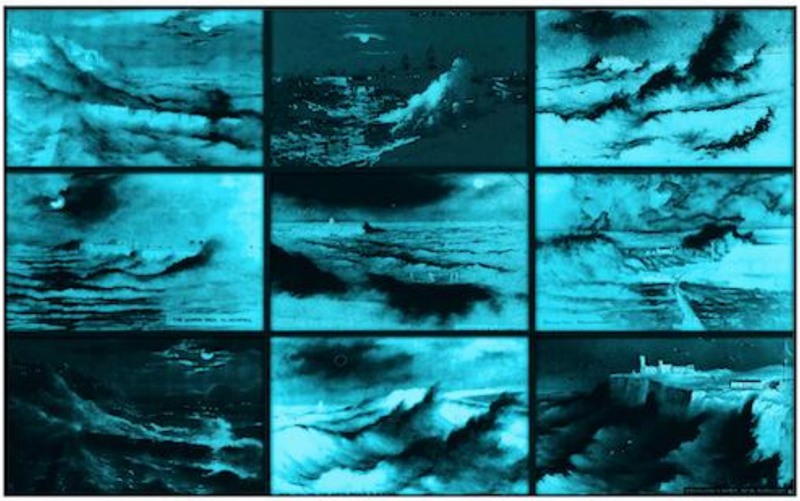
Actually the campfire version was first shown in a somewhat different form in my show at the ICA in 1986. The original living room version refers to the real meaning of *unheimlich*, something repressed or unacknowledged in the home that emerges with uncanny, frightening effect. The campfire version relates to the way people like to tell stories around a campfire, frequently ghost stories – both situations can be frightening.

Your idea that we receive information from multiple points is foregrounded in the campfire version, but basically the effect on viewers is the same in both iterations. The work is set up to draw people in, to encourage empathy. You can accept the experience at face value or you can reject it, it's up to you.

I want to say something that relates to your really horrible story about a campfire. I always like to tell this about *Belshazzar's Feast* because it's the way people sometimes misunderstand it completely. A man who always liked my work told me that he absolutely hated this piece. I asked him why and he said "you put in all those devils. Why are you making me watch all these devils?"

I said, "You are putting the devils there, not me". But he never believed me.

Other people tell me, "I love the piece! I saw dancing dinosaurs!" They think I make animation and insert it under the fire imagery... I would like people to realise that the moving blips of light are triggering images. I want to give back that self-awareness to people. But if they insist on ignoring the fact that they're making the images, then the work has failed.



Susan Hiller, Rough Moonlit Nights (Cyan), 2016, Glicee print on Hannemuhl Photo Rag, 101.6 x 76.2 cm, 40 x 30 in © Susan Hiller Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Can it fail? If you've presented something that can trick a viewer in such a way that they refuse to believe they've even been tricked, that seems like an enormous success for revealing the power of the mind.

Well, my interest in setting up these situations is in creating a conscious awareness of how we operate. That we are simultaneously creating and perceiving the world, that the two processes are entirely related and usually simultaneous. That's what I'm interested in.

Is that what you were saying in your later work, *Psi Girls*, from 1999? [A video installation depicting a series of girls and young women manipulating telekinetic abilities, with the footage lifted from films]. *Psi Girls* has been discussed as a kind of ode to girl power or claimed that it shows how the media misrepresents the bourgeoning sexuality of young women, putting a fear element into it.

A newspaper said that. It's like when people ask me "Do you really believe in this?" Do I believe in colour? Why does it matter? What's to believe? I'm an artist.

Psychokinesis is subject matter. It's not the content of the work. Everyone wants to know if I believe in 'this stuff' because it perplexes them, I provide them with something that they don't want to think about, although it's all actually just special effects...

These are all possible interpretations but basically I was showing what the media shows us. The interpretation is available, multiple interpretations. I know what my own is.

The reason I used the gospel choir on the soundtrack is that the compulsive rhythm aims to drive you to belief. The construction of the work [two minutes soundtracked, two minutes silent] is an attempt to demonstrate at least two modes of viewing, immersive and distant scrutiny. You have the option. That's the situation that I consider all of us to be in, that's why I'm sharing it. This is a long way from witchcraft, paranormal – anything like that.

That's actually one of the reasons that I wanted to do this interview. The prevalent theme that I found in researching your work has always been opportunity.

When you look at an art work you have to start somewhere. I find that I am interested in setting up situations that are empathetic to people. You can enter into it or you can withdraw from it but you have to realise that that's who we are as a society.

Susan Hiller, Rough Moonlit Nights, 2015, Archival dry prints, 51 x 76 cm (each panel) 20 1/8 x 29 7/8 in © Susan Hiller, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

That reminds me of the quote from Gertrude Stein's 1926 essay 'Composition as Explanation' that can be paraphrased as: *Nothing changes from generation to generation except what we are perceiving at that moment*. I feel that that links directly to what you're saying. From generation to generation, the setting has changed. It's the evolution of *Belshazzar's Feast*. The idea that we are now being surrounded by media, but it's being condensed so as to stop us from noticing.

That's interesting. I can't necessarily comment on that directly but I do know that artists can do a variety of different works but they're always about the same thing because you only have one being. You just find different ways of speaking about it.

In my recent *Resounding* works [audiovisual installations including transcriptions of the big bang, pulsars and plasma waves; a morse code message from a lucid dreaming experiment; static interference from radio and television programs containing traces of the big bang; and the voices of individuals describing their experiences of unexplained visual phenomena], I'm attempting to represent scientific descriptions of cosmic phenomenon.

These phenomena are only communicable through mathematics (which I don't understand) or through sound. Scientists translate light waves to sound online for our benefit. So when we experience the sounds, what are we actually experiencing? How does that relate to the way that we try to speak about these sorts of things and to feel their reality?

I am trying to focus on ways of creating a structured situation for people to realise how distant we are from experiencing some things that are said to be part of our world, knowledge that needs to be taken literally on faith....

It's quite similar to your piece *The Last Silent Movie* [A 22 minute video piece consisting of endangered and extinct languages spoken, subtitled on a black background]. I remember hearing something about the discussion around what it means for a language to die and a community to die but what I found most interesting is that there are things which used to be explained with these languages that we no longer have terminology for. The idea that we can't talk about certain things because we either don't want to or that we don't have the tools to describe them is an interesting dichotomy.

That's the situation we're at – if we don't start learning soon, we're not going to be here. I feel quite apocalyptic at the moment.

I think what you've said is true, although it wasn't my intention in that work. It comes across because using the human voice is physical. Your relationship to someone talking to you is a physical one that's very special. It's like touching. It has an intimacy that the other senses don't provide.

Of course, you experience people in other ways, but it's not the same. When you hear people talking, it's vibrations touching your ear. You compile an image of who they are. The *Last Silent Movie* provides a much more complex experience than just reading about a dying language.

It's interesting you should mention that. Researching for this interview, I had one of your works playing on some laptop speakers. My partner was in bed and she got up to ask me to use headphones because this sort of disembodied tinny voice was echoing down our hallway, sounding very unsettling. I think particularly because of the context of the paranormal within your artwork.

That's interesting because there were not – and now are – a lot of artists exploring the paranormal. They're doing things like séances. To me that's not getting anywhere. The fear that people have is very real because it's a whole area that our society categorises as frightening. It's death, it's haunting, it's ghosts, blah blah blah… It frightens people. But is anyone frightened by a recording of a deceased musician, or watching deceased actors in an old film? These contradictions are part of our culture. If we were from a different culture, we would have a very different attitude towards this kind of thing.

Even around 100 years ago, there was the occult boom in Europe – the Parisian Mesmerists, Crowley, etc.

Of course, it was a way of broadening out what the mind is. I suppose it is still continuing. The fact is that people want to see aliens when in the past it would have been angels. We have to put it in our own terms. It's the problem we have when faced with certain experiences: How can we represent it?

Do you feel like these experiences can sometimes be limiting due to their ease of reproduction? For example, I was introduced to your work as "This is Susan Hiller, she is a feminist artist making art about feminism" however there are other viewers focusing more heavily on the paranormal or 'other' aspect of your work, giving it context that way.

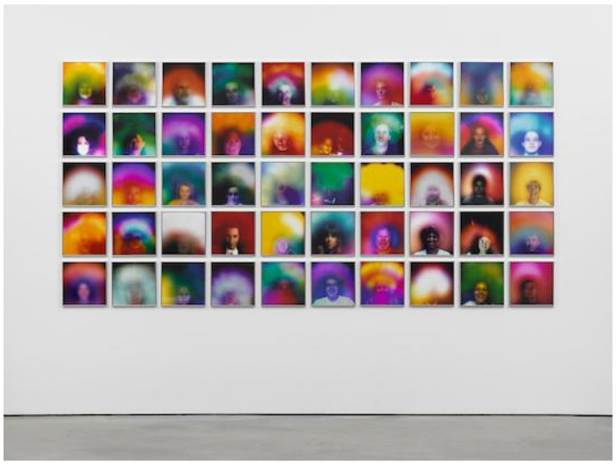
I'm all these things but I resent all of this categorisation. There is a difference between art and advertising. Advertising targets a potential market that's already recognisable and you want to target with your imagery. If I include women in bikinis, I assume this will appeal to a specific group. I don't think that's what art tries to do.

Art creates an audience that was previously disparate from the way it presents un-codified ideas in some kind of formal order to be considered. You end up with an audience that perhaps recognises itself as sharing some insights, but it's not like you're all wearing the same trainers.

The artists who target known groups and use their art as a logo do very well commercially. I'm not saying that it negates their work but it's different from my work, maybe because I'm from a different generation.

I'm not sure if it's necessarily generational. If I were to think about the work that I was making in relation to a particular audience then I wouldn't really consider myself to be making art, I would be producing a commercial product.

I'm not sure it's that close a relationship. If artists gave up as soon as they sold work, if they considered selling work to be reprehensible, nothing would happen. There has to be a balance.



Susan Hiller, Homage to Marcel Duchamp: Aura (Blue Woman) 2017, Giclée print, 182.5 x 121.5 cm 71 7/8 x 47 7/8 in © Susan Hiller, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

With art, you can be sidelined. You can be taken away from what you could ideally be doing. Success can be one of those things that can sideline you. It would be very depressing to think that only mega-multi-millionaires were able to experience your work. These people are not necessarily always nice or interesting. It would create the question of exactly what you were doing for this to be the group your work appeals to. One of the joys of being an early conceptual artist was that nobody bought anything so we were all very pure!

When I first showed *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* [an early work consisting of postcards, charts, maps, one book, one dossier, mounted on fourteen panels], I did a piece of writing that described myself as a curator. This was me introducing the act of collection as something that you do in art. A collector expressed an interest in purchasing some – not all – of the postcard panels. Of course, I said no. I didn't realise that nobody had really seen a work like this that had fourteen parts. It was looked at like different drawings or paintings with a shared formal language instead of a conceptual project in fourteen sections.

Nobody ended up buying that work for about thirty years until the Tate bought it. We were also very privileged in those days. it was cheap for us to live and cheaper materials were what we had. It necessitated this kind of making.

I think that kind of living was still going on even in the early 1990s. I do look on people who were able to leave art school and immediately support themselves with the dole whilst concentrating on their work with a certain amount of envy.

And so you should. In the 1970s, in London, that's what everybody did. They weren't sitting around, they were working. This was how you supported yourself as an artist or a writer or musician. Art school was free. You probably received a maintenance grant. You didn't have to work however many hours as well as studying, it's probably one of the reasons art schools are far less exciting nowadays. The students aren't there half the time because they're working at paying jobs. This is a great cultural tragedy.

People's are increasingly making use of one-liners in art. Only artists doing very well financially can actually afford to make slow, complex work. We are seeing a mass exodus of artists from this country because they can't afford to live here. What artists need is time, that's the only thing you can guarantee.

There are some advantages for artists working now. There has never been access to information like we have. Almost everything is available freely online. It's so vastly different to how things were before. Making works like you made with *Channels* [a multi channel video installation] used to be almost impossible but now we have the ability to show audiovisual work or digitally focused work anywhere in the world. We can send works to galleries via email.

You have to be very tough to continue under difficult circumstances. You need to recognise them as difficult circumstances and push on. We're never alone, you know. If you have an idea, you must recognise that there will be many other people with this same idea. It's always surprised me, as someone who has taught a lot, why some new graduates suddenly are taken up and others are not. Looking at this from a distant perspective proves it's really not a horserace where one horse wins. I don't know what it is like, but it's not like that. You just have to work.

Somebody asked me a few years ago, “Why are you hiding in Britain?” The reason is that I have no context here. When I arrived here, nobody knew who I was. To this day I ask myself why I am still based here not out networking in New York or LA, and I've come to the conclusion that it's just not for me. I like the situation of being in a world that I don't know very well. It's interesting for me. It's all surprising.

Hiller's work can currently be seen at the Staatliche Kunstammlungen, Dresden, Germany, and her work was the focus of recent survey shows at The Polygon, Vancouver, and at the Officine Grande Riparazioni, Turin

LISSON GALLERY

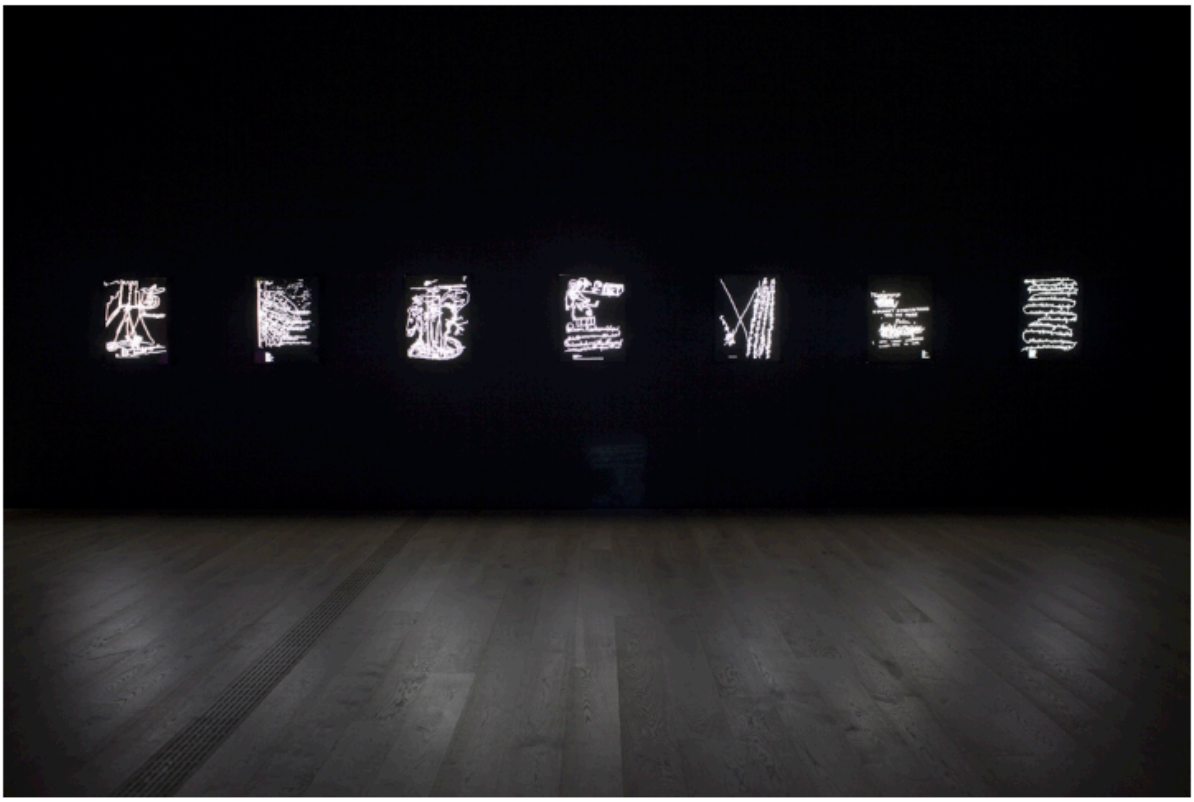
Hyperallergic
27 August 2018

HYPERALLERGIC

How Susan Hiller Has Foregrounded Empathy in Her Art

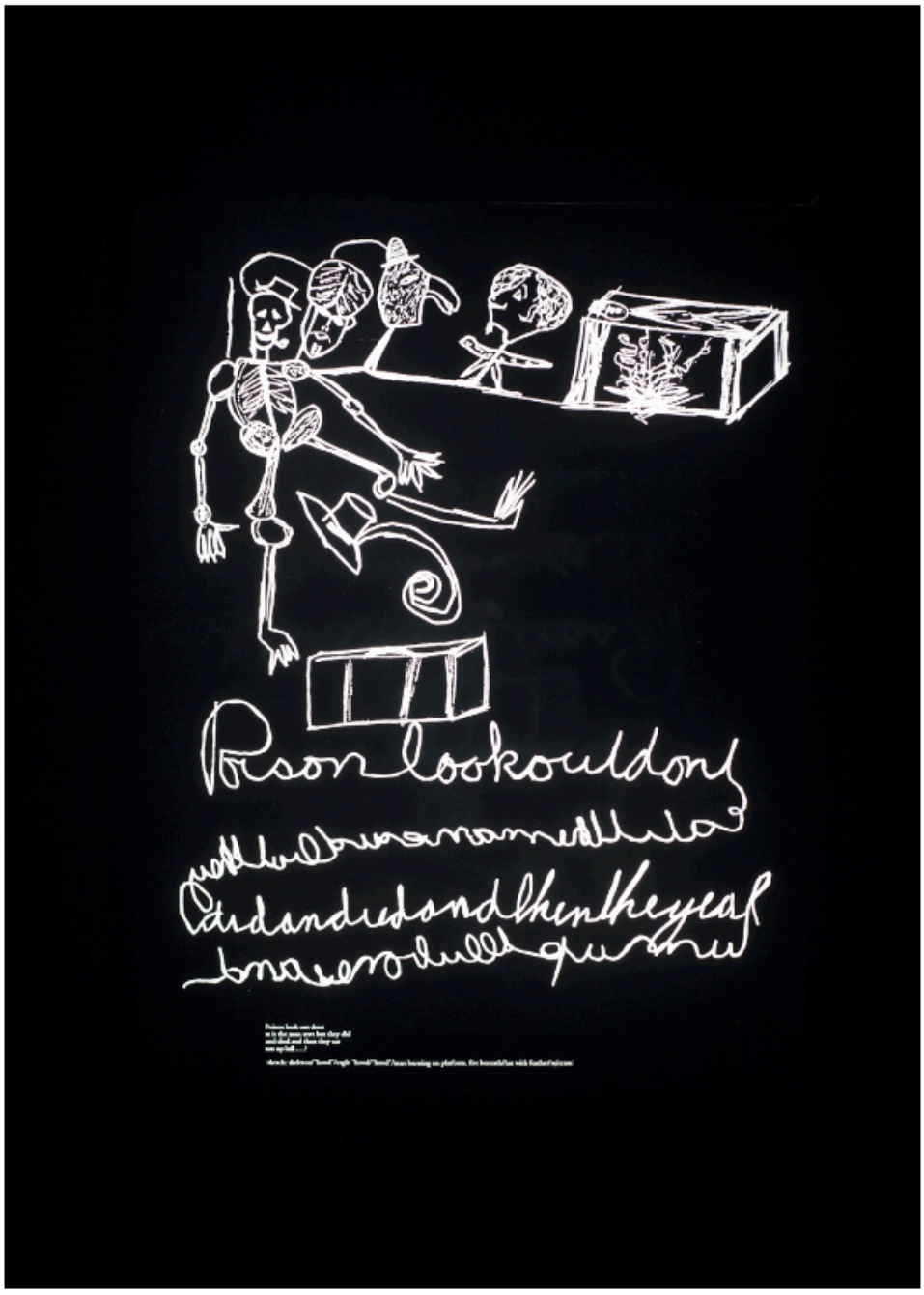
This exhibition of Susan Hiller's 50 years of work, creates an environment that begs thinking about empathy and its role in making and viewing art.

Caitlin Chaisson August 27, 2018



Susan Hiller, "From India to the Planet Mars series" (1997 – 2017), unique photographic negatives in lightboxes, each panel: 67.5 x 52 x 12 cm (© Susan Hiller; courtesy Lisson Gallery, photo by Amy Romer, 2018)

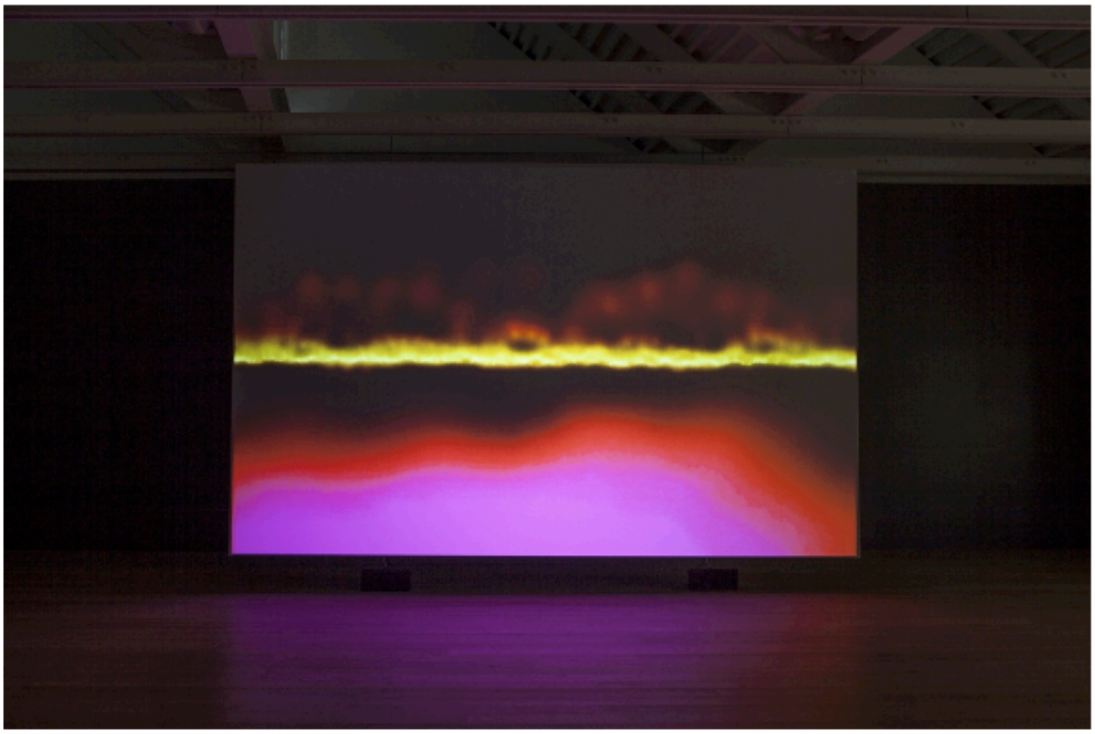
VANCOUVER, British Columbia — “Scoffers cannot alter fate.” The barely legible handwritten line scrawls across one of the automatic drawings in Susan Hiller’s series *From India to the Planet Mars* (1997–2017). *Scoffers cannot alter fate,* I repeat to myself as I witness Hollywood representations of telekinetic acts and earnestly listen to descriptions of UFO encounters. *Scoffers cannot alter fate,* Hiller seemed to be saying in a public talk delivered at the exhibition opening, when she addressed the absurdity of having to repeatedly answer the question, “Do you believe?”



Susan Hiller, detail of “From India to the Planet Mars (29) series” (1997 – 2017), unique photographic negatives inlightboxes, each panel: 67.5 x 52 x 12 cm, (© Susan Hiller; courtesy Lisson Gallery, photo by Amy Romer, 2018)

Susan Hiller: Altered States is the first solo exhibition to be presented at North Vancouver's newly transmogrified Polygon Gallery, previously known as Presentation House Gallery. The exhibition narrows the spectrum of the artist's 50-year-long practice into a concise selection of works that address the potencies of altered states. For Hiller, whose work emerges out of the unexplained, the dismissed, the denied, or the ridiculed, the notion of belief or disbelief is misguided. From the paranormal to the occult, these phenomena and experiences already exist in cultural life as social facts. The more pressing question to be asked is: what are the implications?

In her talk, Hiller subtly, though repeatedly, stressed the significance of empathy. Referring to her training in the field of anthropology, she said, "in art, the viewer can be forced into a situation that creates empathy, which cannot be done in the social sciences." Empathy, a feeling that increasingly haunts contemporary culture as an apparition of something gone missing, is the ability to vicariously experience the feelings or thoughts of another, even without those sentiments being communicated in a fully explicit manner. Empathy is both challenging and prosaic. A mode of making contact with the inexplicable, using imagination to inhabit a new position.



Susan Hiller, "Resounding (Infrared)" 2013), single projection video installation with sound (© Susan Hiller; courtesy Lisson Gallery, photo by Amy Romer, 2018)

The difficulty of translating the unequivocal into something that can be shared is apparent in the hypnotic sound and video installation "Resounding (Infrared)" (2013). A glowing, vibrating band of light spans the width of the screen, as though it were both a horizon and an undulating sound wave simultaneously. The gallery space is engulfed in cosmic noise. A sonic experience is composed out of audio transcriptions documenting the Big Bang, pulsar and plasma waves from the Earth's radiation belt, dream experiments, and unexplained sightings of objects in the sky. As the title implies, the mysteries of the universe are both unmistakable and invisible to us, and our perception of these events require various audio-visual translations.

As "Resounding (Infrared)" progresses, we hear a lengthy compilation of UFO reports from the Witness Archive. As speakers try to recount their experiences, they struggle with language. Uniquely singular incidents begin to sound alike. Each speaker attempts to forge equivalencies for the listener: it was as bright as a car headlight; the size of a three-story building; it was as fast as the speed of light. The dialogue clings to exact dates and precise times of occurrences, as though temporal continuity were an anchor in the world we share and understand together, as we're asked to consider otherworldly possibilities. Amidst the fumbling of words, Hiller carefully indicates the irreducible nature of these experiences. None of the spoken accounts are played in their entirety. The speakers are abruptly interrupted with the crackling frequency of white noise, a familiar sound that few people realize contains audible traces of cosmic background radiation from the Big Bang. We are wrapped back into the beginning sequence once again, where the mysterious is embedded in the banal. As translations dovetail with interruptions, empathy must fill the gaps.

Susan Hiller, "Psi Girls" (1999), five-screen video installation with sound (© Susan Hiller; courtesy Lisson Gallery, photo by Amy Romer, 2018)

The way in which one body can communicate with another body is explored in the work "PSI Girls" (1999), a five-screen video installation that projects footage from popular and cult films that depict the psychic power of young women. By way of movie magic, we are able to witness the protagonists' telekinetic abilities. Pencils hover, playing cards orbit, and water glasses tremble from the intent and concentrated gaze of girls. The marked absence of touch in the videos is complicated by the musical track, taken from a field recording of the gospel choir at St. George's Cathedral in North Carolina. The score is a clapping percussion that crescendos, generating a palpable suspense. The battery of this intense sound underscores the forcefulness of these remarkable acts, heightening the paradoxical experience of touch.

Each scene is overlaid with a spectral color, as though the installation itself has been dispersed through an optical prism, reducing the projections into their pure forms. In one scene, a young girl's powers are tested in a laboratory setting. Scientists are careful to keep their own physical distance, working at a remove behind glass walls and foil suits, measuring her abilities through a complex scenario of electrical wiring. In moments like these, Hiller breaks down the purported distinctions between rational and irrational behavior, confronting us with the instabilities and double standards of these divisions.

Hiller frequently draws from popular culture, which can be seen in the context of her explorations into shared consciousness. "G – – STS" (2012) is an arrangement of photographs Hiller has taken from various Internet sources. The photographs are ordinary domestic scenes, except for unusual ghostly emanations of light that obscure what was otherwise the subject of the photograph. The title, "G – – STS," appears to playfully make reference to the popular game of Hangman, where you fill in what you know through a process of guessing, until you either solve the riddle or die. Playfully staging the missing letters and the blank spaces of the visual grid, Hiller has offered us clues to recognize the game we are playing together, while also suggesting the failure of words to capture these experiences.

Hiller's radical propositions have often been framed through discussions of the bizarre or the spooky, little has been written about the forces of empathy at play. *Susan Hiller: Altered States* encourages us to remember that empathy is one of the most quotidian ways to experience an altered state, perhaps even without being touched.

Susan Hiller: Altered States *is on view at Polygon Gallery (101 Carrie Cates Court, North Vancouver, BC) through September 2.*

straight.com
6 June 2018

THE GEORGIA straight
VANCOUVER'S NEWS & ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

Susan Hiller: Altered States takes a mesmerizing look at paranormal activity, UFO sightings, and telekinetic powers

by Robin Laurence *on June 6th, 2018 at 12:03 PM*

Susan Hiller, *PSI Girls*, 1999, (detail). Five-screen video installation with sound. ©Susan Hiller, courtesy Lisson Gallery

At the Polygon Gallery until September 2

In an interview with British curator Matthew Higgs, Susan Hiller states, "I consider that definitions of reality are always provisional...that we are all involved collectively in creating our notions of 'the real'." Then she adds, "Anything that is 'super' or 'extra' is just a way of throwing up a debate around the kind of experiences that people have all the time." In addition to "super" and "extra", you can add "para"—as in paranormal—to describe the human experiences that Hiller often investigates in her work. Over her 40-year career, she has made reference to subjects that range from clairvoyance and automatic writing to fairy rings, levitation, and UFO sightings.

Perhaps it would be more precise to say that Hiller's art examines accounts of such things, posing questions about how the collective human psyche attempts to give form to the mysterious and the supernatural. The photographs, paintings, and video and sound installations in her Polygon Gallery exhibition Altered States, so smartly curated by Helga Pakasaar, indicate Hiller's curiosity about certain tropes, images, and narratives that recur in our culture and that yet are often considered undeserving of serious examination or contemplation.

Born and educated in the United States and based for more than four decades in London, England, Hiller studied archaeology, linguistics, and anthropology before turning her high-beam intelligence toward art making. Critics and curators have frequently observed that her doctoral degree in anthropology has informed her practice. It is both illuminating and delightful that this influential senior artist, writer, and educator describes herself as a "paraconceptualist". ("I'm interested in occult powers," Hiller told the *Guardian*'s Kate Kellaway, "and if people find this ludicrous that is their problem.") An example of a practice situated somewhere between conceptualism and the paranormal—between the histories of art and science, too—is G-STS. This work is composed of a grid of small photographs of what appear to be ghostly emanations or spectral presences in everyday settings, images Hiller found on the Internet and reconfigured to resemble Polaroids. (Polaroids suggest both immediacy and, yes, provisionality.) Two of the 16 squares in the photographic grid are blank, perhaps intended to accommodate our own projections, perhaps to symbolize the open-endedness of the phenomena, or perhaps, too, to suggest that the age-old belief in ghosts is an element of that provisional rather than absolute reality that Hiller cites. As is true of all the works in the show, the images are presented without judgment. Hiller insists, again to Higgs, that her art has nothing to do with her own "belief or disbelief in the realm of the supernatural".

Other works here include backlit negatives of automatic writing, enlarged reproductions of antique postcard imagery of high seas pounding British shores, and paintings on collaged layers of old wallpaper. Most compelling, however, are Hiller's two immersive video installations with sound.

Hilleropening – Susan Hiller, *PSI Girls*, 1999. Five-screen video installation with sound. Installation view.

AMY ROMER

Psi Girls, a five-screen work from 1999, employs brightly tinted, highly edited two-minute excerpts from the films *The Fury*, *Stalker*, *The Craft*, *Firestarter*, and *Matilda*. All were made between 1978 and 1996, all were written and directed by men, and all feature little or teenage girls exercising telekinetic or pyrokinetic abilities. Run without dialogue, *Psi Girls* is backed by a percussive soundtrack that builds in tempo, reaches a crescendo, then ends abruptly with a loud and static-y eruption of white noise as the screens go blank. The excerpts then rearrange themselves on different screens and the action begins again. It's a mesmerizing work, drawing us in as it asks, among other questions, why popular culture of the period invested innocent-looking girls and young women with such frightening, even demonic powers. (This, before vampires took over centre stage and scary sexuality.)

Projected onto a single large screen in a darkened room, *Resounding (Infrared)* is equally mesmerizing throughout its 30-minute running time. Shifting and shimmering colours and patterns are projected onto a single large screen, keyed to a complex and encompassing soundtrack that includes audio transcriptions of Big Bang cosmic radiation, radio waves from Pulsar BO 838-45, unexplained short-wave radio recordings, and, significantly, spoken accounts of UFO sightings by many individuals around the world. Visually and aurally arresting, intellectually probing, Resounding asks us to join Hiller in examining the human longing to understand and give form to the deepest mysteries at the heart of our universe.

Can't ask much more than that of any artwork anywhere.

LISSON GALLERY

Artforum
28 April 2017

ARTFORUM

Susan Hiller

Susan Hiller, *Homage to Marcel Duchamp: Auras*, 2008, fifty color archival dry prints, each 12 x 12", overall 12 1/2 x 12 1/2".

London-based artist Susan Hiller is known for her innovative media works, many of which incorporate elements of anthropology and psychoanalysis. One recent strain of her practice involves artworks that pay tribute to other artists whose works reveal an influence of occult or paranormal ideas, such as her ongoing Homage to Marcel Duchamp: Auras*, 2008–, a collection of aura photographs, sourced online and digitally modified; the work is inspired by Duchamp's* Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel*, 1910, which shows the sitter surrounded by colorful emanations. Here, she speaks about the aura works included in her current exhibition, "Susan Hiller: Paraconceptual," on view at Lisson Gallery in New York. The show, which features a range of pieces made between the 1970s and the present, runs from April 28 through June 10, 2017.*

I LIKE TO STAND IN THE MIDST of the whirlwind, and show what's out there and what's denied. For the most part, the artists in my homage pieces—such as Gertrude Stein, Marcel Duchamp, and Joseph Beuys—did not emphasize that their work carried forward a whole tradition of occult knowledge, but they referred to it and they used it, even when denying it. When Duchamp made his painting of Dr. Dumouchel, he didn't talk about clairvoyance or ancient beliefs in auras. He adopted the idea as a painting device. I picked up on that and have contextualized it within our contemporary world, where more and more people are attracted to this kind of reality. I know our culture is in denial about a lot of things. Our hard-wiring as human beings probably prevents us from knowing a great deal about what is real, and each language also sets limits. But every once in a while people experience breakthroughs.

My approach to all this is political. The politics has to do with a conviction that it's only in moments of liminality that anything new can come into being. Whether it's an idea, a political action, an invention—it

originates where we function creatively. This is of course very important in art practice but also socially and politically.

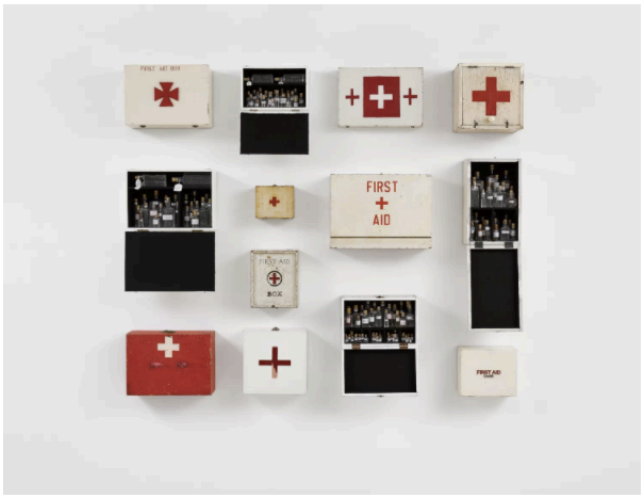
The desire to record and capture auras has two kinds of advocates. There are clairvoyants, who say they see colored emanations around people, from which they can tell the health, temperament, and well-being of the person according to the hues, brightness, or strength of the aura. And there is also the work of scientists from the nineteenth century onward, which has led to today's specialized aura cameras. These don't actually photograph auras, but they use computers to translate the electricity from a person's hands into unique colored patterns around their portrait.

I am interested in demonstrating the connections among supposedly unique "genius" artists, and I am also interested in mapping out networks of the many people who are participants in the same kind of work but don't situate it within the discourse of art. For example: Not all the people who post their aura pictures online want to be acknowledged as artists, but they do want to have those pictures seen. It's interesting that the subject dissolves in a cloud of colored light. On the one hand, the image has a history, and on the other, it is enigmatically definitive of how we see ourselves in the digital age. You know, we are pixels; we're light.

— As told to Allison Young

LISSON GALLERY

ArtRabbit
26 April 2017



Susan Hiller: Paraconceptual

28 Apr 2017 – 10 Jun 2017

Lisson Gallery is proud to present the work of Susan Hiller for the first time at its main gallery space in New York.

About

The exhibition includes a selection of work from over four decades of her career focusing on themes to which she has often returned, encapsulated in the title 'Paraconceptual,' which sites her work "just sideways of conceptualism and neighboring the paranormal."

Hiller has committed her practice to examining the cultural undercurrrents of society and its belief systems. Using a method she describes as "a kind of archaeological investigation, uncovering something to make a different kind of sense of it," Hiller probes the unseen, unheard, unspoken and unexplained, and in the process has explored subjects such as lost languages, telepathy, dreams and automatic writing. The exhibition in New York will include the multi-channel video installation Psi Girls (1999), two rare and rarely seen paintings from the 1980s, new aura photo-portraits, a recent installation of holy water medicine cabinets from her ongoing Homage to Joseph Beuys series and a sculptural work on automatic writing, Homage to Gertrude Stein: Lucidity and Intuition (2011).

In Psi Girls, clips from five movies show adolescent girls performing telekinetic feats. Over five large screens the girls exercise their fierce and concentrated gaze to move objects by thought alone. Each part is tinted a different color and is at first silent, then joined halfway through by the pulsating, seductive rhythm of a gospel choir. The effect is unsettling; the soundtrack draws us into a dream-like daze, a suspension of disbelief, only to suddenly shock us into distanced scrutiny by the loud 'white noise' of a blank television screen. Then the sequence repeats itself, each scene now on a different part of the wall and in a different fluorescent hue.

Hiller explores the fluid interrelation between the rational and the irrational. Her work is often dialectical, placing contradictions within a creative synthesis, preferring to focus our attention on the liminal areas in between the deadlock of incompatible meanings. In Psi Girls she does not simply appropriate movie clips as ready-mades, but edits, collages and compares them to tell their own story and comment on how altered states and magical phenomena hold such a strong fascination in our culture.

Since 2008, Hiller has made a number of works in homage to other artists – including Gertrude Stein, Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, Marcel Broodthaers and Marcel Duchamp. A little-known painting by Duchamp titled Portrait of Dr. R. Dumouchel (1910) inspired Hiller's aura works. In his painting, Duchamp illustrated the ancient belief in auras by showing a field of mystical colors emanating from the sitter's body. In Hiller's series, she presents a collection of reworked internet-sourced portraits of people who have been scanned for their auras by photographic means. These electromagnetic projections produce clouds of colored light, illustrating the individual's personal energy field. While we might typically associate auras with historical representations of saints, Hiller has purposefully worked with ordinary people from a variety of cultures—describing their images as "metaphors of the self in the digital age." Hiller has made a new installation of fifty aura portraits, After Duchamp (2016–17).

Interested in language and its layers of subliminal meaning, Hiller has experimented with automatic writing since the early 1970s. This free-associational technique was adopted by Dadaists and Surrealists, among others, to create writings or art with involuntary actions and processes not under the rigors and discipline of the conscious mind. Get William (1975/81), one of Hiller's earliest experiments in automatic writing explores this alternative mode of transmitting ideas and images, blurring the boundary between consciousness and the unconscious. The desk and book sculpture Homage to Gertrude Stein: Lucidity & Intuition (2011) functions as both a monument to the author and as a selective library on the topic of automatic writing. Despite her early experiments with automatic writing, she spent the rest of her life denying her interest, viewing her work as deliberate and vigilant annotation. Hiller's work excavates this ignored and suppressed aspect of Stein's legacy, and contextualizes it in this exhibition with an illuminated collection of automatic writings and drawings From India to the Planet Mars (1999–ongoing), produced by a wide range of people.

The exhibition also includes First Aid: Homage to Joseph Beuys (1969–2017), a display of first-aid cabinets containing miniature phials filled with water taken from holy wells and streams, which references both Beuys's ability to endow ordinary materials with sacred values and the potential healing power of art.

Elephant
April 2016

ELEPHANT
THE ART CULTURE MAGAZINE

COMMUNICATIONS FROM SUSAN HILLER

THE CHTHONIC UNCONSCIOUS

Despite making the first video installation to be bought by the Tate, **SUSAN HILLER**—an American long resident in the UK—says she has never quite felt 'at home' here. Likewise, her startling artistic investigations of the irrational and uncanny refuse to be domesticated or comfortably explained away. 'If talking and thinking and working with ideas were enough,' she tells **SUE HUBBARD**, 'then why should we make art?'

'And I reason at will,
in the same way I dream,
for reasoning is just another
kind of dreaming.'

Fernando Pessoa
The Book of Disquiet

I first got to know Susan Hiller around 1999 when I included her work in my exhibition, *Chora* (co-curated with Simon Morley). Recently, when we met for lunch, after seeing her debut show at the Lisson Gallery, she told me how much of an outsider she continues to feel despite a major show at the Freud Museum, a retrospective at the Tate and recently joining this prestigious gallery. 'For example, I've never been invited to join the RA', she says over our green tea and satay. 'Some of my students have, but I don't fit. I'm not part of the establishment.' With her multimedia practice of over 40 years, she is one of the most original and influential artists of her generation. But, perhaps, there's some truth in her self-assessment. An American who has lived in London since the '60s, she's never felt quite 'at home' in her adopted country. 'I'd never heard a woman called a cow before I came to England,' she says, a phrase incorporated in her installation *008: Cowgirl* from the Freud Museum, London (1992–94).

First trained as an anthropologist (a fact that, if given too much weight, annoys her), Hiller displays the intellectual rigour and curiosity of the academic, counterpointed with the 'irrational' explorations of the artist. Her work poses complex questions about identity, feminism, belief and the role of the artist. Never cynical or market-driven, it remains uncompromising, erudite and complex. The sort of art that forces you to think. She describes it as 'a kind of archaeological investigation uncovering something to make a different kind of sense of it', focusing 'on what is unspoken, unacknowledged, unexplained and overlooked'. She explores what, to many, may seem irrational, sidelined and marginal aspects of human experience. She is interested in the traces we leave behind, be they the automatic writing generated in *Sisters of Menon*, a work made in the '70s that investigates the permeable boundaries between conscious and unconscious utterance, or the investigations in *Lucid Dreams* (1982), where the presence or absence of her own face, photographed inside a photo booth, underlines the fragile nature of identity and the transience of existence like a series of grungy, do-it-yourself vanitas paintings. For the *J Street Project* (2000–05), she searched for every street sign she could find in Germany that included the word *Juden* (Jew). A chilling reminder that these are places from which whole populations and histories have been erased.

Her sources are eclectic, ranging from arcane texts and psychoanalysis, to popular culture. In her 2002 lecture at the Edinburgh College of Art, she quotes Freud who, in 1921, wrote: 'It no longer seems possible to brush aside the study of so-called occult facts; of things which seem to vouchsafe the real existence of psychic forces... which reveal mental faculties, in which until now, we did not believe.' Freud, she writes, claimed 'that an uncritical belief in psychic powers was an attempt at compensation for what he poignantly called "the lost appeal of life on this earth" and that the problem with believers in the occult is that they want to establish new truths, rather than scientifically "take cognisance of undeniable problems" in the current definitions of reality'.

Her Lisson debut, which occupied both gallery spaces, interwove these tensions between the scientific and the rational with our desires and instinctual drives, in four ongoing themes: transformation, the unconscious, systems of belief, and the role of the artist as collector and curator. The presence of rare and unseen early works from the '70s and '80s underlined her interest in alchemy and psychological transformation. The 1970–84 *Painting Blocks*—made from cutting up and reassembling old paintings into sculptural 'books', labelled with the dates and dimensions of the original work—were shown alongside the small, ash-filled vials of *Another* (1986). Packed with the remnants of burnt paintings, these illustrate the reconfiguring of objects (or identities) in a transmuted form, one that echoes the theories of the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein on reparation and creativity.

Belief and the boundaries between the unconscious and the paranormal are examined in another work on show, *Belshazzar's Feast* (1983–84), the first video installation ever to be bought by the Tate. As with much of Hiller's work, the readings are fluid. This new bonfire version (which surely evokes notions of burning heretics and witches at the stake) is built from a stack of television sets that each frame a flickering orange flame. Accompanied by Hiller singing, whispered reports from people apparently seeing ghostly images on their TV screens, her young son's reminiscences of the biblical story and Rembrandt's painting of the same name, it creates a work that evokes primitive uncanny feelings.

In her 2012 *Emergency Case: Homage to Joseph Beuys*—that quintessential shamanic artist—Hiller extends her investigations into faith, the irrational and reason. Vials of 'holy' water, from as far afield as the Ganges and an Irish sacred spring, allude to traditional beliefs, as well as to contemporary 'alternative' systems of healing. Clustered in reclaimed wooden cabinets picked up in antique markets, the installation is reminiscent of a medieval apothecary's shop, as well as Damien Hirst's medicine cabinets, suggesting that faith and reason are, to a large extent, cultural and historical.

It was in the eighteenth century that Carl Linnaeus devised a system of taxonomy, that branch of science concerned with classification which drew together species into rational groups and gave meaning to the modern world. This desire to define and categorize is inherent in *A Longing to Be Modern* (2003), an installation made up of 32 ceramic vases from the old East and West Germany, along with 18 recycled cast bronze letters from gravestones, arranged on a kidney-shaped table in the gallery.

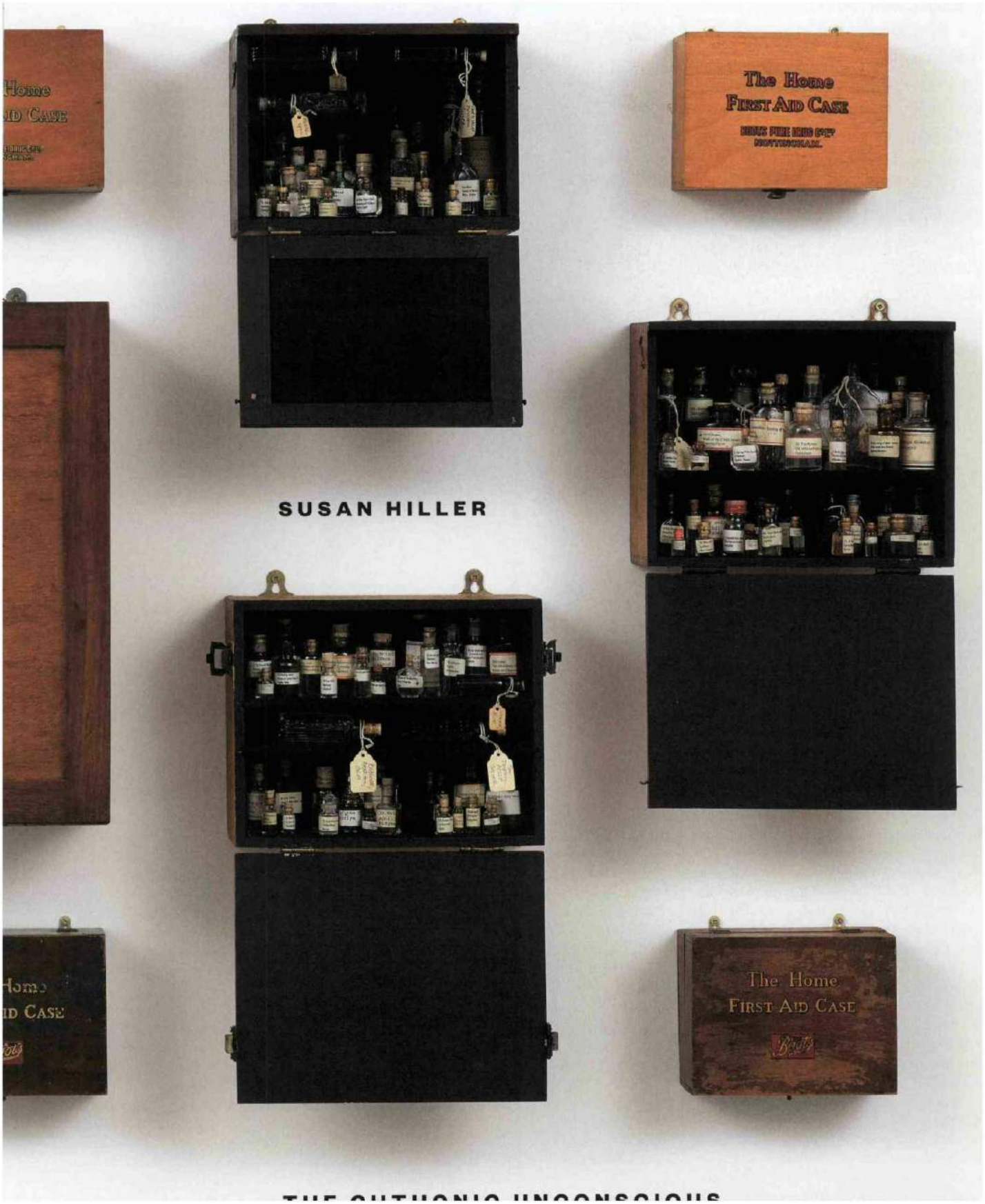
The role of curator and collector has long been part of Hiller's practice. In the '70s, a seminal work, *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972–76), consisting of a collection of over 300 postcards by unnamed artists, all

bearing the words 'Rough Sea' and picturing stormy seas around the British coast, used the methodology, labelling and tabulation of a scientific research project. The investigations of this highly conceptual work have, more recently, been revisited in *On the Edge* (2015), a piece that presents 482 views of 219 locations along the coast of Britain where rough seas meet the land. Not only does this work tap into notions of English landscape and seascape painting, with its Romantic penchant for untamed nature and the sublime, but, in the use of ephemeral postcards, evokes that very British love of the untamed and unspoilt; that need to get away from the hurly-burly to become immersed in the authentic, raw and unmitigated. The phrase 'on the edge', of course, carries multiple readings—on the edge of sanity, of mainstream society, and of artistic or psychological breakthrough (or down). The relentless stormy tides battering this small island could easily be understood as the chthonic unconscious beating at the doors of reason or anarchy pommelling the gates of polite society.

Over lunch Susan Hiller is cautious about explaining too much about her work. 'If talking and thinking and working with ideas were enough,' she insists, 'then why should we make art?' She has no overarching authorial narrative and does not provide resolutions but simply offers the viewer a complex palimpsest of ideas. What is unique about her work is that her past anthropological studies help to frame a series of questions that are then translated through the sensibility and language of art.

A prodigious writer herself, Hiller is mindful of the possible interpretations, in our decentred world, between the discourses of art, anthropology, religion and psychology. Her evocation of the work of Joseph Beuys seems to emphasize a belief that the traditional ways in which artists make and speak about their work are largely exhausted. She does not seek definitions or clarifications but rather reflects the ambiguities of the society in which we live. Like psychoanalysis, these are built on a chain of associations that are often slippery and fluid. 'Truth', a principal allegorical character in the discourse of modernism and humanism, has within this postmodern narrative been replaced by notions of relativity and legitimacy. Hiller refuses to pander to established tastes or prejudices but, to some extent, creates the audience she needs to respond to her work. Never nostalgic or self-consciously poetic, her archeological rummaging through the iconography of the past results in a series of investigations into the arbitrary and the marginal that run like fault lines though the contemporary world.

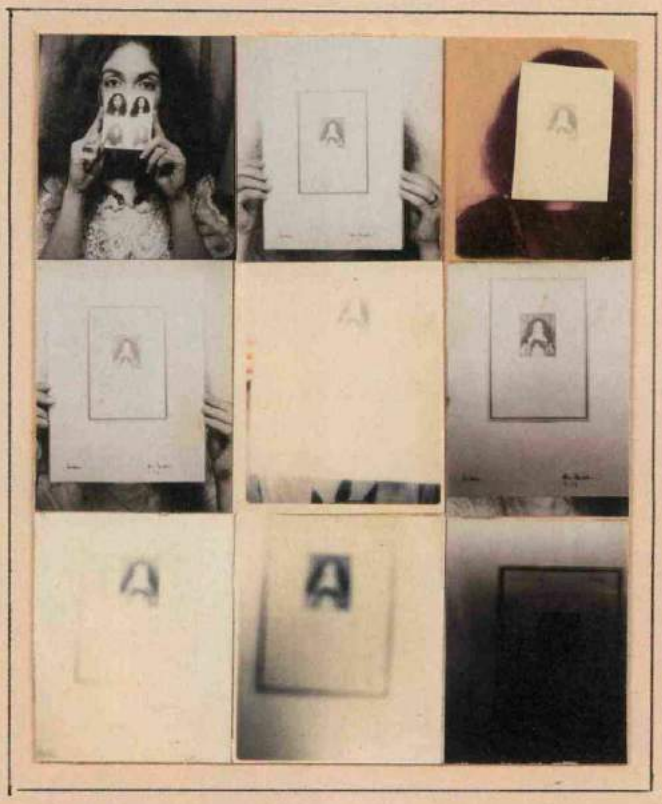
COMMUNICATIONS FROM



SUSAN HILLER

THE CULTURAL UNCONSCIOUS

Portrait by Julia Grassi



Susan Hiller
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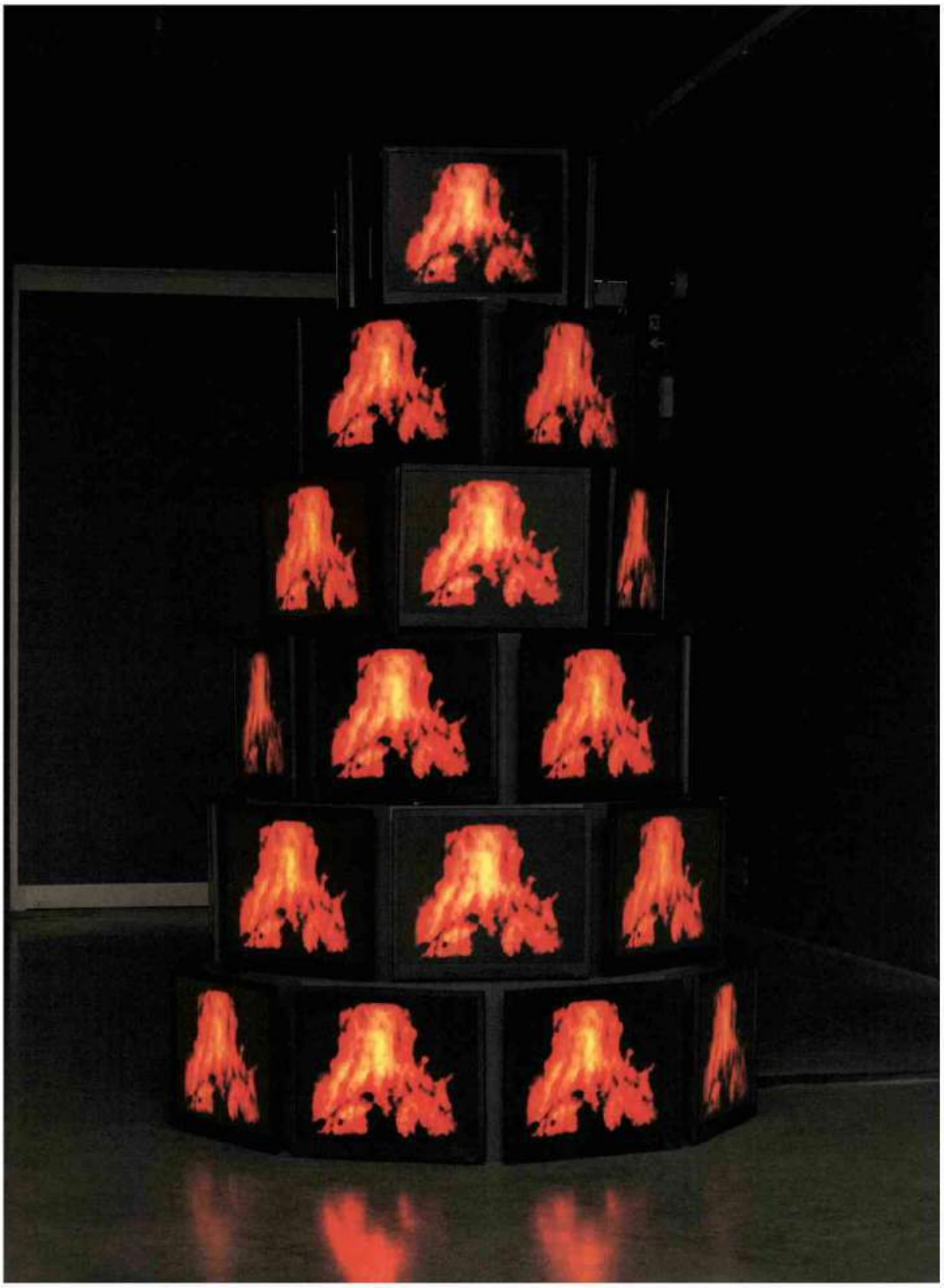

Opening pages
Emergency Case: Homage to Joseph Beuys
2012
13 wooden felt-lined first aid cabinets, containing bottles of holy water and vintage first aid supplies
98 x 117.5cm

Previous pages, right
Untitled
1973
Photo booth images
30 x 21cm

Opposite
Belshazzar's Feast (Campfire Version)
1983
20-minute single-screen installed video programme
Dimensions variable

"I'VE NEVER BEEN INVITED TO JOIN THE RA. SOME OF MY STUDENTS HAVE, BUT I DON'T FIT. I'M NOT PART OF THE ESTABLISHMENT"

Opposite
On the Edge
2015
Rough Sea postcards, map,
482 views of 219 locations,
mounted on 15 panels
77.5 x 107.3cm each

Right
Split Hairs: The Art
of Alfie West
1998
20 framed and captioned
split hair works by Alfred
West (1901–85) on glass
or mirror; various dates;
installed in vintage vitrine
with accompanying
catalogue by Susan Hiller
(curator) and David Coxhead
(collector)
Dimensions variable

Apollo
9 February 2016
http://www.apollo-magazine.com/susan-hillers-search-for-the-right-medium/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=susan-hillers-search-for-the-right-medium

APOLLO
THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

Susan Hiller. Photo: Mark Lyon, 2014

Susan Hiller's search for the right medium

ISABEL STEVENS

The pioneering conceptual artist Susan Hiller talks to Apollo about her interest in the supernatural, working in different materials, her commitment to feminism – and why role models are hard to find

‘What’s happened to the witch, the German puppet witch?’ Susan Hiller (b. 1940) enquires of the waitress in the North West London bar that we’re sitting in, which she regularly frequents. Behind us every inch of the wall is filled with flea market paintings. Above us, shelves are casually piled with all manner of dusty bric-a-brac: bottles, trophies, ornaments, a Budweiser sign, and a stuffed owl. The witch is found. She’s hidden behind old saucepans, lamps and violins hanging from the ceiling. Hiller is an artist who has always had an eye for everyday objects and occurrences and an interest in the supernatural, subjects that before her, were rarely the focus of artworks – be it the ‘Rough Sea’ postcards she collected from the 1970s of British seaside towns, or the stories of UFO sightings she gathered and recorded for *Witness* (2000). So this seems an apt setting to look back over her 50-year career. ‘That sail boat wasn’t here last time,’ she says.

Hiller hates the word ‘retrospective’ but her current show (until 9 January), not far away at the Lisson’s two galleries, is close to being one. It contains new work but also reaches right back to the 1960s, when she abandoned a career in anthropology. It was during a lecture on African art that she made the decision to pursue her teenage dream of becoming an artist: ‘I committed myself to dealing with our culture,’ she tells me. Hiller moved from America to London after visiting the city and didn’t want to leave: ‘It was an astonishing place in the late ’60s and ’70s. It was the most open situation for all the arts. Different worlds were more interconnected. People came from all over because it was cheaper. It’s hard to believe now.’

While she works with ephemera as Pop artists did, and while the appearance of Hiller’s work may resemble her conceptual contemporaries and forbearers, her thinking has always been different. She calls her practice ‘paraconceptual’, her interest in the supernatural separating her from other artists of the time. In her *Homage* series, she has even looked back into art history, highlighting where artists have been inspired by the paranormal but have distanced themselves from it. Influenced by minimalism and conceptualism, she has always worked in series: ‘It’s more democratic, less hierarchical than a single thing that is elevated. Singularity is very old fashioned. Multiplicity is more compatible with the way we are. We’re surrounded by endless multiples.’

Hiller has also worked with many different media, from photography and ceramics to moving image, and she used sound before many other artists thought to. She likes it because it's ghostly and intimate. 'And it's actually physical. The vibrations touch your ear. That makes it unique in a way.' She continues: 'Someone asked me the other day, "What made you think that you could use sound when no-one else was?" Well, I got permission from Kurt Schwitters, who was already dead.' Working with so many different media hasn't been without difficulties though: 'People used to say to me, and it was a criticism, "Oh, you do so many different things." Artists were trained to do the same thing over and over again and it was thought to be a lack of consistency if you didn't do that. But I would say that I am very consistent. Possibly even more consistent than I'd like to be. I can't help it. You can try and make every piece of work different but they're always the same. The medium is often different. Or the formal approach is different. But we only have a limited amount of obsessions.'

I ask her how she chooses her medium. 'It's a question of matching the two together. The medium is selected because it's appropriate to the subject matter,' she says. 'That's the difference between the way I work and the way a lot of artists work. They make films. Or they use photography. I don't work like that. I've had to learn so many different media because I've had to find ways that are suitable. But it does mean that I don't produce work as quickly as some people do. It's never boring. I don't know what the next work will be.'

Levitations: Homage to Yves Klein (2008), Susan Hiller © Susan Hiller

Included in the Lisson's show are a number of little-seen works, many from her early years and many paintings in some guise, like those she made on wallpaper or her *Midnight* series from the 1980s – photobooth self-portraits she made abstract with paint and automatic writing. Painting is the medium that she is least associated with but she tells me she has never given up on it. 'The curator at the gallery wanted to show some of these because he thought that they were surprising. They don't surprise me. They are like my other work – they are only different because they are older.'

In other instances in the exhibition, there are what used to be paintings: *Painting Blocks* (1970–84), books of chopped-up painted canvases: 'I turned the painting into sculpture, turned surface into mass'; and glass containers holding the ashes of burnt paintings in her *Relics* series which she began in 1972. 'When I started burning my paintings,' she says, 'it was at the same time, or possibly earlier than, other artists started making a big deal about the death of painting. So they burned their student work, usually in a kind of statement about the end of painting. That wasn't my idea at all.' Hiller continues: 'I was interested in transformation and the different stages of an object or a work. I was aware in museums, in our society, we're constantly trying to keep everything the same. We're always restoring it, keeping it in correct conditions, whereas in other societies this is not the case.'

'In Africa, they used to create big wooden masks for ceremonies and then after the ceremony they would throw them away. It was no big deal. They could always make another one. The Eskimo do beautiful little carvings from whale ivory and so forth. There was a time when anthropologists visited them in the 1930s and '40s and the floors of the igloos they used to live in – they had moved out to go hunting – were littered with tiny little gorgeous sculptures. They tried to explain to the anthropologists that the art was in the carving of the thing, not in the thing itself.'

Emergency Case: Homage to Joseph Beuys (2012), Susan Hiller. Courtesy Lisson Gallery; photo: Jack Hems; © Susan Hiller

This idea of transformation is often integral to Hiller's art and not just its subject matter – like the young children who are seized by telekinetic powers in her installation *Wild Talents* (1997); the bottles of holy water which promise transformation in her *Emergency Case: Homage to Joseph Beuys* (2012); or in *10 Months* (1977–79), where she documented her growing belly changing like a moon over the course of her pregnancy. She's not always content to see a piece as final. 'When you are an artist you can play games with your own work but when it enters a museum you are not allowed to change it.' It's something she sometimes finds frustrating. At the Lisson she has reconfigured her installation *Belshazzar's Feast* (1983–84), with screens stacked on top of one another like a bonfire rather than one lone television set showing flickering flames in a living room, as the Tate has in its collection. She has also delved back into her 'Rough Sea' postcard collection to make a new series *On the Edg*e (2015), which presents 482 postcards from the stormy edges of Britain. She is endlessly fascinated by 'the whole idea of the miniature sublime. You go on holiday and you want to send some postcards to some people and instead of a beautiful view you get this really wild view. A small crack in the boring everydayness is this wildness of nature that you can unconsciously seek out if you go to a British seaside resort.'

Looking at the palette of works in the show, it's noticeable that one of the ways Hiller's practice has changed is in her use of colour, with more recent works increasingly iridescent. 'One of my very earliest memories is being taken to nursery school. I must have been three. In the doorway to the house was a bunch of prisms hanging up and the whole entrance was covered in rainbows. That was one of the first things I remember. I still feel that way about colour. Everyone loves that kind of effect. One of the sad things is the way we now get all this on-screen. When you look at that fake Tiffany light-shade over there' – she points to one of many lamps dangling from the ceiling of the bar – 'It would have been such a pleasure and thrill when the light came through it and you saw the red and the green. Now it's just kind of ordinary.'

Looking at a work in the show like *Enquiries/Inquiries* (1973–75), which compares English and American culture, I wonder if her experience as an outsider in Britain informed her practice as much as her background in anthropology? 'When I first started working,' she says, 'things that people might just think of as ordinary, struck me as unusual and fascinating. I do think as a general rule that artists need to go someplace else. Travel is good, but working in other places is really good. Just having to search for the right pencil in a foreign land is an interesting experience.'

Panel from On the Edge, (2015), Susan Hiller. Courtesy Lisson Gallery; © Susan Hiller

The romantic notion of Susan Hiller that I had concocted in my head was of a rummaging, collecting, hoarder-artist. I had read about her salvaging old medicine bottles from the banks of London's canals. In the middle of one of the Lisson's galleries are a number of Alfred West's *Split Hairs* works (last on show in the treasure trove that was Brian Dillon's 'Curiosity' exhibition). Just like the 'Rough Sea' postcards, which highlighted unheralded amateur artistry long before outsider art became fashionable (Hiller titled that 1972–76 project *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists*), these bring to light West's intricate virtuosity. She found West's text pieces all made from human hairs on the street: 'The split hairs were being thrown away after Alfred died and the vitrine from the museum was as well, as they were renovating it. The museum looks boring now but they had wonderful old Victorian furniture. I believe Damien Hirst has bought most of it.'

However, she professes she's not a collector: 'When I was young I collected colour crayons, shells, cards, the usual things. I was never an obsessive. And I'm still not. *This* is a collection,' she says motioning around her. Although she does add: 'I have a few other things that I've collected that may turn into works eventually.' I had imagined her studio brimming with curios. Perhaps it isn't so surprising to find it so neat, with everything packed away on shelves in boxes with labels. The sight of them sitting there side by side, brings to mind the precise ordering and display of her artworks, like the bottles of holy water, each with their label noting where the water came from.

In addition to collecting, Hiller has also organised exhibitions as an artist-curator, a way of working that many have since copied. Her most well-known exhibition is 'Dream Machines', which explored art and altered states of consciousness at the Hayward Gallery in 2000. But in New York in 1981 she also co-curated with Suzanne Lacy a show called 'We'll make it up when we meet/aka LA-London Lab', which gathered female artists from LA and London. I ask her how that came about. 'I happened to be in New York and the British council or the Tate had organised a big show of British art of the '70s,' she tells me. 'It was all men of course. Martha Wilson who ran a very famous performance and exhibition place called Franklin Furnace came running up at the opening saying, "Where are all the women?" And I said, "Well, this is England and we don't mention that, it's not polite." And she said, "Well I want you to do a show with me."' Hiller selected the British participants. 'There were a number of fascinating artists in it – Rose English, Sally Potter…It was a huge success in New York but of course no one here knew anything about it.'

Auras: Homage to Marcel Duchamp (2008), Susan Hiller © Susan Hiller

In April, Tate Britain is holding a survey, 'Conceptual Art in Britain: 1964–1979'. Hiller and Mary Kelly are the only two female artists currently listed in the selection. I ask her what it was like working as a female artist at that time. 'I didn't have problems with other artists who were men,' Hiller says. 'The problems I had were with the administrators and curators, even when they were women. For years and years and years one didn't even mention feminism. No one wanted to discuss it. I was told by an English gallerist in the '80s that my commitment to feminism had ruined my career. Postcards, trivia, the things that really interest me are dangerous for a woman, because they reek of domesticity and craft.'

It took a long time for Hiller to come out as an artist, 'Because I never had any role models. I never heard of any female artists who were really wonderful.' I mention I read she had a portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe (the subject of a Tate Modern retrospective this year) hanging on her wall when she was younger. 'That was when I went to University,' she explains. 'But I didn't want to make work like Georgia O'Keeffe so there was this dilemma. There was a cultural sense that women's art was deficient. As someone who did anthropology I'll tell you that cultural bias runs very deep. And it's always backed up by the fact that people say there are no great women artists in other cultures. This is not true. It is something that is being worked on all the time by historians and anthropologists now, but when I was doing anthropology, you went out to a place and no one ever talked to the women; they talked to the men about the women so they got very weird ideas.'

Hiller describes the different attitude towards ceramics in China and Japan, where ceramicists were regarded as artists, to America, where native American ceramics were condescendingly regarded as craft. And in the context of her own work, she explains, 'When I made sewn canvases that was what women did, sewing. But when male artists made sown canvases at the same time, that was art [...]It was hurtful but at the time I thought it was hilariously funny. I only got angry a bit later on when I realised all the damage it was doing, not just to me but to all the other women I knew who were artists.'

But, although Hiller is a feminist, she has never wanted to be 'a feminist artist'. 'My feminism,' she says, 'is embedded in the work. It's not on the surface of it. Since I never wanted to make polemical art, which has been another thrust of women's art, I think my position has seemed a little complex to those who want to label work feminist or not.'

Has the situation changed sufficiently? 'I think we've caught up, maybe not as much as we should have. But it has certainly improved here,' she thinks. We talk about all the solo shows of female artists that have happened recently: Leonora Carrington, Sonia Delaunay, Hannah Höch. 'It's good, but they are being inserted. The canon of works for most people stays male. Eventually that will change though,' Hiller says. She tells me how much she enjoyed Tate Modern's Agnes Martin retrospective. 'Martin had a quiet life. I read someplace that she checked herself into an old people's home. She could have stayed there all day watching TV but she didn't. Every day she drove to her studio. She liked living there because they did the cooking and she didn't have to worry about all of that. That's great isn't it? I thought that is for me. That's a role model.'

Susan Hiller. Photo: Mark Lyon, 2014

Isabel Stevens works at *Sight & Sound* and writes about art and film for *Aperture* and the *Guardian*.

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Sublime digressions

BRIAN DILLON

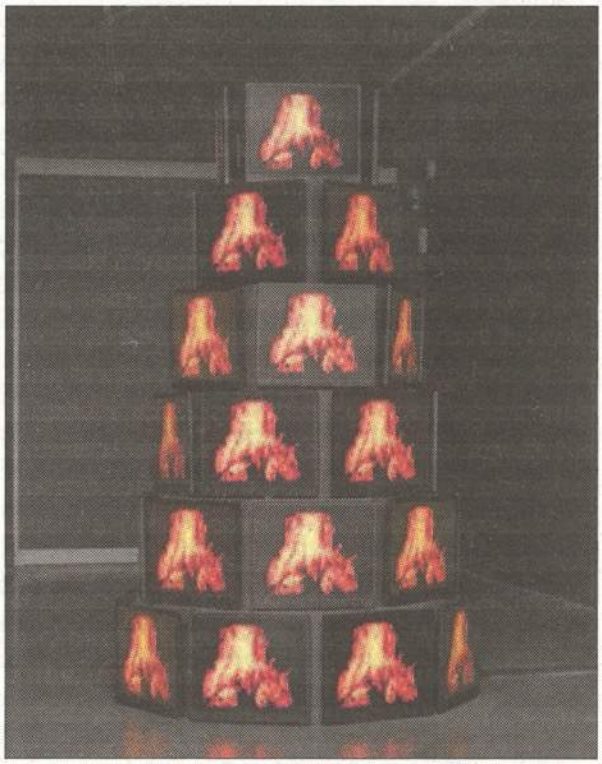
SUSAN HILLER
Lisson Gallery, London, until January 9

On a visit to Weston-super-Mare in the early 1970s, the American artist Susan Hiller came across an old postcard depicting the Somerset resort lashed by rough seas. She soon found another in (and of) Brighton, and realized she had hit on a quaint vernacular genre with echoes of Romantic sublimity. In the hundreds of postcards that Hiller subsequently amassed for her installation "Dedicated to the Unknown Artists", seafronts both garish and prim are assaulted by huge waves, masses of foam that menace the harbour-side hotels of Margate, Whitby, Herne Bay. Hiller arranged these images in grids, drew maps showing the locations of the coastal towns in question, and tabulated such details as caption and format: vertical or horizontal. Occasionally she revealed a handwritten inscription: "It has been really like this today, had splendid time".

"Dedicated to the Unknown Artists" signalled Hiller's commitment to a type of romantic conceptualism, a mix of organizing rigour, visual interest and intense emotional appeal. At four decades' remove it is hard to recapture what an affront the latter two qualities were to the more austere conceptualists of the period. Hiller was accused of a sentimental attachment to the image per se, a Pop-derived reliance on mundane cultural artefacts and a ruinous attraction to affect. If such taunts seem absurd now, the artists and critics who voiced them were right in a way: Hiller's art is usually poised between ideas and embodiment, reason and ravishment.

At the Lisson Gallery there is a recent offshoot of the rough seas project in "On the Edge" (2015): a collection of 482 views of 219 locations, arranged in grids on fifteen panels. Hiller had a retrospective at Tate Britain in 2011, and the current show seems a more modest summation of her long-standing methods, themes and motifs. She moved to London at the end of the 1960s after an education in photography, linguistics, archaeology and anthropology; in retrospect she seems to have been well trained for the theoretical rigours of the day, but time and again her work proposed "adventures and deformations", digressions from the conceptual to the material, emotional and (most famously) paranormal.

In 1999, in an essay on Andrei Tarkovsky, Hiller wrote: "I like to work with materials that have been culturally repressed or misunder-



"Belshazzar's Feast (Campfire version)", 1983

stood, what's been relegated to the lunatic fringe or what's so boring we can't even look at it anymore". If Hiller's final category describes the source material for such works as "Dedicated to the Unknown Artists", the "lunatic fringe" must include true believers in psychic powers and paranormal activity: the subjects of Hiller's most celebrated and influential works. The Lisson exhibition features "Wild Talents" – a video installation from 1997 that repurposes horror-movie scenes of girls with strange powers – and "Belshazzar's Feast" (1983–4), a video piece in which newspaper accounts of hallucinations seen in late-night television "snow" are read over footage of the dancing flames of a Guy Fawkes bonfire.

When it was first exhibited, "Belshazzar's Feast" was screened on a single cube monitor amid sofa, armchair and lamps, thus recalling the domestic TV set and its uncanny visions. (In 1986, it was broadcast by Channel 4 at midnight, after programming had officially ended.) At the Lisson, Hiller shows what she calls the "campfire version": a small tower of flatscreen monitors all showing the original footage. The work is surely weaker for this elaboration, and if there is a criticism to be made of the exhibition as a whole it is this: Hiller's more recent reiterations of earlier work can sometimes look – it's true of some larger prints related to "Dedicated to the Unknown Artists" – like capitulations to technological change, or to present demands for more saleable objects. It's a small caveat, however, in light of Susan Hiller's half-century of haunted and haunting conceptual visions.

Sublime digressions

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Lisson Gallery, London, until January 9

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"Dedicated to the Unknown Artists" signalled Hiller's commitment to a type of romantic conceptualism, a mix of organizing rigour, visual interest and intense emotional appeal. At four decades' remove it is hard to recognize what an affront the latter two qualities were to the more austere conceptualists of the period. Hiller was accused of a sentimental attachment to the image per se, a Pop-derived reliance on mundane cultural artefacts and a ruinous attraction to affect. If such taunts seem absurd now, the artists and critics who voiced them were right in a way: Hiller's art is usually poised between idiom and embodiment, reason and enchantment.

At the Lisson Gallery there is a recent offshoot of the rough seas project in "On the Edge" (2015), a collection of 882 views of 219 locations, arranged in grids on fifteen panels. Hiller had a retrospective at Tate Britain in 2011, and the current show seems a more modest summation of her long-standing methods, themes and motifs. She moved to London at the end of the 1960s after an education in photography, linguistics, archaeology and anthropology; in retrospect she seems to have been well trained for the theoretical rigours of the day, but time and again her work proposed "adventures and deformations", digressions from the conceptual to the material, emotional and (most famously) paranormal.

In 1999, in an essay on Andrei Tarkovsky, Hiller wrote: "I like to work with materials that have been culturally repressed or minimalized, what's been relegated to the lunatic fringe or what's so boring we can't even look at it anymore". If Hiller's final category describes the source material for such works as "Dedicated to the Unknown Artists", the "lunatic fringe" must include true believers in psychic powers and paranormal activity: the subjects of Hiller's most celebrated and influential works. The Lisson exhibition features "Wild Talents" – a video installation from 1997 that repurposes horror-movie scenes of girls with strange powers – and "Belshazzar's Feast" (1983–4), a video piece in which newspaper accounts of hallucinations seen in late-night television "snow" are read over footage of the dancing flames of a Guy Fawkes bonfire.

When it was first exhibited, "Belshazzar's Feast" was screened on a single cube monitor amid sofa, armchair and lamps, thus recalling the domestic TV set and its uncanny visions. (In 1986, it was broadcast by Channel 4 at midnight, after programming had officially ended.) At the Lisson, Hiller shows what she calls the "campfire version": a small tower of flatscreen monitors all showing the original footage. The work is surely weaker for this elaboration, and if there is a criticism to be made of the exhibition as a whole it is this: Hiller's more recent reiterations of earlier work can sometimes look – it's true of some larger prints related to "Dedicated to the Unknown Artists" – like capitulations to technological change, or to present demands for more saleable objects. It's a small caveat, however, in light of Susan Hiller's half-century of haunted and haunting conceptual visions.

The Guardian
12 November 2015

theguardian

Susan Hiller
Jonathan Jones on art

Susan Hiller review – a bizarre, brilliant haunted house

★★★★☆

Lisson Gallery, London
With UFO testimonies, ghost photographs and drawings made by literally splitting hairs, Hiller's new show is a fascinating gathering of countercultural beliefs and outsider truths that will leave you spooked

Jonathan Jones

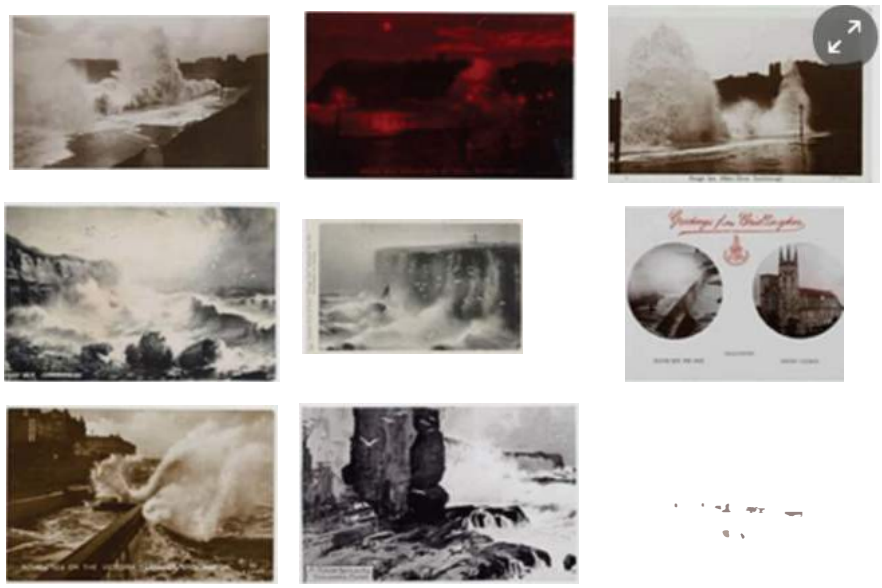
Thursday 12 November 2015
18.05 GMT

A place of troubled souls looking for spiritual consolation ... Susan Hiller's Emergency case: Homage to Joseph Beuys, 1969-2012. Photograph: Susan Hiller/Lisson Gallery

Something has been lost. It vanished years ago and no one can remember what it is. But still we search the skies and the shadows. Every mysterious light in the sky and each phantom in the camera lens is a glimpse of that nameless thing we lack.

Susan Hiller's modern world is a haunted house. It is not a smooth-running machine, a utopia, or a digital playground but a place of troubled souls looking for the spiritual consolations that once flooded everyday life but are marginalised now by our technocratic age. As a Russian woman laments in one of the many voices collected in her eerie exhibition at the Lisson Gallery, we were happier in the middle ages, when we had angels and demons.

A demonic fire haunts a pyramid of TV screens, bottles of holy water haunt old medical boxes, and the unique art of Alfie West (who made delicate drawings with strands of hair that he split with a razorblade) nestles in all its strangeness in a wooden cabinet. West died in 1985, and in 1997 Hiller displayed his outsider art at the museum of The Royal College of Surgeons. Restaged here, her cabinet of hairy curiosities is troubling and arresting, reflecting the ghost of a man who spent his life literally splitting hairs.



Dangerous and exciting ... On the Edge (Rough Sea postcards map), 2015. Photograph: Susan Hiller/Lisson Gallery

Equally weird are outmoded postcards from around the coast of Britain, each of which portrays a savage, stormy sea crashing against rocks, piers or promenades. Clearly these postcards were popular in the past, perhaps with holidaymakers who liked to think their seaside destinations were dangerously exciting in bad weather. Hiller collected hundreds for her 1970s artwork Dedicated to the Unknown Artists and in her new piece called On the Edge she uses 482 stormy postcards to map the entire coastline of Britain in an array of framed compositions at once comic, nostalgic and sublime.

In a nearby set of enlarged storm scenes Hiller has drawn a Turneresque sun, in a jokey homage to romantic painting. But she finds her darkest mysteries far from the great tradition. She is a listener, an anthropologist who collects the bizarre and takes it seriously. From ghost photographs and pictures of people surrounded by their glowing “auras” to the testimonies of people who have seen UFOs, this is a gathering of countercultural beliefs and outsider truths.

Her sensibility is alert to the world and makes you see the world her way. After leaving the gallery I walked the streets of west London feeling spooked. The November light was spectral and what was that kid on the corner listening to on his white earphones? Voices from the other side of the universe.

At Lisson Gallery, London, from 13 November to 9 January 2016.

More reviews Topics Susan Hiller Art

The Guardian
15 November 2015
http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/15/susan-hiller-interview-self-doubt-is-always-present

theguardian

Interview by **Kate Kellaway**

Sunday 15 November 2015 09.00 GMT

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Susan Hiller: 'To a young artist, I would say: just go day by day and see what happens. Don't worry about other people's judgment.' Photograph: Antonio Olmos for the Observer

I always wanted to be an artist. This was my fantasy as a child. I grew up in Coral Gables, Florida. During the time I lived there, it changed from being a self-contained community to a suburb of Miami. My mother trained as a psychometrist - an expert in psychological testing. My father was a businessman, rather a wild one who started and lost many businesses. They let me set up a corner of my bedroom as a studio. I had a work table with art supplies but didn't know any female artists and, when I got older, every time a female artist's name was mentioned, people would say, "Oh she was not very important" or, "She was a student of so and so" and, although I didn't realise it, this was very discouraging. I still liked drawing and making things but

> When I was young, I'd get treated like a groupie, not an artist, by gallerists. You have no idea what it was like'

I picked up a booklet in my secondary school careers office called *Field Anthropology As a Career for Women* by Margaret Mead. I thought: this is for me. I have no regret about having studied it. Anthropology is wonderful but it is my rejection of it that influences my work. I limit myself to studying artefacts in our own society. But I have an anthropological curiosity about them. I don't believe in studying others. Who are others, you know? We are the others. Once you understand that, how could you be an anthropologist?

I came to London through love. I married an Englishman. We lived in New Orleans and, at a certain point, decided it would be nice for him to go back and introduce me to his parents and England. We arrived at the beginning of the 60s and it was so fantastically wonderful that we stayed. And I am still here and have a British passport and a son who is British. Compared to the United States, people were very politically aware, you had a national health system, council houses, rent control, a utopian view of society. There was nothing wrong with being poor, and that generation of artists, poets and musicians developed because of those conditions. It was the most creative time. Now they are tearing my studio down. This studio was put up years ago by Camden council when there was a completely different orientation towards life, politics, art, money and everything else. Now it is lent to businesses but it was supposed to be for artists.

Emergency case: Homage to Joseph Beuys, 1969-2012 (13 wooden felt-lined first aid cabinets, containing bottles of holy water and vintage first aid supplies), by Susan Hiller. Photograph: Susan Hiller/Lisson Gallery

I don't want to talk about being old. When I was young, being a woman was a problem because people often did not realise I was the artist in my relationship. They would talk to him, not me. Or I'd get treated by gallerists and art lecturers as if I was a groupie, not an artist. You have no idea what it was like. It has changed so much. Now we have an extraordinary number of amazing female artists. When I was a young artist, I had incredible confidence on the one hand and total lack of confidence on the other. The lack of confidence comes from: how is this going to work out? And yet I so enjoyed doing what I wanted to do and the level of pleasure was so extreme, it overcame fear. But was I going to go on being poverty stricken for ever? I went for years without making any money through art and working in terrible jobs. I was a receptionist at the Skoda car factory and a temporary audio typist and eventually, after I had shown a few works, I was invited to teach and learned a lot through that.

To a young artist, I would say: just go day by day and see what happens. Don't worry about other people's judgment. If it resonates, then listen, otherwise pay no attention. Self-doubt is always present for artists because we have the job and the privilege of defining problems and then asking ourselves whether we have solved them.

I tend not to look backward except I have to say that, as you get older, looking forward becomes more complicated. When you are young, you have some idea of the future: you're going to get older, you're going to get better at what you are doing, you're going to be more in control of your life. When you get older, it is a bit like being an adolescent - every day is different. It is a strange thing. You are proceeding into the unknown, which is different from growing up and proceeding into the known.

I'm interested in occult powers, and if people find this ludicrous that is their problem. I'm not a true believer but these things are there and to say they aren't is ridiculous. I've recently made a piece called *Channels* about people relating their so-called near-death experiences. I am interested that these stories occur all over the world and always have done, and if we don't think that is interesting then we are very boring.

I don't think of myself in terms of decades. I can't take that seriously because the artists I know may be 70 or 80 but they don't fit the picture at all. I think artists stay younger, longer. I didn't "grow up" until my late 30s. I think being treated as a statistic is one of the horrible things about the way our culture operates. It would be different if each change in age were celebrated and if getting older were understood in terms of wisdom and you achieved some kind of higher stature, but at the moment it is thought to be all downhill.

I am not retrospective except that I keep going back to what I set out to do and wonder whether I am still doing it. Regrets? I do wish I had done more, better.

● At Lisson Gallery, London NW1 until 9 January 2016

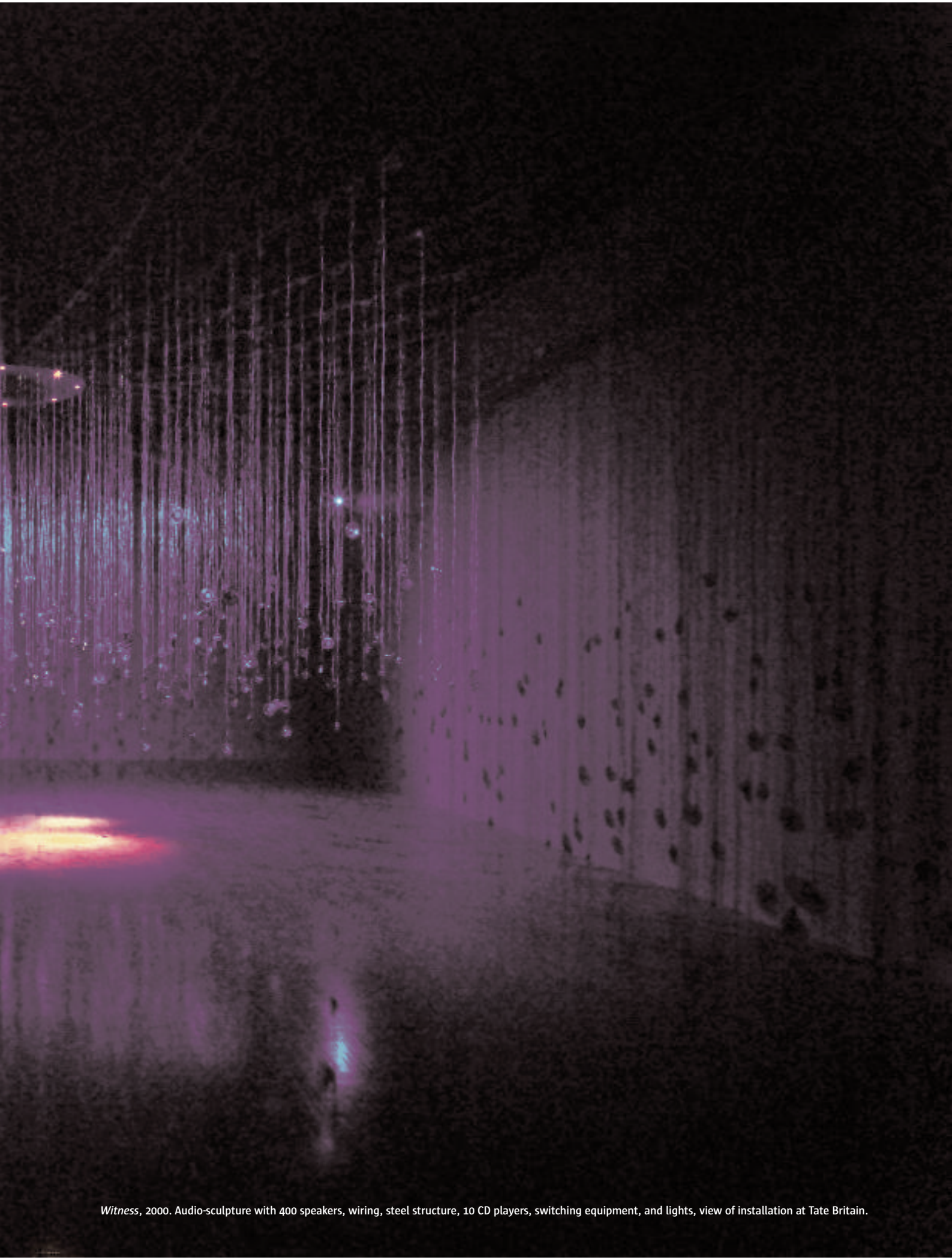
LISSON GALLERY

Sculpture Magazine
May 2012

TODD WHITE ART PHOTOGRAPHY, LONDON. © SUSAN HILLER. COURTESY TIMOTHY TAYLOR GALLERY, LONDON

HAUNTINGS

A Conversation with Susan Hiller



Witness, 2000. Audio-sculpture with 400 speakers, wiring, steel structure, 10 CD players, switching equipment, and lights, view of installation at Tate Britain.

BY INA COLE

A pioneer of multimedia installation art in the 1980s, Susan Hiller went on to create a complex body of work that subverts our understanding of reality, offering an intellectual investigation into the darkest recesses of the human imagination. Accepted arguments are swept aside as Hiller embarks on an enquiry into alternative modes of representation and explanation. Her multi-faceted use of materials and technology immerses the viewer in a world of imagery and sound, creating an altered state of consciousness that questions the very nature of existence.

Ina Cole: *You've lived in the U.K. since the 1970s, but what memories do you have of growing up in Florida, particularly in relation to your early interest in anthropology and art?*
Susan Hiller: I was born in Tallahassee but grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, until my parents moved back to Florida, to Coral Gables. As a child, I was always interested in art. My father, an amateur painter, was very supportive, and I had a corner of my bedroom set up as a workspace with art supplies. The anthropology came in high school when I found a fascinating booklet by Margaret Mead called *Anthropology as a Career for Women*. Mead, who was responsible for the first generation of women anthropologists, offered the field in a gendered way that seemed terrifically interesting. At that point, I thought that being an artist was impractical; but at university in the U.S., I took art courses to keep up with it. So, my career as an artist was partially formed by a vaccination of anthropology, but that doesn't mean my work is anthropological. It's simply that my definition of art is anthropological, which leads me to be interested in certain things.
IC: *Part of your practice involves recycling paintings into three-dimensional forms or burning them and displaying their ashes in glass cylinders.*

***Monument*, 1980–81. 41 photographs, park bench, and audio track tape, view of installation at Tate Britain, 2011.**

***Belshazzar's Feast*, 1983–84. Video program and installation, view of installation at Tate Britain.**

SH: There's an idea that sculpture's existence as an object is the most important way to define it. My work isn't committed to objecthood in quite the way of traditional sculpture. With the recycled works, I'm interested in how far you can go before something doesn't exist materially anymore—it's an investigation.

A few years ago, I was invited to participate in a conference on Henry Moore at the Sainsbury Centre because of a shared interest in ethnographic art, and I explained that my decision to leave anthropology had taken place during a lecture on African art. D.H. Lawrence criticized the "photographic" idea of sculpture, as opposed to the African commitment to "all-roundness" that characterizes Moore's work. My own commitment to the idea of sculpture being all in the round rather than flat against the wall has emerged in my installations in a fundamental but less obvious sense. Some installations document particularly well because you see them from one angle like a theater set, mine less so because they're in the round and use sound, which goes back to the very beginnings of my interest in African sculpture.

IC: Monument *is a signature work from the 1980s, a moving exploration of how people continue to live through the thoughts and voices of others. How did this work represent a breakthrough for you?*

SH: It was the first work I'd made like that. The photographs are inset into a wall and presented with a park bench and sound. The soundtrack is in analog format, so you can rewind the tape machine and my voice unwinds in your ear in a physical way, which doesn't happen with digital. People approach the work from a distance, move closer, stop, and read the panels, then notice that there's a place for them to sit, listen, and become part of the ensemble. The memorials are from a London park, which is wonderful now, but was overgrown and melancholy then, and I photographed them because I found the texts poignant. People sat on benches with their backs to the plaques, and I realized then the fate of memorials or monuments of any kind. They're ignored, no one pays attention to them. The idea of this invisibility became important in the work.

IC: Monument *also reflects on our difficult relationship with temporal existence.*

SH: It was made up of one panel for each year of my life. The element of time, which is so important in sculpture, is fundamental in this piece because the subjects of the texts exist longer as representations than as living creatures. If I die and someone keeps

***Painting Block*, 1971/84. Oil on canvas, cut and bound with thread, 11.5 x 16.5 x 7.3 cm.**

***An Entertainment*, 1990. 4 synchronized video projections and quadraphonic sound, view of installation at Tate Britain.**

a photograph of me, I'll be around as a representation for other people, not as myself, which is curious. Our society is obsessed with conserving histories because we can't conserve ourselves, and I addressed this explicitly in the soundtrack. *Monument* is built up around the idea of memory and commemoration, but it doesn't provide answers; it just raises more questions. Empirical explanations don't satisfy our yearnings for continuity. There's a kind of Hollywood mishmash of cult fantasies and beliefs, a desperate groping for something that used to be taken care of by religion. A lot of work needs to be done to address these issues because the fantastic explanations posited by physics about the nature of reality don't match the boring, commonsense, empirical view that's pounded into society. When people wonder about other possibilities, others usually laugh at them. It's a big problem, and our society is in crisis. Do you feel that?

IC: *Yes, I think we've reached a crisis point in terms of human consciousness. People still pursue answers, but these experiences tend to be individual and quite insular rather than of collective significance.*

SH: In a recent work, *From Here to Eternity*, I explored the medieval idea of creating an altered state of consciousness by metaphorically undertaking the great pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The work is based on the idea that time and space can be experienced from a diagram. There are three slow, silent, video projections of three different labyrinths with little dots going round a pathway, similar to an early computer game graphic or a Frank Stella painting. There's something very interesting about the concept of a labyrinth as opposed to a maze. A maze is a place to get lost; a labyrinth has only one right way to go, but it's complicated, and you often seem to be going backwards or in the wrong direction. You think this can't be right, but it is, and that's why it's such a great statement about life. If you follow the moving dots, you'll feel your attention moving from one side of your brain to the other in a very physical way. My work is increasingly designed to create situations in which people begin to understand something about themselves, and this work does it without text or sound.

IC: *In* Belshazzar's Feast, *the central element is a television screen set within the configuration of a living room. In movies, the screen frequently serves as a paranormal device whose victims become obsessed with occult transmissions. Here, it creates tension through its dual nature as an accepted everyday object that nonetheless has the power to subsume us all. Can you discuss the ideas behind this work and explain why the screen shows footage of flames?*

SH: Communication at a distance, starting with the radio and the telephone, opened up new possibilities of spookiness in the history of Western culture. *Belshazzar's Feast* is based on newspaper articles about apparitions appearing on screens after a broadcast had ended. Marshall McLuhan had a very rational explanation about the lure of television when he said that it had replaced the living room hearth. Deconstructing television isn't my primary interest; I'm interested in the phenomena of reverie that can happen regardless of what program is on, which is similar to what happens if you stare into a fire because of the little blips of light. If you're good at imagining, you'll see pictures and make up a story. It's probably the origin of image-making. The biblical story of Belshazzar's Feast describes a collective hallucination in which everyone sees a hand writing a message of doom. The relationship of that story to my piece is that numerous people rang the BBC after the close of broadcast saying that they could still see images, which they found very spooky. This work is about projection, which can be a source of great pleasure if you enjoy imagination, otherwise it's scary.

IC: An Entertainment *offers a moment of high drama, presenting itself as a visual and acoustic shock to the senses. Here, the spectator*

***Witness*, 2000. Audio-sculpture with 400 speakers, wiring, steel structure, 10 CD players, switching equipment, and lights, detail of installation at Tate Britain.**

becomes the victim, boxed within a four-screen installation. Is it important for you that viewers become complicit in the interpretation of a work, that by experiencing it they become something like collaborators?

SH: In *An Entertainment*, I wanted to put the adult in the place of the child, and the only way to revive the hypersensitivity of a child was to make things big and make us feel small. All the repetitions in the piece are from Punch and Judy shows, and because the puppets perform from a box, I thought, "Let's put us in a box." I invented a projection system that surrounds the viewer with images coming from all sides. I went to many puppet shows when my son was growing up, and I'd hear the littlest children crying and wanting to leave, and their parents saying, "Oh, look at Mr. Punch, isn't he funny" or "Don't be so silly, there's nothing frightening here." I realized that denial is a ritual in our society—we're training to deny our own experiences and laugh at our fears. *An Entertainment* has the attractiveness of a certain kind of fear because it triggers childhood memories in which you're terrified of something that turns out not to be real. In childhood, you don't anticipate, and with *An Entertainment*, the sound and image suddenly come from behind, forcing you to turn around. This uncertainty is a deliberate part of the piece. With my installations, the degree of involvement and three-dimensionality increases through time, starting with *Monument*, which you can just walk past, to *An Entertainment* and *Witness*, where they become greater.

IC: *In* Witness*, hundreds of suspended microphones emit an insane cacophony of voices recalling stories of alien encounters from across the world. In the past, people looked to religious icons, while contemporary witnesses often see spectral or extraterrestrial phenomena. Do you think this phenomenon represents a yearning for something greater than ourselves, something to make our earthly existence more tolerable?*

SH: In the past, there was a context for heightened psychological experiences, which could be translated into known iconic figures and therefore made acceptable. We're now out on a limb with this because society is more and more on the surface; we don't have metaphysical ponderings and depth. Freud said that the lost pleasures of life on this earth are compensated for by a belief in occult theories. He saw that there was a need and was sympathetic, even though he didn't believe. That's the place to be, tolerant but skeptical, and I think more work needs to be done on these issues by psychologists and scientists.

In *Witness*, the UFO experiences usually begin when someone is driving through empty countryside at night—the monotony triggers receptivity. It's hard to talk about these experiences, so people create straightforward narratives. Was it an angel, a flying saucer, or just a bright light? It depends on the person, and these stories have a very long history. William Blake saw angels. Are we supposed to mock Blake? No, I don't think so. So what do we do with the stories?

IC: *Perhaps science ignores the workings of the subconscious mind at its peril.*

SH: Yes, and because we don't allow people to have regular paths to unconsciousness, certain issues become big social problems. Everyone yearns for peace, but we have more war than ever because unconsciously something's happening and we can't get at it. It would require a fundamental shift of focus to change things, and I can't see how we're going to achieve that. In *Witness*, these experiences erupt in consciousness when the person is in a state of receptivity. We have this capacity to see the most beautiful things, which may be there or not. Scientists tell us that there are nine dimensions, that everything's happening simultaneously, but how are we supposed to put that together with the stupidity with which we're brought up? We're the prisoners of our senses,

we have bodies, which is why people invented the idea of the soul. I don't think we're ever going to resolve it, but it's interesting to provide experiences that allow people to think about it.

IC: The Last Silent Movie *highlights 400 extinct languages, and* The J. Street Project *is a collection of 303 street signs incorporating the word "Jew." Both works reflect on traces of individuals cast aside by societal conventions. Is our civilization becoming more and more homogenized, with individual traits conveniently erased?*

SH: You could say that I'm erasing the individualism of streets and languages by collecting them, but I'm not—I'm pointing out their existence and uniqueness. In *The Last Silent Movie*, the decision not to have pictures is important because it takes away one of our senses. We listen to voices, and every voice is unique like a fingerprint. We have a closeness when hearing the recorded voice of someone who's dead, because the voice is still living, although that wasn't my first intention, which was to look at the phenomenon of disappearing languages. The fact that languages are collected and shut away in academic archives is very peculiar. So much effort is made by anthropologists and linguists to record languages as the last speakers become old and fade away. We should be asking, "Why are these languages dying? What's going on?" But we never ask these questions because we're stuck on the implications of our own way of life, which is eating up the rest of the world. *The Last Silent Movie* and *The J. Street Project* are about how to make that disappearance visible.

IC: From the Freud Museum *responds to Freud's lifelong passion for collecting. The installation, which you've referred to as "an archive of misunderstandings," includes 50 archaeological storage boxes filled with mementos, relics, and talismans that you acquired. Can you elaborate?*

SH: Freud collected everything, and his collection was the kind that any cultivated European of his period with sufficient income would have acquired. I'm not saying that it wasn't personal, but it's typical of a middle-class man of his time, whereas the things I collected have no value other than that they are perplexing or curious. The misunderstandings are of various kinds. Each box has its own title referring to a particular discourse—art history, anthropology, psychoanalysis. They're juxtaposed randomly so that the different perspectives problematize each other, with each individual box deciphering other kinds of misunderstandings. One box holds colored salt from a mine near Auschwitz that contains

Above: *Hand Grenades*, 1969–72. Ashes of paintings in glass jars, rubber stoppers, labels, and Pyrex bowl, 11 x 18 x 18 cm. Below: *From the Freud Museum*, 1991–96. Vitrine, boxes, and video, view of installation at Tate Britain, 2011.

***Home Nursing: Homage to Joseph Beuys*, 1969–2011. Vitrine, boxes, and video, view of installation at Tate Britain, 2011.**

beautiful carvings made by the miners and a ballroom with semi-transparent walls that glow when lamps are placed behind them. It was used as a TB sanatorium because of the pure air and as a facility for advanced technologies because there was no dust. One of these advanced technologies was the basis for a Nazi armament factory using slave labor. Hundreds of people died, but the tour and the tourist map of the mine don't mention the slave labor camp. I found a book about this mine with a chapter on the camp. So, I placed a photocopy of the tourist map in the box with these lovely orange, green, and gray samples of salt, drawing the location of the slave labor camp in red. That kind of juxtaposition is what the boxes are about.

Another box contains a praying mantis in a painstakingly made glass coffin, with a big red glass jewel set in the top. I juxtaposed this with an excerpt from a 1970s House of Lords debate on UFOs, because the words "mantis" and "mantic" relate to prophecy and supernatural knowledge. I thought of someone placing a praying mantis in a coffin, thinking it was a creature from outer space, ceremonially treating it as though it were holy. The fact that the House of Lords had an official debate on UFOs was irresistible to me. A touch of humor had to enter into this work from time to time, which relates to Freud's idea of the joke, the misreading, and the omission. The individual boxes work by association, and viewer associations probably override my own.

IC: *You've created a series of "Homages" to 20th-century artists and writers including Marcel Duchamp, Gertrude Stein, and Joseph Beuys. All were radical thinkers, but why did you select them?*

SH: I'm interested in what's hidden, left out, or continues to haunt us. The history of Modernist art includes elements from occult traditions that are underplayed or ignored. These artists and others of their generation transmitted occult concepts down to the present. For many years after he gave up retinal painting, Duchamp quested for a vehicle. It isn't generally acknowledged that he went through various occult movements before finally ending up with alchemy. He was interested in human auras, and *Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel* portrays his friend, a radiographer, with auras. Duchamp deliberately conflated the idea of the occult aura with the light of radiography. I wanted to take that further and explore what that means in a digital age.

As a student of psychology, Gertrude Stein had conducted experiments on automatic writing, which she spent the rest of her life denying. Behind the New York Public Library is a sculpture of her by Jo Davidson. It's a conventional figurative sculpture, but he's exaggerated her fatness, which I also wanted to reflect on in my piece. I found a wonderful, rounded piece of art deco furniture, which I stacked with books on automatic writing, books on using the other side of your brain, and books about new concepts of the human being as a result of some advanced thinking at the time. So *Homage to Gertrude Stein* emphasizes the implications of an aspect of her work that tends to be suppressed or ignored.

Beuys haunts contemporary art, and his controversial pose as a shaman mediating between two worlds has both seduced and repelled people. I was interested in representing how he tried to stay on the edge of that by using bottles of holy water. All waters are in constant circulation, so water from one place probably isn't any more holy than water from another. The U.K. has a super-abundance of holy springs, and I started collecting the water years ago. This work situates the holy waters in a felt-lined vitrine and connects Beuys to a current of popular belief that is both credulous and skeptical, because even though people return from official sites like Lourdes with water, I don't believe they think it's actually magic. Beuys was trying to create a bridge between some of the things we've been talking about, but his shamanistic pose and biography as a celebrity create a problem. It's an encouragement for credulity rather than for thinking.

Ina Cole is a writer based in the U.K.

The Guardian
01st February 2011

theguardian

Arts 01.02.11

Voices from the sky

Lost languages, dreams of UFOs, dead prime ministers – Susan Hiller's work is haunted by transmissions from other worlds. **Adrian Searle** tunes in at her new Tate exhibition

PHOTOGRAPH: FELIX CLAY FOR THE GUARDIAN

Flying saucers . . . a visitor listens to Susan Hiller's Witness

Box of delights
Sam Leith on Sky Atlantic, page 22

Never kiss with a cold
John Gordon Sinclair, page 23

Monday night misery
Stuart Jeffries on last night's TV, page 25

The art of the 20th century was littered with all sorts of nonsensical ideas - from theosophy to the fifth dimension, from skewed modernist ideas of progress and universality to quasi-religious calls to faith in the artist's shamanistic and magical powers. "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths," wrote Bruce Nauman, in a 1967 neon sign.

Nauman himself never believed in any such thing about mystic truths, but one thing we can be sure of is that the wish to believe persists. We think that art can change us and change the world. That it has secrets, that it is an oracle.

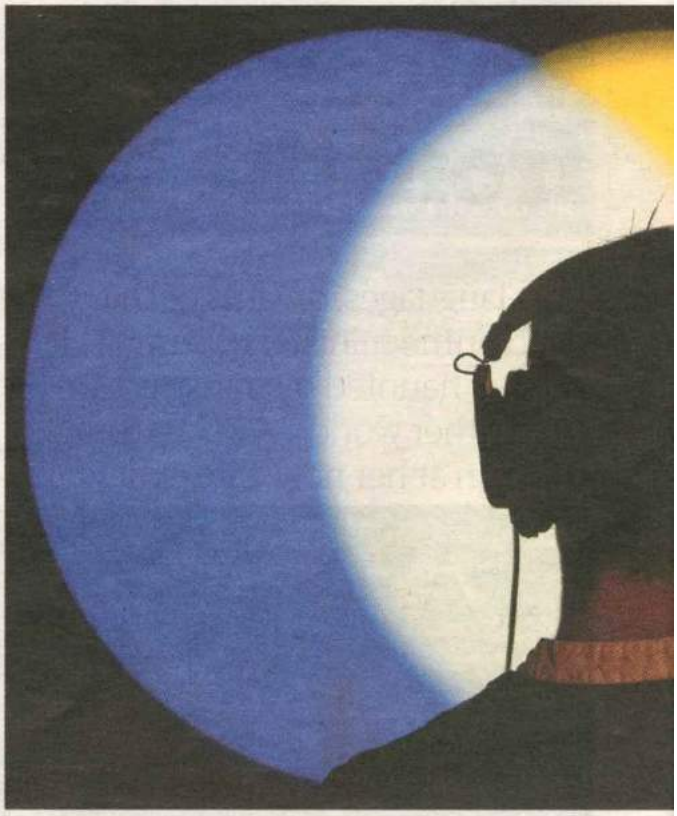
Artists themselves are not immune to bunk. Sometimes it helps them. The things they do are something else. But think of the hushed reverence one encounters in the Rothko room at the Tate, or the simpering new age ceremonies that take place in his chapel in Houston. At least, unlike the movie world, there aren't too many high-profile artists who admit to being Scientologists.

Susan Hiller's work often deals with strange phenomena, misplaced belief, arcane rituals, mistaken ideas, collective and individual hallucinations. This in part accounts for her work's appeal. Even if we are not all suckers under the skin, the power of the irrational is a big draw. For all her decades as an artist, Hiller's curiosity in the world remains that of the anthropologist she once trained as.

Her fascination with UFO encounters, with the presence of ghosts on the TV screen, with the voices of the dead in the radio ether, with levitations, automatic writing and other phenomena is more than academic. One must, I think, have to see it all as metaphor, as material. All this would be fun were it not for the fact that Hiller's work has, at certain moments, achieved something much richer. When in the 1970s, she got her friends to sleep inside fairy rings in fields and record their dreams, the results were as uninteresting as any dream left uninterpreted. One of her subjects records a dream in which he tries to hide his stash of hash when the police raid his house. Spooky, or stoned, or what? And you can't be responsible for the banality of other people's dreams. Hiller was just - one might say - channelling her time, as well as the old folklore about these naturally occurring circles of funghi.

Her cabinet of bottled holy water, from the Ganges and Greece, Willesden and Wales, is collected in old glass medicine bottles reclaimed from canalside middens and river mud. These little bottles might themselves have once have contained laudanum, poison, or snake-oil potions that promised a cure for all your ills. Dedicated to Joseph Beuys, who professed to believe in the healing powers of such everyday and abject substances as fat, felt and beeswax, Hiller points up the ridiculous idea that some water is inherently precious. But hers is not an entirely materialistic view. What interests her is that we put our faith in, and that includes art itself. Any art worth the name reflects on its own condition, as well as on the world itself, and Hiller's work at its best does just this. When she cut up and incinerated her early paintings, she gave them a fetishistic, relic-like quality. There's nothing there but ash and canvas. If there was a radical spirit to her gesture, it has evaporated with the years, and that becomes metaphoric, too.

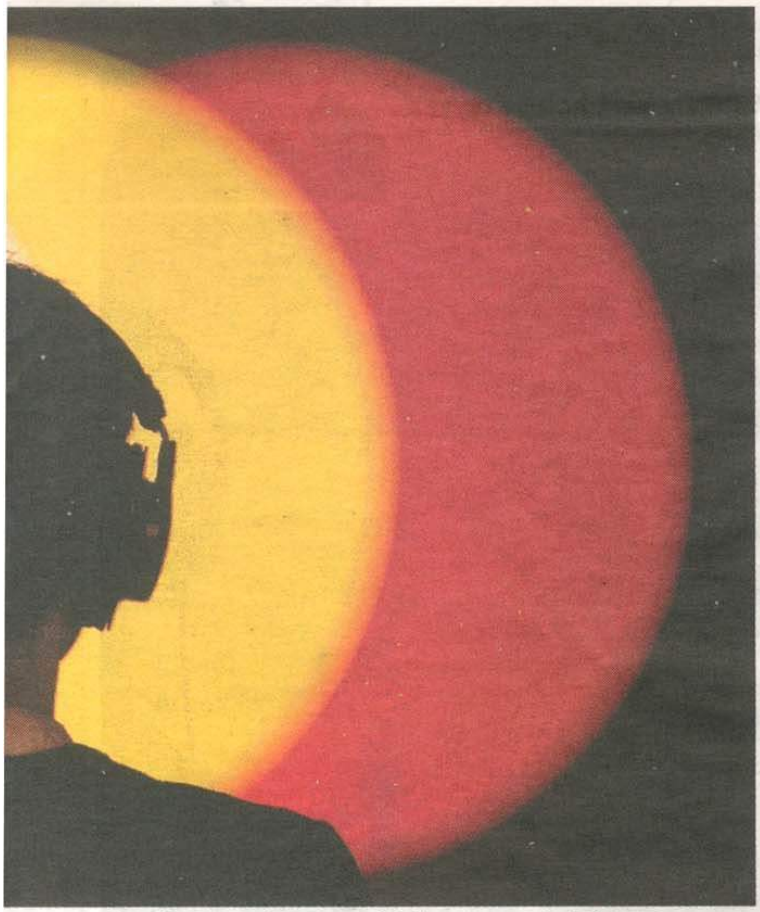
Roni Horn's columns of melted glacier water in her Library of Water in Iceland, Shirin Neshat's photographs



Swimming in front of your eyes . . . *(above)* **Magic Lantern, accompanied by a supposed recording of the voices of Winston Churchill and James Joyce;** *(below right)* **The Tao of Water: Homage to Joseph Beuys**

of women with Persian calligraphy written on their faces and hands, Jane and Louise Wilson's early films all seem to owe a debt to Hiller, just as Hiller has paid homage to Beuys, Yves Klein, Duchamp and others. Art, it has been said, is always a homage and critique to what came before. If it's any good, it also leads to what comes later, wittingly or not. In this way, the artist (and it's true of writers and composers, too) is a medium, and one who is always haunted.

There are ways in which Hiller's work is a consideration, and even an acting out, of male ideas about "the feminine". Her installation Psi-Girls



takes footage of commercial films dealing with girls with terrifying psychokinetic powers - causing model trains to crash, tumblers to move, inanimate objects to fly and things to burst into flames. These movies, and Hiller's art, play on the potent male stereotype of the feminine dark continent, and women as being in touch with intuition, as superstitious, as somehow, even, evil.

Her well-known video installation An Entertainment from 1990 has scenes from Punch and Judy shows roaring round the walls: garish colour, the awful voice of Mr Punch, the terrible violence, the hurdy-gurdy music, all shot and projected in smeary low-resolution video that would be almost unthinkable now. The images erupt and decay around us in a granular fizz of winking dots of colour, as if some ectoplasmic substance were being hurled on the walls. The whole thing feels like some sort of summoning of violence.

It is extremely sad to hear these last speakers of Manx, Ngarrindjeri and Xokleng. Voices disappearing, words failing

Another well-known work uses the recordings made by the Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive, who in the 1960s discovered what he thought were the voices of Winston Churchill, the poet Mayakovsky and James Joyce, which he claimed he had recorded on a tape recorder left running in a soundproofed room. These fuzzy, disquieting fragments of voices, buried in the electrostatic boom and sizzle, with their original, plummy-voiced English commentary, are replayed beside a slideshow of constantly shifting and overlapping discs of coloured light, demonstrating the properties of colour. What we see and hear bear no direct relation to one another. But the optical effects swim in our eyes, persist on our retina, and make us see things that aren't there, just as we hear voices of the long dead that also aren't present. Or are they? What's out there and what's in the mind? Witness, meanwhile, is a room full of clamouring voices emitted from dangling little speakers that look like flying saucers. The voices recount lights in the sky, the alien ships above. What we are really listening to are wishes and projections, fears and dreams.

The best comes last, as we hope it might. In The Last Silent Movie, we watch a black screen. Text is the only image, the translation of recordings of speakers of vanishing (and some now extinct) languages from all over the world. This is overwhelmingly sad, to hear these last speakers of Manx, Ngarrindjeri, Potawatomi, K'ora and Xokleng. Voices disappearing, words failing.

Words fail again, watching Hiller's 2002-5 J Street Project, which I wrote about in the Guardian five years ago. Hiller travelled Germany, photographing and filming every street sign and location still prefixed by the word Juden (Jew). 303 Judenstrasses and Judengrasses, back alleys and country lanes, city streets and unmade paths. Birds sing, cars go by. It rains, and there's a gorgeous sunset. The camera is unwavering.

Nothing happens in the film. It has already happened, in bucolic villages and city side-streets. The film lasts a long time. It dwells on the past's persistence in the present. Headscarfed Muslim women fold away some washing. A bloke stumbles on the roadside verge to avoid a passing truck. Prosaic scenes of everyday modern Germany, in which the unseen is palpable, witnessed to cumulative, crushing effect. Haunted is the only word.

i Susan Hiller is at Tate Britain, London SW1, until 15 May. Details: 020-7887 8888. Get two tickets for the price of one at guardian.co.uk/extra

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The Collective Conscience

The artist who needs no introduction takes over London with a massive retrospective at Tate Modern and new works at the Timothy Taylor Gallery.

Since Susan Hiller (b. 1940) arrived in London in the late 1960s at a time when Minimalist and hard-line conceptual art was at its height, she has been making groundbreaking conceptual and installation art. Much of her work has been pioneering: in her work *Monument* (1980-1981) she used sound and images in an installation in a way which created the intimate and private in a public space and hadn't been done before. Hiller's work encompasses a startling range of techniques, materials and forms, including sculpture, sound, video, installations and projections. This accumulation of diverse work is now the subject of a major survey at Tate Britain that runs until mid-May. It's the largest collection of Susan Hiller's work yet shown. With its roots in second-generation conceptualism, Hiller's practice was daring and free-spirited enough to expand the lexicon of conceptual art by applying it to subject matter that was humorous, approachable and founded in our everyday experiences of consciousness and perception. It made many of her early installations controversial with her peers, but by the same token it has been a decidedly influential aspect of Hiller's work for younger artists.

The collective nature of many of Hiller's works, where selections of everyday artefacts are reframed to throw fresh perspective on our attitudes, mean that many of Hiller's works form long, decade-spanning series that pointedly remain forever open-ended. A concurrent exhibition of new and recent work at Timothy Taylor Gallery, defiantly entitled *An Ongoing Investigation* reminds us that Hiller is an artist still very much engaged in her projects, collections and series, some of which have been accumulating since the very start of her career.

Much of Hiller's art is characterised by an engagement with cultural artefacts. Her seminal piece *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1976) is based around a collection of hundreds of vintage and contemporary postcards she made between the years 1972 and 1976. It's one of the earliest of Hiller's works on display at Tate Britain. All the cards depict rough seas around the coastline of the British Isles. The dramatic, unruly seascapes are presented in contrasting neat and orderly framed rows, making a playful comment on the British public's enduring fascination with its perceived inclemency. A meticulously compiled catalogue, including dates, details of the sender's message if any and credits of as many of the photographers as Hiller could discover the names of, accompanies the piece, alongside a map detailing the locations of the postcard photographs. The title refers to the unheralded photographic artists, as well as the skills and artistry of the completely anonymous workers in the postcard-tinting industry. The collection reveals the dramatic variations of colour tinting in the postcards, a process that required considerable ingenuity, since each image was tinted individually.

Hiller initially trained as an anthropologist, and *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* displays an anthropologist's interest in collective psyche and imagination. In this work Hiller unifies the two meanings of the word "collective", meaning both a commonality and an accumulative tendency. Her piece subtly interrogates the British tendency to exaggeratedly bemoan our climactic conditions, which is in fact one of the most moderate. A number of themes emerge in the collection, from a belief in naval supremacy, to the sense of Britain's embattled isolation, aloof from the disorderly and riotous outside world. By taking the hackneyed images of seaside postcards and compiling them in an extensive collection, Hiller reveals and illuminates aspects of our collective imagination.

It's an approach she has returned to throughout her career. Indeed, Hiller has continued collecting the postcards, and new work on show at the Timothy Taylor gallery includes some of her latest work in this series, entitled *Rough Seas*. Curator, Emma Dexter, explains the role of everyday, underappreciated artefacts in Hiller's practice as "the taking of things that are so familiar that you haven't analysed their political nature or how they work sociologically. Through the re-presentation of something familiar, you can see it in a different light." The sound installation *Witness* (2000), involves small microphones hung from the ceiling, through which eyewitness accounts of UFO encounters are played in a number of different languages. In spite of the humorously evocative positioning of the microphones as unidentified dangling objects in their own right, the overall effect of the piece is neither mocking nor straightforwardly ironic. This is something Hiller has stressed in interviews about the work, making the point that the phenomenon of UFO sightings is part of our shared consciousness. "All these things are collectively produced and that's what interests me about it." The accounts are narrated with heartfelt conviction, and the sheer number and breadth of accounts is compelling. There are hundreds of encounters from many different countries. *Witness* tests the visitor's belief-threshold, inviting you to consider the phenomenon for what it is, a widely held and enthralling part of our shared imagination and an adapted, contemporary incarnation of the will to believe in visionary experience.

Unusually for a conceptual artist working in the 1970s and 1980s, the irrational, subconscious, untamed parts of the human psyche are subjects that Hiller's artwork frequently incorporates. The result is what Dexter calls a "productive tension" between her rigorous investigative conceptualism and her enthusiastic engagement with bizarre phenomena and dream-states. One manifestation of these separate impulses is Hiller's interest in automatic writing, the free-associational writing technique adopted by the Surrealists among others to supposedly write from the subconscious mind, without the strictures and discipline of consciousness. Her early automatic experiments were exhibited as the artwork *Sisters of Menon* (1972). An arrangement of L-shaped frames featuring her automatic drawings, indecipherable hieroglyphs and automatic writing are wall-mounted alongside printed interpretive translations. It's a striking work, not least because the translations are so inadequate at expressing the mystery and enchantment of the wordless symbols and drawings, which point to buried meaning-systems under the surface of our subconscious minds. Automatic writing is also utilised in her work *Midnight, Baker Street* (1983) in which she overlays photobooth portraits of herself with a dense layer of automatic writing.

More recently, automatic writing has emerged in Hiller's work in her *Homage to Gertrude Stein* (2010), which is on display as part of the exhibition *An Ongoing Investigation* at the Timothy Taylor Gallery. An antique writing desk takes on literary significance, as it seems to stand in for Gertrude Stein's desk. A number of books and textbooks on the subject of automatic writing are pointedly shelved just below the surface of the desk, as though the desk-top were a metaphor for the writer's mind. This work perhaps as well as any other seems to articulate the tension in Hiller's work between a commitment to research-based work and an exploration of spontaneous, automatic techniques.

The writing of experimental automatic text-based pieces is one facet of Hiller's considerable body of language-based art. Another strain is the cataloguing and collecting of languages, to reveal their inherent strangeness. Her work *Enquiries / Inquiries* consists of simultaneously projected slides of pages from a British Encyclopaedia and an American one. The piece not only articulates Hiller's personal relocation and adjustment from the United States to London, but the disparity between the two books, both purportedly written in the same language, English. More than this, the piece reveals neither encyclopaedia to be quite encyclopaedic, both equally filled with quirks and curiosities. By presenting this work in side-by-side slides, Hiller playfully reveals the bizarre in even the most authoritative of source-texts.

Hiller's career to date has been marked by her pioneering use of up-to-the-minute technologies, a feature of her work that Ann Gallagher, Curator of the exhibition at Tate Britain has attempted to emphasise: "She has always been at the forefront in terms of new technological advances, combining media or using new innovations, such as the internet, as forms of basic cultural material." *Belshazzar's Feast / the Writing on the Wall* (1984) combines an installation of a living room environment with a background sound installation, and a television screen playing moving images of flames. The piece takes its inspiration from reports in the popular press of hallucinated visions on TV screens after end of broadcast. The living room environment is familiar and humdrum, while the lapping flames and carefully lit installation encourage the viewer to see images in the shadows and the flickers of the screen. Meanwhile, a disconcerting soundtrack plays hushed fragments from the newspaper reports, the artist's own voice performing improvised singing and her young son narrating from his memory the biblical story of Belshazzar, in which a hand writes a mysterious, coded message of doom on the wall that can only be interpreted with the use of free translation and imaginative interpretation. *Belshazzar's Feast / the Writing on the Wall* is a complex, multi-media installation that references Marshall McLuhan's theory of the TV as replacing the hearth as the focal point of the living-environment, feeding our imagination as flickering flames once did. It operates as a critique of the materials it employs.

Similarly, when Hiller made *Dream Screens* (1996), a very early interactive web-based artwork in which the viewer clicks on the screen to change its colour while a woman's voice discusses the role of dreams in modernist art, simultaneously overlapping with a woman's voice discussing the theory of colour. The rationality of the two narratives merge and blend with a background, tapping electronic sound, altering each other into a hypnotic sequence of sounds. The electronic sound is Morse code for "I am dreaming. I am dreaming." The viewer can choose the pace of colour-alternation by clicking their mouse regularly or irregularly. The piece explores our reactions to colour, sound, repetition and fragmentary narratives. Overwhelmed with stimuli, the participant can only focus on certain aspects. *Dream Screens* is a remarkably foresighted diagnostic of the internet's fragmentary and overloaded nebulae of information.

Throughout her career, Hiller has made use of long-stretching, open-ended series of works. For example, she has consistently made series in homage to artists who have influenced and inspired her. The artists include Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers, Yves Klein and Gertrude Stein. In the case of Joseph Beuys these works span her whole career to date, having been begun in 1969, and continued until 2009. In recognition of the unfinished, ongoing, accumulative character of Hiller's work, the Timothy Taylor Gallery show is being held concurrent to the Tate Britain exhibition and focuses on her recent work. The most recent of the *Homage to Joseph Beuys* (1969 – 2009) makes use of Victorian glass vials, which Hiller finds in informal archaeological digs on the banks of the Thames. These vials are used as vessels for holy water, which Hiller collects by going on pilgrimages to holy springs and sites around the world. This is another piece where Hiller's collector's mentality is at the core of the piece. The piece investigates how objects are imbued with significance and sacramental meaning. The *Homages* demonstrate another strong impulse in Hiller's work, a transparency about the collaborators and influences on her art, the same impulse behind *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972 – 1976 and now ongoing). Most of the *Homages* are accompanied by refreshingly frank commentaries by the artist acknowledging her debts to their work. This aspect of Hiller's work is particularly evident in her *Homage to Yves Klein* (2008), which features a collection of photographs that people have made of themselves supposedly levitating. The photographs are compelling in their appearance of defying gravity. The work refers to Yves Klein's famously faked photograph of himself "leaping into the void." Hiller describes her interest in these photographs: "They are fascinating and I am not ironic about that. I don't think these people think they levitated and I don't think they produce these photographs to trick other people. They're doing it because it's a kind of aspiration. It's a desire."

These images seem to be a useful touchstone for Hiller's artistic investigations into our known and unknown consciousness, which is at the root of the tension in her work between order and chaos. In the dramatically diverse and wide range of forms adopted in Hiller's artistic practice over the last 40 years, there emerges a persistent and inventively tenacious attempt to illuminate the workings and implications of the imagination in collective consciousness, consistently on the tight-rope and threshold between fantasy and believability.

Susan Hiller at Tate Britain ran until 15 May 2011. **www.tate.org.uk** and *Susan Hiller: An Ongoing Investigation* at the Timothy Taylor Gallery ran until 5 March 2011. **www.timothytaylorgallery.com**.

Colin Herd

The Guardian
6th February 2011

The Guardian

The Observer
Susan Hiller

Review

Susan Hiller – review

Tate Britain, London

Laura Cumming
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Sun 6 Feb 2011 00.04 GMT

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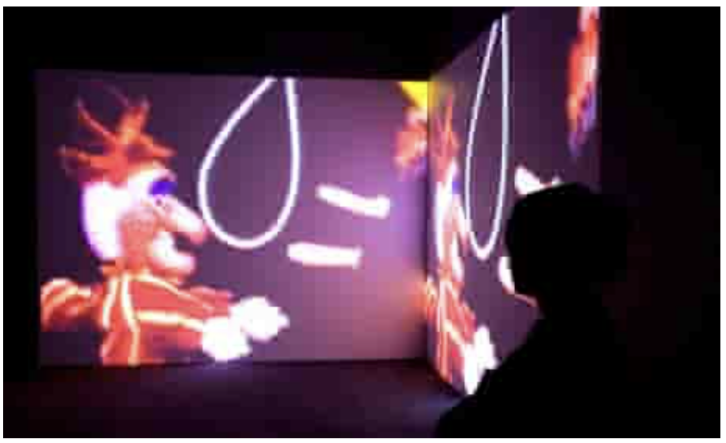

Susan Hiller's An Entertainment at Tate Britain: 'Images explode out of the darkness and you are returned to the bewildering fears of childhood.' Photograph: Felix Clay

Twilight at Stonehenge and a human figure hovers in the sky above the stones, spectral as a ghost. In suburbia, a mother and daughter levitate above the garden path. An elderly gentleman at a Victorian seance rises several feet above his seat, to his neighbour's amazement – for there is no visible explanation.

That we can fly is one of our dearest dreams and, like a dream, partakes of both faith and fantasy. Children imagine they can fly, mystics really believe it. For the rest of us, the sensation occurs briefly in our sleep, ancient and common as mankind.

Such thoughts are occasioned by Susan Hiller's wonderful *Homage to Yves Klein: Levitations* (2008), an immense array of photographs that record (or purport to record) instances of unaided human flight: figures leaping, floating, levitating, cross-legged in mid-air, people defying gravity – all of it presumably impossible.

Presumably. What is so curious about these images is that they defy disbelief, suppressing the immediate question of truth. In the interval of looking, it seems as if there is no down to this up, no weight to these bodies, no artifice keeping them forever aloft. And this is not just a trick of Photoshop and shutter speed, but somehow inherent in the mass spectacle itself, in the exhilarating uplift of seeing all these visions together. Scepticism coexists with wonder.

This is Hiller's achievement: to hold belief and disbelief in equal tension; and it is also her method. Ever since she came to Britain in 1969, this American-born artist has been collecting evidence of strange phenomena, of near-death experiences, visitations, voices from beyond the grave, automatic writing, hallucinations, and presenting it in such striking forms as to bewilder and beguile while simultaneously stifling prejudice.

About her own beliefs, nothing is revealed (although the reference to Klein and the famous montage of himself "flying" must be at least telling) but my sense is that Hiller is a committed agnostic. Who can disprove, after all, what someone else claims to have seen, heard or experienced? What stands against their testimony other than our own incredulity, our own opposing conviction? Belief is more interesting than disbelief, the irrational more fascinating than the simply explained.

Hiller's Tate Britain show is pure human fascination, very nearly, from first to last: a record wave at Scarborough, water from the Lethe, telekinetic teenagers, a graveyard of unsung heroes, a language entirely composed of whistling sounds, the voice of the dead Churchill supposedly picked up live by a recording machine in a soundproofed room.

The show has many classics, including *From the Freud Museum*, with its captivating boxes full of "found" objects (a tile from the underworld, a corsage from Soviet-occupied Germany, a praying mantis in a coffin) paired with "records" of customs and rites, which makes a spry game of the Freudian drive to collate and classify the random and unclassifiable, while unleashing its own force of wild ideas and stories.

Here is the son et lumière *Magic Lantern* (1987), in which discs of primary colours are projected on screen, overlapping, merging, separating and fading in a continuous flow of images and afterimages that mesmerise the eye, ranging from dark suns and blue moons to blinding whiteouts. On headphones the voices of the dead, supposedly captured by the Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive, mumble and drawl in harsh gutturals, barely audible in the ocean of interference.

You look and listen but do not learn, unable to yoke the sound to the vision, or to make sense of either, the horror of the one being as baffling as the beauty of the other. Perhaps what is isolated here is the mysterious operation of positive afterimages, but I am uncertain of anything about this installation except the perplexity of the whole experience.

Which is precisely the strength of the work, after all: it creates an experience analogous to the original phenomena. And this is Hiller's forte. Over the decades - she is 70 - she has found many highly original ways to transform her dark materials into something that will remain resonant and powerful in the gallery.

You see, or hear, that in particular in the ever popular *Witness* (2000), with its hanging garden of little speakers on silver wires transmitting first-hand accounts of UFOs. Everyone has a different experience of this work, with its ethereal blue light. Indeed, 10 years ago it seemed to me thronged with voices like a beehive, but this time only one speaker was audible - murmuring everywhere, yet also talking more directly whichever speaker I approached, as if vouchsafing something secret just to me, rather like the interplanetary message the speaker claimed to have received.

I don't doubt his claims. On what basis could objections be raised? He might be an actor, this might be a fiction, and even if not, there are no available witnesses to counter his version. What strengthens *Witness* is the anonymity of the voices, everyman and everywoman, with their universal tales. What weakens Hiller's work is too much focus on individual experience.

Specifically, her own. This show overplays her early career as a conceptual artist: the dreams transcribed in exercise books after sleeping outdoors, the automatic writings she claims to have made in a trance, and so on, all of them classically boring. It seems from this show that Hiller doesn't find form until her 40s - but when she does, what form.

An Entertainment, from 1990, remains piercingly new with its violently abrupt clips of Mr Punch magnified on four vast screens that enclose the viewer in a devastating cycle of assault and battery, with Punch's demonic repetitions "Nasty baby! Nasty baby!" distorting on the soundtrack. Caught in the middle, images exploding out of the darkness, you are returned to the bewildering fears of childhood.

And what disturbs most is least predictable: the bizarre accent of the male voice, the bright pixelations of the low-resolution video blazing and fading as if the whole thing were taking place in some paranormal realm. It is the strangest combination of primitive and sophisticated, overpowering yet extremely cool.

The last takes you outside the main galleries and turns you into a witness yourself. In *The J Street Project* (2002-2005), Hiller begins with the signpost in Berlin's Judenstrasse - Jews' Street - and gradually films more and more streets named after their sometime inhabitants. Judendorf, Judenhof, Judenweg, so close to where the Jews were murdered in Mannheim or Passau, yet boats drift through, people cycle past and nobody seems to notice. The film is haunted by these signs, literally, of people who are no longer there. You want to point them out to these oblivious crowds, as if you were suddenly able to see ghosts.

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Susan Hiller: Channels

Matt's Gallery, London
13 February–14 April 2013

by Dr JANET McKENZIE

Susan Hiller's exhibition: Channels (2013) at Matt's Gallery in East London is a large audio-sculptural installation made using a vast, multi-screened television set, which covers a long wall from floor to ceiling.

The colours of the many screens create a room-size minimal pattern with intense light; a quiet crackle is audible as the viewer enters the room. Viewers are urged to stay in the room for at least 15 minutes by Robin Klassnik, who has run Matts Gallery for 40 years. Matt's Gallery 'exists to support artists with the space and time to take risks, test and who has shown four exhibitions by Hiller. He prepares the visiting school group, urging them to ask questions: "because you will have questions."

As the gallery explains: "Hiller uses audio accounts in many languages from people who believe they have experienced death as the raw materials for her new work. Vivid stories of those who believe they have died and returned to tell the tale constitute a remarkable contemporary archive, whether the accounts are regarded as metaphors, misconceptions, (sic) myths, delusions or truth. Hiller's interest in this subject matter is neither the advocacy nor the dispute of the anecdotal, traditional or scientific evidence for or against the 'reality' of NDEs, but in considering them as social facts, widely spread in time and space, as appropriate for the subject matter of art as Cézanne's apples or Schwitters' bus tickets. Channels is an artwork designed to engage us in a consideration of some of the gaps and contradictions in our modern belief system and collective cultural life. It is not intended as a religious consolation nor 'new age' fantasy, but rather as a de-stabilising aesthetic device opening to the un-representable."[1]
Hiller has a special relationship to Matt's Gallery where her exhibition in 1980 was one of the gallery's first; in 1991 Matt's Gallery commissioned the video installation *An Entertainment* (the first synchronised multi-screen video work made in Europe); and in 2008, the first London showing of *The Last Silent Movie* took place at the Gallery.[2]

The low-key electronic buzz in Channels, gives way to voices. One voice at a time, interspersed with the soft chatter of an A&E department, (that eerie juxtaposition of fear on the part of patient and relatives, and the seemingly mundane procedures of medics). The voice tells of his or her “near death experience”. Other television sets show ECG patient monitoring. Using an oscilloscope (a sonic measuring device which translates sound into line) the artist produces electronic patterns, which form a disconcerting theatre of sensation. The visualization of the sounds of language has an empowering effect. It can be viewed as a physical presentation of voices that have been overlooked, for the lines on hospital monitors, sound waves or digital graphs, denote accuracy, a scientific and therefore a “truthful” interpretation of data.

A sense of apprehension experienced when viewing Channels, can possibly be explained by the fact that it is a quintessentially human work of art without visible human images. The lack of imagery enables the viewer’s projection onto the space, although that can in itself, be unexpectedly emotional. The artist describes the “intimate contact” the viewer has with the speakers, “because sound touches the ear in contrast to something that we see does not touch our eyes. It sets up a close relationship with those speaking”. Susan Hiller does not seek to create didactic images about death, rather to create “a situation for audiences where an audience has a sense of connection with other people”.[3] Channels can be better understood in the context of Hiller’s last project at Matt’s Gallery, The Last Silent Movie.

Susan Hiller’s work addresses the unknown, more specifically, the areas of knowledge that have been described as beneath recognition, or outside of normal experience. Research methods and materials chosen, in the case of Channels, television sets and ECG monitors, play an important role in eliciting a response in the viewer, as well as presenting the research material gathered. The use of everyday objects with associations or implied states of mind has been employed by a number of artists, following the canonical early conceptual work of Marcel Duchamp and later Joseph Beuys. Hiller harnesses the powerful medium of television and presents the dichotomy between the calm voices in matter of fact tones describing near death experiences, implying tragic loss but also establishing a continuity (the continuous presence of modern media such as a 24 hour rolling news programme); medical screens measuring life evoke a sense that life goes on. In fact the effect of Channels (due to this being my first physical experience of Hiller’s work perhaps?) inside the closed gallery door was almost eerie and quietly overbearing. Channels addresses the experiences of those who have been pronounced dead, and brought back to life. The testimonies question established notions of what death entails, and interestingly each of the narratives was calm and candid, in contrast to the fearful images, that our society as a whole associates with death.

Susan Hiller was born in the United States, and studied Archaeology and Anthropology at Colombia University and then Tulanes, New Orleans. The shift in practice from academic researcher, to that of a woman artist living in the UK from 1973, where she has established a remarkable career based on methods of: collaborating, collecting, archiving, and analyzing, culminated in a major retrospective: Susan Hiller at Tate Britain, London (2011). She has had a strong influence on younger artists here, through teaching and particularly through her projects that challenge the underlying premises of our intellectual heritage: a white, male, English speaking, cultural hegemony. Experiencing Hiller's work at first-hand is essential, however much one can recognize the importance of her work in cerebral terms. The use of materials is also of great importance, establishing both a unique tenor and resonance in her works.

Language is central to all of her projects. Channels relates to Hiller's post colonial project, *The Last Silent Movie*, where she uses a black television screen (after 20 minutes of silence), to present an audio version of extinct languages, sourced from sound libraries in linguistic or anthropology schools around the world. Her appropriation of anthropological research (the archive material) is used by Hiller to scrutinize the motives of nineteenth and twentieth century western attitudes to other cultures. In revealing biases inherent in cultural research, Susan Hiller explores the ramifications of endangered languages and asks whether dead languages can be given a new voice. The influence of Hiller's desire to assert the validity and importance of peripheral cultures can be found too, in the work of Arthur Watson, President of the Royal Scottish Academy. An admirer of Hiller's work, *Singing for Dead Singers*,[4] (2000) a conceptual performance where Watson, an accomplished voice, sings ballads in Scots dialects that do not exist in written form, to represent oral traditions that would otherwise die out.

In *The Last Silent Movie*, layered voices speak in what are now dead languages from archive recordings, so that they emit the sound of a 'conversation without meaning' for the individuals who have no voice, an allusion to globalization, and the dehumanizing potential of homogeneity in culture in the present. Hiller has incorporated the use of text in this and other works. The very methodology of anthropological research is drawn into question by Susan Hiller - the scholarship she brings to bear and her inventive visual language- endow her work with a rare authority and originality.

She questions the loss of meaning through translation (everything nowadays into English) and the loss of nuance and therefore identity and self worth, as a consequence of cultural disintegration. The sensitivity with which Hiller uses her research materials enable the audience to comprehend the actually impoverished condition of contemporary global culture, and the danger of ignoring alternative perceptions of life. Over the past 25 years in particular, white Australians have been forced to recognize the deplorable actions of their forebears against the Indigenous population, and the extreme cultural condescension used to impose European methods of living in an alien environment. In the process they have begun to understand the unique and multifarious culture of the Indigenous populations, including complex language systems, now extinct.

The extinction of language becomes the extinction of other realities[5], of other ways of living and experiencing the world. “Each extinction marks the termination of a site from which to critically view the world as constructed by English.” In *The Last Silent Movie* Hiller uses sub-titles, but she says it is soon clear that they are not adequate. In any case, it is the unique “rhythms, textures, speech, sound, the repertoire of different forms of vocalization and sound, some of which we cannot make”.[6] Antony Gormley, who also studied anthropology before becoming an artist, observed in Arnhem Land in Northern Australia, the implied meaning in the voices of Aborigines there: “Some of the most sophisticated intuitions are resistant to deductive, analytical reasoning. As city-based people, much as it is valuable, we will never fully understand it. You just have to sit under a tree in the Kimberley Ranges or listen to the locals talking like the rustling of leaves, you feel there in the quiet, almost lost but in a wonderful way. I wish I could speak one of the many languages of that continent. There is something incredibly touching about Aboriginal diction that does not seem to be about the forming of subject/predicate relations, but about something else – perhaps more about being than doing.”[7]

Hiller however, recognises the paucity of historical anthropological methodology, for by the time a language is defined as in danger of extinction, and the tapes created and archived, (another form of silencing) the action required to stop living people facing such a fate, is ignored. The death of language is, like marginalized aspects of society, “the death of an entire worldview.”[8] Hiller’s art practice seeks to draw attention to such lost aspects of culture, and to address the erasure of experience deemed less valuable within Western hegemony. It is difficult to imagine such a profound or varied career, since the 1970s without the Women’s Movement, which itself challenged power structures, and sought to redress the subjugation of female experience. Where the feminist artists then used consciousness-raising to empower women to question their position, so too does Susan Hiller endow her art practice with the ability to inform: “If people don’t think there are possibilities other than those that were laid down by official culture, it leads to despair, a lack of progressive development then occurs in societies.”[9] Hiller does not “editorialise“, as she puts it, rather she presents material and allows the audience to fill the space she provides. This is a generous act, enabling the participation of the audience, in an essentially non-elitist and empowering role.

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5. Mark Godfrey, *The Last Silent Movie*, Matt’s Gallery, 12-27 July, 2008, p.6.

6. Hiller: *Talking Art*, *op.cit.*

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The Guardian

Susan Hiller

Susan Hiller: Close encounters

UFO-sightings, a macabre Punch and Judy show, old postcards of waves – Susan Hiller's work highlights the supernatural, bizarre and banal. Rachel Withers admires a long career full of wit and diversity

Rachel Withers

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Susan Hiller: Belshazzar's Feast, the Writing on Your Wall, 1983-4. Photograph: Tate © Susan Hiller; © Susan Hiller/Courtesy Timothy Taylor Gallery, London

Large numbers of people claim they've had some form of outlandish, transforming experience that defies both common sense and the laws of science. Some of these experiences are wonderful and visionary while others are horrific. Some people report picking up terrifying alien messages from blank TV screens. Others have unscrambled the voices of the dead from the static hiss of untuned radio sets. Some have parted company from their own flesh and stared down from mid-air at their own seemingly lifeless bodies. Others have communed with other minds via telepathy or seen objects hurled through the air by the power of thought alone.

All these scenarios inform the remarkable art of Susan Hiller, subject of a major Tate Britain exhibition that opens a week on Tuesday. Over a career spanning more than 40 years, this US-born, UK-resident artist has crafted images, objects, installations, audio, video and web projects, often discovering new artistic applications for new media. She is also celebrated as a writer, speaker, teacher and curator who has inspired generations of younger artists and critics - not least by opening their eyes to the value of such apparently unpromising material as the stories above.

From a rationalist viewpoint, such tales result either from nervous systems going on the blink or the survival of superstitious twaddle, or both. For the credulous, they prove that the planet really is secretly awash with demonic forces, disembodied spirits and little green men. Hiller's work steers hard away from this dull stalemate. Researching exhaustively, gathering often vast quantities of data and recycling it in humorous, compelling new ways, she asks viewers to reconsider, to notice its variety, oddness and beauty. With its potential unleashed, she suggests, this supposedly generic, trivial or banal stuff builds into a powerful "argument for the primacy of the poetic imagination". Take her audio installation *Witness* (2000). First made for Artangel and shown in an abandoned London chapel, this subtle, insidious work has travelled around the world. At the Tate it will draw still more viewers into its web of stories.

In a darkened room, a cloud of electronic droplets - dozens of tiny, opalescent speakers - hang from the ceiling on fine wires. As viewers wander about, they pick up the sound of individual voices speaking many languages. Each one recounts an extraterrestrial encounter. The babel of voices rises and falls; a single voice dominates then fades away. The witnesses are doctors, teachers, pilots, hikers, farmers, drivers, parents, children. The accounts, mainly found online, are voiced by a multilingual team of collaborators recruited by Hiller. They are by turns thrilling, absurd, lyrical, sad, or even strangely offhand, and spiked with piquant details. "This was a UFO fair dinkum!"; "My wife and I and our grandson, along with the bank manager, saw an object . . ."; "Two beings came to the window . . . Their conveyance was like the northern lights"; "I was exonerated and reinstated in the military academy . . . but I know I will never be accepted as normal again . . ." It's a beautifully judged piece, luring visitors into its kaleidoscope of peculiar narratives but not expecting them to check in their critical faculties at the gallery entrance.

Hiller's convictions about art and her decision to become an artist were influenced by her study of social science. Born in 1940 and raised in Florida, she embarked in her 20s on research in anthropology, but came to see the anthropologist's "equal-but-different" participant-observer role (in which researchers rubbed shoulders with their subjects, yet claimed that the data they gathered was scientifically "objective") as a sham. Art, she felt, would allow her to make work without any false claim to objectivity - she wanted to be free to live "inside all my activities".

She also held that the best art was untrammelled by theories: in Gertrude Stein's words, it was "made as it was made". It's a view she still advocates. "Not editing out and not forcing strange juxtapositions and unanswered questions to conform to theory is an aspect of my style, almost a signature," she said in 1998. And a more recent comment hints that she sees not just a difference but a spark of opposition in the relations of art and science. "Artists' research disturbs the kind of research that scientists do," she noted in a talk with the critic Jörg Heiser last year.

By the early 1970s Hiller had moved to London, where she still lives, and was setting out the terms of her mature art practice. It was a kind of curatorship: a drawing-together of new works from pre-existing artefacts, images, histories and legends gleaned from the long grass of global culture. Her search for the curious, the overlooked and the intellectually discredited is, however, driven by political and ethical as well as aesthetic motives. To give significance to the apparently "meaningless, the banal, the unknown, even the weird and ridiculous" is to change the cultural balance of power - to recognise ideas and experiences that are scorned or stifled by mainstream culture and "normal life". From this principle to the 1970s feminist practice of "consciousness raising" - acknowledging and articulating the repressed aspects of women's lives - clearly isn't a long stretch, and Hiller has always stressed her work's feminist tendency.

Yet its cultural-political roots reach even further back, to the tactics and ideals of revolutionary surrealism, itself a movement widely disparaged by the modern art mainstream when Hiller was starting out. Like the surrealists she is fascinated by dreams, and in some early pieces she invited friends to work with her on a series of studies of their dream contents. The Tate show includes *Dream Mapping* (1974): diaries and maps recording dreams that came to the group while sleeping al fresco in the Wiltshire countryside over three midsummer nights. Borrowing a phrase from Magritte, this was a definite case of reckless sleeping, for all were lying in "fairy rings" formed by scotch bonnet mushrooms. These are held to be perilous gateways to the spirit world. Those who trespass into them may end up (among other bad things) in permanent thrall to their fantasies. It's all supposed to be "intensely serious and very funny".

The vast project *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972-present) does just that. The task was to collect multiple examples of a genre of postcard. The results were logged. Details such as location, format, colour and the card's written message were recorded, and the data was then displayed on a grid. All of which sounds pretty dry; but the sober process forms a brilliant foil for the fabulous antique postcards themselves. They show images of "Rough Seas": giant waves cresting over cliffs and beaches, bombarding esplanades, grand hotels and piers and swamping heavily-clad early-20th-century daytrippers in clouds of spume. Some images are thrilling, some lovely, some ridiculous, some a mix of all three, and some are faked - enhanced with colour tinting and painted-on tsunamis. The cards and their banal, odd or touching messages emerge as wonderful. They are traditional landscape paintings in miniature: tiny echoes of the grand sublime tradition made by "unknown artists" and invested in by friends and relatives. They are also slim cracks in the polite surface of everyday life, hints of desires for the excessive, the unruly and the fantastic.

At the Tate, the "unknown artists" bask in the limelight once again in the most extensive presentation of Hiller's work to date. There is recent work, much of it focusing on the internet as a hunting ground (plus, at the Timothy Taylor gallery in London's west end, a further helping of new works, including a tribute to kindred spirit Stein). And many of her most famous projects are on view. *Belshazzar's Feast* (1983-4) is an installation resembling a sitting room. Inside, viewers can relax on sofas and watch an old-fashioned TV screening Hiller's video of the same name, a landmark work that was first broadcast late at night on Channel 4. It shows a flickering fire and its soundtrack includes eerie ritualistic singing and a whispering voice reading newspaper reports of alien messages broadcast on domestic TVs after closedown. The television is recast as a hearth or campfire: a place where the imagination may be set loose and fantasies incubated. Fittingly, the piece sits at the heart of the show.

There's also *From the Freud Museum* (1991-1997), 50 cardboard archive boxes containing a trove of enigmatic small objects, images and texts: toys, herbs, maps, pottery shards, souvenirs, fakes, phials of holy water. Originating from Hiller's 1994 residency at London's Freud Museum, these microcosmic museums-within-a-museum are a kind of free association with physical stuff: reflections on museums, psychoanalysis, Freud's life and Freudian lore.

There's also a rare treat: a reconstruction of the startling *An Entertainment* (1990-91). A four-screen video installation, this was made for and first shown in the celebrated not-for-profit space Matt's Gallery. It's edited from footage from a traditional Punch and Judy show. Projections paint the gallery walls with images of the Punch family, Death, Devil and Hangman, grown monstrously large. They loom over viewers and dodge about the room, accompanied by shrieks, distorted voices, odd fragments of academic-sounding commentary and curious moralistic pronouncements. The impact of *An Entertainment* is visceral and disturbing. It shows how some of the "entertainments" we offer children fuse play and pleasure with fear and violence, without adding any comforting moral judgment.

And, technically, it's brilliant - an achievement rendered doubly impressive when one registers that, in 1990, Hiller was not just making an immersive video installation but inventing the genre from scratch.

The Tate's exhibition will bring many aspects of Hiller's artistry into focus: the diversity and depth of her interests, her art's vitality and humour, and her willingness to let it question and disturb rather than soothe and reassure. But, in this practice dedicated to the re-evaluation of the devalued, it may well be its commitment to the present that moves visitors most. Hiller's work has faith in now - in new cultural stuff, new techniques and new media - and in the power of tracing connections between the cultural galaxies of the present and long, indeed ancient, traditions and customs of art.

Susan Hiller is at Tate Britain, London SW1, from 1 February. *Susan Hiller, An Ongoing Investigation*, is at Timothy Taylor gallery in London W1, 3 February-5 March 2011