

Music has always held a special place in Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard's work; since the late 1990s the London-based collaborators have honed a performative practice through live works based upon reenactment and restaging, often involving significant research and obsessively replicated details. *PUBLICSFEAR*, the duo's first major London retrospective, brings together film, video and soundworks, representing the artists' long-running interests: the process of reenactment as a means of channelling the 'spirit' of a past event, the use of restaging as a way of deconstructing the nature and psychology of public performance and an investigation into the mnemonic powers of music.

*File Under Sacred Music* (2003), their feedback-heavy video reenactment of the Cramps's legendary 1978 performance at the Napa State Mental Hospital, may now be just as well known as the event it recreates. Its legendary status has less to do with the band of cult figures assembled to play the roles of Lux Interior (Alfonso Pinto) and Poison Ivy (Holly Golightly) than it does with knowing that if ever a hybrid genre based on a vaguely exploitative, oddly exhilarating interaction of sleaze-rock, stilettos and psychosis were to gain popularity, this would be its Rosetta Stone.

Since 2005 the pair have been reworking iconic performance and video art of the 1960s and 70s. In *Performer. Audience. Fuck Off.* (2009), an adaptation of Dan Graham's 1975 performance *Performer/Audience/Mirror*, comedian Iain Lee stands, mike in hand, in front of a small audience. Just as Graham did, Lee embarks on a rambling monologue that begins with an examination of his own movements, his insecurities and the inauthenticity of performance, before turning on the audience, visible primarily via the mirrored wall behind him. The shift in the dynamics of performance and spectatorship produced by this reinterpretation of conceptualist art via the genre of standup comedy is typical of their practice, its apparent simplicity giving way to increasingly complex layers of both meaning and hermeneutic disruption as it progresses.

In *Kiss My Nauman* (2007), the duo's tribute to Bruce Nauman's seminal *Art Make-Up* (1967), the iconic black-and-white stage faces of the band Kiss are lovingly recreated by each member of the world's longest-running Kiss tribute band, *Dressed to Kill*. Here the complex, highly mobile relationship between wilful credulity and direct dissemblance which is a constant theme in their work is foregrounded. *Anyone Else Isn't You* (2005), meanwhile, features 14 young(ish) people describing the emotional significance of music, and the influence it has had, and continues to have on their love life. It's a pretty fey affair, running the usual gamut of safe, white, thirty-something indie holy cows – Beefheart grinds up against the Velvet Underground, while the Beach Boys harmonise with Belle and Sebastian – yet nevertheless a nice meditation on the complicated biographies and psychologies attached to songs, a sort of alternative lived-in pop history.

All the same, one can't help but feel that what distinguishes Forsyth and Pollard's work – the blurring of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' forms of culture, between the individual and the collective – is also where this show falls just short. Not because the show isn't both enjoyable and thought-provoking – it is. Rather it seems to lack the desire to step outside its own, slightly worn frames of reference, or address the audience in a way that might leave them feeling either subjectively or art-historically unmoored. *Luke Heighton*

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## Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard

### *PUBLICSFEAR*

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South London Gallery  
4 February – 18 March



*Walking Over Acconci (Misdirected Reproaches)*, 2008, video still.  
Courtesy the artists and Kate MacGarry, London