

Polygraphs

Neil Cooper



1 Hito Steyerl, *Abstract*, 2012 © Hito Steyerl. Image courtesy of the Artist and Andrew Kreps Gallery

2 Peter Kennard, *Haywain, Constable*, 1821. Cruise Missiles U.S.A., 1983. Courtesy of the artist

3 KennardPhillipps, *Know Your Enemy* (2005) © courtesy of the artists

4 Scott Myles, *STABIA (Black and Blue)* (2009) © courtesy of the artist and The Modern Institute, Glasgow

Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow
Until 17 September

Fake News alert. All is not what it seems in this group show that questions the

con trick of authenticity through a series of appropriations of history as modern

myth-making. Taking Hito Steyerl's seven-minute film, *Abstract* (2012), as

its centrepiece, a much bigger picture is revealed by the show's 17 artists, who

explore notions of colonialism, slavery, the arms trade and identity politics. This

in turn subverts received hand-me-down narratives dressed up as truth.

In this respect, 'Polygraphs'

questions the show's own existence within the context it sets down for itself

and GoMA's perceived complicity in the polygraph, after all, is a lie detector, that

pulse-racing gizmo beloved of pulp crime thrillers and daytime TV quiz shows, and

itself questionable in terms of reliability. From Peter Kennard's subversion

of Constable with his now classic anti-nuclear montage, *Haywain with Cruise*

Missiles (1980), through to Scott Myles' *STABIA (Black and Blue)* (2009), in which

construction workers are reconfigured as something more ordered, first impressions count for nothing in a show which requires forensic investigation. Graham Fagen's *Plans and Records* (2007) dissects the slave trade by way of reggae and Robert Burns. Gerard Byrne's Loch Ness-based images put himself in the frame and in the murk of the grandest of hoaxes.

Constructions by Alasdair Gray, Ian Hamilton Finlay, David Hockney and

others all offer windows onto alternative realities or else challenge existing ones. In

Know Your Enemy (2005), KennardPhillipps do this through a backwards-facing image

of Bush and Blair walking into 10 Downing Street as a torture victim is beaten behind

them, the everyday lies of those holding high office laid bare.

Abstract itself is a twin-screen creation that casts Steyerl as both

protagonist and author as she attempts to excavate the clues behind her friend

Andrea Wolf's death in 1998 in Kurdistan. With footage dove-tailing between

the scenes of the crime in Kurdistan and outside the Berlin offices of arms

manufacturers Lockheed Martin, *Abstract*

becomes both document and eyewitness

in a drama that recognises its own sense of

mediation. 'The grammar of cinema follows

the grammar of battle' goes one caption on an otherwise blank screen as Steyerl is

led through a bombed-out inventory on the other. In terms of truth being stranger than

fiction, in the case of both *Abstract* and

'Polygraphs', the truth hurts. For reals.

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