



Patrick Lowry, *Metro: Red River Line*, 2023, installation view

machines themselves seemed almost as ancient as Cornwall's circular Stone Age monuments, a tour of which the sounds evoke.

Downstairs, the musician and organiser Liam Jolly's revival of found and mundane objects, such as car mats, unearthed the unimagined aesthetic facets of their geometric abstraction. Jolly helped lay the ground for Flamm's viability when he opened the town's former Auction House as a gallery space and studio in 2018, a project that raised the level of ambition in the region with its dynamic independence and its collaborations with progressive artists. Indeed, a lasting value of Flamm's coordinated programme has been to connect the various venues into public consciousness, many of them artist-led, such as CMR Projects and Back Lane West, in an initiative that demonstrates the potential of joint marketing throughout West Cornwall, where the county's art scene has historically been concentrated.

From whichever critical direction Flamm is approached, it can only be welcomed. Since the festival was partly funded by the last gasp of EU investment that was so beneficial to Cornwall, its continuation could be an uphill task. Nevertheless, the organisers hope that Redruth 'will be the first of many towns' for future Flamms (the Cornish word for 'flame' that in certain usages can also mean 'brand new'). That prospect beckons the question of future curatorial direction: the inaugural programme predominantly featured local initiatives so that the inclusion of projects initially shown in Scotland - Heather Phillipson's new film *Dream Land* and *{stereo-type-music}*, 2023, by Richy Carey - seemed uncomfortably anomalous in this setting. Yet, at the same time, these artists implied an embracing of an international offering.

In summer 2018, the multisite and multipart project 'Groundwork', masterminded by Teresa Gleadowe (an *AM* trustee) at the venturesome CAST in Helston, did just that to broad acclaim and regional artistic benefit. That momentum remains latent and has yet to be followed up. Could Flamm be its successor?

Flamm Contemporary Art Festival took place in Redruth 21-22 October.

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Artists' Books

Ghislaine Leung: *Bosses*

Literal descriptions of things intersperse *Bosses*, 2023, Ghislaine Leung's new collection of texts: 'Index of Services'; 'Air Passenger Duty'; 'Avoidable Mortality'. They might be titles for works, such as *Public Sculpture*, 2018, which I encountered in Suffolk earlier this summer, a taxonomical line-up of toys from a Reading local authority lending library. Produced according to a score, it was also exhibited in 'Fountains' in 2022 at Simian gallery in Copenhagen, and more recently for the Turner Prize in Eastbourne.

The score, Leung writes, presents a generative way to rethink the production and circulation of sculpture within the limitations of one's life: challenging ownership and authorship, while raising questions about when a performance begins and ends, who performs the work, and how spatial and material conditions affect its outcome.

'I write a score,' Leung explains early in *Bosses*, 'as a parameter of how a particular work gets shown. I produced this way of working specifically because I was interested in finding a mode of production that made space for a different kind of work, a different way of working for me - something that was generative, that I could do while letting life be what it actually is.' Synonymous with musical composition, Leung continues that scores 'are ways to generate: they are constitutively mutable and informal, contingent on their performance'. Constituent elements of her work are assembled interdependently, Leung not necessarily being present during an installation. The challenge of writing a score for Leung becomes: 'What might be written to maximise such contextual contingencies?'

Leung once considered context a problem, conscious of the ways in which the meaning of a work becomes unstable when it enters the world. Pushing these factors to the fore - institutional histories and conditions, her own body and, not least, the contingencies of life itself - are the limitations that constitute work and the creation of value: Leung quotes her friend and colleague, the curator and educator Ian White: 'What there is to be jubilant about is that limit is everyone's material and it is always here. And this is where to start.'

This application of economic thinking in her work is informed by her experiences of working at LUX, the moving-image library that has long ensured artists' fees for screenings and performances. This transposition of one economy to another has wide-reaching and critical repercussions; indeed, Leung's approach shares similar conceptual sensitivities as Adam Linder's dance works (he has instituted remuneration for dancers in the gallery informed by his experience at the Royal Ballet), or Cameron Rowland's rental contracts for artworks pegged against carceral economies.

One interpretation of works by these artists is to consider how they assert novel commodity forms and, more pragmatically, how they intervene in real-world conditions of value creation to expose its biases and failings. Leung emerges in *Bosses* as a deep and optimistic artist-thinker on value and labour: 'I wanted to think of ways that my work could address [labour] not only through striking against my own self-exploitative tendencies, but actively cancelling them. To think of these as constructive issues of labour connected to market viability, visibility, and metrics. A privileging

of visibility that compounds extractive forms of production and rides slipshod over informal or invalidated labours and communities.’

Leung’s work challenges the image of the contemporary artist enacting the fantasy of capitalism’s limitlessness. As the sociologist Isabell Lorey diagnosed, the artist is the virtuoso embodiment of independence, flexibility and creative resilience in a world of precarity that has been economised. ‘Why,’ Leung asks, ‘do I seek to exploit myself? I often choose to be my own bad boss ... Given that I’m my own worst enemy, why can’t I stop seeking to collude or even be complicit in these abuses?’

Leung resolved to shift from speaking *about* labour relations to ‘pursuing a project of understanding how I was instituting, and what my role in instituting was – how I worked, not what the work *was*’. Vital to this realisation, we learn, was becoming a mother. *Bosses* opens with Leung’s moving account post-partum. ‘I was struck,’ she writes, ‘by how my ability to reproduce and provide care was assumed.’ Leung recalls preparing an exhibition at the same time and fighting to resist compartmentalising ‘artist’ and ‘mother’, instead opening up her practice to let it all in as a constitutive fact.

Leung makes clear that the seemingly ‘non-productive’ is as important to a work as that of distribution, exchange and consumption – an extended process of learning when to say ‘no’ (an approach that brings to mind Josef Strau’s writing on the ‘non-productive attitude’). Besides the recognition of limits, Leung has also learnt that entanglement of support is also an enabling one: ‘Freedom is often conflated with autonomy,’ she writes, ‘but dependence is perhaps less the incarcerator than the liberator. I am free with support, not without.’ Leung’s take is counter to that of Sheryl Sandberg’s corporate big-tech ‘lean in’ philosophy, often more straightforwardly defined as being a ‘girl boss’. Indeed, Dawn Foster’s rejoinder to ‘lean out’ was an invitation to consider these structural conditions as economic and social fact.

The intriguing affective blankness and literalism of Leung’s work – no, its deflectiveness – points to everything but itself. This ‘auto-factual’ mode is where the intangible values of her practice lie.

Ghislaine Leung, *Bosses*, Divided Publishing, 2023, 104pp, 15b&w and two col illus, pb, £11.99, 978 1 916425 00 2. Leung’s work is part of the Turner Prize, Towner Eastbourne to 14 April.

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Books

Russell Ferguson: Bohemia – History of an Idea 1950–2000

‘There is a conga line of bohemianism stretching down through history,’ wrote Glenn O’Brien in 1996, ‘and there’s always room at the end for one more blip.’ Russell Ferguson quotes this line in the concluding chapter of the catalogue accompanying the show he curated for the Kunsthalle Prague earlier this year. He seems to broadly agree, while hedging his bets and suggesting that the party may be drawing to a close, that the market has overtaken all its opposition, and that there are no more alternative lives left to live. His book opens with a portrait of Arthur Rimbaud, whose bohemian credentials are impeccable and, making his point, it closes with a panoramic photograph that Wolfgang Tillmans took of debris in his London studio after a party had roared through (*wake*, 2001).

The problem with O’Brien’s argument, and thus the premise for Ferguson’s show, is that it’s difficult to know what bohemianism is, if it can go on forever. For Jerrold Seigel, who wrote the classic 1986 study *Bohemian Paris*, Bohemia wasn’t so much a loose concept as a real social world. It was brought into being by the shape and character of the bourgeoisie in the 19th century, one that created margins inhabited by a mixture of souls. There were the young, studious, artistic aspirants who would eventually, most likely, join the genteel classes; for them, bohemia was an enjoyable, eye-opening way station. There were others, like the petty criminals and prostitutes of the *classes dangereuses*, who never had a hope of doing so. And then there were those whose fortunes or talents would never lift them out of it, or for whom the sheer freedom of the bohemian life eventually became an end in itself. Its cast was first paraded by the writer Henry Murger when he published a series of stories in a Paris newspaper in the 1840s, yet Seigel says that this particular conga line came to an end in the early 20th century when the shape of bourgeois life changed and modes of avant-gardism arrived to form different outlooks among artists. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti would be the model for many in the 20th century and, for him, the dive bar squalor of Bohemia had no appeal; he was an aggrieved bourgeois black sheep with his mind set on cultural domination.

Ferguson has no serious intention to come to grips with this argument, and his history proceeds in a series of unexplained baton-passing episodes in which Bohemia sets down here, then there, then elsewhere. The further we get from Rimbaud, the more implausible it becomes. And yet, and yet ... one of Ferguson’s backdrops is 1950s Paris, where Guy Debord was working to dominate an eclectic crowd of characters who drank in cheap cafes and dives. Photographer Ed van der Elsken documented that *demi-monde* in a volume entitled *Love on the Left Bank*, 1954, and he went all-in on the Boho myth. The show included several of van der Elsken’s pictures and indeed they do describe a world we would call bohemian: the youth smoke, drink, do both while reading psychology, and sit

Maybe it is convenient for Russell Ferguson to declare that Bohemia is dead, for if it were not, we could race out there tonight and verify his claims; alas, like the existence of the dodo, we shall have to take it on trust that it once walked the earth.