

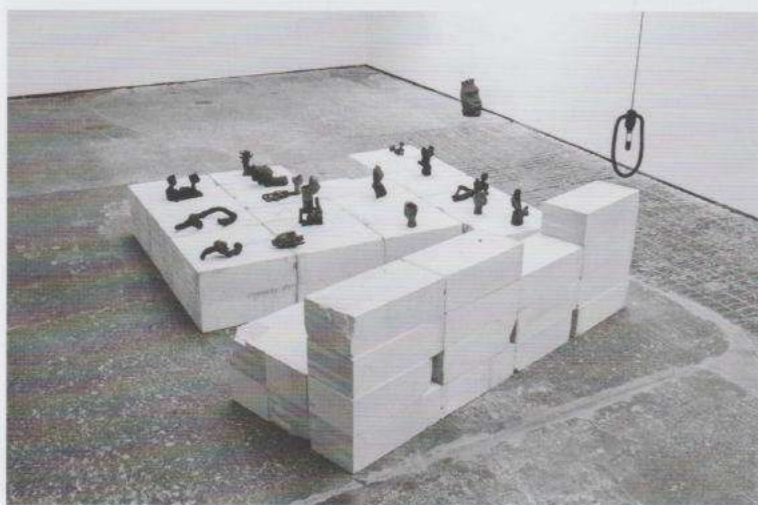
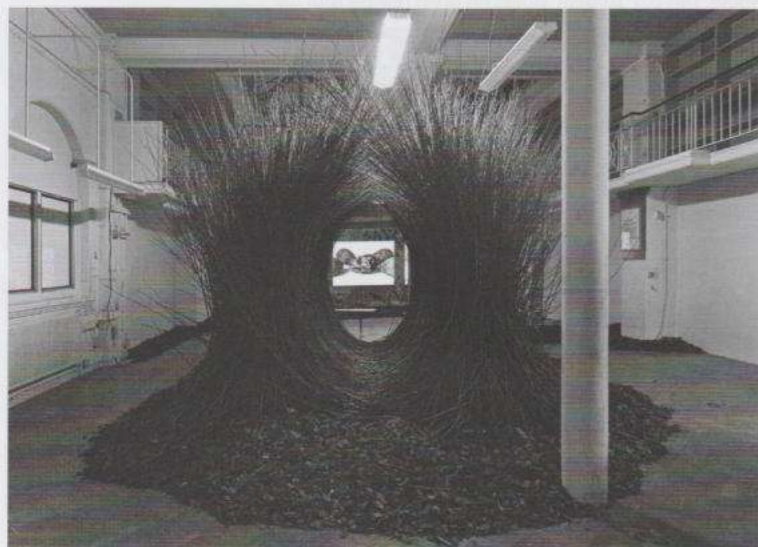
The crow's voice belongs to artist **Andy Holden**, who has marked the culmination of a five-year collaboration with his father, the highly regarded ornithologist Peter Holden, with an expansive exhibition titled 'Natural Selection', which brings together animation, video, sculpture and music in this Artangel commission. What soon becomes evident is that birdlife, in the many facets that are richly explored by father and son, has been present around the dinner table for much longer.

In a three-channel video installation titled *A Natural History of Nest Building*, 2017, the artist and his father lead us through the types, sites and materials of the bird nest. With the ostensible cosiness of a natural-history programme from a 1990s-era BBC, their exchange gradually enacts a subtle unravelling of this format. As father and son take turns to explain and interpret the intricacies of the bird nest, their familial connections and discordances are revealed through a quiet collision of artistic and scientific viewpoints. The pedagogic impulse of these two presenters, who perform the jargon of their respective disciplines as they study these birds' acts of homemaking, gives way to a telling study of a father-son relationship.

The significance of language to these human-animal acts of kin-making is present throughout the installation. Punctuating beds of tree bark, which evoke the woody mustiness of the library surroundings, are several totemic poles made of smooth, carved willow. Inscribed on

**Andy Holden and Peter Holden**  
'Natural Selection'  
2017  
installation view

**Josephine Callaghan and Sarah Cameron**  
'The Landscape'  
2017 installation  
view



each are textual renditions of birdcalls, such as *Sit-EE!* *Sit-EE!* and *polo! tree-tre-tre!*, which attempt to translate these sonic variations into a linguistic confine. Nearby is a series of turned-wood sculptures made by Geoffrey Leeson, which similarly use the waveforms of bird song to create their form. A continuity emerges between acts of making that are shared by both humans and birds. By subverting the familiar forms and structures through which we study, interpret and, significantly, appropriate other life forms, 'Natural Selection' not only undermines the authority of the human as artist-creator, but also proposes an alternative scenario for living together.

'The hideousness he sees is the reflection of himself,' reads a pile of paper in the corner of Cubitt, just one of the textual fragments that frame **Josephine Callaghan and Sarah Cameron's** collaborative exhibition. Titled 'The Landscape', this loaded subject is almost rendered mute by the plethora of interpretations that have inflected it over time, an expansiveness that is contained within the capitalised 'L'. Through painting and sculpture, Callaghan and Cameron present 'landscape' as messy and open; it is a site of projection, improvisation and individualism with the potential for both beauty and ugliness.

A second handout evidences the artists' continuous exchange and parallel working since first meeting in Greece. Covering the page is a series of textual fragments where organisational snippets revolving around travel, money and future plans are interrupted by spikes of inspiration and opinion. Consciously imperfect, this assemblage of fractured correspondences lends a sense of immediacy and continuity to this artistic dialogue and the premise of the installation itself.

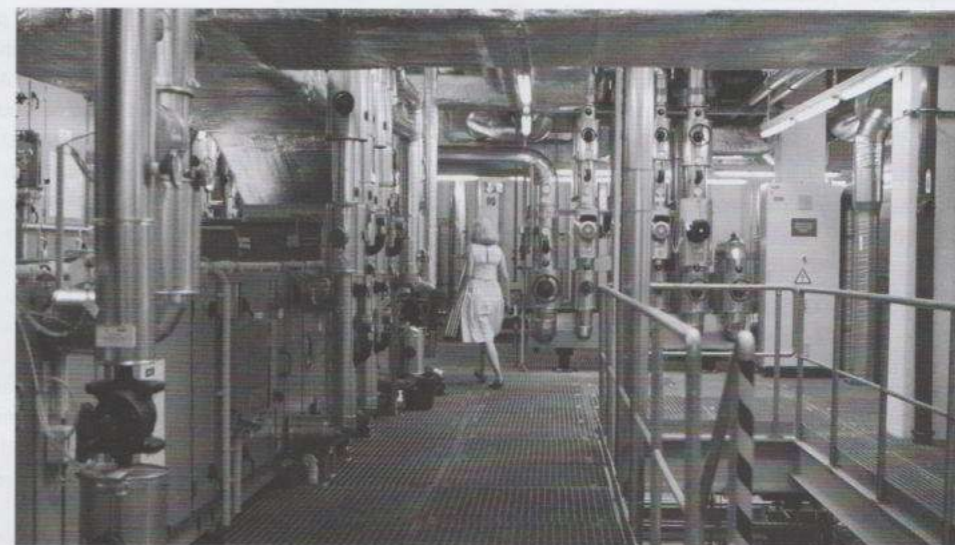
A stack of fractured breeze-blocks is the support for Callaghan's ceramic sculptures, taken from the series 'Stampalia' and 'Iridos', both 2017, that the artist made in direct response to the Greek landscape. Rendered in charcoal black, contorted figures lie bathing alongside mottled, hollow heads and craggy, rock-like formations. Arranged together and yet markedly autonomous, these tiny figures balance precariously on their rugged terrain. Positioned low to the ground, this awkward diorama is viewed from above, while a UV light bulb encased in a clay ring hangs over the landscape, ineffectually lighting the scene.

Surrounding this provisional topography are three paintings by Cameron which continue her engagement with free association as a means of creating images. In one work, an unstretched canvas presents colours, textures and forms caught in a blurry frisson of movement, such that paint overflows the edges of the composition. Sitting somewhere between the nebulous forms of an indefinite dreamscape and the heady haze of the Greek landscape, the paintings enclose Callaghan's platform of figures as a turbulent staging of a landscape in flux.

At Matt's Gallery, **Marianna Simnett's** film installation *Worst Gift*, 2017, welcomes its visitors with the mellifluous tones of Dr Declan Costello, a voice surgeon and singer who plays a dystopic version of his profession within a world gone awry. 'Men gather, make your voices low again,' he chants before being joined by the choral sounds of the pre-pubescent boys whose necks he injects in order to fulfil this beckoning command. These voices, these immaterial, gendered vibrations, form the starting point with which Simnett expertly stages a cathartic queering of bodily subjectivity.

The voices in *Worst Gift* are distinct in their over-pronounced and theatrical delivery, while the bodies that utter them continue to fall sick, break out in sweats, go sallow

**Marianna Simnett**  
*Worst Gift* 2017 video



and cry. This picturing of a body that is lacking, a body that is dying, is embodied by *The Girl*, played by Simnett herself. This protagonist plays many different roles: a lone wanderer, a female villain, a performing spectacle and a tragic heroine. What drives her throughout this 18-minute film is a desire to receive the same treatment as the sick boys and presumably escape her socialised body via the doctor's injection-infection: 'Make my voice low like the boys,' she demands.

This yearning to dissolve the constraints of her gender is aligned with the dependency of the addict. An installation of light and liquid embeds this desire within an aesthetic of ecstatic psychedelia. A grid of suspended needles hangs from the ceiling, becoming a continuation of the screen's action via its synchronised, rhythmic pulse. As a cinematic ricochet of filmic movement, the installation compounds the sensory overload of lurid lights at a funfair, the smoke-and-mirrors magic of Disney, and a disorienting simulation of a body going beyond itself.

At the film's climax, after labouring through rain, fields and eluding a security guard, *The Girl* reaches her final destination: the factory that produces the voice-modifying liquid she has been seeking. Shot in a Botox factory, this final scene is full of order and machinic categorisation as small vials of the liquid move around a conveyor belt beneath a network of worm-like, phallic pipes. The ominous openings of these pipes, which conjure the cavernous larynxes with the 'tone and bulk' of male vocal cords that the doctor earlier described, appear to end the film. What persists, however, is the repetitious motion of the factory line before the film loops and the protagonist's plight starts again. These cyclical shifts, from rapturous, light-filled chaos to processes of sedation, are the movements of control and power that Simnett grapples with. It remains unclear whether an escape is ever possible. ■

**JOSEPH CONSTABLE** is a curator and writer based in London.

## Amsterdam Round-up

Stigter van Doesburg • Stedelijk Museum  
Amsterdam • Ellen de Bruijne Projects

What does authenticity mean in a world that is dominated by the internet and alternative facts? Does it even matter what is 'real' or what is 'fake', or who is 'the first' to invent something? According to **Daniel van Straalen** it is a conscious choice to accept whether to be misinformed or not. His work can be seen as a glorification of the not-knowing. For his second solo show at Stigter van Doesburg gallery, '(slow heavy metal music playing)', Van Straalen creates a structure that might put you on the wrong track: he is playing with miscommunication and misinterpretation through the use of images that are familiar to almost everyone. When entering the gallery, you immediately bump into a not-yet-finished plaster wall. The wall makes the rest of the space feel like there is more focus, but at the same time the roughness of the wall contradicts this. One of the gallery's walls is covered with wallpaper, repeating the face of Bobby, one of the main characters in the animated sitcom *King of the Hill*. He is a stereotype of a not-so-bright, not-so-athletic American teenager. Thanks to repetition and the enlargement of Bobby's face he looks even dumber, something emphasised by Van Straalen's new work *Bobby* installed on the wallpaper. Bobby's face is seen repeatedly on a piece of textile, stitched to a foam background. Following the lines of Bobby's face, the stitches obliterate what little nuance he might previously have had. In front of this 'Bobby-wall' is a gigantic transparent plastic cap with a cannabis leaf pattern made from real leaves that have been plasticised and stitched onto the cap. By playing with the characteristics that commodity

## WILLIAM HUNT: A VESSEL

Object Performance

PREVIEW AND PERFORMANCE

EXHIBITION

Primary, 33 Seely Road

COMMISSION #5

Thursday 12 October, 6–9pm

13 October–18 November

Nottingham, NG7 1NU

SUPPORTED BY: The Ampersand Foundation, Arts Council England, The Henry Moore Foundation, and The Elephant Trust

www.weareprimary.org