

ARTS



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What a riot

Psychedelic flooring, a high-wire balancing act and magic carpets – Glasgow's art festival is bursting with energy.

Adrian Searle has a ball

One Saturday in July last year, Didier Pasquette attempted to walk between the tower blocks of the 1960s Red Road housing development in Glasgow. He stepped into space and just kept walking, sliding his feet forward, one after the other, on a cable slung between the towers, 90 metres above the ground. Pasquette's high-wire walk was filmed from several viewpoints by the film-maker and photographer Catherine Yass; Pasquette was also provided with a lightweight head-cam to record his journey.

It was a mild, sunny day with a light breeze. A few metres out, Pasquette hesitated. The view from his head-cam records the bounce in the wire, and a sideways tremor, as though the cable were being plucked by the wind. He reversed, gingerly making his way back to the tower, feeling behind him for every step.

The different views of Pasquette's perilous journey are



Magnificent jumble... Jim Lambie at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow

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« premiered at the 2008 Glasgow International, which opened at the weekend. A wuss with vertigo like me shouldn't watch this. Standing in the middle of Yass's four-screen installation (an Artangel project) in the Centre of Contemporary Art on Sauchiehall Street, I asked myself, what if Pasquette had fallen? Would Yass have continued with her project? As it is, I have little doubt that Pasquette's decision to retreat makes High Wire more riveting. A success, after all, is only a success, in a business as risky as Pasquette's. As metaphor, a high-wire act cannot fail.

Founded in 2004, Glasgow International is now set to become a regular biennial. Building on its low-budget, do-it-yourself approach, each edition has been better than the last. The project has slowly expanded, occupying not just established venues but studios and abandoned and derelict buildings around the city. It runs until April 27, but some projects will continue into the summer. There are shows, performances and concerts all over town. Glasgow has the most developed arts scene outside London, and many empty spaces. Successful local artists tend to stay (even if, like Douglas Gordon, they spend protracted periods in New York or Berlin), and the city supports a number of commercial galleries – The Modern Institute, Sorcha Dallas, the improbably named Mary Mary, as well as public sector spaces and museums.

Douglas Gordon recently opened a gallery in his house, where commissioning organisation Common Guild presents the first UK solo show by French-Algerian artist Adel Abdessemed. In one video, Abdessemed hangs by his feet from a rope attached to a helicopter. Suspended upside-down in the roar and the swirling dust, the artist tries to make a drawing on the ground. In another recorded performance, he attempts to write the phrase, "Also sprach Allah" on the underside of a carpet that has been nailed to the ceiling, which he can only reach by being tossed in a blanket. I like Abdessemed's approach, though I get motion sickness just watching this, so I wonder how he felt. The strange ritual in the room, with the artist repeatedly thrown heavenwards, the magic carpet stuck to the ceiling, the references to Nietzsche and the Thousand and One Nights – there's a lot to unravel.

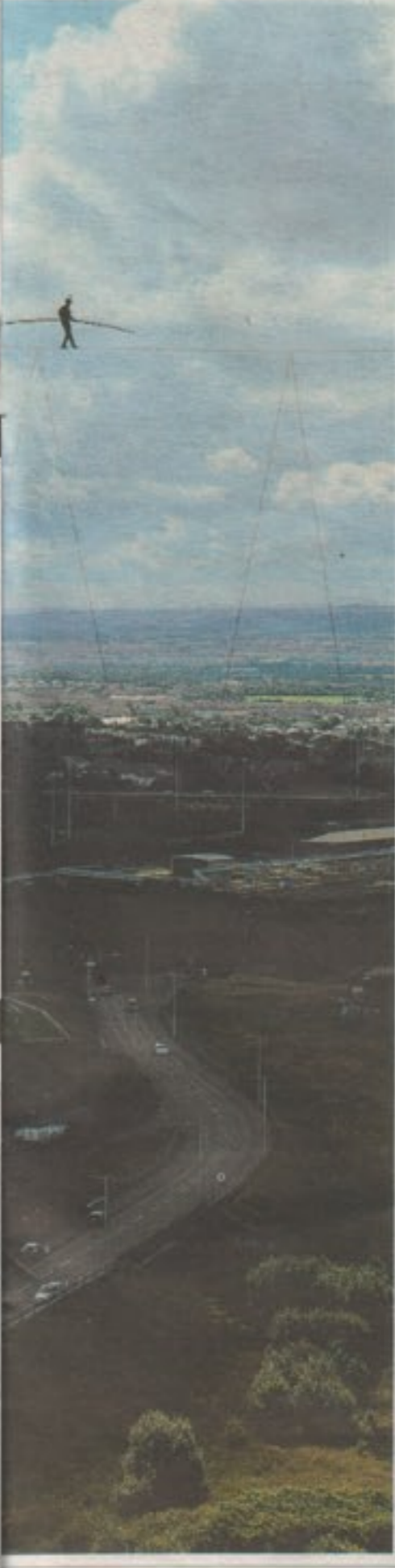
Some of Abdessemed's best works appear slight or inconsequential. The difference between success and failure here is all a matter of timing, execution and exactitude. Any hint of worthiness or laboriousness kills the art. Elsewhere, in Turner prize-winner Simon Starling's latest work, which concerns "the

possibilities of generating complex sculptural forms from the micro-geology of photographic images", a technical hitch had melted the micro-geology; Starling's project has so far failed to materialise.

Over at Tramway, Jonathan Monk has gilded the tramlines that run the length of the building with gold leaf. This sounds beautiful but somehow isn't. As it is, the shallow groove through which the tramlines run has also been plugged with lengths of rope, doubtless for health and safety reasons, but which overcomplicates the effect. Other works are dotted about this huge space, and in the middle is a drum-kit that visitors are invited to play, as a sort of accompaniment to the show. I model my frenetic drum technique and weird time signatures on Animal in the Muppets. By contrast, the 10-year-old who followed me on to the stool was a rhythm genius. You've either got it or you haven't.

What the Glasgow International lacks curatorially (this edition's theme, where it has one, is described as "public and private"), it makes up for with energy. This comes directly from the vitality of Glasgow's visual arts scene itself. Jim Lambie has managed, through a kind of artistic overkill, to destabilise and disarrange the ground floor grand salon of Glasgow's Gallery of Modern Art. Anything that screws with this space is fine by me. Work often has a hard time surviving here, next to the hall's massive columns, the ornate ceiling, the windows on three sides. Lambie has made a magnificent jumble of it.

Half submerged in the surging pattern of op-art arcs that cover the floor, concrete boxes bob about, like icebergs, each apparently filled with 12" albums. Lambie's work often references music (the show is titled after Love's 1968 album Forever Changes), and I found Mantovani, Barbara Dickson and Harry Secombe records in one of the boxes. Warm Leatherette, a sort of giant starfish made from sewn-together sleeves of leather jackets sits under a window, and in the centre of the hall stands a higgledy-piggledy arrangement of brightly painted wooden chairs, from which dangle handbags covered in shards of broken mirror. An arrangement of mirrors hangs from the ceiling, in a configuration that mimics the constellation of Cancer. The show is a series of encounters with strange objects and singularities. There's a black bag on the floor that appears to have morphed with a dartboard and a writhing tangle of handbag straps; it sits among multi-coloured farts of spray paint. You might take this as a sort of rejoinder to Monk's efforts over at Tramway; the



What if Pasquette had fallen? Would Yass have continued with her project?

effect is a kind of overexcited visual riot. By contrast, Tyrolean artist Ernst Caramelle, at Mary Mary, does just enough. As well as making small, discrete paintings, Caramelle paints directly on the wall. Blocks of bright translucent colour slide over lintels. Black rectangles and rhomboids run along the bottom of walls, or complicate corners and doorways. He twists the way we see space, but his art is more than an optical game. It is understated and elusive. Caramelle deserves to be better known in the UK: I can imagine him making a beautiful show at Camden Arts Centre, or the Icon in Birmingham.

Of the commissions made especially for Glasgow, Polish painter and filmmaker Wilhelm Sasnal's is the most poignant. Music echoes through an empty space in a warehouse near the Saltmarket. In the basement, a looped 16mm film shows Polish punk band 19 Wiosen singing about Angelika Kluk, a young Polish student raped and murdered in Glasgow in 2006, and whose body was hidden under the floor of St Patrick's church in Anderston. The song is played twice, the first time sung by Marcin Pryt, the second by a naked unnamed actress. Much of the time the female singer doesn't bother to mime as she crouches before the camera. Her nakedness is somehow less disturbing than the emptiness of the space. The projector clatters. The music rises through the floorboards. That's it. What really works is the dynamic between the filmed performance and real space, the emptiness and how sound fills it, what is visible and what is hidden.

Round the corner, I was plunged into a labyrinthine space where seven video works by Dani Marti and Katri Walker are being shown. Some are in large spaces, others in tiny cubbyholes. It's inventively done. In one work, a bunch of Australian blokes camp in the Outback, and discuss art, life, lesbians and the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden. There are tensions in the group that pass like the weather. There are flies and thunderstorms. Another video focuses on a young homeless Glaswegian, with his chewed-up polystyrene begging cup, while others feature a Mexican woman who sings prayers for the dead, and whose hobby is baseball, and a man whom God has told to be a sculptor. There was something about a dog. The darkness is filled with lives and stories. It's all very unexpected, extremely well done and utterly disorientating. I hope future Glasgow Internationals can keep it that way.

Not for wusses... a high-wire walk filmed by Catherine Yass

Glasgow International is at venues throughout Glasgow until April 27. Some projects continue through spring and summer. Details: glasgowinternational.org

The beauty of maths Laura Barton meets Mavis Staples

Comedians on skis Alistair McGowan's big regret Lucy Mangan