

## Mel Brimfield: *Death and Dumb*

25 March - 02 May 2014

Curated by Elaine Forde

Brimfield's practice provides the audience with an eccentric, highly original and infectiously humorous art history lesson. She tactically confuses, questions and amusingly complicates the terms of validity in the history of art and the politics of representation.

The exhibition draws together a welter of second-hand anecdotes, lurid gossip and conjectural mythologies surrounding artists, performers and their performances. Humour and memory come together to transcend the limitations of the documented performance towards a new experience. In resolving tensions between the immediate, experiential reality and the physical artefact that it attempts to represent, Brimfield creates the space to reconsider how we view, can laugh at, and ultimately re-imagine the politics inherent in constructing narratives, histories and contemporary art.

Approximating the style and economy of romance comic book covers, ten gouache panels of the *The Love Lives of the Artists* series cast a prurient eye over the romantic entanglements of our great Artists. For instance, one painting depicts Barbara Hepworth poised over a Henry Moore reclining nude, she pauses midway through carving some obscene graffiti to reflect, with wonder, on his will to succeed, despite his ham-fisted inability to grip a chisel.

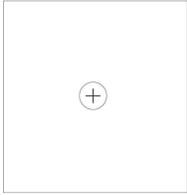
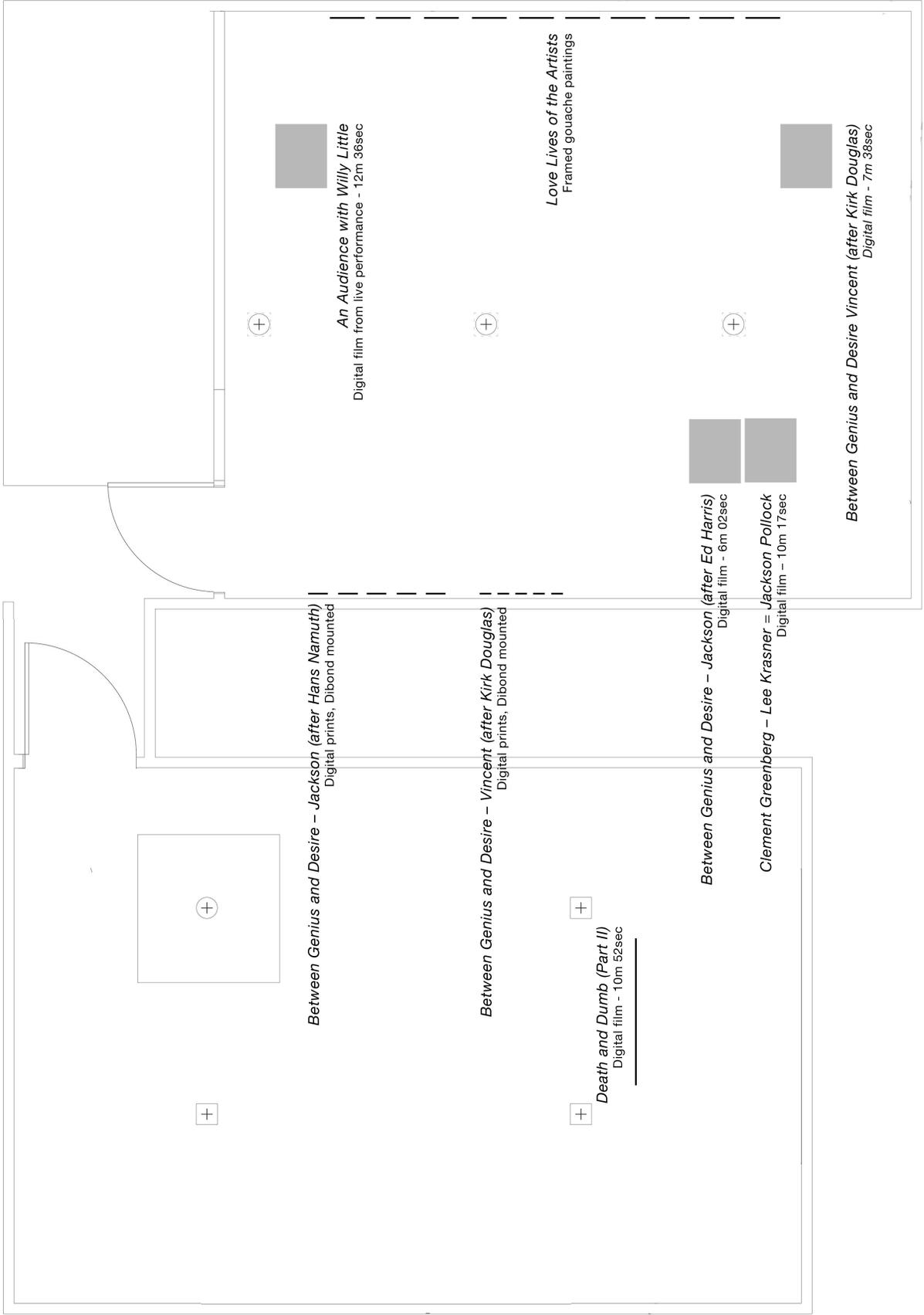
From a series focusing on films about artists '*Clement Greenberg – Lee Krasner = Jackson Pollock*' made in collaboration with actress and comedian Joanna Neary, Brimfield turns to the uneven historical representation of the 'great artists' in the art world. Abstract Expressionist, Lee Krasner is re-imagined as a downtrodden, dowdy Home Counties frump and Pollock reduced to a helpless feral dog-like caricature. Krasner puts up a relentlessly optimistic front despite Greenberg's blatant misogyny and the art world's complete disinterest in her as anything other than Pollock's carer.

'*Between Genius and Desire – Jackson (after Ed Harris)* created collaboratively with alternative cabaret artist Dickie Beau (winner of the 2013-2014 Samuel Beckett Theatre Award). The subject is Ed Harris' unintentionally comic turn as a moist-eyed, thick-skulled Jackson Pollock, lumbering dumbly about the studio like an injured bison to the thrum of inexpressible emotion in his self-directed Hollywood biopic. The performance is condensed into a script constructed from fragments of his most emotive monologues, and recorded as an audio track by actor Tony Green; Dickie Beau's lip-synched physical interpretation of it is performed for camera as a composite portrait of a 'great artist' revealed through a variety of clichés -from hysterical and desperate to the ecstatic and violent.

Brimfield's latest work *Death and Dumb: Part II* is suspended at one end of the gallery like a malevolent quasi-sun, presenting a vast projected image of an isolated barking mouth on a circular screen, spewing forth a menacing unending babel. The script is comprised of an illegible garbled sequence of the fragmented and incomplete off-colour rude jokes, skits, bits and lurid innuendos, from a multitude of dead Variety-era comedians, delivered in a spectrum that fluctuates wildly between louche insinuation and frenzied rage. Appropriating Beckett's startling formal device of the impossibly situated disembodied Mouth in *Not I*, the film boils down the mechanics of the comedic routine to a grotesque delirium, heedless of its audience, to produce rather unsettling results.

**Artist's Bio:** Mel Brimfield was born in Oxford, 1976. She lives and works in London. Recent solo exhibitions include 'Death and Dumb', John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK, 2013; 'Between Genius and Desire', Ceri Hand Gallery, London, 2012; 'This Is Performance Art – Part 2: Experimental Theatre and Cabaret', LICA, Lancaster, 2012; 'This is Performance Art – Performed Sculpture and Dance', Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield and Mead Gallery, Warick, 2011; 'This is Performance Art: Performed Sculpture and Dance', Camden Art Centre, London, 2010; 'Waiter Waiter, There's a Sculpture in my Soup: Part II, Performance Art and Comedy from Gutai to the Present', Pumhouse Gallery, London, 2009 and Group exhibitions include 'Revealed: Government Art Collection', Whitechapel Gallery London, Ulster Museum, Belfast, UK, 2013, and Birmingham Museum, Birmingham, 2012; and 'LOCATE', Jerwood Visual Arts, London, 2010.

Works on show commissioned by, Lee Krasner Film, John Hansard Gallery & Ceri Hand Gallery



*Between Genius and Desire – Jackson (after Hans Namuth)*  
Digital prints, Dibond mounted

*An Audience with Willy Little*  
Digital film from live performance - 12m 36sec

*Between Genius and Desire – Vincent (after Kirk Douglas)*  
Digital prints, Dibond mounted



*Love Lives of the Artists*  
Framed gouache paintings



*Death and Dumb (Part II)*  
Digital film - 10m 52sec



*Between Genius and Desire – Jackson (after Ed Harris)*  
Digital film - 6m 02sec



*Clement Greenberg – Lee Krasner = Jackson Pollock*  
Digital film – 10m 17sec



*Between Genius and Desire Vincent (after Kirk Douglas)*  
Digital film - 7m 38sec