



Jo Longhurst – Commission proposal

I am planning a new long-term project, *Perfect*, which will be an interrogation of the process of training, exploring the physical and emotional experiences of local and elite gymnasts. I will develop my interest in perfection by tackling it from this new perspective. I also want to expand my photographic practice to incorporate the use of time-based media and found images - from existing photographic archives and those I gather myself.

There are many ideas of what constitutes perfection. In this project I will concern myself specifically with those to do with the idea of *technical perfection* - although the training required to develop innate talent also has a perfecting impact on the physical body of the gymnast. Through a series of artworks, pose and performance will be used to highlight personal and ideological work in competitive gymnastics, and the mediation of lens-based media in the creation of the gymnastic spectacle. I hope to create an alternative to the representation of gymnastics by mainstream media through my visual questioning, and my independent artistic practice. I also hope that this new body of work will exceed its specific subject matter: I intend this to be an exploration of physicality, liberation, pleasure, and achievement; failure, exhaustion, and despair: a further probing of lens-based media and the human condition.

The project is rooted in my personal history. In my youth I was a keen gymnast, trampolinist, and, eventually, qualified coach. I spent the early 1980s studying Russian at Leeds University, and at the Institute of Foreign Languages in Minsk, Byelorussia - drawn both to the different social and political structures of the Soviet Union, and fascinated by the amazing gymnasts they produced. Gymnastics has a long social and political history, and one often entwined with an idea of aesthetic perfection. Leni Riefenstahl's 1936 Nazi propaganda film *Olympia*, for example, which features Olympic gymnasts of the inter-war era, is widely acclaimed for its technical and aesthetic achievements. Despite the technical difficulty and sophisticated performance gymnastics demands, there is something extremely pared down about the discipline - a good routine has an element of purity; of form, movement, and expression.

I am proposing a discrete body of work for the Pavilion Commission, *An A-Z of Gymnastics*. I plan to create a visual taxonomy, based on elements of a routine that are named after the gymnasts who invented them. For example, the Azarian cross, after the Soviet Albert Azarian's signature move on the rings, first performed in the 1950s; the Mo Salto after Chinese gymnast Mo Huilan, who rose to prominence in the late 90s; the Miller, a maneuver on the beam invented by the American Shannon Miller in the early 90s; the Korbut Flip pioneered in the 1970s by the legendary Soviet, Olga Korbut; and the Tsukahara, after the Japanese gymnast, Mitsuo Tsukahara who performed this vault in the

1960s and 70s and which is still widely used today. These and other iconic moves, devised by individuals in their quest to push the boundaries of the sport, are now integral to the discipline and have given their inventors a lasting place in the history of the sport.

I will source a range of photographs of various gymnasts performing each move, and create a photographic installation, which emphasises the visual language on which the discipline is built. An analogy might be the production of an alphabet using various different typefaces for each letter - but I expect the gymnastics taxonomy to be far more interesting, as it will deal with specific individuals, histories, nationalities and photographic media. The work will foreground the significance of the visual aspect of the sport.

I will use *An A-Z of Gymnastics* as a springboard from which to develop the *Perfect* project.

I aim to develop a collaborative relationship with *British Gymnastics* and with *The EIS National Gymnastics Performance and Research Centre* at Loughborough University.

Jo Longhurst - Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2008 PhD by Practice, Fine Art, Photography, Royal College of Art (London)
1984 BA Honours Russian Studies, University of Leeds (Leeds)

Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 *The Refusal*, Museum Folkwang, Essen (Germany)
2006 *Descent*, MAC (Birmingham)
2005 *Breed*, Studio 1.1 (London)
2000 *Feast*, European Academy for the Arts, part of the Creative Switzerland 2000: Dialogue between Cultures programme (London)
Elephant & Castle Families 1994/2000, Museum of London (London)

Selected Group Shows & Projects

- 2008 *Pavilion Commissions Programme 2008*, National Media Museum (Bradford) – September 2008
Phantasma, Ballhaus / Nordpark, Düsseldorf (Germany)
Parade, projections and performance, Shunt Lounge (London)
2007 Final shortlist for *The people's playground*, a competition for regeneration of The Golden Mile; with Victor Burgin, Gensler, and MIT Media Laboratory (Blackpool)
To the Dogs, Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver (Canada)
Anticipation: the best of London's emerging artists, One One One (London)
2006 *Too Dark in the Park*, Café Gallery Projects (London)
Nützlich, süß, und museal / das fotografierte Tier (The photographed animal / useful, cute and collected), Museum Folkwang, Essen (Germany)
2005 *Future Face*, National Museum of Natural Science, Taipei (Taiwan)
Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy of Arts (London)
2004 *Weeds*, Hiscox Artprojects (London)
Future Face, Wellcome Gallery, Science Museum (London)
2003 *Ausländer*, Dahl Gallery of Contemporary Art, Lucerne (Switzerland)
T/Reason, symposium and screening, Serpentine Pavilion (London)
Treason, Café Gallery Projects (London)
2002 *Longhurst, Playford, Summers*, Whitehall, Hockney Gallery (London)

Awards

- 2005 *Twelve dogs, twelve bitches*, Discovery Award nominee. Rencontres d'Arles (France)

Festivals

- 2005 *Twelve dogs, twelve bitches*, Rencontres d'Arles (France)
2003 *Essen Arts Festival*, screening, Essen (Germany)

Residencies & Commissions

- 2008 *Pavilion Commissions Programme 2008*, Pavilion Commission (Leeds)

Published Work

- 2008 *The Refusal*, Steidl, (66 colour plates, a text *On looking and being looked at*, and an introduction by Ute Eskildsen, Director, Museum Folkwang, Essen), April 2008
Jo Longhurst's best shot, Leo Benedictus, The Guardian, 6 March 2008
2007 *Vincent, Selected Acquisitions*, Hiscox Contemporary Art Collection

- Perfectibility; the Whippet as a mode of enquiry* (edited extract), *The refusal (part I)*, *Breed and Terence*, Sandra Kemp (ed), *research rca*, Royal College of Art
- Breed*, Florian Ebner, Christiane Kuhlmann, Esther Ruels, TRICATEL, Sehen Zeigen, Steidl
- To the Dogs*, Presentation House Gallery, Vancouver (Canada)
- Selected Acquisitions*, Hiscox Contemporary Art Collection
- 2006 *Terence and Afterword: What a dog might tell us*, Sandra Kemp, *Future Face*, National Science & Technology Museum, Taiwan
- William Wegman: Funney Strange*, Camera Austria edition 95 (Austria)
- 2005 *I know what you're thinking*, Ute Eskildsen, *The Photographed Animal / Useful, Cute and Collected*, Museum Folkwang-Steidl
- Notes on the Missing Pet*, Ute Eskildsen and Hans-Jürgen Lechtreck, *Nützlich, süß, und museal / das fotografierte Tier / essays*, Museum Folkwang-Steidl (in German)
- Foto-Ausstellung: Das Mienenspiel der Tiere*, Spiegel Online
- Put me off at the strawberry*, Sean O'Hagan, *The Observer*, 10 July
- I know what you're thinking*, *Portfolio: Contemporary Photography in Britain*, Issue 41
- Twelve dogs, twelve bitches*, Photography Arles 2005, Actes Sud
- Breed*, Keran James, Studio 1.1
- 2004 *Terence and An introduction to dog theory* (edited extract) Sandra Kemp, *Future Face: Image, identity, innovation*, Profile Books
- Vincent* in Hiscox Artprojects, *Weeds*, Hiscox
- 2003 *I know what you're thinking*, *Ausländer*, Dahl Gallery of Contemporary Art

Collections

Hiscox Art Collection (London & Paris)

Museum Folkwang (Essen)

UBS (London)

Private collections