

# CHAPTER

## A Fire in the Master's House is Set

Adam Chodzko, Melanie Counsell, Mark Dean, Michael Dean, Sarah Dobai, Ruth Ewan, Roger Hiorns, Andy Holden, Henry Krokatsis, Daren Newman, Elizabeth Price, Mike Ricketts, Matt Stokes, Magnus Quaife

Curated by Simon Morrissey

The American band Rage Against the Machine became renowned in the 1990s for their abrasive, polemic music that fused rap and thrash metal and a strong activist stance, providing the perfect soundtrack to the idea of rebellion against authority.

This exhibition takes its title from the refrain of 'New Millennium Homes', a song from their seminal protest album 'Battle of Los Angeles' (1999). The band's lyric, removed from its original context, talks of ideas of anticipation, of a stage set for an event, of the implication of an action of resistance.

Incanted repeatedly in the song, the phrase almost has a spellbinding quality – as if the repetition of the phrase, if said enough, could somehow make rebellion truly possible. The exhibition takes this idea and expands it to create a somewhat contradictory space in Chapter's building. This space is one where ideas of rebellion and resistance – so often the social language of music culture – are invoked but simultaneously muted or buried within abstract forms, as if made into a code that only the initiated understand.

Despite the foreboding nature of the exhibition's title, on the surface many of the works appear formal, beautiful, quiet even. Rather than being explicitly present music haunts the exhibition, slipping in and out of the works literally and metaphorically. The works permeate with the sensation of latent energy. In response, the exhibition is itself conceived of as a kind of spell – as if the combination of the artist works might release unknown possibilities.

The exhibition deliberately extends beyond the formal gallery space to colonise Chapter's building and even permeates the fabric of the city beyond, to suggest the idea of a different order beginning to slowly encroach on our everyday experience.

Outside the building a vast expanse of violet dominates the Chapter façade. This newly commissioned work by **Melanie Counsell** establishes both the feeling of anticipation that is echoed in many of the works in the exhibition and the idea of unrevealed potential. In the corner of this colourfield sits an image of the palm of a hand with two strangely sculptural tablets on it. The hand is open in offer, yet we do not know what the tablets are or what they are for. Are they medicine or mood-altering drugs? Without answering this question the work directly alters the visitor's experience of space. The vinyl covering the windows immerses the Theatre foyer in a purple hue completely transforming its interior environment.

Counsell's work also extends into the Café, casting shifting puddles of violet light that alter the mood of the space. The walls of the café are similarly altered; Counsell's looping wall drawing 'um-ut' (2011), dominates like elegant graffiti in an undecipherable language. The walls either side are covered in hundreds of intricate, interlocking black and white posters by **Daren Newman**. The interwoven, curling white lines of the posters look like a repeat pattern but this intricate abstract form contains the title of the exhibition, repeated like a mantra, both in the building and fly-posted around the city.

Newman's posters lead the visitor into the Gallery where **Henry Krokatsis'** cut mirror sculpture 'Untitled (P.F.h, stack)' (2011), sits in the centre of the space like something from 'Alice Through the Looking Glass'. Is the work simply a mirror or is it a portal to another state? **Adam Chodzko** and **Matt Stokes'** works in the exhibition suggest the latter but in very different ways. Chodzko's film 'Design for a Carnival' (2003) cuts between a record playing techno music, ants arranging sequins and teenagers with painted faces in the woods to suggest some kind of reconfigured social ritual.

'The Echo/Narcissus Interval' (2011), consists of an advert placed in the South Wales Echo on the day of the exhibition opening informing people that a specific sequence of music will be played in Chapter's Café ten years into the future. In contrast, Stokes' prints take graphic information from flyers produced by the hardcore music scene in Austin, Texas and reconfigure their low-budget publicity material for alternative culture into a detailed, decorative object.

These two versions of Stokes' print in very different colours are shown side by side. This idea of repetition occurs throughout the exhibition. From the repetition of Newman's posters to the repetition of record covers in Ruth Ewan's 'Damnatio Memoriae (Paul)' (2010/11), to **Michael Dean's** posters of two separated halves of a mysterious object taped to the wall like a teenager's poster, repetition gives images and objects an added importance, investing them with an almost ritualistic quality.

This repetition is often combined with an abstraction or removal of information that might further describe the work. Ruth Ewan's work is comprised of nine record sleeves, many of which are repeated, but which have also had most of the images or text that might identify them torn away. 'Damnatio Memoriae' is a Latin phrase that means 'condemnation of memory' — a form of dishonour from Roman times that means someone who should not be remembered. Ewan's work is a comment on the CIA and FBI's attempt to silence the legendary singer and activist Paul Robeson for his political views, but is also a form of memorial to the singer.

**Elizabeth Price's** photographs and **Magnus Quaife's** watercolours are also memorials of a sort. Price's black and white photographs of elegantly arranged junk describe themselves as monuments to record labels, and talk of the death of culture but also an attempt to keep the memory of that culture alive. Similarly Quaife's sensitive watercolours of images from newspapers, depicting events from the year 1968 and 'other myths', memorialise student protest, rock stars, art performances and political rallies. The images are bleached of colour and blurred as if such rebellion is lost in time, yet the delicate copying of these images speaks of a desire to bring its spirit back to life.

Between Price and Quaife's work a road sign lies on its back as if ripped from the ground during a protest or some sort of social unrest. But rather than featuring a road name, **Mike Ricketts' sculpture 'Azurite'** (2011), has the name of a crystal cut into it which is stained with spray paint as if it has been used as a graffiti stencil. Another of Ricketts' road sign sculptures, 'Amethyst' (2008), sits similarly dumped in the building's main foyer. Despite their familiar appearance, Ricketts' sculptures are more like talismans, their references to crystals bringing associations of magical properties as much as their form suggests protest and unrest. In this way they share a similar quality with **Roger Hiorns' sculpture 'Impulse'** (2004), in which a spray of perfume on a slab of steel suggests a transformative relationship between the materials or between the object and the people who encounter it.

This idea is found again in **Andy Holden's** film 'Folly' (2006), which cuts between footage of a strange, huge boulder on top of an urban building and two youths gesturing in celebratory defiance into the camera. This defiance occurs again in a more subtle fashion in **Sarah Dobi's** photographs of coupled figures that stand staring back from cold architectural sets at either end of the gallery, as if united in union against the viewer.

This union takes on a different tone in **Mark Dean's** film 'Christian Disco (Terminator)' (2010). Here the sombre tone of the soundtrack is contrasted with a psychedelic, fractured image of dancers lost in celebratory abandon. The work pits youthful hope against a sense of impending apocalypse to almost hallucinatory effect.

This power of music to transform is also at the heart of Adam Chodzko's work that takes the spirit of the exhibition out of the building and into the city night. For 'And the City Grew Quiet...' (2011), a customised car slowly cruises the streets of Cardiff on a Friday night after closing time, loudly broadcasting peaceful sounds from relaxation and meditation CDs into the rowdy city night. The soundtrack is broken briefly at its centre by the sound of a crackling fire. A fire set and brought to life, and a spell cast over the city night....