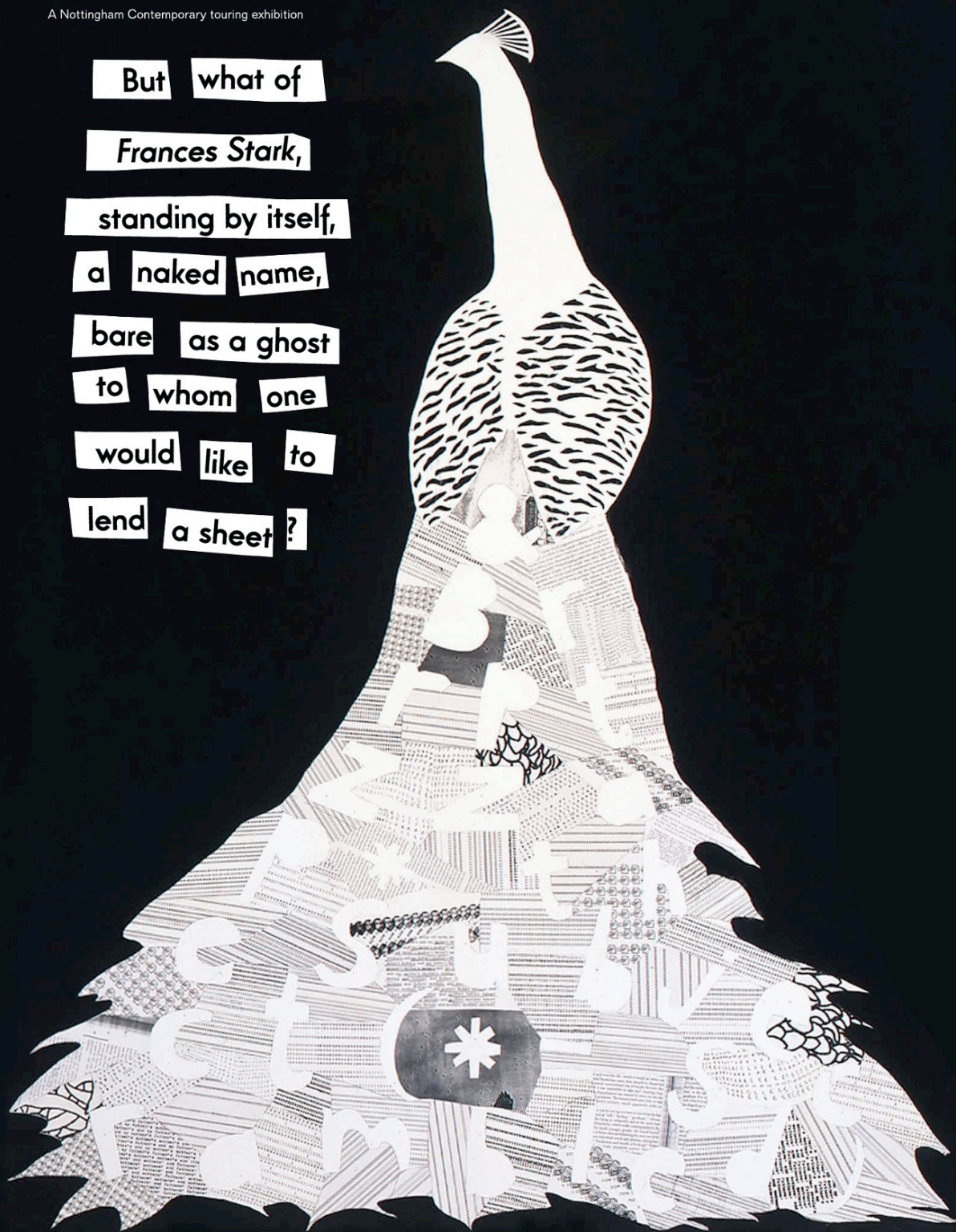


Saturday 13 February – Saturday 3 April 2010

Centre for Contemporary Arts

A Nottingham Contemporary touring exhibition

But what of  
Frances Stark,  
standing by itself,  
a naked name,  
bare as a ghost  
to whom one  
would like to  
lend a sheet?



**But what of *Frances Stark*, standing by itself a naked name,  
bare as a ghost to whom one would like to lend a sheet?**

**Centre for Contemporary Arts  
13 February – 3 April 2010**

Frances Stark (born 1967, Newport Beach, Southern California) is one of the most intriguing artists to have emerged from Los Angeles's vibrant art scene in the last decade or two. The show opened at Nottingham Contemporary in November 2009 before coming here to CCA and is her first exhibition in a public gallery in the UK.

Stark's art mainly consists of collages. Many of them are visually pared down and often areas of blank paper and under paint are left showing. Despite this modesty, they open onto rich areas of thought.

Writing, used visually, has always been important in Stark's art. Her work of the 1990s was made up almost entirely of repeated short phrases, and for a long time she was better known for her art criticism and creative writing than for her own art. The words in her collages and paintings are rarely her own. Instead she lifts them from various literary sources – Emily Dickinson, Witold Gombrowicz and Robert Musil are particular favourites, as are philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and Mark E Smith from post-Punk band The Fall. Somehow the words of others become her own, revealing her highly distinctive way of thinking.

This exhibition picks up the story in 2001, when images enter the work – beginning with birds, either mating or playing the role of distracted readers. Since then imagery has become increasingly important, to the point where language drops away altogether. Certain images recur, asking to be read as signs: women, who resemble Frances herself; peacocks, trailing their extravagant tail feathers; chorus girls taking the stage or waiting self-consciously in the wings. As these examples suggest, for Stark the act of making and exhibiting her art is a kind of performance, one that involves a journey from the private realm of her thoughts, her studio and domestic life to the public realm of audiences and the responses of others. For Stark, putting oneself on display is a process wracked with anxiety and self-doubt, as well as excitement and satisfaction. She lightens these anxieties with irreverent, eccentric or bawdy wit. Laughter is never far off.

Even when she is playing herself, Stark is engaged in a game of masquerade. Her work is not directly confessional, but it does offer glimpses of her life and thoughts. She is by turns direct and evasive. We are left uncertain as to whom Frances Stark is, and what the relationship of her work is to the self. Does her work reveal or conceal her? The wings of butterflies, the kimonos of opera singers and the tail feathers of peacocks all suggest a desire for both display and concealment.

The materials have become denser in many of her recent collages – textiles and papers hang loosely from their surfaces. This has led to the new sculptures - kimonos, which resemble

old-fashioned dial-up telephones, which look like they've strayed away from an eccentric opera.

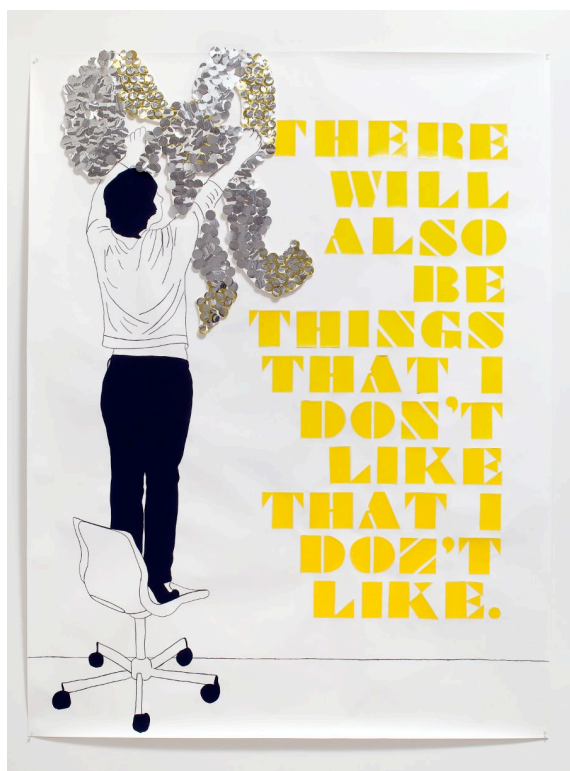
***And brrrptzzap\* the subject.***  
**(\* = scrambled), 2005**

In this collage, the peacock's tail feathers are made of scraps of her own past work. The letters spell out the last line of an old lyric by The Fall, the fiercely literate Mancunian punk band. Stark was involved in punk music herself.

*brrrptzzap\** suggests a scratch in the record.

***There will also be things I don't like,*** 2007

The woman who appears in some of Stark's works roughly resembles the artist herself. She is standing on a chair, with her back to the audience, hanging an elaborate party decoration on her work, as if she is attempting to deflect or make acceptable its message. She seems to be anticipating an adverse reaction to her work too, as if to prepare herself for failure. Making an art work and preparing an exhibition is equated with preparing for a party, with the same nerve wracking sense of self-consciousness in wondering whether the guests will arrive, and what they will think of you. The repetition of "I don't like" in the work is like an anxious stutter.



Frances Stark, *There Will Also Be Things I Don't Like*, 2007  
Image courtesy of Beth Rudin DeWood

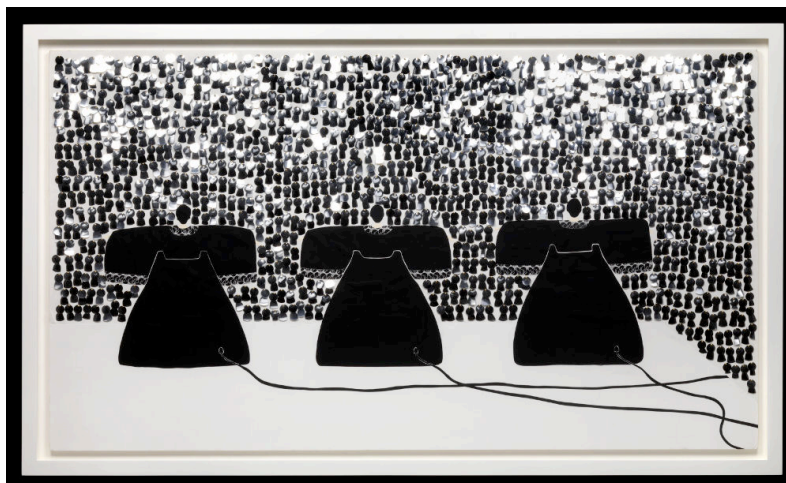


Frances Stark, *And brrrptzzap\* the subject. (\* = scrambled)*, 2005  
Photo courtesy of greengrassi

*...“This tough but vulnerable individualism asserted in Stark’s work is not typical of the art world where the persona of a particular artist is cultivated until it is a formidable brand name. Instead it is used to reveal glimpses of domestic realities in artists’ lives, the creation of friendships, the intellectual exchanges that grow into ideas or works... small, plain facts that penetrate the carapace of the international art world”*  
Francis McKee, Director, Centre for Contemporary Arts

***Backside of the  
Performance, 2007***

Three performers in kimonos, or old-fashioned telephones, face an audience. Like the view from the back of a stage in a theatre, the image invites you to share the artist's terrifying sense of utter exposure.



Frances Stark, *Back Side of the Performance*, 2007  
Photo courtesy of greengrassi

*“Stark’s work is sometimes about the nerve wracking, exhilarating, painful*

*moment of putting oneself, one’s art practise, oneself as a creative individual, on stage, risking both triumph and opprobrium. This is if you like, the “backstage” of any artist’s practise, but it’s rare in art to see it on full view”* Alex Farquharson, Director, Nottingham Contemporary.

Related events:

Thursday 11 March 7pm Screening of Frances Stark video works

Saturday 27 February 2pm Tour of the exhibition led by artists Sarah Tripp & Ruth Barker

A catalogue of the exhibition is on sale at the front desk for £10.00

A Nottingham Contemporary touring exhibition

**For further details of the events accompanying the exhibition please visit  
[www.cca-glasgow.com](http://www.cca-glasgow.com)**

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