

BILLY BULTHEEL & JAMES RICHARDS: *WORKERS IN SONG*

Performances:

Saturday 09.09.2023, 18:30

Sunday 10.09.2023, 16:00

90 min., English spoken, 2023

Exhibition rooms +2

Tickets: €12/8 (Performance) or €15/10 (Combi performance + exhibitions on Sunday)

Followed by exhibition from 12.09 until 08.10.2023

The result of a collaboration between visual artist James Richards (b. 1983, UK, based in Berlin) and composer Billy Bultheel (b. 1987, BE, based in Berlin), *Workers in Song* brings together new music, archival film and text.

Drawing from research interests around cinema architecture, spectral music and the tradition of cover songs, the project places the fragility of the voice against the ever-renewing repetitions of the electronic within an immersive audio-visual environment. The performance is haunted by histories of occult photography and spectral music, as well as more trivial pleasures such as internet hook ups, fanship and Franz Schubert's *Winterreise*.

Coming from a classical conservatory background and academic studies in the performing arts, Bultheel has developed musical performances that unfold spatially. He practices an extended notion of composition which includes performance, architecture and narrative as equal musical parameters to harmony rhythm and timbre.

While Richards works mostly with found and self-shot video footage to explore how images are seen and perceived— music, sound and voice play an equally important role in his practice. He often engages with sound in a way that is influenced by film foley and Dadaist collage. This way of working extends into using exhibition design and curation to set up more physical encounters with the moving image.

Both artists are occupied with an expanded thinking within their respective disciplines, where film becomes a material expression, or where music unfurls into a performative encounter that renegotiates the position and movement of the listener. With this project they depart on a trajectory to explore new ways of unfolding their practices, bringing together each other's thinking to amplify innovative and peculiar methods.

RESEARCH AND PERFORMANCE FEATURES

The cover song is a well-developed practice in 20th and 21st century pop music tradition, meant to pay homage or simply revive an original track. In the context of *Workers in Song* the practice of covering songs will become a working method to deviate, deconstruct and phantomize musical memories. Several existing songs that share a limping pulse and hypnotic interiority will form the building blocks of the work. Their melodies will shapeshift into cyclical forms that are spooled and unspooled around the audience, at times erupting in lyrically evocative passages of romance and even melodrama.

The performance is executed by a mobile ensemble of musicians working with winds, reeds and voice, blending harmonies and building polyphonic structures. They are accompanied by a multichannel electronic score, complicated by a more primitive and performative shadow system—for instance a single (rotating) speaker.

During the performance, a suite of short films capturing atmospheric musical performances of singer Sebastian de la Cour and percussionist Sara Neidorf is screened in relation to the live interventions. On screen sounds and voices are fleshed out by the murmurs of the musicians in real time and space, with live melodies roving through the space encountering a number of pre-recorded cameos: screenings of underground films by Wendy Apple or Warren Sonbert and re-stagings of text and performance work by Rae Armantrout, Liesl Lindeque or Ian White. Conceived to be episodic in structure, the compositions can be reworked, videos added or replaced, and new musicians invited into the ensemble as it travels.

Songs and images come flickering and humming into life, performers shift in front and behind the audience, weaving an array of cover versions, interruptions, distortions and homages, turning the exhibition spaces into a musical Frankenstein.

Taking apart the seamless and unified apparatus of the cinema, film programme or chamber concert, *Workers In Song* is determined to break away from the conventional blueprint of watching film together. Instead it stages video screens and audience seating in a circular fashion, reversing the frontality of the theatre and putting closeness and distance into a generative dialogue.

Following the performances, key elements are left in place as an audio-visual installation. *Workers in Song* questions the boundaries between liveness and the pre-recorded, between presence and absence, between ghosts and the archive in a dynamic and intimate encounter between the audience, musicians and the moving image.

Curator: Helena Kritis

Project Partners:

Co-commissioned by WIELS Centre for Contemporary Art, Batalha Centro de Cinema, Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean and KW Institute for Contemporary Art.

With support of: Vlaamse Gemeenschap Projectsubsidies, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin; Kemmler Foundation, Berlin.

Artist Biographies:

Billy Bultheel is a composer whose work lies at the intersection of performance art and music. He composes for site-specific projects that bring together sculpture, installation, performance art and live and synthesised music. His music is rooted in the electronic tradition, but deeply inspired by renaissance music, early baroque and medieval polyphony. Dark and melancholic compositions are translated through noise, ambient metal and experimental orchestration.

Some of his recent performances are: 'When Doves Cry' at the Schinkel Pavillon (Berlin, 2019), 'Spat from My Mouth, a piano concerto' at KW (Berlin, 2019), 'The Minutes of Olomouc' (PAF 2020), 'Songs for the Contract' (folia.app 2021), 'Athens Songs I-IV' at the 7th Athens Biennial (Athens 2021) and UNTER for Schinkel Pavilion (Berlin 2021) and Halle für Kunst Steiermark (Graz 2021).

He composed music for Imhof's exhibition-as-opera *Angst* (2016), *Faust* (2017) and *Sex* (2019) alongside with Eliza Douglas and Anne Imhof and received major acclaim. Furthermore Bultheel composes music for the choreographer Michele Rizzo and has recently written for the Satire *IXNEYTAI/TRACKERS* (2021) by Sophocles which was presented at the ancient amphitheatre of Epidavros, Greece.

James Richards' work in moving image, installation and sound addresses the incessant flow of images that have come to define the 21st century, creating a space where personal politics and digital materiality meet. In addition to making films, Richards has presented numerous exhibition projects based on archival research and ongoing exchanges with other artists.

His work was presented as part of the Fondazione In Between Art Film's exhibition *Penumbra* on the occasion of the 59th Venice Biennale. Recent solo exhibitions include *Internal Litter*, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin (2022); *When We Were Monsters*, Haus Mödrath - Räume für Kunst, Kerpen (2021-2022); *Alms for the Birds*, Castello Di Rivoli, Turin (2020); *SPEED 1* and *SPEED 2*, w/ Leslie Thornton, Malmö Konsthall and Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (2019).

In 2017 Richards represented Wales at the 57th Venice Biennale, and he was shortlisted for the 2014 Turner prize. Most recently, he was awarded the prestigious Preis der Nationalgalerie 2024.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Press conference with preview of rehearsals: Wednesday 6 September, 11:00
Tickets: <https://www.wiels.org/en/events/billy-bultheel-james-richards-workers-in-song>

Press contact for interview and image requests:

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Press images:



Download link to images: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/c1dtoe5rfi971d4/AADmy1ICHsin3ADvmDa-TtPqa?dl=0>

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