

Art

Edited by Ossian Ward
twitter.com/timeoutart



Queues for Jeremy Deller's 'Sacrilege' (left), a screening at the Factory Cinema (above) and a still from Tom Gidley's installation 'Hollow Moon' (below)

Seaside special

This year Whitstable's art Biennale focuses on performance and film. **Martin Herbert** takes a day-trip to find out more

The Whitstable Biennale, like its higher profile and more established international cousin, the Venice Biennale, is a festival of art exhibitions and events that materialises every other summer in a place surrounded by gently lapping waters. But unlike its Italian counterpart, in Whitstable works are not housed within imposing pavilions, palazzos, churches and manicured gardens but in a zig-zag of Scout huts and fishermen's cabins, a bowling alley, a local library, a community centre and a gallery shaped a bit like a boat. But this year the decade-old East Kent expo might actually be the more forward-thinking event of the two.

For its latest incarnation, it's been split into three sections, curated in turn by **The Island** (Andrew Bonacina and Victoria Brooks), artist/writer **Jeremy Millar** and artist **Emma Leach**. Though it's not always obvious who has organised which event, what is clear is the significant focus on film, video, performance and public interventions. This emphasis also feels very timely, as performance, particularly dance, has hijacked the artworld of late.

The show at the Horsebridge Centre, 'Speak Near By', is a modest-looking presentation of four simultaneously running films, made at different times during the past 60

years. But what it sets up is an unexpectedly expansive conversation across the decades – about dance, possession, reverie and violence. In **Maya Deren's** ostentatiously edited 'Ritual in Transfigured Time' (1945-6), time stops and starts around a woman as she passes through elegant parties and formal gardens of living statues. **Derek Jarman's** fiercely elegiac 'Jordan's Dance' (1977), features a tutu-wearing punk cavorting around a wasteland bonfire; the dancers in **Joachim Koester's** 'Tarantism' (2007), convulse as if shaking out the poison from a Tarantula bite (from which the Tarantella dance gets its name). **Shezad Dawood's** 'New Dream Machine Project' (2011) features trippy, gleaming visuals, a performance of Indian music and one of painter and performance artist **Brian Gysin's** (1916-1986) hypnotic, rotating Dream Machine gizmos.

Sound and vision again intersect in **Tanya Axford's** austere video performance in the blacked-out community centre. A projector swinging from a pendulum creates a downward image of ellipses of light that float

across the floor, expanding and shrinking while a viola player and a pianist improvise sparse, luminous live music in sync to the movement. The viewer is left to decide how the title 'The Path Made by a Boat in Sound (3 down)' relates, aside from its maritime flavour. **Tom Gidley's** 'Hollow Moon', in the Scouts' Hall, is another interdisciplinary work.

A voiceover for a video shot around Whitstable's streets posits a 'solar event' that has somehow split the female speaker into two people; cut to a studio, where a dancer contorts in response to Gidley's own glazed-plays sculptures (also on show in the hall). As the visuals repeat, so does the narrative, but with a new narrator: we're listening, seemingly, to the previous speaker's other self: an inquiry into how the proximity of things makes their significance slip and slide.

If that's too serious for a seaside outing, however, a raft of oddball entries includes a suite of what are described as 'Children's Films' (in the Sea Cadets Hall).

Artists including **Ulla von Brandenburg**, **Keren Cytter** and **Geoffrey Farmer** have made 16mm shorts for kids that include footage of playful cats and children making anarchic paintings accompanied by creepy voiceovers. (This critic was politely informed

that he should have brought a youngster with him. On reflection, he didn't agree.) There's also what's advertised as a work including puppets, although it doesn't. **Emma Hart's** 'Monument to the Unsaved #2 (M20 Death Drives)' features, projected on to wing-mirrors on stands, skittering footage of a re-enactment of a drive, years ago, which

ended in a crash and the artist's near-miraculous survival. The piece – also involving tiny model figures, irons and calculators – seems specifically about troublesome form: how one might make a memory into a film and a film into a sculpture. It comes off as equal parts confident and awkward.

Much of the Biennale had yet to unfurl when I was there, on opening day. Those visiting later can expect, among other events, a fairly voluminous programme of film, performance, talks and music, including a 'symphony' created for the town and an outdoor cinema; live work set on boats and **Jeremy Deller's** inflatable Stonehenge, 'Sacrilege', continuing its national tour. There is also **Richard Layzell's** 'Metropolis' a collaborative project with other artists through which he's going to argue that Whitstable 'has everything and is everything'. Perhaps during the Biennale that statement doesn't seem wholly implausible.

Whitstable Biennale continues at various locations in Whitstable until **Sept 16**. For full details of all events see whitstablebiennale.com www.timeout.com/art

