listening sense. Presented, as were the other films, using the council building's built-in projection facilities, Boyce's single-screen version of *Yes, I Hear You* was less visually seductive. Emitting from an ordinary speaker in the darkness of a bare office, the voices had a more phenomenological resonance that allowed me to feel between the gaps of the constructed scripts, distillations from transcripts of the dozen or so interviews Boyce conducted as part of her research.

Sagar's *The Body Blow*, 2022, taking its title from one of the original ballads, is a two-channel experimental documentary about and made in collaboration with people suffering with asbestos-related cancers, Barking and Dagenham having the highest level of these diseases in London due to its colonial trade connection with the Cape Asbestos Company. Combining archival footage, present-day shots of Barking's post-industrial docklands, and interviews with several actors (social workers, lawyers, medical professionals and people with lived experience of the diseases), the film's reportage is pensive, with slow-paced tracking shots and a softly thrumming score adding to its atmosphere. More experimental sequences digitally manipulate what look like body scans to simulate materialist film over which a man's voice on a landline chokingly describes the daily grind of being caught between social and medical services. *The Body Blow* is engrossing, informative, but I wondered what, if any, is the difference between watching this film in a gallery space and watching it in a TV slot such as BBC4's Storyville? A provisional answer to what would be missed in a single-screen viewing emerged during a sequence in which participants of the London Asbestos Support Awareness Group, with whom Sagar collaborated on the script, perform hand movements and breathing exercises to slow down the breath. 'Breathe in, breathe out'; these exhortations registered in my body, a relation to those afflicted with asbestos-related cancers and mesothelioma, felt not via the gaze but via the two-channel film, which itself operated as a kind of breathing apparatus, its diaphragm moving between the microscopic intimacy of bodily interior damage and the panoramic exteriors of decaying urban infrastructures.

Pilgrim's *RAFTS* addressed environmental concerns via the lens of mental well-being. A collaboration with many project partners, the film loosely takes the structure of the original ballads in being organised around seven songs and comprising eight chapters, each one featuring a resident of Barking and Dagenham involved with Green Shoes Arts, an organisation offering artistic and creative activities to vulnerable young people and adults. At 60 minutes, the film gets a little repetitious, each chapter usually beginning with a participant talking about the solace of parks and trees, followed by a concert in a church in which either the participant performs spoken word, or Pilgrim's arrangements of their words are sung by a singer and choir to the accompaniment of the London Contemporary Orchestra, Pilgrim also featuring on piano and harp. Occasionally this bordered on the sentimental, but mostly the resonant voices shone through in ways that potentially connect viewers and subjects to the mutually life-enhancing spaces of nature, music and art. Here the screen itself is a kind of raft, a metaphor emphasised by Olga Micińska's and Mathild Clerc-Verhoeven's *Held Together*, 2022, the engraved wooden frame and other nautical paraphernalia surrounding it, Pilgrim's installation generously showcasing other artists work, not least the stunning botanical paintings by Eddie Paggett, and a delightful animation by Catherina Rowland, both members of Green Shoes Arts.

A decade ago, there was concern in art discourse about socially engaged and relational art practices being used to shore up a failing state. Much has changed since, and what this collaboration between Serpentine and Barking and Dagenham shows is how both social care and art institutions are not only rethinking what and how they provide for multiple stakeholders across all spectrums of society, but also how they can learn from one another. That said, the curatorial decision to have one kind of exhibition for the borough and another for the art world raises more questions about audience and site than I can address here.

Maria Walsh is reader in artists' moving image at Chelsea College of Arts and author of *Therapeutic Aesthetics: Performative Encounters in Moving Image Artworks*, Bloomsbury, 2020.

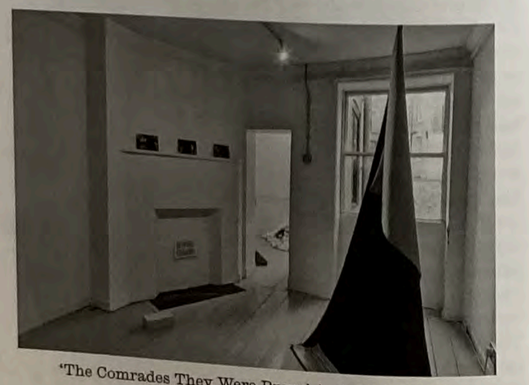
The Comrades They Were Brave

44 GRS, London, 18 March to 10 April

For Edith Garrud, the fight for suffrage was painfully slow: 'we might just as well take time by the forelock and use science, otherwise jiu-jitsu', she said. Curator and artist Cecilia Sjoholm invited six other artists to respond to Garrud, who trained a female bodyguard unit in jiu-jitsu to protect suffragettes from police violence.

Iain Hales addresses Garrud's legacy directly in the wall sculpture *Koshi Nage*, 2022, named after a hip throw. Two suggested figures entangle in the move, one meticulously crafted from white tiles, the other from pale lavender jesmonite. Three green arrows show the direction of the fall. The piece, both awkward and dynamic, conjures the disbelief you experience watching martial art until the throw happens. The suffragettes' emblematic colours are hinted at and the figures' interdependence suggests the roles played by activists and police in what became known as 'The Cat and Mouse Act' of 1913.

Laura Moreton-Griffiths's *Gas Hood Costume*, 2016, speaks of resilient despair. This white canvas hood for head and torso would not protect from a noxious attack. In the witty, psychedelic video, *L'air, Légère, Leg Air, La Guerre, Grrr!*, 2022, a figure in a hood multiplies in a kaleidoscopic dance amid clouds of violent yellow and pink gases. One figure encounters



'The Comrades They Were Brave', installation view

a bottle of red perfume called 'L'air' and is annihilated in a flash. The grim context of 'air-guerre' is expanded in Moreton-Griffiths's takeaway pin-up poster which features the poem 'Raise the Alarm Beautiful Breath'. Gong baths and stilettos will not deliver 'atmospheric justice'. Clearly, coronavirus, climate catastrophe, and chemical and thermobaric vacuum warfare all inform this ferocious manifesto of the breath.

Text is also central to Sjoholm's work. In *Unhallowed Affiliation*, 2022, a panel is indented with three columns of pink pyramids, above black cursive text. Styled like a lipstick display, the piece cannily explores the will to leave the comfort (and cosmetic artifice) of a family to become oneself. Sjoholm suggests that femininity and familiarity force a 'smooth and pearly' surface, while determining your own path, 'rough on the inside', is vital. In *The Thrill of a Vendetta*, 2022, double-backed pink and green fabric hangs from one eyelet on the ceiling, forming an elegant cone. The print along the hem undercuts the cloth's seduction: 'They began screaming, her voice being soundless. She decided either this was imperative or there must be other tactics to making a fuss.' Sjoholm's textual elusiveness recalls the parataxis of the 1970s' New Sentence movement, especially Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, 1987, where she writes: 'You cannot determine the nature of progress until you have assembled all of the relatives.' Sjoholm's sculptures show an assured wisdom of materials and the spot-on tactics of art.

Leaving to Join the Wounded, 2022, by Jillian Knipe, imagines Medusa in profile, sidelining her petrifying gaze. The painting, the dimensions of a front door, evokes a barricade with its layers of geometric and serpentine tropes built over an abstract ground. The movement and counter-movement create an effect of camouflage in a hotter climate, while glitter on the canvas evokes contested tropes of femininity. This portal to a dreamscape moves through the traps of traumascape, locating collective joy against the current.

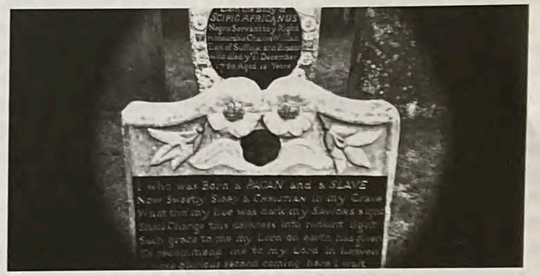
Deborah Tchoudjinoff draws on a mythological future in *Ovoo, City of Gold*, 2022. Invoking Mongolian rituals, Tchoudjinoff's vision returns the earth's land to one continent, erasing all borders. Will shamanic practices suggested by the pile of handmade white stones survive devastated nomadic life? A grave for the people of Ukraine is conjured by a post, wrapped in blue and yellow cloth.

Textiles are key to the work of Hatty Buchanan and Garth Gratrix. From Buchanan's engaging 'Alter Ego Series', 2022, of painted linen and fake fur, come *Maud*, *Elsie* and *Irene*, here hung from bamboo sticks, dissolving boundaries between craft and fine art and between painting and sculpture. Linen rectangles are stitched together, fringed with tufts that play with the notion of banners, but the trailing threads suggest vulnerability and an unruly attitude towards seams. These works are packed with painterly and performative purpose, referencing formalist painting as strongly as the tradition of sewing as women's work with clever rebelliousness.

While referencing Minimalism, Gratrix's works are rooted in queer culture. Three low-toned handkerchiefs lie offhandedly on the mantelpiece as if their owner has just left. Named after household paint, *No Boundaries/Innocent Peach/Snake Charmer*, 2021, presents a quiet memorial to an evacuated femininity. Gratrix's photographs place the same hankies in the back pocket of someone's jeans, elegising gay cruising grounds and the hankie codes that denoted one's chosen erotic pleasure. Gratrix's pastels question the rigid masculinity of clone culture and signal the threat to analogue dating and community.

This delicately interrogative show is haunted by the defiance and daring of our feminist freedom fighters. Here art is its own bodyguard.

Cherry Smyth is a poet and writer.



Adam Khalil, Bayley Sweitzer with Oba, *Nosferasta*, 2021, film

Adam Khalil, Bayley Sweitzer with Oba: Nosferasta

Spike Island, Bristol, 5 February to 8 May

In his 2006 novel *Blindsight*, former marine biologist Peter Watts suggested a fantastical solution to the predicament of deep space transit. A resilient astronautical body must be imagined, Watts reasoned, one that could withstand the protracted durations of interstellar frontierism. The answer could be found in the hypothetical discovery of an extinct subspecies of human being, a terrestrial 'vampire', whose immortality and glacial metabolism might be resurrected in the service of a new era of colonial ambition among the stars. That these ancestors were plagued by an unquenchable bloodlust provided a sinister undertone to their labours, forecasting human expansionism – whether global or interplanetary – as an always extractive and bloody affair.

As if sketching the macabre pre-history of Watts's prognosis, Adam Khalil and Bayley Sweitzer's hypnagogic horror film *Nosferasta*, 2021, made in collaboration with the Trinidadian artist and activist Oba, deploys a similar interpretation of the vampire, albeit backwards through time, to an *ur*-site of the colonial imaginary. Opening on the twilit sands of a Caribbean beach in 1504, the film reconstructs a cryptic conversation between a European navigator and his servant as they cautiously contemplate the breaking of dawn. 'Can you change yourself into an Indian? Or even better, an African?' the navigator asks before painting his face with boot polish and hinting at the parasitic