

Catherine Bertola  
Susan Collis  
Liz Harrison  
Claude Heath  
Kaori Homma  
Jools Johnson  
Tim Knowles  
Tonico Lemos Auad  
Scott Martin  
Marzia Migliora

Justin Mortimer  
Andy Parker  
Gala Persico  
Michael Robbs  
Kate Scrivener  
Elisa Sighicelli  
Finlay Taylor  
Vedovamazzel  
Sarah Woodfine  
Simon Woolham

ARTTRA

FIELDGATE  
GALLERY

The Henry Moore  
Foundation

Private View

Friday 19 October 2007  
6 – 9pm

Fieldgate Gallery  
14 Fieldgate Street  
London E1 1ES

Curated by Gaia Persico

Exhibition continues:  
20 October – 11 November 2007

Friday – Sunday, 1 – 6pm  
Thursday 1 November, 6 – 9pm

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## The Line, The Look And The Gaze

Laura Gonzalez

Isobars connect points of equal atmospheric pressure and make them visible through a line. Strictly speaking, isobars only exist as representation. They are a visual construct, designed to help us know what the weather will be like tomorrow, whether we can get out of the house without our coat. The isobaric line is not distant from the concept of gaze, also an unseen line. Gaze for the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan is different from the look and the organ of sight. While the latter belongs to the subject, the former, which mobilizes desire, belongs to objects. Gaze is the object of the scopic drive, a pure, silent, borderline mechanism that links mental and physical aspects of our existence. Drives move away from the body towards satisfaction, presumed to be in the object. But it never reaches it and has to be contented by circling around it before returning to the subject. For Lacan, there is a difference between looking (active), seeing (passive), and the gaze or reflexive mode. Objects without eyes have gaze and, in their condition, make the subject become something other: that which is seen. There is a relational element, a duplicity to this action; I see the other seeing me. In this way, gaze is key to the development of human agency. This reflexivity is what the viewer encounters in the gallery space we are visiting today.

Each of the artists showing under the umbrella of *Isobar* is a pressure point within contemporary art, a point representing a constant value which the viewer recognizes and links up as she wanders around Fieldgate Gallery. So, what is this constant value? The link between all the works exhibited is the posing of a visual problem that could be described as attempting to reveal the pleasure we derive by looking at things and, in its reciprocal action, being looked at. The care I am taking with words is deliberate as the phenomenon I experience in front of these works is complex – although not overly complicated. For Lacan, the visual is a trap in which the viewer is caught; the line, the fishing line this time, captures us. Darian Leader in his reading of Lacan in relation to the queues formed in front of the Louvre in 1911 to see the empty space left by the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, puts forward the theory that, rather than humans being image-capturing devices, it is in fact the other way round: images are human capturing devices. Luring and



deceiving are intrinsic to the image. By asking our abandonment, by making us lay down our gaze and our resistances, it acts as a pacifier. What we cannot see, what is lacking from our visual reality, is what seduces our eye and our look.

In his seminar XI, Lacan further describes the gaze by means of another linear metaphor: the thread which, in space, allows for the visible to take place. In the context of the particular space that occupies us today, one can easily add another metaphor to our emerging collection: the drawn line. Drawing, as contemporary artistic practice, aligns mark-making and gesture to combine them with art's call for gaze. This drawn line, however, is not reduced to the graphic representation of perspective, often used as an example for discussions around the eye and the gaze. Instead it expresses perspective in all its connotations, including cognitive ones. The viewpoint embodied by the artists showing at *Isobar* is that of trying to apprehend something that resists being turned into an image. The functional, the purposeful and the meaningful collapse to let the works presented speak of that fall and of something else. This resistance, this exclusion from the field of vision is based around an impossibility rather than a prohibition; the impossibility to satisfy gaze and, by extension, desire.

The drawing practice shown here has similarities with that other intersubjective situation in which gaze and lines – of thought – are paramount: the practice of laying down on the analytic couch and talking. Analysis, like art, only happens to a few, as it takes place in a privileged enclosure. The contexts of the analytic room and the gallery space are comprised by institutional conventions and provide the constants in which the processes of unbinding and revealing take place. The visual pleasure explored by these artists, in their abundance of media and content, creates a state of playfulness – which is different from lightness – that brings the impossibility of representation and satisfaction to the tip of the viewer's fingers and allows for things to happen. If this gallery space is akin to an analysis room, the works shown in *Isobar* are not structured or coherent speech, memories or symptoms. Instead, these pieces take the place of the unconscious, as manifested

in the everyday, for example when one of Freud's patients said *in flagrante* when she meant *en passant*. This psychopathology we all experience (who has not misplaced one's keys?) is also a representation of a fall, a collapse in knowledge.

Walking around the gallery is like being tripped by things unseen, which is not to say they are invisible. Jokes and puns (recognizable in the works of Johnson, Parker, Martin, Woolham and Vedovamazzei), slips of the tongue (think of Collis), bungled and unintended acts (Mortimer, Harrison, Auad), slurred speech (Heath, Persico, Scrivener, Robbs) and dreams (Woodfine, Taylor, Bertola, Sighicelli, Homma, Migliora, Knowles) inhabit this space. These things have been there all along but have only been made visible by the violent encounter with one's own body. What this fall brings about is a renewed seeing, in the same way that when the conscious is made to stumble on the unconscious we discover something about ourselves.

The screen behind which we hid is shattered into pieces, and reality is jolted. This idea of tripping and trapping the look and the gaze through the line (an isobar, a thread, a drawn mark, a fishing line, a line of thought), takes the form of an accident, a collision, unplanned at least for the viewer. And this event, in all its violence and unpredictability, manifests our quest for visual pleasure. With such a fundamental act of creation, mystery and desire are preserved.

