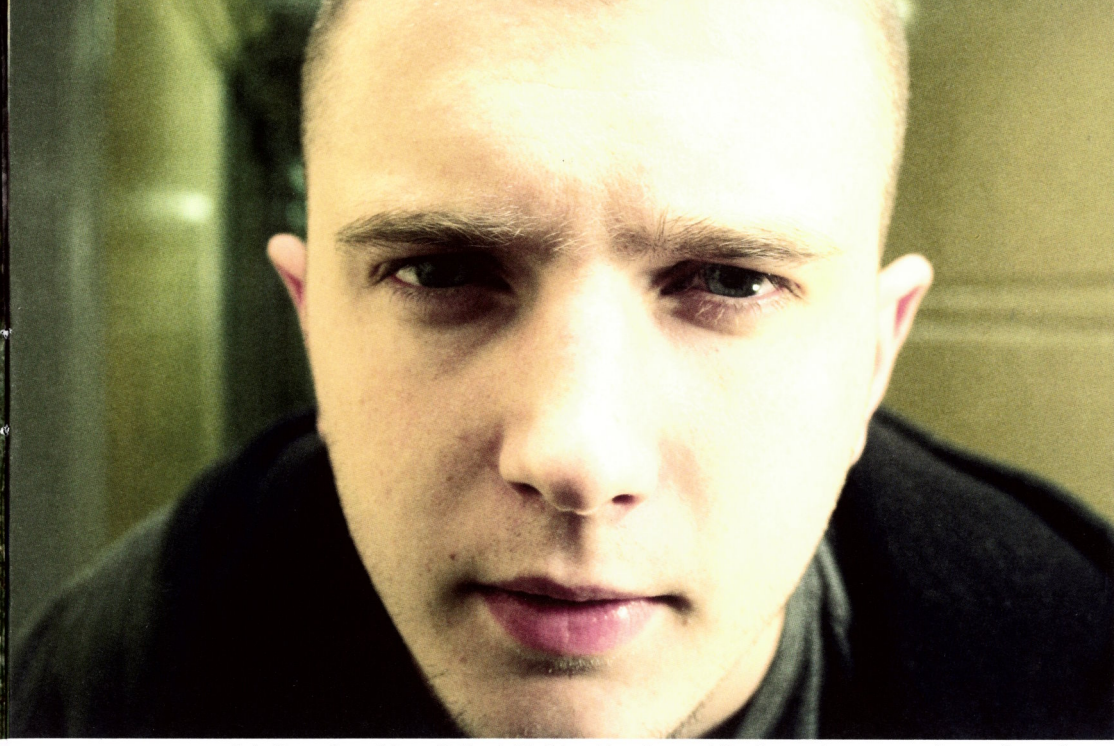
Spartacus Chetwynd, *The Walk to Dover*, 2005–7 (detail)



Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard, *Walking After Acconci (Redirected Approaches)*, 2005 (detail)

It is a peculiarity of film and video art that it asks us to wait patiently while it unfolds its meaning. In a time when we receive and discard images with increasing speed, many artists relish the chance to bend our ear, tell a story, or allow us the chance to pause and reflect. The diversity of work in *Now Showing 2* is testament to the wealth of possibilities offered by the moving image, and to the innovation of artists working within the field today.

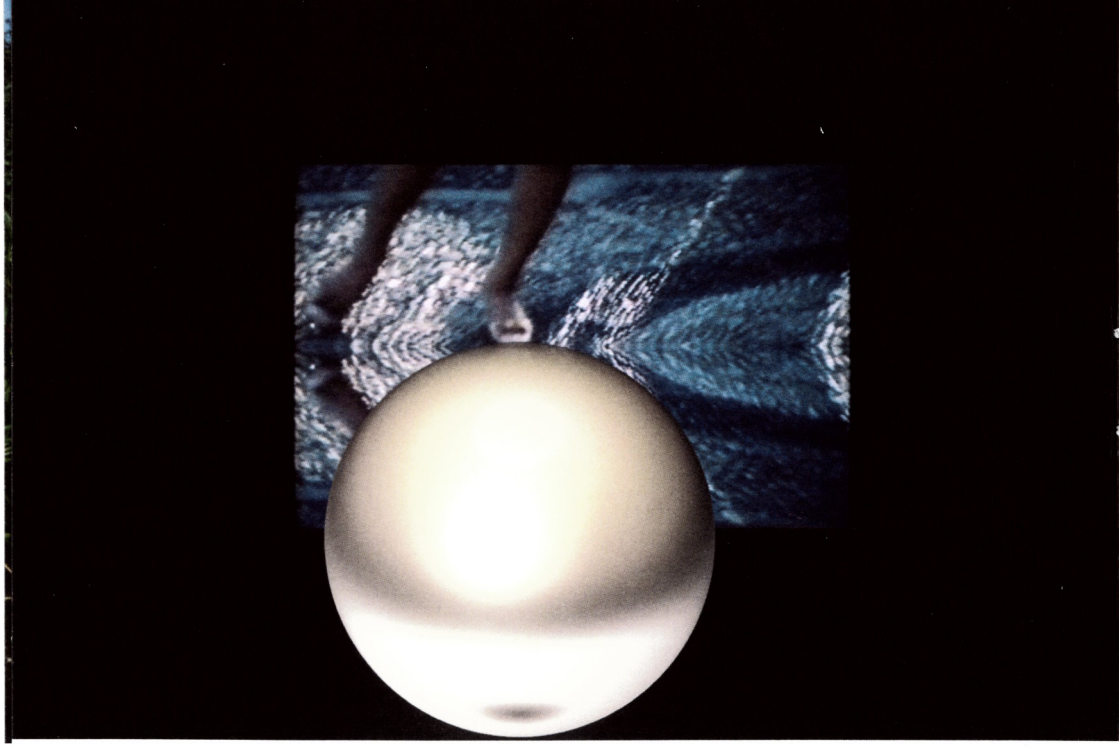
The Walk to Dover (2005–7) by **Spartacus Chetwynd** isn't so much a video as a collage of sound and image. It documents a journey that the artist took with two companions from London to Dover, re-enacting the journey taken by the penniless David Copperfield in Charles Dickens' novel and foraging for nuts and berries from hedgerows and allotments as they went. Chetwynd's work brings to life part of a story that was itself based on real events in Dickens' life but her video, with its borrowed illustrations and halting voiceover, reframes the journey once again as fiction. (We will never know if the characters on screen really did walk all that way, or supplemented their hedgerow diets at Little Chef).

The Walk to Dover also conflates reality and fiction in a more pointedly political manner. Foraging for wild food conforms to a middle-class idea of a thrifty, self-sufficient 'good life', which has nothing to do with the deprived hinterlands that the travellers pass through, nor with the advice of self-help financial guru Alvin Hall invoked towards the end of the film. While the work might be a quest for a freer way of life, it also acknowledges some of the obstacles in its path.

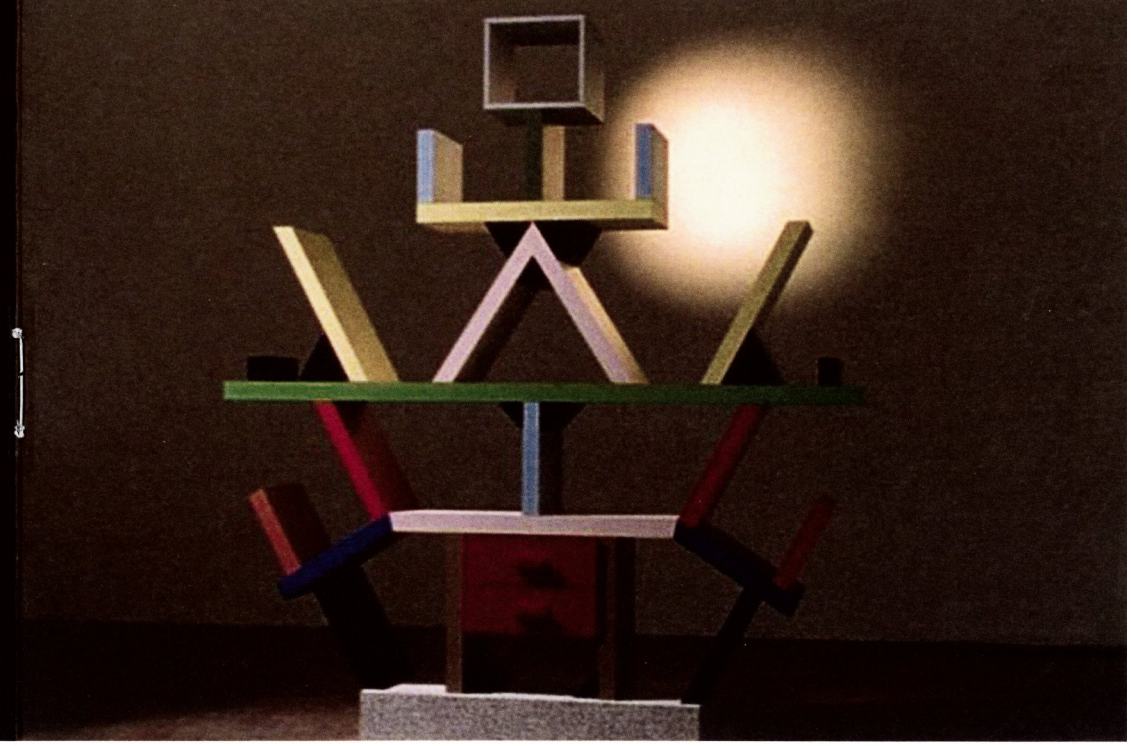
In *Walking After Acconci (Redirected Approaches)* (2005), **Iain Forsyth** and **Jane Pollard** return to the forms of remake, cover version and re-enactment that have characterised their practice. It is a contemporary translation of *Walk-Over (Indirect Approaches)* (1973) by Vito Acconci, a pioneer of performance and video art, which shows the artist talking to the camera as if to a former lover. In Forsyth and Pollard's film, the monologue is delivered by a young man who peers into the camera lens as if through a letterbox. The role is performed by the singer and rapper Plan B, who developed his part in collaboration with the artists.

At first he flatters us, his self-assurance veering between charm and threat, and although he addresses the girl with whom he 'used to be close', there is also a sense in which we, the anonymous viewers, are being asked to play a role. But things soon turn nasty. 'You and me' becomes 'me and her' and, just as the young man wins us over, he starts to insult us: 'I'm talented and you wasn't, that's just the way it was.'

It's not easy to tell how much of Plan B is in this delivery and how much is an invented character, but this is precisely where the work takes flight. Forsyth and Pollard understand that behaviour, performance and imitation are inextricably intertwined, not just in swaggering London street culture but throughout all of our social interactions and relationships.



Torsten Lauschmann, *Pandora's Ball,* 2008 (detail)



Simon Martin, *Carlton*, 2006 (detail)

While the other films in *Now Showing 2* ask to be watched from beginning to end, *Pandora's Ball* (2008) by **Torsten Lauschmann** is a more like a 'motion sculpture' than a moving picture. It appears to sit on the floor and, by perpetually looping, invites our contemplation as might a fountain or a spinning wheel, while refusing the possibility of escape or conclusion that a linear narrative typically offers.

It is also a collage: two registers of image have been spliced together to create a hybrid construction that is both a riddle and a paradox. A pearlescent sphere, so perfect that it can only have been produced in the utopian world of digital animation, supports the feet and lower legs of a young woman rescued – or abducted – from an old feature film. She dances, feet landing perfectly on top of the ball, elegantly keeping the two elements in play with one another.

But something else is happening: the footage of the dancing woman has been sliced through the middle and mirrored along a horizontal axis. Not only is the lower half of the image a reflection of the patterns in the upper half, but, as logic dictates, another, inverted, woman is imprisoned within the ball. The work, of course, is done not by the dancer but by the artist, who painstakingly adjusted each frame of the footage to allow her to keep her balance. Two timescales, textures, histories and narratives teeter endlessly and precariously on top of one another.

Carlton (2006) by **Simon Martin** is a very different kind of film. With its measured voiceover and careful camerawork, it resembles the sort of interpretation material one might find in a room *adjacent* to a museum exhibition, rather than in the exhibition itself.

The voice tells the story of Memphis, the Postmodern design group led by Ettore Sottsass, and of perhaps its most iconic product, the 'Carlton' bookcase from 1981. Despite its use of kitsch laminates instead of rare woods, the original bookcase was beyond the financial means of most households, and was made only in limited numbers. Nevertheless, the film proposes that its influence ripples not only through every home but also through the design of every public space and building we encounter.

The female narrator asks how Postmodernism, a movement that sought to prioritise wit, individuality and irreverence, has led us to this condition of bland homogeneity, 'no place in particular and everywhere we go'. *Carlton* attempts to diagnose the condition of 'today' by historicising an artefact of a still recent yesterday, asking whether the very fact that we are able to do so points to part of our answer. The work frets about the contemporary role of artists, once a breed apart but now 'like everyone else'. Martin suggests a way forward by gently asking questions and creating space for reflection. Like a teacher, the narrator asks us to take a moment to think about how 'we arrived at today' and waits patiently while we do, before suggesting some answers of her own.

Mark Neville, *Fancy Pictures*, 2008 (detail)

Margaret Salmon, *PS*, 2002 (detail)

Mark Neville's film *Fancy Pictures* (2008) exploits the formal possibilities opened up by contemporary moving image technology. He employs high-speed film cameras typically used to analyse car safety or capture slow motion wildlife images, allowing viewers to study, with superhuman levels of attention, the action filmed. Paradoxically, in Neville's hands, the process only reveals further depths of complication.

The film was shot while the artist was in residence at Mount Stuart, a gothic mansion on the Isle of Bute. Finding himself a recipient of the same artistic patronage enjoyed by Joshua Reynolds and Allan Ramsay in the eighteenth century, Neville turned his attention to the social fabric of Bute, which, he observed, had changed little over the years. Mount Stuart's aristocratic owners continue to own much of the island, including most of its farms, which are worked, as they have been for centuries, by tenant farmers.

For the work's title, Neville borrows a term used to describe eighteenth-century paintings containing elements of imagination or storytelling; oddly, it also applied to certain paintings featuring beggars or peasant children, as if they too belonged in a dreamy otherworld. Neville's ethereal film pits two realities against each other, placing Mount Stuart's portraits, including those by Ramsay and Reynolds, behind farm animals from the Bute estate, creating unexpected but inconclusive convergences and disjunctions. While Neville has emphasised that *Fancy Pictures* is not a polemic against the aristocracy, the work nevertheless scratches at some of the contradictions and anachronisms inherent in contemporary rural life.

While many films use their medium to create the possibility of objective reflection, Margaret Salmon's film *PS* (2002) allows no such luxury. Instead, its viewers do the work, struggling to reconcile the fractured narratives suggested by the harrowing audio track and the sleepy black-and-white images on screen.

The sound of clattering crockery tells us we are in the kitchen, at the centre of the home and of a vicious argument between husband and wife, Paul and Cathy. The background noise and heavy static on the recording hint that there is something covert about us witnessing their conversation, creating an uneasy sense of voyeurism. Meanwhile, black-and-white images shot on soft 16mm film play out in accompaniment. Could the man we hear attacking his wife be the same person smoking in dappled sunlight, pulling weeds from a vegetable patch and enjoying alfresco lunch with friends? He seems detached and inwardly reflective; is this the real Paul, or is a raging, abusive Paul simmering beneath the surface? When, towards the end of the film, he repeats the accusation 'you have not been honest', we begin to wonder where dishonesty might hide. Is it in the 16mm film stock, the performances or the way in which truths are filleted and restitched by the filmmaker?

Like many of the works in *Now Showing 2*, *PS* is as much a lesson in the codes of representation – in the diverse ways in which we package and unwrap messages or meanings – as it is representation itself.

Jonathan Griffin