

# Counterpoint: a new exhibition at the Talbot Rice Gallery



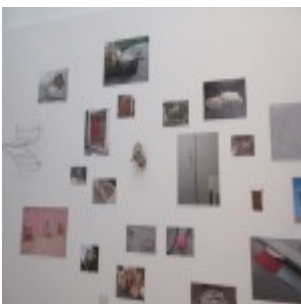
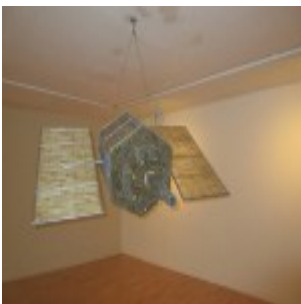
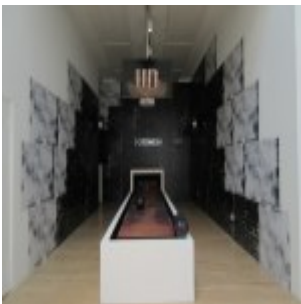
A bowling alley, bee hives and some politically-dependent cannons: these are just some of the pieces included in the [Talbot Rice Gallery](#)'s new show, *Counterpoint*. It is, says Principal Curator **Pat Fisher**, 'an intelligent exhibition.'

Speaking at the opening of *Counterpoint* (which forms part of **GENERATION** and the **Edinburgh Art Festival**) Fisher explains that the gallery has always been interested in experimentation and especially in the development of ideas. Talbot Rice is part of the **University of Edinburgh**, and although the eight artists exhibiting here were given no special direction to refer to the university, Fisher says it is refreshing to see how many have done so: if their views are sometimes critical 'the university is not afraid of that', and she hopes that many Edinburgh graduates will enjoy seeing today's use of the buildings as a contrast to their last memories of them as exam halls.

The bowling alley *PTOMEKIN FUNKTION* has been created by **Craig Mulholland** and is surrounded by dark urban/industrial walls.

The word 'PTOMEKIN' is written in light above the lanes, but is regularly replaced by 'FUNKTION.' An electronic soundtrack and a hypnotic voice-over add to the feeling of dislocation and menace in what Fisher describes as a 'discourse on power.'

Are we able to rebel against the overwhelming power of machines that pretend to offer us pleasure (whilst still creating power structures of their own) or are we caught up in the inescapable 'function' of the post-industrial world?



A very different experience is provided by **Andrew Miller's**

**Refraction (2014)**, which many of us were sitting on before we realised it was an exhibit. A clue is in the fact that its previous incarnation was *Breakfast Bar (1995)* – a steel and wooden structure providing seating, standing or just leaning space. Miller ‘wanted to make a work that would have a playful and sculptural presence in the space, which would offer the possibility of interaction, as much about looking out at the rest of the space as it is looking in to the work.’

*Refraction* is a beautiful piece; its success is already clear from interaction that took place at the launch – everyone was drawn to it and felt comfortable using it. Miller’s second exhibit is *Bhagwansingh’s*, a display of found items and photographs of discarded objects covering one wall of the gallery. Miller ‘strives to foster curiosity in the discarded, worn and redundant’ and *Bhagwansingh’s* certainly achieves this; every object provokes thought and reflection. ‘We must not be afraid to reuse and reinterpret historical material’ says Pat Fisher, and this can apply equally to Miller’s work as to the gallery’s own reinterpretation of the university buildings.

In the **Georgian Gallery** we are confronted by four cannons.

**Ellie Harrison’s** installation *After the Revolution, Who Will Clean Up the Mess?* is an artwork completely contingent on the result of the Independence Referendum on 18th September 2014. If the nation votes **YES** the cannons will be fired and the gallery showered with confetti. If the result is **NO** the cannons will remain dormant for the entire exhibition, ‘we will never witness what might have been.’ Harrison splits her time between direct activism and art: she doesn’t think that art has much power to bring about political change, but feels that it can be ambiguous and pose questions without having the solutions. This exhibit expands on her interest in the artist as commentator on current affairs. If you’d like to be present on the night of 18th September, you can apply to be a special guest – or tune in to watch the live webcast. See [Ellie’s website](#) for details.

**Ross Birrell** also focuses on the date of the Referendum in his *A Dice Throw, 18th September 2014: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle cast into the Firth of Clyde*. Birrell's project *Envoy* is a series of 'site-specific gestures' in which he gifts works of literature as a symbolic act. This time Heisenberg's equation, cast in copper, will be thrown into the Clyde, the home of Trident, on the day on which Scotland decides its future. One wall of the gallery houses Birrell's vast blue painting, which bears text from Mallarme's poem *A Dice Throw*: casting a vote is, says Birrell, just as much a game of chance as throwing a dice – in both cases, the future remains uncertain. Uncertainty is thrown into the water as a 'gift', but of what and to whom? Birrell quotes **Wittgenstein**, 'In any serious question uncertainty extends to the very roots of the problem.'

Upstairs **Alec Findlay's** *Global Oracle*, perhaps my favourite part of the exhibition, shows stunning sculptures: flying objects that could be birds or insects, planes or GPS trackers. Behind them sit rows of beautifully crafted honey-coloured bee houses. In what Fisher rightly describes as a 'poetic installation', Findlay compares the flight of bees to satellite navigation: bees have an innate spatial memory whilst we have to rely on computers to remember things for us.

Findlay creates 'colonies' of work; he has studied bees extensively and even makes houses for them from books about them. Here he considers the fragility of bees and their relationship to the world, the symbolism and myth associated with them and the way in which they build honeycomb.

**Michele Hannah's** video *Statue* dominates one wall of the ground floor gallery. A woman stares at a point off camera. She is surrounded by streams of green light. Her face is encrusted with jewels. Hannah's influences include **Grace Jones**, **Annie Lennox** and **Kraftwerk**, but for this piece she refers especially to **JG Ballard's** *Vermillion Sands*. 'Remember, I'm of the MTV generation...in between analogue and digital. Pre- and post-

internet. I'm creating a science fiction self.' The video was filmed in the university's **Playfair Library**, 'I imagine being in this futurist utopia: in the..library lamenting as a dystopian chanteuse with a crystal face and singing to the blind statues.'

This interesting and challenging exhibition is open now until 18th October 2014 at The Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge (contact Gallery for opening times.)

A series of talks accompanies *Counterpoint*: the first is on 11th August at 6.30pm, when **Ellie Harrison** will discuss her work with **Ewa Jasiewicz**. Admission is free. On 16th August there will be an evening of live performances by **Jeans & MacDonald, Ortonandon**, and **Alexa Hare**. For details of these and the rest of the programme, see the Gallery's [website](#) or call 0131 650 2010.