

Press Release for use within the Catalogue
Festival Stage TOTAL, Bauhaus Museum, Dessau
Camberwell College of Arts, University of the Arts London

London cheese toast, monsters, walls, games, colour wheel dances, rainbow hands, silver musicians, transcendental states, feet, skateboard paintings, diagrams, protests, spirit beings and clocks.

For the *Festival Stage TOTAL*, BA Fine Art students and lecturers from Camberwell College of Arts reimagined and staged Xanti Schawinsky's performance-installation 'Play, Life, Illusion' (1936). Schawinsky¹ was taught by Oskar Schlemmer, who led the Stage Workshop from 1923 – 1929. Schawinsky became particularly active in the Stage Workshop and eventually led the course, a course that investigated all aspects of performance. Later on, Schawinsky moved to America and founded the Stage Studies Workshop at Black Mountain College. Importantly, Schawinsky saw the theatre as a place of action where '...teaching and learning is shifted from the classroom to the stage as a practice ground and a laboratory for demonstration.'²

Schawinsky referred to 'Play, Life, Illusion' as a *Spectodrama*, a total experience performance installation concerned with duration, light, sound, colour and bodies moving in three-dimensional space. 'Play, Life, Illusion' is a non-narrative work, ordered into a series of episodes, within which the performer figured in a tableau and addressed particular themes such as colour, the news, motion and endlessness.

The Camberwell group undertook research into Schawinsky's oeuvre, recognising him as a Bauhäusler unrestricted by media, who worked across painting, photography, architecture, graphic design, stage design and played saxophone in the Bauhauskapelle (Bauhaus band). In reimagining 'Play, Life, Illusion' students and staff worked together as a community of artists to produce a series of innovative performances which were staged throughout the entirety of the four-day programme of the *Festival Stage TOTAL*.

Following a similar episodic structure to that of 'Play, Life, Illusion', the Camberwell group produced seven performances (episodes). The creation of these episodes began with students and staff selecting an object, sound and idea, that captured something they wished to develop into a performance demonstration. These included: Yoga Mats, an egg timer, a medical bag, the butterfly effect, a gift, absurdity, over-engineering, illusion, a synthesiser, WhatsApp pings, atemporal sounds, homelessness, a trap door, velcro, a mirror (on the floor), a raised heart-beat, an oak branch, discussions around immigration. Senior Lecturer Sarah Kate Wilson explains, '...the conversations that arose in our initial meeting pivoted around migration, surveillance, human rights and the political unrest we find ourselves in, in the UK, in 2019. Working with the objects, sounds and ideas generated in this initial meeting we set about organising these ideas under the following themes Socio-Political-Technological, Protest, Colour and Painting and London.' These topics extended far beyond the groups staged episodes, into the set lists, costumes and activities devised for the evening parties which the Camberwell group hosted each evening.

Similarly to the way in which Schawinsky devised his *Spectodramas*, the Camberwell group worked across mediums to produce costumes, soundscapes, scripts, films, improvised actions, paintings. They played instruments, made sets and moveable sculptures. Each episode used a variety of technologies to explore the radical ethos of the Bauhaus, inflected through performance. The low-

¹ Xanti Schawinsky, born in 1904 in Switzerland into a Jewish family of Polish decent. Schawinsky enrolled at the Bauhaus Dessau in 1924.

² Spectodrama: Contemporary Studies, Xanti Schawinsky, *Leonardo*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Jul., 1969), pp. 283-286

tech came into contact with the hi-tech, AR filters, drums, record players, smartphones, painting and live streaming were all employed. Costumes that incorporated prosthetic limbs that hindered instead of helped the body, emergency silver blankets were worn as 'thought clouds' and bespoke tailor-made hand-painted jumpsuits drew attention to the way colour moves in space.

Inspired by Schawinsky's painting 'Trac', (1960) the Camberwell group made enormous paintings using spray paint. Cans were attached to the undercarriage of skateboards, therefore the skaters left painterly marks as they traversed the canvas. These 4m x 2m canvases were stretched and installed, freestanding in space and formed the backdrop to much of the groups performances. Another element of the set was a wooden structure formed of interlocking trapeziums, populated with circular colour wheel paintings which had been painted or printed by each performer. These colour wheels were danced, choreographed according to a diagrammatical translation of a tableaux from 'Play, Life, Illusion'.

Live soundscapes were produced as performers were attached to electric guitars via extended wires, therefore the movements of the body registered in eerie metallic sounds from the guitars effects loop. Performers broke the forth wall by offering toasted cheese sandwiches to spectators and elsewhere an all seeing being incessantly questioned the audience, asking the public to do something, and save the planet. One episode saw Camberwell BA Fine Art Sculpture alumna Hannah Skinner re-staged her degree show work, which explores themes of queerness, mimicry and humour through soft sculpture, air and sound. In another episode notions of protest and upheaval were explored, workers in hi-vis jackets carried enormous white banners aloft. These banners quickly become walls that were used to barricade and trap people. Performers danced in response to sounds made when contact mics interfaced with objects just as rocks and trees. In one episode the vision of performers was replaced by a gopro camera, which streamed by way of a live feed on Instagram, what the performers could 'see', the performers could see the audience, therefore the audience, in watching the performance by way of the live feed, could 'see' themselves.

In their reimaging of Schawinsky's seminal work, the Camberwell group wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of the Bauhaus by choosing to work alongside one another as artists, sharing ideas whilst developing and exchanging skills. Following the festival at the new Bauhaus Museum, Dessau, their performances were re-staged at Camberwell College of Arts on the 24 October 2019 as part of the University of the Arts London *OurHaus* Festival, a programme of events that celebrates 100 years of The Bauhaus.

Tutors:

Juan Bolivar (Lecturer BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting), Matthew Draper (Lecturer BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting), Prof. Daniel Sturgis (Professor in Painting), Dr Sarah Kate Wilson (Senior Lecturer BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting) with Hannah Skinner, artist and alumna – BA (Hons) Fine Art Sculpture.

Students:

Helen Simone Ainscough: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting, Leon Barnard: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting, Molly Brown: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting, Martin Del Busto: BA Fine Art: Photography, Rafaella Lazarou: BA, (Hons) Fine Art: Drawing, Amy Lotts: BA Fine Art: Photography, Claire Marsden: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Drawing, Martin Del Busto: BA Fine Art: Photography, Amy Lotts: BA Fine Art: Photography, Luke Parry: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting, Robin Pickering: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting, Zviad Sokhadze: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting, Joe Tebbutt: BA (Hons) Fine Art: Painting.

