

## LDP arts

Theatre, music, dance and the visual arts

### CATEGORIES

[Books \(5\)](#)[Chat \(3\)](#)[Classical \(14\)](#)[Comedy \(2\)](#)[Dance \(11\)](#)[Festivals \(4\)](#)[Film \(5\)](#)[International \(10\)](#)[Links \(7\)](#)[Museums \(7\)](#)[National \(15\)](#)[Opera \(3\)](#)[Photography \(6\)](#)[Pop and rock \(14\)](#)[Reviews \(25\)](#)[Theatre \(67\)](#)[Visual arts \(88\)](#)

### USEFUL LINKS

- › [Art in Liverpool blog](#)
- › [National Museums Liverpool blog](#)
- › [Open Eye Gallery blog](#)
- › [Tate blog](#)
- › [FACT's blog](#)
- › [Liverpool Cultural Champions' blog](#)
- › [The Reader Online](#)
- › [The Public Reviews](#)
- › [Vasily Petrenko's blog](#)
- › [Liverpool Biennial blog](#)

## Liverpool Biennial: ghost stories, torch light and drag queens

By **Linda Pittwood** on Oct 29, 12 10:00 PM in **Visual arts**

I sat down on Sunday to write my forth Biennial blog and I realised... I hadn't actually seen any of the Biennial in the last two weeks. This isn't strictly true as I went to the Random Acts symposium at FACT, which was promoted as part of the Biennial; but there is so much to say about this event that I am covering it separately. Otherwise, I went to the Homotopia launch (more about that later) and... that's it. This can only be biennial fatigue.

In an effort to re-engage myself with the festival, I pulled on a waterproof jacket and braved rainy Liverpool. Having been quite event focussed, I had yet to see the 'Unexpected Guest' exhibitions at some of Liverpool's core contemporary art venues. However, my first port of call was a space adjoining the Monro gastro pub on Duke Street, curated by the Biennial team. Tempting as it was to duck in to Duke Street Espresso or Sound Food and Drink, I remained committed to my mission and found Biennial A-board number 9.



In the interests of producing a meaningful relationship between the Biennial artists and the city, over the summer the Liverpool Biennial curators brought several of the artists up to start a dialogue before the festival. They opened some of these events up to other curators and members of the public. One of these talks introduced me to the fascinating Australian artist Dane Mitchell (pictured). One question had niggled me while listening to him talk though: what could an artist from the other side of the world have to tell me about Liverpool?

It was actually the exhibition Thresholds at Tate Liverpool that took this conundrum as a starting point. The exhibition begins with an analysis ~ through the work of Keith Arnatt, George Shaw, Mark Titchner and others ~ of British identity. It then goes on to investigate migration and territories. These are some of the big themes of our times; in art, the media and academia. What defines us as British? What defines art as British? What makes it international?

### LDP ARTS AUTHORS



#### Laura Davis

As the Liverpool Post's Arts Editor, Laura covers theatre, music, dance and the visual arts in Merseyside and beyond. Contact her at [laura.davis@liverpool.com](mailto:laura.davis@liverpool.com)

[Read My Posts »](#)

[Meet our bloggers »](#)

### FOLLOW US ON TWITTER



**LDParts** DAVID HIGGERSON: Call the Midwife reminds us just how much things have changed: IN A world of 24-hour TV, with h...  
[bit.ly/WsTQGW](http://bit.ly/WsTQGW)  
3 days ago · reply · retweet · favorite

**LDParts** THEATRE INTERVIEW: Mark Womack on returning to the stage after eight years with Hope at the Royal Court Liverpool...  
[bit.ly/UhLoLH](http://bit.ly/UhLoLH)  
4 days ago · reply · retweet · favorite

**LDParts** @RawActs no problem  
4 days ago · reply · retweet · favorite

**RawActs** @LDParts any chance of RT for our comedy night?  
[wegottickets.com/event/197854](http://wegottickets.com/event/197854)  
7 days ago · reply · retweet · favorite



[Join the conversation](#)

### RECENT POSTS

- › **Visual arts:** Linda Pittwood wins first John Moores Critics Award
- › **Theatre:** Jonathan Harvey's Beautiful Thing will tour to Liverpool
- › **Visual arts:** Liverpool Biennial: ghost stories, torch light and drag queens
- › **Visual arts:** Liverpool Biennial: gin tea, agency, sorting and shipping
- › **Visual arts:** GUEST BLOG: Juan Cruz, director of LJMU's School of Art and Design, on the new John Moores Critics Award
- › **Visual arts:** Liverpool Biennial: Primal Scream anecdotes and karaoke funeral anthems
- › **Visual arts:** Turner Prize 2011 nominee and John



» [The Double Negative](#)

» [Seven Streets](#)

» [West End Whingers](#)

» [The Stage](#)

» [Makng a Mark](#)

» [Frieze blog](#)

» [The Flaneur](#)

MORE ON...

[Everyman](#)

[Theatre](#)

[Liverpool](#)

[Biennial](#)

[Liverpool](#)

[Playhouse](#)

[Empire Theatre](#)

[Tate Liverpool](#)

[Walker Art](#)

[Gallery](#)

[Everyman](#)

[Unbound](#)

[FACT](#) [RLPO](#)

[John Moores](#)

[Painting Prize](#)

[liverpool](#)

[biennial](#) [Slung](#)

... ..

This prompted me to think about the relationship that visiting art has with visiting cities. Although I am a resident of Liverpool and work in the city, I live 8 miles south of the city centre so it feels like I have to make an effort to spend my free time there. As a cultural tourist, all elements of the make up of a city can affect the way you read and understand the art you see. For me Liverpool is home and the 'Unexpected Guests' feel like they are my guests, but I have a complicated relationship with the city and on occasion see Liverpool at its worst.

Back in the *Monro*, the first artwork I encountered was wallpaper designed by Mitchell, repeating the equation "host + guest = ghost". Even having listened to Mitchell talk about his interest in etymology and knowing it was a nod to conceptual art godfather Marcel Duchamp, the wallpaper felt a bit ~ no pun intended ~ flat. However, also on display were several of his blown glass objects full of air from the lungs of people telling ghost stories. It was a pleasure to see these fragile sculptures heavy with meaning tucked away in a little corner of the city I hadn't seen before.

On the table near to Mitchell's ghost story vessels, was a silver spoon cast with the inside of a mother's hand at one end and the teeth of child at the other. This could have been made by Salvador Dali but was in fact the work of contemporary NYC-based artist Janine Antoni. All three artists' work at the *Monro* combined a Whitereadian restraint with fanciful surrealism. In the farthest rooms artist Markus Kährer offered an installation so simple and perfect I won't spoil it by giving away the twist.

From the *Monro* I went to the Tate and from there I walked the short distance to Open Eye. Since opening at its new location in 2011, Open Eye has invested in a series of architectural commissions on the facade of the building. Sintra Tantra is responsible for the jazzy offering during the Biennial period. Although I like the way her work interrupts the corporate atrium outside the gallery, it feels like all the stops have not been pulled out for the festival and it is basically business as usual. Inside, the lens-media specialist space is showing the work of Kohei Yoshiyuki downstairs and Mark Morrisroe in the archive exhibition space; both are fun but standard Open Eye fare. I enjoyed the process of viewing Yoshiyuki's photographs, using a torch to illuminate his highly suggestive vignettes in the dark.

Elsewhere, the Bluecoat seemed to be trying to combine narratives around identity, with the sensitive curatorial approach used at the *Monro*. It did this fairly well by selecting some beautiful genre-bending pieces like Sun Xun's projections combining new media and traditional Chinese painting, showing John Akomfrah's engaging multi-screen investigation of identity and memory and Dan Graham's barely-there pavilion. The only work here that jarred was Dora Garcia's 'live talk show', which at the time I went was an empty room crying out to be populated for some sort of event.

Earlier last week I had attended a very spectacular event, not part of the Biennial this time. Thursday marked the launch of Homotopia, the annual LGBT arts and heritage festival delivered by an organisation based in Liverpool but expanding its reach all the time. At the opening, visitors had access to Council House Movie Star, an artwork that was funny, sad and extreme, which occupied part of the building on Greenland Street that until 2010 was used for ambitious commissions under the auspices of A Foundation. It blurred the boundaries of video, theatre and installation and involved drag queens dancing in the living room while their stereotypical scally kids looked on. The evening showed another side to Liverpool, one that confronts and then laughs at its problems, and one that I am glad exists.

In many ways this Biennial seems like an art festival for austere times, without the drama and fanfare of previous Biennials. The Unexpected Guest exhibitions seem to be going for complexity but understatement. My Biennial ~ and non-Biennial ~ experiences this week were an important reminder of all that art can be and achieve: analysis of big issues, spaces for reflection, aesthetic pleasures and the ability to challenge and change the way we feel about the city we live in.

 Like

15

 Tweet

8

 Share

3






Moores Painting Prize 2012 judge George Shaw's Walker Art Gallery talk

» **Theatre:** Leanne Best short-listed for Theatre Awards UK 2012 for Frank McGuinness' *The Match Box* at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio

» **Books:** GUEST BLOG: Laura Rose on her novel *Just Wishing*

» **Visual arts:** VIDEO: Rhys Chatham's *Crimson Grail* at Liverpool Cathedral for the Biennial

#### MOST COMMENTED

1. Your chance to vote in the Daily Post Arts Awards  
By **Laura Davis** on Nov 21, 11  (2)
2. Mike Leigh, Nicholas Serrota and Fiona Rae on Tate Liverpool's Monet Turner Twombly exhibition  
By **Laura Davis** on Jul 9, 12  (1)
3. Paul Du Noyer to give album covers lecture at The Bluecoat with music by Candie Payne and The Zutons' Paul Molloy  
By **Laura Davis** on Aug 13, 12  0
4. Igor Memic's Happy at Liverpool's Lantern Theatre  
By **Laura Davis** on Aug 14, 12  0
5. 50 things to do in Merseyside  
By **Laura Davis** on Aug 15, 12  0