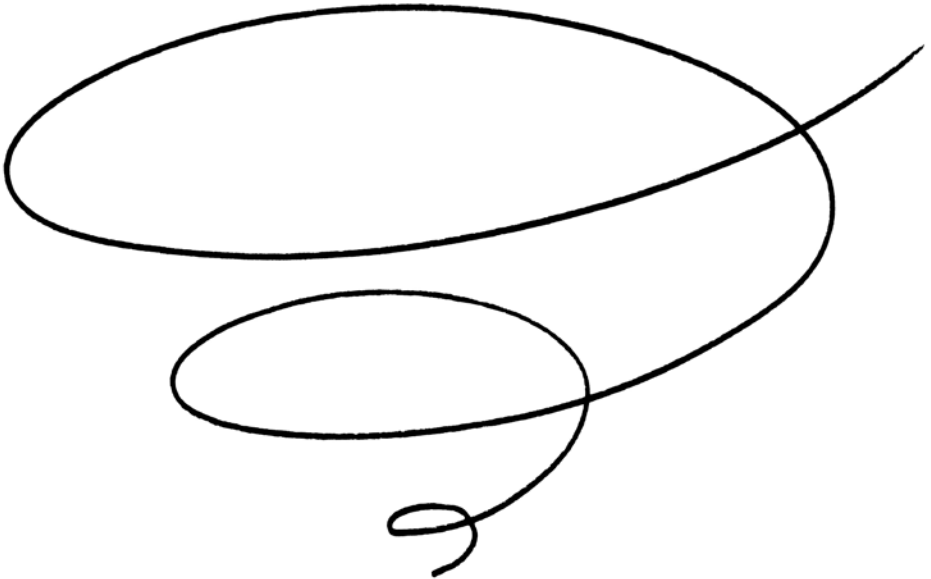


Bonnie Camplin



Camden Arts Centre: September 2016–January 2017
File Note #107 **Bonnie Camplin**



Multi-dimensional Princess 2013
Ink on paper, 27.5 × 37 cm

Bonnie Camplin produces drawings, films, performances, music, writing, installations, immaterial and situational research. A dialogue with consciousness and reality, her work doesn't occupy set positions. Rather, it harnesses tools of research and observation to shed light on ideas otherwise not visible or widely accepted. How to live in—*survive*—a world clouded by ideology and illusion? This question compels her quest to illuminate information patterns excluded from the network of belief systems that upholds rational and acceptable modes of thought and behaviour. Despite being innate to most psychosocial and cognitive regimes, Camplin maintains that it is necessary to exercise a healthy skepticism towards 'consensus reality,' to constantly question how is it claimed and secured as the state of things.

Grounded in subjective experience as opposed to rational, objective knowledge, Camplin's practice—a constantly curious disposition she calls the 'Invented Life'—is the transmission of this open and generous skepticism into various creative structures. These range from large-scale installations—this exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, for example, or *The Military Industrial Complex* (2014) at South London Gallery, the exhibition that led to her Turner Prize nomination—to more simple outputs like drawing and filmmaking (what she refers to as the "solitary practice of making artefacts alone in an empty room"). As individual objects, or woven into larger installations, Camplin's drawings are a constant in her projects. At times they're small-scale, brisk and scratchy, a bit like stoner doodles: floating body parts, gappy shading, weird geometric clusters and cartoonish figurations. At other times they're more considered and grander in scale: a realist technique grounding a tighter, narrative focus. It's clear that both styles seem to carry the mood of their making. In the first instance a kind of urgency is communicated; getting a quick, not yet fully composed idea, thought or feeling *out*. A purge-like method contrasted by the calmer, more meditative feel of the second approach (I imagine Camplin operating in a trance or visionary state, a kind of delirium). *The Pebbledash Swells* (2012) is just such a hypnagogic offering. Inspired by a Tarot reading, it's a detailed HB pencil drawing in which a bureaucratic mythos comes together. In the foreground a figure adorned in knightly garb and sporting the head of a melting

snowman (carrot, coals and all) squats before a large bird. Further back, dropped below the image's horizon-line, two suit-wearing, bald-headed, businessmen grimace and gesticulate in some discomfort. Just above them, positioned like trophies (perhaps pillaged by the figure—his bird also proudly wears one), hangs a rack of soberly patterned ties: a signifier of the high abstraction of business and management codes. As Camplin says "I think ties are hilarious. This is to do with the theatre of corporate macho." Funny as ties are, their centrality in this aberrant and fantastical drawing also reminds us of the insidious and destructive dimensions of acquiescence to particular normalised codes.

Though low-fi in their editorial sensibility, making good use of distortion and collage (both of image and sound), Camplin's short, highly crafted films shift between found offcuts of junky pop-culture and original filmed footage. In *My Name is Ko Ko* (2002), an initially upbeat start propelled by Sister Nancy's dancehall staple *Bam Bam* (1982) soon collapses into a sequence of disjointed images. Lab-rats mate; flies stream from a boy's gaping mouth; a man perched on a bridge defenestrates a cat, then suicides himself—all to a haunting soundtrack of slowed down heartbeats, modulated voice-over and heavy breathing. Decomposing narrative cogency in favour of delivering fractured, eerie, at times even uncomfortable, ambient messages, like all of Camplin's films, *My Name is Ko Ko* is shot through with raw and unvarnished affect conjured through the offbeat manipulation of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the film-form.

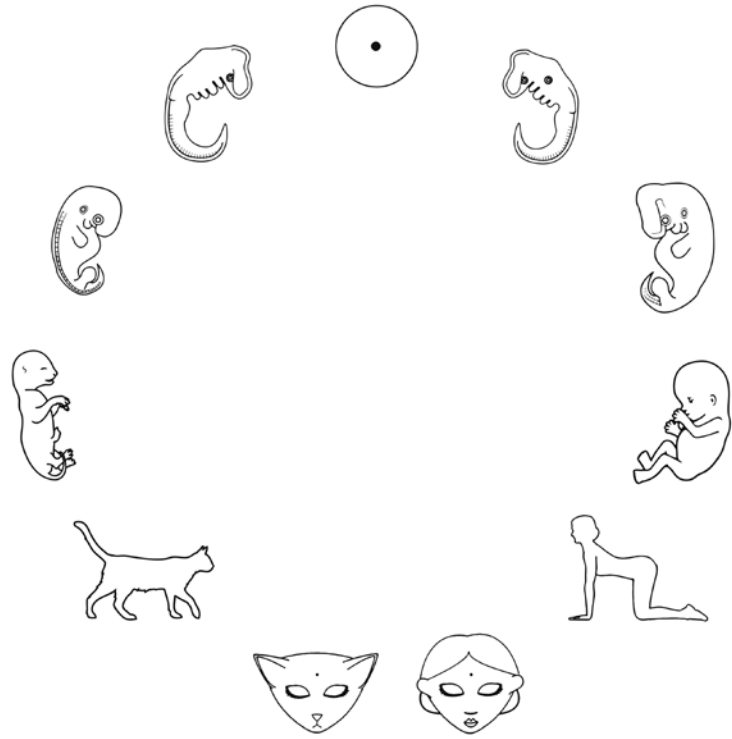
Camplin's recent installations represent a return of sorts, a connection back to her earliest years as an artist. After graduating from Central St Martin's in 1992, in addition to taking jobs at Parcellforce and McDonald's, she began producing 'experiments' involving music, dress-up and performance in the nightclubs of London's Soho district. Though not yet articulating her ideas formally (she describes these experiments as "all pre-lingual glamour") this period proved vital in terms of the emphasis Camplin *now* places on art as a lived and energetic *experience*; something to be met and felt, not just looked at, analysed. Described as "an artwork that is also a research tool," the aforementioned Turner Prize exhibition is exemplary in this regard. The installation centred around five video interviews in which individuals recall extraordinary experiences (from encounters with inter- and extra-dimensional beings to systematic trauma-based mind-control techniques). We are immediately forced to ask: are these individuals crazy? Are the events described entirely impossible or unbelievable? What is clear is that, in line with the general approach to such things, Camplin doesn't think so. As she proposes: "I find that I'm

perfectly open to the possibility that they are telling the truth; that they are not mad, rather than the situation itself may be quite mad." Alongside the videos, Camplin collected books and printouts, seemingly evidencing the experiences described in the interviews. Exploring topics such as physics, philosophy, witchcraft, quantum theory, capitalism and warfare, these materials were positioned in a specific way in order to form pattern-based relationships between what, at first glance, are very different ideas. Crucially the viewer was left with the responsibility of mapping their own meanings onto the diverse materials gathered, an affirmative and generous mode of engagement running through much of Camplin's work.

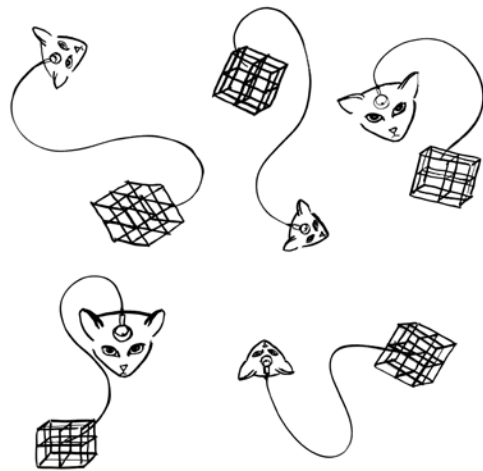
Appraising Camplin is no easy task. Her work does not come neatly packaged, nor does not deign to explain itself with particular clarity. Rather it is about honouring the complexity—the *full* complexity—of human experience. As London-based curator Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz has argued, Camplin's practice retains a defiant "liquid element," one that makes it "impossible to contain within the walls of the gallery or an auditorium, or indeed the lines of a resume or artist's statement." This chimes with Camplin's own reflections on how people might access her art. As she has stated: "I do not wish to eliminate the public and visible aspect of my practice. Rather, I believe that the value brought to visibility is amplified by a serious commitment to conscious activity outside of what is made visible." What we get from Camplin's art is, therefore, the succour to assay the assumptions and expectations of everyday life, timely encouragement to think for ourselves in order to forge new, as yet untrammelled paths through consensus reality.

Paul Pieroni was recently appointed Senior Curator at the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow and was co-curator of the 2015 Turner Prize





Zero Point - in Felinity (2016), direct-to-substrate print on painted panel, 122 x 122 cm



Omniscience Cannot be Measured (2016) direct-to-substrate print on painted panel, 122 x 122 cm

Design: Practise & Sara De Bondt studio
 Print: Xtraprint, London

Bonnie Camplin (b. 1970, London), lives and works in London. She graduated from St. Martins School of Art London BA Fine Art (1992) and post-grad diploma in advanced photography (1996). Throughout the '90s she was a dancer, performer, host, DJ and director / promoter of experimental avant-garde club nights in Soho London. In 2005 she released a solo LP vinyl recording of music / spoken word, *Heavy Epic* on the Decemberism label. Her solo exhibitions include *Salty Water/What of Salty Water* Portikius, Frankfurt (with Paulina Olowaska, 2007) and *Lightbox*, Tate Britain, London (2008). Camplin was included in *Strange Things Permit Themselves the Luxury of Occuring* curated by Steve Claydon, Camden Arts Centre (2007). In 2013 the ICA presented a screening of Camplin's early films and she was the recipient of a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award the following year. In 2015 she was nominated for the Turner Prize for her 2014 presentation at South London Gallery as part of Anxiety Arts Festival. She was in the band DonAteller with Mark Leckey, Ed Laliq and Enrico David and has also collaborated with Paulina Olowaska and Lucy McKenzie. Her teaching posts include: Städelschule Frankfurt; Ruskin School, Oxford; Goldsmiths University London; The University of Manchester; The Architectural Biennale Venice and The Architectural Association (AA) London. Camplin is represented by Cabinet, London and Michael Benevento, LA.

Viewing List

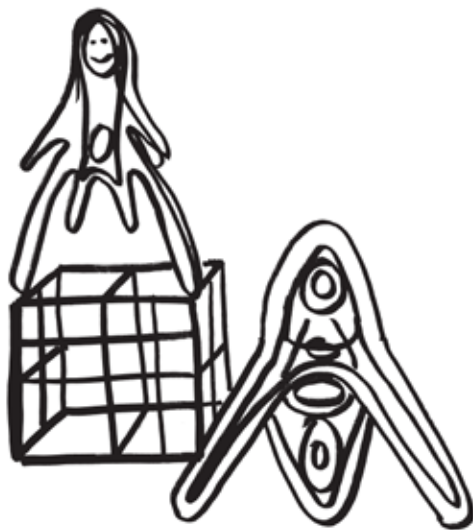
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|------------------------------|------------------|
| Zero-point (the unspeakable) | Harmonics |
| Water | Cymatics |
| Vortex-geometry | Electronics |
| Fluid-dynamics | Logic and Syntax |
| Liquid-crystals | Cybernetics |

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All images courtesy the artist and Cabinet, London

Empty All Cages



Opening hours
Free Entry
Tuesday - Sunday: 10.00am - 6.00pm
Wednesdays: 10.00am - 9.00pm
Closed Mondays

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Friends of the Cube (2016), direct-to-substrate print
on painted panel, 119.5 x 112 cm

Front cover: *Exit* (2016), direct-to-substrate
print on painted panel, 122 x 122 cm