

PSYCHIC NEWS

DEVELOPING YOUR MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT



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WITH JAMES
VAN PRAAGH

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ART VIEWED FROM BOTH SIDES OF THE VEIL

Photo: ©Sylvain Deleu

TWO art exhibitions, one in London and the other in San Francisco, have had visitors contemplating the afterlife from very different angles.

Entering Karen Mirza's first solo exhibition at fig-2, in the ICA Studio on London's prestigious Mall, just a short royal carriage journey down the road to Buckingham Palace, was like stepping into a physical séance.

The room was bathed in red light and among the exhibits was a huge image of physical medium Stanislaw P (later identified as Stanislaw Tomczyk) with ectoplasm exuding from her mouth. This photograph was taken in 1913 during test séances with Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, the German psychical researcher.

What is interesting about the image the artist has selected is that Schrenck-Notzing covered the medium's face with netting to demonstrate that the ectoplasm was capable of passing through it and was not, therefore, a physical substance that the medium was regurgitating.

Attention is not drawn to this and for good reason. The purpose of Karen Mirza's exhibition, titled "The Ectoplasm of Neoliberalism" was not to expound on Spiritualism and psychic phenomena – though she is the daughter of medium

Phyllis Mirza – but to open up a much broader dialogue with those who view her work.

The idea, she explains, was to "bring forth a confluence of occult and radical politics" that is a further step in experimenting with her ongoing exploration of "positions that concentrate on women, bodies and sites of resistance".

Her large scale collages were drawn from her research in radical and psychic archives, and her set of photo-prints were described as "outcomes of studies of dissonance".

Neoliberalism, she says, "is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade".

If these concepts were difficult for exhibition visitors to absorb without time for quiet reflection, there were on hand several rare exhibits from the archives of

London's College of Psychic Studies, of which the artist is a member, to help bring them back to Earth.

On loan were some rare spirit photographs, séance notes from the visit to the College made by Scottish physical medium Helen Duncan, and the original editions of two controversial books, *Art Magic and Ghostland*, edited by medium Emma Hardinge Britten. There was even an original copy of *Psychic News* (dated April 1, 1944) reporting on Helen Duncan's trial at the Old Bailey.

"The Ectoplasm of Neoliberalism" exhibition was staged from July 6-12.

Meanwhile, coincidentally, an exhibition called "After Life" was opening in San Francisco on July 10 at Incline Gallery, on Valencia Street, a former funeral home. The gallery gets its name from the ramps used to move caskets and gurneys to the embalming room.

"After Life" is described as "an intriguing exploration of the possibility of life after death, and a way to honour the dead by allowing them the pleasure of interacting with the living". The exhibits on show, by artists Fernando Orellana and Al Honig, are designed to give the "living-impaired" – in other words, the dead – a way to participate in the connected living world.

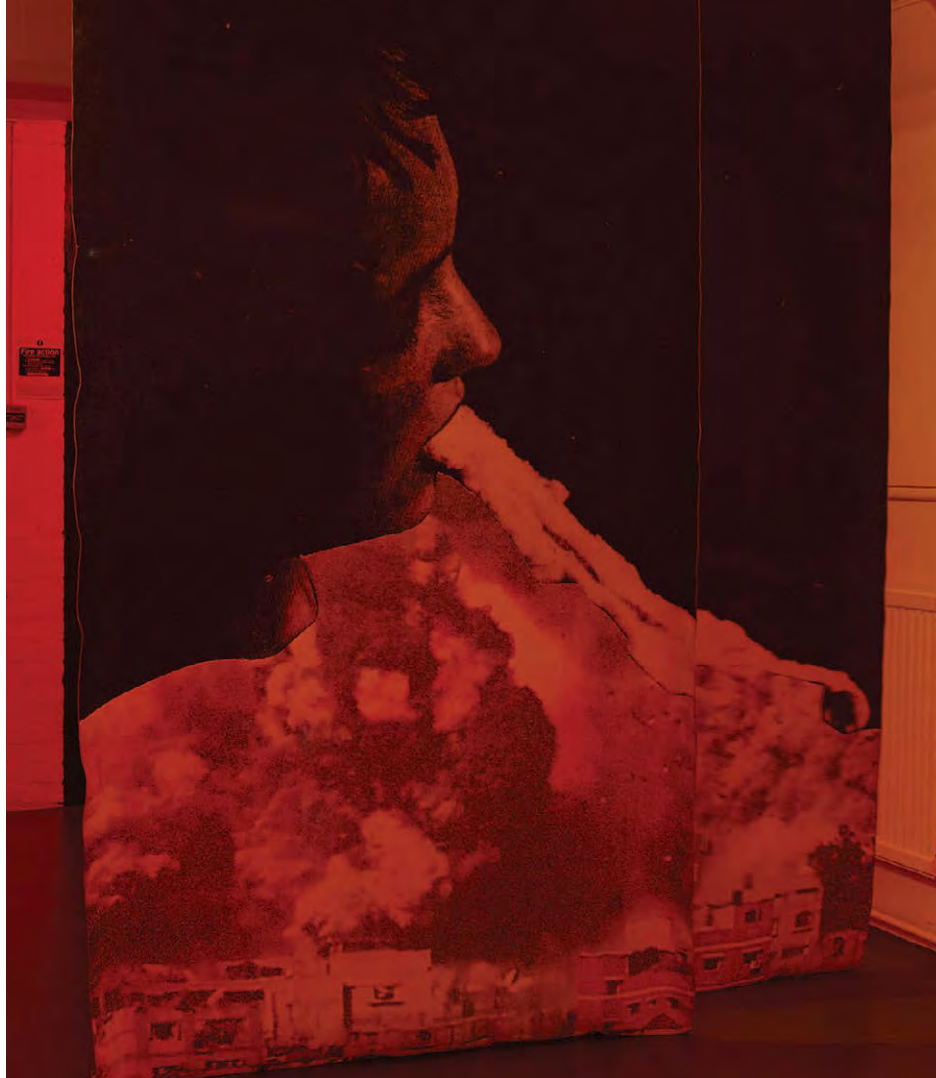


Photo: ©Sylvain Deleu



HER BELL

Photo: Fernando Orellana



THEIR WORDS

Photo: Fernando Orellana



HIS RECIPES

Photo: Fernando Orellana

Orellana's creations are interactive machines built around personal artifacts that respond to factors that are detected by ghost-hunters: changes in temperature, infrared light or electromagnetism.

When the device detects sudden activity in two out of three of these triggers, it "activates the object for the dead" says "After Life" curator Valerie Leavy.

For example, in a piece called *His Minerals* the machine will light a stick of incense when it senses the ghost of a deceased man who left behind a collection of minerals and handmade incense. Another piece, *Her Bell* is composed around a brass bell left behind by a deceased bell collector. The bell rings when it senses a paranormal trigger.

Orellana argues that the living get plenty of devices to help make their lives easier and the dead deserve the same consideration.

The other works on show in "After Life", created by Honig, are elaborate sculptures housing the cremated remains of the departed. Each "urn" also has a "window" so that the dead can

observe the world outside.

"After Life" runs from July 10 - August 8 at Incline Gallery, Valencia Street, San Francisco.



HIS LIGHT

Photo: Fernando Orellana