

the planet, while respecting, and even deepening, its familiar mysteriousness.

Finally, Colombia-based artist Leonel Vásquez's sound sculpture *Templo del agua, río Tyne (Water Temple, Tyne River)*, 2023, is perhaps the show's fulcrum. Water drips from a series of copper bulbs hanging from the ceiling. As the drops hit a plate suspended directly below, the vibrations are amplified into a soothing, rhythmical sound. Made using rocks and purified water from the Tyne, which flows alongside the gallery, the installation creates a kind of liquid temple, urging a sense of mindfulness and heightened attention. What would actually happen, Vásquez seems to ask, and what kind of world would be possible, if, for once, we just stopped and listened?

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Li Yuan-chia in his studio at the LYC Museum and Art Gallery, Cumbria, 1969

Li Yuan-Chia & Friends: Making New Worlds

Kettle's Yard, Cambridge
11 November to 18 February

In 1972, Li Yuan-Chia founded the LYC Museum & Art Gallery in the Cumbrian village of Banks. An extension of the artist and his oeuvre, the LYC was also a home, studio, workshop and gallery, and its domestic nature meant that cooking, eating, gardening and passing the time of day were admitted as inherent to the process of making art. Li worked assiduously to put his museum on the map, cultivating its touristic potential (at its peak it had up to 30,000 visitors a year), and showing the work of some 323 artists over a decade. The LYC has been neglected since its closure in 1983, and not just in terms of discourse: in contrast to the flourishing cultural centre at Kettle's Yard, another paragon of the experimental museum-as-home, the LYC building is now in ruins. Co-curated by Hammad Nasar, Sarah Victoria Turner and Amy Tobin, this exhibition explores Li's life and oeuvre, and rectifies the historical narratives around his significant contribution to the

landscape of experimental museums in the UK, building on the 'Black Artists and Modernism' project (2015-18) and Manchester Art Gallery's 2018-19 'Speech Acts' exhibition, curated by Nasar, which posited the LYC as an exemplar for public galleries today.

Marked by both solitude and community, Li's life was punctuated by his participation in international avant gardes. Born in 1929 in China's Guangxi province, as a child Li spent time in orphanages and in 1949, following the Chinese Civil War, he moved to Taiwan where he studied art and co-founded the Ton Fan group, which sought to update traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern abstract art. In 1962, Li joined his Ton Fan associate Hsiao Chin in Bologna, Italy, to work with Il Punto, a movement that brought together Eastern and Western contemplative artistic traditions. In 1966, David Medalla invited Li to show at the Signals gallery in London, and the following year his work was featured in the first of three shows at Lisson Gallery, where he met carpenter Nick Sawyer, who helped him produce sculptures and invited him to spend Christmas with his family in Cumbria. Li went and lived there until his death, in 1994.

The LYC was an expression of 'the cosmic point', a concept Li developed in the early 1960s to unite physical, spiritual, social and creative concerns. Representing 'the beginning and the end of everything', the cosmic point proffered a circular cosmology discernible in Li's sparest painting of a single drop of ink, his round kinetic sculptures and circles of friends coming together over the brown dot of a cup of tea. Arguably the most interesting aspect of Li's art-making and curating is his foregrounding of friendship - an approach the curators have dubbed 'friendship as method'. His sprawling network of friends spanned several generations of international artists, from Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo (Interview AM4) to David Nash, Lygia Clark, Mira Schendel, Andy Goldsworthy and Liliane Lijn, as well as poet Dom Sylvester Houédard and musician and composer Delia Derbyshire, who spent a year as an assistant at the LYC in 1976.

The LYC is an inspiring case study when considering questions around how to do a lot with modest means while sustaining creative energy and community long term, especially today, when unprecedented challenges around affordability, sustainability and societal tolerance for experimentation stymie even the most enthusiastic of artists and curators. Li himself, however, is a tough act to follow. He had a relentless work ethic, manning the museum 9am-7pm, 365 days a year for ten years. And although he opted for 'friendship rather than transaction', as the curators put it, he also received regular public funding from Northern Arts and sold catalogues and calendars to garner income.

Embodying Li's experimental spirit at Kettle's Yard is a collection of his paintings, sculptures, hand-coloured photographs and textiles alongside works by artists associated with the LYC and new commissions made in response to the artist's legacy. These include

Kat Anderson Mark of Cane

A new film and exhibition exploring the impact of sugar on the African-Caribbean Diaspora, at the Nunnery Gallery until 21 April



a pair of rugs by Grace Ndiritu from her series of protest carpets: one depicts Li digging in the museum's front garden and floats above visitors' heads as they arrive at Kettle's Yard; another features an image of women felting wool during a rug-making workshop that epitomises the LYC's engagement with local tradition, craft and community. Alluding to Li's occasional disaffection (an undated note reads 'I am alone. No woman, no money') and his encouragement of participation, Charwei Tsai's *Ancient Desires*, 2023, consists of rows of fired clay vessels that invite offerings from visitors, initiating the passage from scarcity to abundance and recirculation. Aaron Tan's *Kitchen Cabinet*, 2022, is based on cupboards Li designed to hold tea and biscuits that were given for free to LYC visitors. Alongside some of Tan's condiments, crockery and maquettes, they contain LYC exhibition catalogues and a film by Li projected onto a frying pan. Yet another cosmic punctuation point, the pan is an appealing symbol for the hospitality that nourished Li's life, work and legacy.

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David Panos: Gothic Revival

NN Contemporary, Northampton
23 November to 20 January

'Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together', observes Walter Benjamin in his seminal analysis of 'The Task of the Translator', 1923, 'must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another.' This remark is particularly relevant to David Panos's short but complex film *Gothic Revival*, 2023, a 21-minute two-screen work commissioned by Northampton's NN Contemporary, and filmed in the city's streets and in two of its music rehearsal spaces, All Saints' Church and The Black Prince public house. In the former venue we witness the preparations of a choir of young people engaged in perfecting a clutch of Church of England hymns, while at the appropriately titled Black Prince, local band Raven Rust rehearse the 1980s goth group Bauhaus' classic track 'Bella Lugosi's Dead'. This juxtaposition of musical genres is ostensibly *Gothic Revival's* main, or at least most obvious, theme. An adjacent single-monitor extract from Panos's *Time Crystals*, 2016, completes the picture.

While the stitching-together of multiple snippets of recorded time is an inherent attribute of film, Panos takes fragmentation to a new level, in that these two contemporary musical performances restage portions of earlier historical moments. In the case of the choir,



David Panos, *Gothic Revival*, 2023, video

carefully chosen fragments of a long, rich tradition of church music are subjected to repeated attention, honed down and polished up, while Raven Rust focuses on a single goth song that functions in goth circles as a synecdoche of goth culture per se. 'Bella Lugosi's Dead' is, at one level, a mere splinter of an erstwhile-substantial countercultural 'scene', but it is *that whole moment* in miniature too, just as the choir's music teleports the listener to a strain of values now largely defunct or radically transformed. Both musical groups work hard at sharpening up tiny portions of their respective material, perfecting them through repetition and correction, while simultaneously striving for the total coherence of the whole.

Further instances of fragmentation in *Gothic Revival* involve Panos's use of the double screen, which literally splits one's attention in two, cutting the viewer's concentration in to (manageable) pieces; but there is also his engagingly unusual framing: capturing a torso, shoulder or hand in such a way that the image remains readable as a recorded action, as opposed to a 'merely' abstract concatenation of colours and forms. Several close-ups of guitarists tuning up are carried out in what one might describe as a conventional documentary fashion; such 'straight' filming really helps one see how much of the work is shot in an inventive, but certainly not pretentious, way. It is surprising, regardless of its playful cutting and framing, how readable the film remains, even taking into account the occasional insertion into the mix of a completely black screen, or a digitally manipulated architectural detail – a 'hieroglyph', to use Panos's term.

Both sets of musicians are involved with the reconstitution of what is in effect ancient history, united not merely by the linguistic label of the goth or gothic, but also by their complete commitment to the task at hand; and if the choir is garbed in the Christian uniform of the smock or surplice, Raven Rust members also have their clearly coded attire through which a certain set of beliefs is stated and retained. One of the film's many ironies is that the members of the goth band are middle-aged, while the choir, connected through their music to centuries-old traditions, are very young. Tradition, it seems, takes many forms.

Beyond the paronomastic comparison of two different groups of people who happen to share a similar name, *Gothic Revival* strongly asserts the role of musical participation with respect to forging a social space in which one might escape from the relentless commercialism of everyday life, a point intelligently discussed by Panos and the show's curator Emer Grant in the accompanying publication. The film critically conveys the mood of cultural and political despondency found in so many British towns and cities today: a feeling, as Panos himself puts it, of living in 'an interregnum between neoliberalism and something new and possibly worse'.

What is gained by both sets of participants is, perhaps, a kind of hope or space of potential through art, and in this the film unexpectedly echoes Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, 1936, and, of course, Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, 1913–27. Scattered throughout the work, sonic devices, such as the beautiful overlaying of voices culled from Panos's street recordings, carry with them a melancholic trace. In the end, Raven Rust perform the whole of 'Bella Lugosi's Dead', a 'Sympathy for the Devil' for the present age.

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