

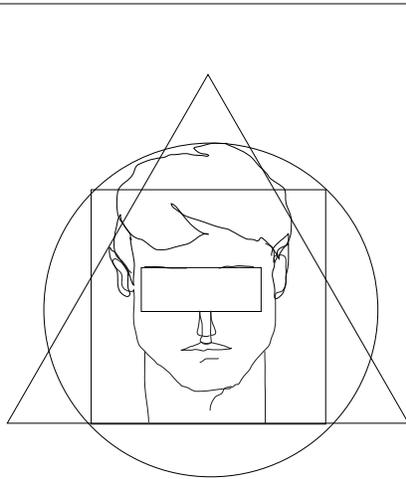


**Royal College of Art**  
Postgraduate Art and Design

# The Pleasure Of The Look: Gazing and Surveillance

## One day Symposium

Wednesday 6th June 2012,  
11am-4pm, Royal College of Art



**Panoptophobia – Rethinking the Utilitarian Visual Field**

**Dr Malcolm Quinn**

Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Graduate School,  
University of the Arts, London

**The Ambiguity of Transparency**

**Christian Nyampeta**

Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London

**Last Day before the Veil**

**Hengameh Golestan**

Iran's foremost documentary photographer

**Labour: live art and femininity in Irish culture**

**Helena Walsh**

Drama Department of Queen Mary, University of London

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Venue: **Research Seminar Room,** Stevens Building, **Royal College of Art**

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*Booking essential as places are limited* [RSVP to azadeh.fatehrad@network.rca.ac.uk](mailto:azadeh.fatehrad@network.rca.ac.uk)

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**Convened by Azadeh Fatehrad,** PhD Candidate, Photography Department, RCA, a Research Methods Course event



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In the context of practice-based research, this day-long event will explore the idea of ‘looking at women’ in contemporary society and, in particular, the oppressive gaze of surveillance to which women are subjected. During the day, a combination of text and imagery will map the ways in which women are represented in eastern cultures today and discuss how these representations can challenge and inform western assumptions in this area.

This event is inspired by a work by Victor Burgin, entitled *zoo 78*, in which Burgin compares the idea of scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) with the notion of oppression (based on the panopticon prison of Jeremy Bentham). The work highlights Burgin’s belief that women are constantly under an oppressive gaze (a form of surveillance) in contemporary society.

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**11.00**

### Introduction

**Professor Olivier Richon**

Acting Dean, Fine Art, Royal College of Art

**11.10 - 12.00**

### Panoptophobia – Rethinking the Utilitarian Visual Field

**Dr Malcolm Quinn**

Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Graduate School, University of Arts London

In his essay ‘Modern Philosophy and the neglect of aesthetics’, Roger Scruton argued that ‘I have a need, as a rational creature, for aesthetic experience, and for the habits and customs which engender it. No utilitarian calculation can substitute for this experience, which consists in a projection forwards of the acting self.’ Scruton’s appeal to aesthetic values against utilitarian thinking chimes with the received opinion on Bentham’s Panopticon as an instrument of state surveillance and oppression. This talk will offer an alternative view of the utilitarian visual field that lays emphasis on the forms of liberty and democracy it proposes. I will argue that utilitarianism gives us a way of thinking individual aesthetic experience through aggregate behaviour that is foreign to much contemporary theorising in art and design.

- Dr. Malcolm Quinn is Associate Dean of Research in Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Graduate School, University of the Arts London and the author of the forthcoming book *Utilitarianism and the Art School in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Recent publications include a chapter for *The Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts* and an essay *The Disambiguation of the Royal Academy of Arts* in the journal *History of European Ideas*.



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**12.00 - 13.00**

## **The Ambiguity of Transparency**

**Christian Nyampeta**

Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College, University of London

Is transparency an instrument of power? Does transparency cancel the necessity of surveillance?

Departing from Barthes transposition of a room as a symbolic space of subjective interiority, this paper investigates the ambivalence of unveiling. Equating 'unveiling' with 'awaking', this paper aligns with Barthes exposition of the room as, on one hand, a stern and dangerous place - the scene whereby the subject undertakes a lonely and bitter fight against malevolent 'spirits'. On the other hand, the room is approached as a pacifying interiority that soothes. Beyond the notions of the room as a corrective device (such as the prison cell), the solitary room is imbued with historical ambivalence. The room can be approached as the symbolic enclosure embodying that which one desires to exhilarate. Simultaneously, however, the room could also be understood as the symbolic refuge at the source of identity. For instance, one of the inaugural acts of adolescence is moving into one's own room.

Thus for Barthes, this cameral interiority of the room represents a place of withdrawal that could elude surveillance. The room thus becomes a potential space for self-care.

Conversely, the interference with this individual centrality of the room is perceived as offensive and repressive. The administrative transparency of contemporary offices for instance, whereby implicitly everyone controls everyone, stands in contrast to both the image of the prison cell and to that of the 'cameral' room.

Following the above 'scenarios' of subjective interiority, and drawing from works from within the Visual Cultures, this paper concludes with regarding (the feminine) un/veiling as ambiguous acts within the fight for subjective individuality.

- Christian Nyampeta is an artist living and working in London.

He is an MPhil/PhD candidate at the Visual Cultures Department at Goldsmiths, University of London.

His research is concerned with issues of (re)Living Together: individuality, industriality and heritages.

Christian works collaboratively, through research-driven practices.

[www.christiannyampeta.com](http://www.christiannyampeta.com)

**13.00 - 14.00 Lunch Break**



**Royal College of Art**  
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**14.00 - 14.45**

**Last Day Before the Veil**  
**Hengameh Golestan**

- Hengameh Golestan is considered a pioneer among Iranian women photographers. Her photographs, which have documented life in Iran for the past twenty-eight years, have been exhibited both at home and internationally. During the Islamic Revolution she captured the rebellion of women, including the last day women were allowed to go without the Hejab (Islamic headscarf), in public. She assisted her husband, the late Kaveh Golestan, on numerous projects, including the Channel Four television documentary 'Recording the Truth'. She runs the Kaveh Golestan Estate.

<http://hengamehgolestan.com/>

**14.45 - 15.30**

**Labour: live art and femininity in Irish culture**  
**Helena Walsh**  
**Department of Drama, Queen Mary, University of London**

Helena Walsh will reflect upon LABOUR, a recent artist-led touring exhibition of live art that she co-curated and performed in. LABOUR featured eleven female artists resident within or native to Northern and Southern Ireland. Participating artists were commissioned to broadly consider how ideological representations of femininity may actively produce, limit or devalue various forms of female labour in an Irish cultural context. She will highlight the diversity of contributions to LABOUR, alongside the development of collective dialogues across three durational successive live events. Helena asserts that in activating new and multiple forms of expression and resistance, alongside the production of empowered discourses from and between live female bodies LABOUR gains its performative power.

- Helena Walsh is an Irish artist based in London. Through her research Helena is exploring live art and femininity in an Irish cultural context. She received a Doctorate Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council and is currently undertaking her practice-based PhD in the Drama Department of Queen Mary, University of London. Helena co-organised *Gobsmacked: Getting Speechless in Performance*, a one-day conference held at Queen Mary, University of London in November 2010 that brought together performance practitioners and researchers to discuss the intersections between writing, performance and silence. In 2011, Helena co-authored *Brutal Silences*, a Study Guide on live art in Ireland commissioned by the Live Art Development Agency, London. She also recently co-curated LABOUR; a live touring exhibition of eleven female live artists resident within or native to Northern and Southern Ireland.

[www.helenawalsh.com](http://www.helenawalsh.com)

**15.30 - 16.00**

**Discussion**

**16.00 - 17.00**

**Reception**