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Art review: Bik Van der Pol

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By Moira Jeffrey

Bik Van der Pol

It isn't what it used to be and will never be again, CCA, Glasgow

IT HAS been a pretty scary week in Glasgow. In my neighbourhood the windows have been boarded up, there is rubbish strewn on the street, water supplies seem to have dwindled so badly that the authorities have placed emergency supply tanks on the stre

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ets. There is an air of imminent crisis, civil disorder, social collapse.

In fact, of course, it's no such thing. Simply another day's filming for a new movie, *The Last Word*, about a couple caught in a crisis-ridden city, starring glamorous Scot Ewan McGregor and "Bond Girl" Eva Green.

Meanwhile, at Glasgow's CCA, Dutch artist duo Bik Van der Pol are investigating the idea of revolution, the potential for action and art's place in the scheme of things. We're used to the image of disorder and the rhetoric of revolution; it permeates not only our history, our B movies and our pulp fiction, but our high culture and rarefied spaces. In Bik Van der Pol's show the artists return again and again to the slogan Art is Either Revolution or Plagiarism – it comes not from some street fighter but the now sanitised and deeply safe painter Paul Gauguin.

The pair are astute hunter gatherers of a cultural nature. Their practice is somewhat peripatetic, their gaze somewhat cool. They create social situations, publish books and periodicals, investigate the museum as an archive as a field of play or enquiry.

In Glasgow, after a summer residency at Cove Park in Argyll, they are hitting the city where it hurts. While the show features a series of films, neons and publishing projects (both created and curated) on global issues, the accompanying publication on fantastically grainy newsprint punctures a number of carefully self-cultivated local images.

The artists and invited local authors speculate on the mythology of the Red Clyde, the mystery of the revolution that never happened in 1919, and the current self-sustaining, artist-led image of Glasgow's art scene.

One of the perpetual gripes about this kind of art is its aesthetic qualities – piles of text, and not an obvious art work in sight – but one of the most striking aspects of this exhibition is that the rather anaemic CCA building has not looked so good in a long time.

The show moves through wall colours as it moves through a shifting century of values. It begins with the red of revolution and Cold War ideology, shifts into a dark uncertain grey and ends in the contrast of virtual darkness lit by the cold flicker of neon.

At the heart of the show is a series of contested empty spaces. Trinity is a film made by the artists in the New Mexico Desert where the first atomic tests took place. Twice a year, a convoy of cars containing the local community, the curious and their kids enter the forbidden zone and hang out. The loose camera work records both the potential of the event and its carefully managed containment.

In the next room is a film made in Belgrade in 2007 on the site of a Tito pet project that never happened. The city's Museum of Revolution was never built, it's an empty site in a city park. The artists "activated" the site, by filming a day of barely perceptible activity. The neighbours hang out and smoke, some techie guys do their techie guy thing. Yellow tape is unrolled and rolled up again. The police turn up.

In Glasgow, the film is now accompanied by a second screen projection featuring a session of the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra attempting to create a live soundtrack for the film. The musicians at work are fascinating to watch as they try to craft something out of nothing. Ultimately their efforts must knowingly fail. As they themselves acknowledge there is no real action, just an ill-defined sense of business.

In the final room, Gauguin's quote flashes in a deliberately faulty neon. On a low bench are piles of the book *How To Disappear Completely And Never Be Found*. Is "going underground" a pragmatic strategy for forcing change, a defeat or an end in itself? Is the ultimate revolutionary action not to overturn society but to completely withdraw from it?

Bik Van der Pol rather leave things hanging in the air. Is this show a call for social or cultural renewal through a kind of studied and careful inactivity? An exposure of culture's deep nostalgia for rupture and crisis? A rather cool diagnosis of the state we're in? When I look out of my window the street has been cleaned, everything has returned to normal. Do we live in a culture that can be as closed in, as fictionalised or as scripted as that movie set?

Until 21 November, www.cca-glasgow.com

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