

Margate NOW is an ambitious and dynamic festival of art, events and performances. This year, in response to Turner Prize 2019 at Turner Contemporary the programme runs from 28 September 2019 – 12 January 2020. It has been developed by Turner Contemporary, Margate Festival, Open School East, 1927, Resort, Crate, Limbo, Dreamland Margate, Kent County Council and Kent Libraries, Thanet District Council and locally based artists. It is supported by Arts Council England through National Lottery funding, as well as contributions from Kent County Council, Thanet District Council and Dreamland Margate. Turner Prize 2019 is organised in collaboration with Tate.

The Guest Curator for Margate Festival 2019 is Russell Tovey – he is supported by the Margate Festival Delivery Team: Claire Orme, Dan Chilcott, Jenny Duff and Jo Murray.

LAST NIGHT AT THE BINGO

LEIGH CLARKE

Leigh Clarke: Last Night At The Bingo

"Eyes down"

Early this year I visited Leigh Clarke at his Margate studio, curious to see the acrylic-on-canvas series he had begun. Despite referring to this new project as 'landscape paintings', Clarke approaches the endeavour very much as a printmaker. After faithfully scaling-up a section of a Bingo ticket strip (to a canvas measuring 120 x 140cm), and reproducing the grid and the randomised yet orderly numerical figures, he had proceeded to add the off-register 'dabber' marks in what appears to be the most basic of printing moves (BANG-SPLAT!) – but each translucent circle is in fact carefully painted with a round brush and then blotted delicately with tissue paper to replicate the effect.

The blown-up scale and the poppy colours recall Claes Oldenburg's giant replicas of everyday objects, and the effect is similar – the oversize Bingo tickets are both sublime and ridiculous – but as well as being awkwardly comic, the scale diminishes and intimidates the viewer. The blood-red marks contain a violence, preserving as they do the intimation of a repeated stabbing gesture. These are 'landscapes' in that within the vertical format of the composition the individual 'house' (a set of 3 lines of 5 numbers) is horizontal – and the game is played from left-to-right, the aim being to complete a line, although the player is constantly scanning up-and-down as each number is called. I experienced this high-tension mental warp-and-weft first-hand when I (in the company of Clarke and a few other artists) went for my first ever evening of playing at Bingo, at Beacon Bingo on Margate seafront, just prior to its permanent closure in April 2019. Clarke's Bingo works are psychological landscapes, to be traversed carefully. Formally they function as grids with the art historical baggage from Piet Mondrian to Agnes Martin that implies, but they are also to be read – literally as numerical figures, as a game or a puzzle, and also figuratively – the poetry of 'Bingo Lingo': most famously *Two Fat Ladies* (88) – other favourites of mine are: *Duck and Dive* (25); *Rise and Shine* (29); *Heinz Varieties* (57); *Gandhi's Breakfast* (80 – 'cos he ate nothing) and *Legs Eleven* (to which the crowd must respond with a wolf-whistle).

Instead of Bingo, Clarke talked about a lecture he had attended by the artist and 'critical engineer' Julian Oliver, focussed on climate change, and issues of society's relationship with technology and the environment, through a lens of 'techno-political-subjectivity'. The urgency of the 'sixth extinction' had propelled Clarke to action – he became vegan as a way to commit to a positive and deliberate personal change. This he characterises as the 'courage' he aspires to, in opposition to the passive lethargy of hope; a dichotomy enacted in the microcosm of the Bingo game, where decisions have to be made, in the moment, conclusively – the die cast. Of course luck plays a part in Bingo – and ultimately the house always wins – but there is still a chance – and the individual has agency.

On Kawara's *Today* series, begun in the late 1960s and totalling nearly 3,000 works, are acrylic paintings made in a similarly perfunctory manner to Clarke's, consisting entirely of the date on which they were executed, in simple white figures set against a coloured or black ground. They are obtuse and banal; yet cumulatively they become a profound attempt to capture the **NOW** – to live in the moment – to, in some way, evidence and document existence. "*I AM STILL ALIVE*" stated over-and-over the telegrams Kawara sent to various people in the 1970s – echoing Marcel Duchamp's 1913 postcard from Kent, assuring Max Bergmann "*I am not dead: I am in Herne Bay*". This was the period of the early development of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (also referred to as *The Large Glass*) that includes stasis, paralysis and frustration amongst its themes.

Ruminating on such things on walks from studio to railway station, Clarke pauses by the clock tower – to his right the glorious sunset over the spectacular Margate Sands – to his left the equally bright lights of the amusement arcades and Beacon Bingo, noisier and more compelling. Landscape, in the context of Margate, means JMW Turner; "*the loveliest skies in all Europe*" he said – the gorgeous vista also inspired TS Eliot and Vaughn Williams to romantic existentialism. Is a maritime sunset as beautiful when seen from a small boat, crowded with refugees (currently from war and poverty but

soon perhaps from an uninhabitable global equator)? – it will certainly outlast humanity and all our travails. Turn away from this and descend the stairs into the cavernous neon-lit hall and people could find sanctuary and revelry (in between the games were performances from celebrities such as Paul Daniels, and a starry roster of musical tribute acts, including grand-final winners off *Stars in Their Eyes* doing Alison Moyet, Bobby Darin, Marti Pellow and Neil Diamond). Bingo was twice a day, in the afternoon and evening, 7 days a week – the bar was open and chips were served. The impact of this loss is profound to Beacon's many displaced frequenters – a night at the Bingo cannot be substituted by drinking in the Wetherspoons, or online gambling, and certainly not by sunsets or art. This work celebrates a local concern yet broadcasts much wider questions about the loss of community venues in contemporary Britain.

Clarke gleaned tickets from the final games at Beacon – not everyone yet played on touch-screen tablets – and now uses them to make his images. He enjoys their rudimentary mark-making, the urgent thud of the dabber; automatic compositions produced simultaneously, *en masse*, in just a few minutes – each one unique, the composition dictated by chance in a Dadaesque participatory performance. Scanned and reproduced as outsized prints, they now litter Margate on existent scaffolding and redundant banner frames – as if blown by the wind – as if the Bingo hall exploded on its last night (they certainly lifted the roof, as can be seen in YouTube videos! *We love you Graeme...*).

Clarke's family, when he was growing up, was all on the St Helier estate in South London – a Utopianist post-War development – where his paternal grandparents had reserved seats at Top Rank Bingo at Rosehill, and his maternal grandparents went every evening to the GLC Social Club, where Bingo was also played. The Top Rank was rather grand, housed in a Deco cinema, and everyone dressed up – suits and ties and dresses. Silence descended upon the usually raucous Social Club when Bingo began, and the kids were given spare change for the arcade machines. Clarke's further association with Bingo was around the age of 12, as a paper-boy, shuffling the loose tickets into the Suns and the Mirrors (a match with the numbers printed inside was a win), resenting the additional weight to his satchel – he took the remaining books to school where he ran a Bingo racket amongst his friends, charging 50p a game, calling numbers plucked from the air.

Each one of Clarke's tickets is one number short of a 'full house' on every occasion – the player is both incredibly lucky (what are the odds?) and ultimately a loser – forever pipped at the post – unless we are perhaps held in perpetuity in the moment before the final number is called – there is still a chance? We are caught forever in the agony of hope – a perpetual pause – everything/anything is still possible. Like the painted lovers of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, expectation is aroused and denied, the possibility of glory "... *cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss*". This, perhaps, is the condition of art itself...

"House!"

Lucy Howarth

Liddicoat & Goldhill Project Space

Leigh Clarke has exhibited widely, through a multi-disciplinary practice, often public facing, and always relational and inclusive. The work is rooted in print and performance, using these practices in a digital age to unite diverse communities in public environments. Previous projects include: *School's Out*, Liddicoat & Goldhill Project Space, Margate; *The Syrian* for Whitstable Biennale (both of these were, in common with this project, in collaboration with Lucy Howarth and Tim Hutchinson for text and design respectively); *Le Loup en Nous* at the Centre de la Gravure, La Louviere, Belgium, all in 2018.

The Odd Guides with Create London 2017; *Fool's Rush In*, Airspace Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent 2016, and The London Open 2012 at the Whitechapel Gallery. This project and publication is supported by Margate Festival, Liddicoat & Goldhill Project Space and London College of Communication, UAL. Limited editions of 2 screenprints on paper, *Getting Plenty* and *Ask For More*, each 76 x 46cm, are exclusively for sale at Turner Contemporary, Margate.

Special thanks to Graeme Corner the former manager of Beacon Bingo, Marine Terrace, Margate (a bingo hall 1985 – 2019).

Design: www.timhutchdesign.com



ual: london college of communication

LIDDICOAT & GOLDHILL



3	13	23	45	53	70	82
7	16	33	46	58	69	83

S25891 T24787

12	21	41	63	86
4	30	49	51	72
5	22	34	52	74

S25892 T24788

2	6	15	19	29	40	50	62	80
6	15	32	56	76	85			
19	29	67	78	85				

S25893 T24789

10	24	42	60	77	84
18	27	35	54	84	
9	39	44	64	89	

S25894 T24790

8	20	59	66	81
17	31	47	73	90
28	37	48	68	75

S25895 T24791

1	25	36	43	87
11	26	55	61	79
14	38	57	65	88

S25896 T24792