

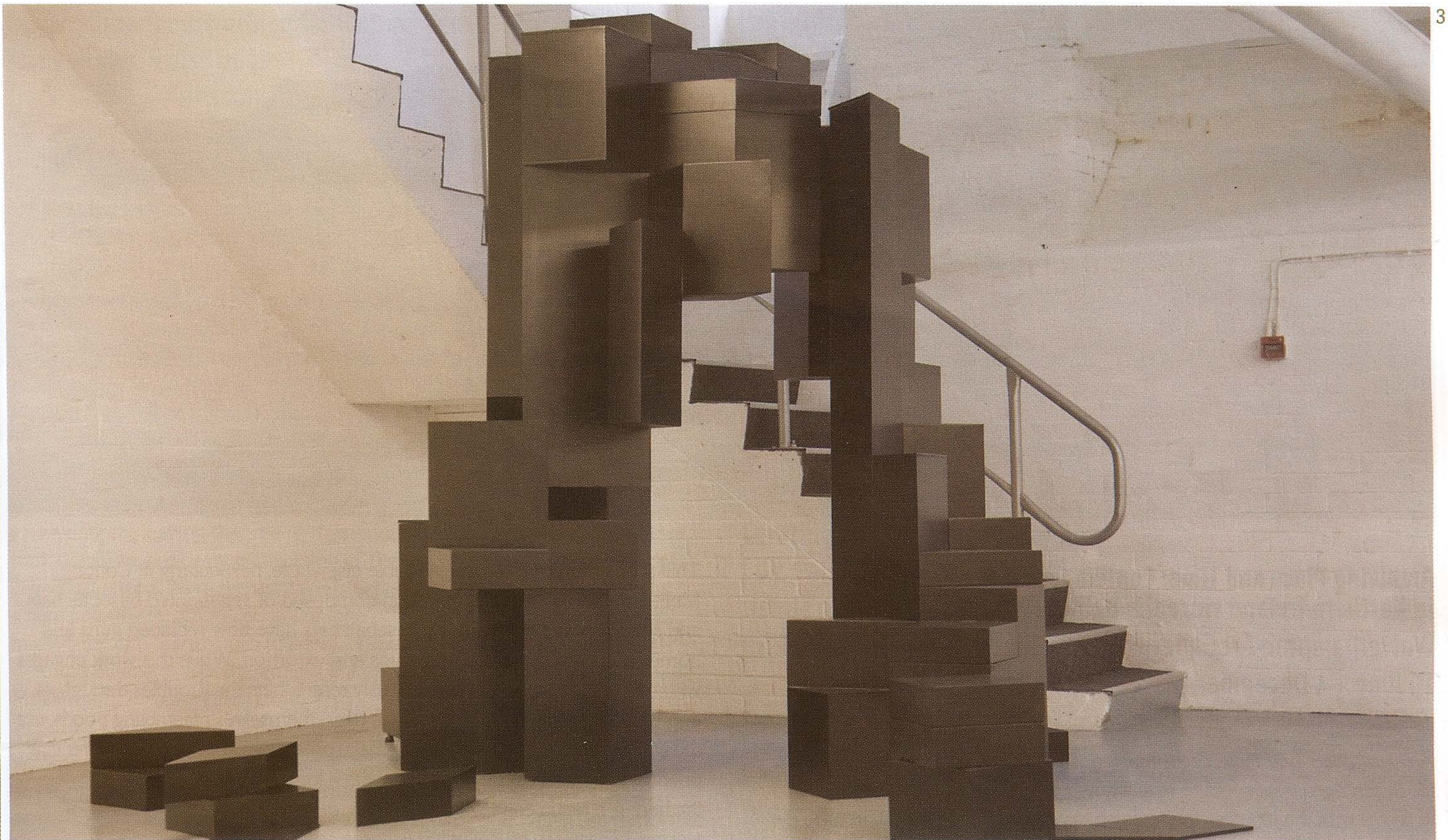
an

magazine

features artists and curators talking, rural initiatives and supporting professional practice *debate* philanthropy and myth *collaborative relationships* kate genever, jo bell and anne atkinson on the companion stones sculpture project *opportunities* exhibiting and selling

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Inside outsider language
 Waterside Project Space, London
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Some compare the artist to a shaman, a figure endowed with powers of communication that can pierce the supernatural realm, and the right to transgress thresholds – of gender or language, for instance – that are off-limits to the rest of society. Even if you doubt contemporary artists' connections to the spirit world this can be a useful comparison, because it hints at the balancing act involved in art-making: on one hand is the artist's drive to push beyond existing structures, and on the other is the artist's foremost tool: a visual 'language' buttressed by the unquestioned pillars of the art historical canon.

The history of art is present throughout 'Inside outsider language'. A first glance revealed the familiar visual idioms, ticks and cues inherited from past traditions of modernism and minimalism, but it quickly became clear to me that the artists in this show are playing just outside these familiar tongues. In this liberating territory of babble, meaning is created not so much through recognisable forms as through their destabilisation.

Ami Clarke's *Folly*, a monumental arrangement of triangular, diamond and square-shaped volumes, embodies this sense of spirited irreverence. Glossy-black and packed with hard right angles, *Folly* conjures the ghosts of both modernist architecture and minimalist sculpture. But, like an architectural folly, which typically takes the form of a mock ruin, it isn't what it seems. *Folly* has no particular form. It is, in fact, a 3D spatial puzzle for the viewer to re-arrange. This opens up the valuable process of thinking in space beyond the hermetic zone of the artist in the studio, and invites the viewer to violate the rules and conventions that prevent us from laying our hands on a Donald Judd.

Modulation of form and a playful attitude toward the modernist notion of medium specificity pervade the show. This is one element of George Young's works, each comprising painting and sculpture as part of a whole. And Matthew Verdon's *Composition Number 1*, in a way, is a specific 1939 Mondrian painting, albeit in its most basic material form: rectangular pieces of wood and a lone can of paint. These are rearranged daily on the floor of the gallery, a gesture that acknowledges the way in which our notion of the past is (or should be) open and changeable.

In some ways, the historical legacy most palpable in this show is that of the 'dematerialisation of the art object', as Lucy Lippard termed the late 1960s rise of conceptual and post-studio practices. The idea of 'dematerialisation' might hold a special resonance today as so many aspects of everyday life – not just art – are stripped of their materiality and recast in digital form. Yuri Pattison's *CH21* reflects the ambiguous role of materiality in contemporary visual communication. In it, the analogue immaterial – specifically, a television test pattern – is made present in physical form. At one end of the gallery, a video camera is trained on a group of grey banners hanging from floor to ceiling that gradate from light to dark. The camera flattens and transmits their image by radio signal to a television across the room where those familiar bars appear, somehow less familiar now for our knowledge of their live tangible source.

Material and history, as components of visual language, become shifting things in this show. Perhaps most importantly, works amenable to the viewer's imprint like *Folly* and *CH21*, and the use of humour and play throughout, remind us that we might all re-arrange the (increasingly) visual codes of communication today, and that the power to trespass is not only the privilege of the artist, shaman or not.

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