

OVADA



The Lounge

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(Cover: *Dumb Art Ahead* @ OVADA 2008, replica by Miles Thomas based on the original by Hamish Roberts)

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Editorial

Welcome to The Great BritDeafArt Issue.

While you, dear reader, celebrate with what we think is our best ever edition, Salon is preparing to fund-raise for the next six months. We are at the end of our ACE grant, and once again, we have to plan for the future.

The day is still too young for us to reveal these plans just yet. In advance of secured funds, to do so would not be practical. However, cultural change is in the air, incurred in part by the 2012 Olympics, and in part by our own new organisational status. Our limited-edition photographic prints, launched this month (page 12), indicate the direction we may take.

For Salon to survive, business must play a key role. While funded projects will always feature in our work, the nature of our support must change, in order for us to sell deaf visual art more effectively. Tough though it may be, the British contemporary visual art market is still worth an estimated £500 million – a figure that is not to be sniffed at.

Community art values have no place in that industry. If we want to break into the mainstream, we must be prepared to step outside our comfort zone and confound investors with competitively-priced, high-quality, thought-provoking contemporary visual art.

Many of the works featured in the Great BritDeafArt Issue are by British deaf and hard-of-hearing artists who are potentially big business. They get our vote because their art is articulate enough to ‘speak’ for them.

Of course, several others are notable by their absence. We’ve already identified a few that we want to target. The key for our new purpose? Look no further than our forthcoming DVD, *The Salon Principle*, due out this autumn. A 55-minute review of our last three one-day workshops to date, *The Salon Principle* highlights the issues that many deaf and hard-of-hearing visual artists still face and asks what we can do to better ourselves in time for 2012.

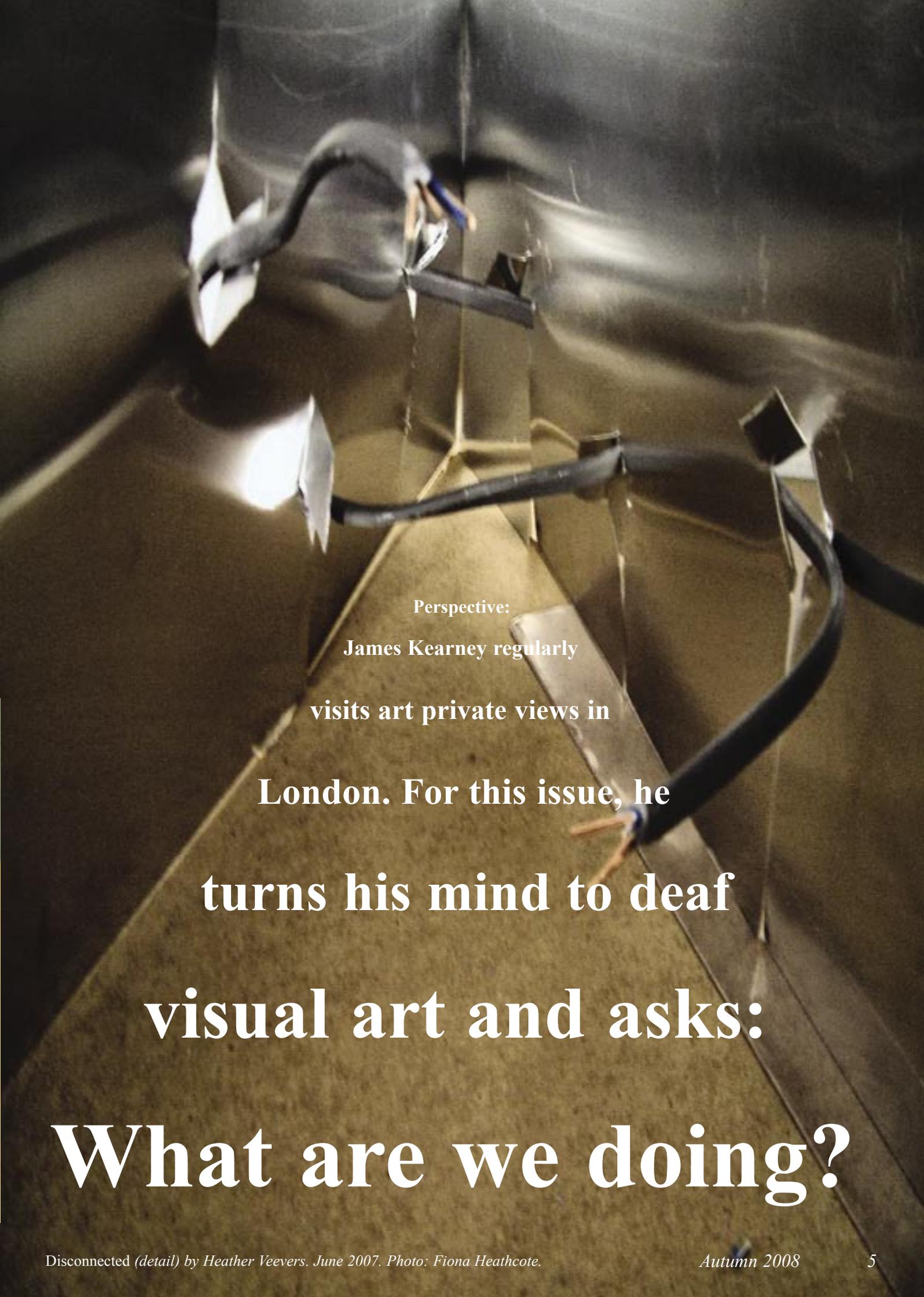
Ready for 2012? Think you can compete with the artists featured in the Great BritDeafArt Issue? Then email us today.

Melissa Mostyn

Right: Wild Boy, live installation by Aaron Williamson, The Showroom, 2005. (c) Aaron Williamson.







Perspective:
James Kearney regularly
visits art private views in
London. For this issue, he
turns his mind to deaf
visual art and asks:
What are we doing?

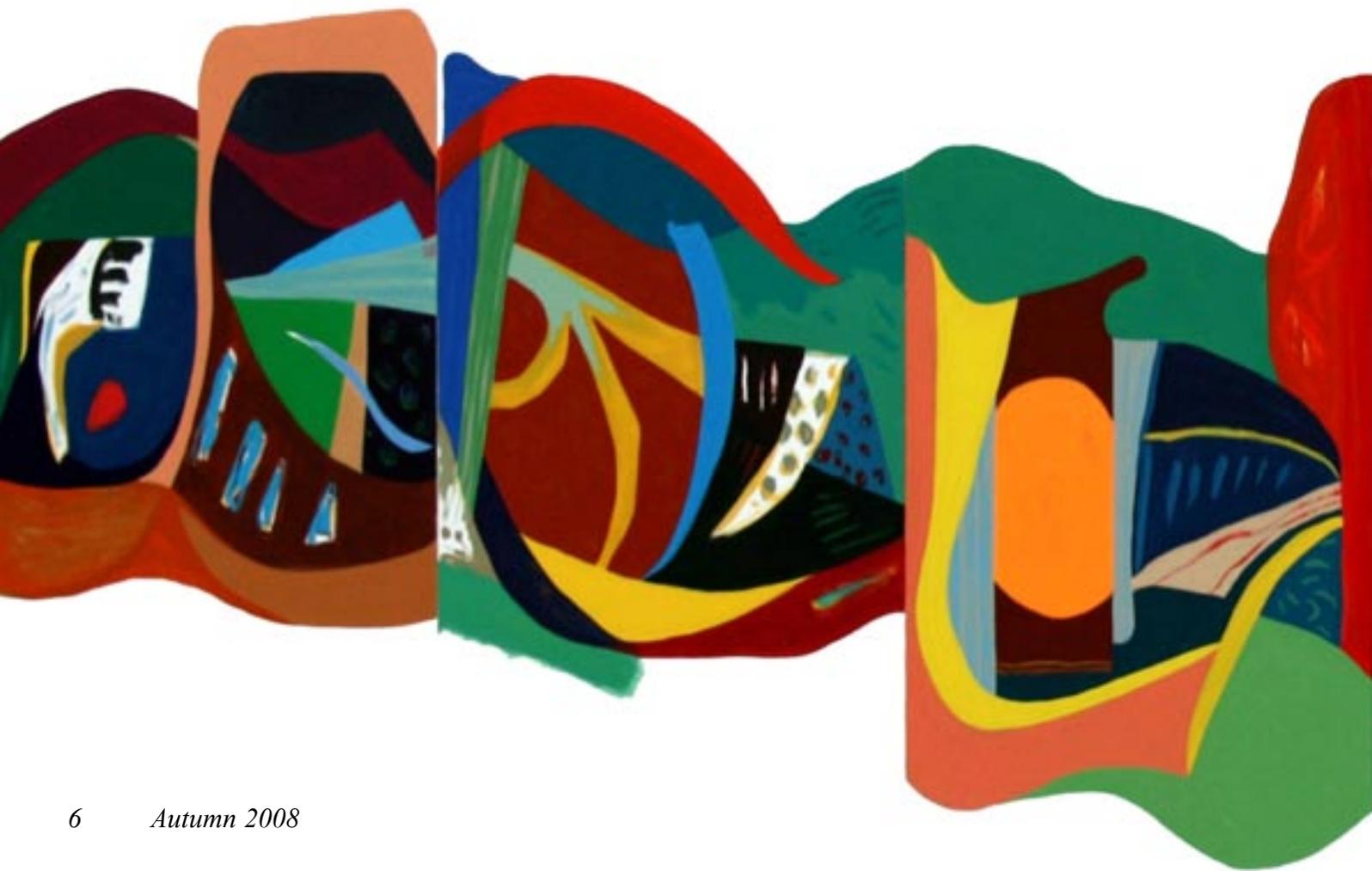
JK: For a long time deaf artists have been a very small, introspective group, painting for themselves. Oppression, hearing aids possibly, sign language, that sort of thing. Do you think this group will grow and become more influential in future?

MM: The one thing that's always been of concern to us is how many deaf artists seem to live in a cocoon - they don't get noticed. They may be just too comfortable with themselves - not thinking hard enough about what kind of impact they're making. Having been around for three years, we very much hope that they will eventually 'get' the philosophy that we've been evolving, enabling them to advance their practice in new ways. If we pull it off...

JK: But would it appeal to audiences? We're still such a small group tackling the universe, don't you think?

MM: Yes I know - but we must try. The advantage of being a deaf visual artist is that you have something that many hearing people don't know much about. It's essential for us to keep encouraging our deaf artists to delve into the potential inspiration their own lives can bring. If you're born deaf, you don't think all that much about cultural difference. What you experience in your everyday life is normal to you. But maybe that's what stops deaf visual artists from making a wider impact. They're navel-gazing - not thinking out of the box enough to objectively view how they might be perceived by the mainstream. But it should be their starting point.

JK: So this is a minority, like black or Irish writers. In the past Irish writers also looked inwards. Eventually they grew confident enough to try and express themselves in a wider context, but however hard they tried to reach out, they were ignored. It instilled in them a very powerful feeling: 'I want to be in the mainstream, I want a wider audience.'



Look at feminism. Women writers are now accepted, but they weren't in the 1850s. This fantastic writer – Maya Angelo - is accepted everywhere, because everyone can identify with her situation. She might be writing about her personal life, but she still promotes a universal message: human adversity. What do we need to see the same happening to the deaf world?

MM: Time is important. We can't just hurry up the process of empowering deaf visual artists. We have to be facing up to the very barriers that are preventing them from breaking through. And we have to be tackling the barriers that the mainstream imposes on them. It's a two-way street.

JK: I can see how Salon is encouraging the artists to promote themselves.

MM: Absolutely. You have to start by knowing yourself first, and your limits. Only then can you push your own limits – and know how to lead. We're working on it, but it does take time.

JK: In your new film, Miles talks about divisions within the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. You might have this dream that we can all unite and work together to succeed. But isn't it important to disagree and criticise? Doesn't the friction help the confidence of the group? There've been famous artists who weren't all best friends - they'd support each other, but then they'd fall out and go on to greater success.

MM: You do need a healthy dose of criticism. But I don't think that we should go so far as to split deaf and hard-of-hearing people. There's just so much for everyone to learn from each other. But through sharing ideas – and criticism – I hope that we'll see a new diversity in deaf and hard-of-hearing visual art practice.

Continued on p.8

Below: Allegro Progression I, II, III, IV, V, VI, Sheng-Kai Chou, 2006. (c) Sheng-Kai Chou.



JK: What qualities do you think a deaf artist would need to appeal to a wider audience?

MM: Conceptual art isn't dying just yet. Young British Artists are still evolving, with a younger generation waiting to take over. So I think we need to find a way of moving our artists to the next level and encouraging them to explore conceptual art ideology. Rather than pick up a brush and think: 'What shall I paint?' they need to work the other way round, consider a little-known part of their experiences and how best to reflect it in their art.

JK: I was thinking more about emotional qualities. For example, Tracey Emin's hand-embroidered tent, *Everyone I Ever Slept with 1966-1995*. Objectively, it's just a tent with lots of names, but people can identify with the idea of romance and partnerships. Another one I can think of is Van Gogh – that painting with his ear cut off. Technically, it's brilliant, but upon seeing it, viewers might identify with his emotional suffering.

MM: It doesn't have to be about emotional suffering. It can just be something that happens to be part of everyday life. Like Joseph Grigely and the notes he's exchanged with hearing people. He's OK about it. After all, they've helped him make it as an artist!

JK: I can see similarities between Joseph Grigely and Tracey Emin doing scribbles and the odd word. Easy money for old rope!

MM: Ha ha. As someone once said, there's no such thing as a new idea. But it's not what you do, it's how you do it. I keep thinking about this work of art made during a Salon activity - *Disconnected*. This older deafened woman basically cut three holes in a piece of aluminium, folded it at right angles, and pushed some cables through the holes with their cut wires showing. They were sticking out at cross-purposes. That represented how removed she felt from sound, but people didn't have to know what she went through. They just had to see it to know it was to do with being disconnected. That's when deaf artists can have a universal message. *Continued on p.10*

Below: (untitled) by Ann Morgan Jones, this work features in Salon's photo gallery at www.salonart.org.uk





JK: Knowing what we know about deaf artists' practice – oppression, technology, sign language - isn't there a danger that if they keep repeating themselves, it'll become a cliché, and they'll be unable to move on?

MM: There is a risk. All this 'hand art' is not going to educate the mainstream. What can the hand, by itself, tell people...what..? We need to be more inventive. We need to encourage deaf artists to focus on other aspects of deaf culture – like community values, sound, deaf behaviour.

JK: Thinking about 2012, how can deaf artists be involved in the Olympics?

MM: There are issues around 2012 that impact on the Deaf Community. Arts funding has changed; a lot of money has been diverted to the Olympics, which is a cause for concern. Deaf artists are being asked to get involved without proper consideration. You can't ask us to contribute something and not expect us to not find a contentious issue.

JK: It's difficult finding arts funding that's no longer there.

MM: I don't know how it affects us specifically, but certain arts organisations have lost grants due to 2012. That ironically makes it a vital opportunity to increase our profile. We have to plant the seed somehow.

JK: Surely poverty will make artists more creative?

MM: I guess that people are putting all their eggs in one basket, and asking everyone else to do the same. I'm aware that the Olympics organisers want to promote British diversity globally. That's easy if you're a carnival group, actor, playwright – you just put on a play. But a visual artist is something else. It goes deeper; you're exploring your inner psyche, expressing deep-rooted emotions or views. You can't ask visual artists to contribute something and expect them to behave like actors.

JK: Earlier you talked about training artists to promote themselves and develop business skills. What's Salon doing in this area?

MM: Well, we hope that by encouraging the artists to work on theory development, they'll develop new marketing skills. It's worth spending a bit of time on it, because then you know how to explain your practice to others. And from there your marketing should emerge.

JK: What do you mean by theory development?

MM: What I mean is, not just making the work and making up a theory afterwards. The *Disconnected* piece – that's marketing the artist already. The message is there for all to see. She's already sold the work to us.

JK: Don't you think you should be training the artists in how to manage finances?

MM: Well, Arts Council grant applications do depend on you being able to explain your art practice well. Having said that, Salon is looking for ways to run fund-raising courses for deaf artists.

JK: That's very important.

MM: I'm hoping that in future, we'll be working with more mainstream people, to take advantage of their expertise to pass on to our own artists – encourage them to find ways of generating income for themselves and work independently. But as I said before, it takes time.

JK: After 2012, where do you see deaf artists? A lot of deaf children will grow up and go into mainstream education, which means that all these deaf contacts and networks could disappear. What contacts do you have with schools and universities to connect with mainstream deaf artists?

MM: It's good that you ask - Salon wants to be doing more outreach work. We're looking now to support young deaf people - ideally those who are about to leave school, or already at university, and it's their first taste of life in the mainstream, if they haven't already done so in school. We're very proud of the work we've done, but there's more work to do. There are more challenges to face in the future, 2012 and mainstream deaf people, notwithstanding, but we're still confident of our potential to kick-start a generation of deaf visual artists eventually.

Our latest film, The Salon Principle, which looks at 2012 and how it could affect deaf visual artists, is due out on DVD this autumn. Email info@salonart.org.uk for details.

Below: X (detail) by Wendy Haslam, Stoke Newington Gallery, 2008. (c) Wendy Haslam.



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Project

Salon is proud to announce the launch of signed limited-edition photographic prints drawn from our archives, including Hamish Roberts' *Ghost Wasps* (below) and *Dumb Art Ahead I* and *II* (front cover).

These beautifully-shot prints, which feature key works by Salon artists made during our activities, are made on A3 Somerset Velvet Enhanced paper, a light-fast, subtly textured art paper weighing 225gsm, and will be available both unframed (£200) and framed in tulip wood (£275) plus postage and packing. Other prints include Alex Kemp's *Cactus*, Colin Redwood's *Natural Satellite*, and Matthew Jenkins' *Untitled (The City vs. Nature)*, which starred in the title sequence for the *Salon in King's Wood* DVD.

Profits will be split between the artists who created the original works and Salon for the benefit of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Delivery is 28 days. Email us on info@salonart.org.uk to request a full list, or visit the online gallery at www.salonart.org.uk.

Below: *Ghost Wasps* by Hamish Roberts, *King's Wood*, 2007. Photo: Miles Thomas.

