

"ARCANA"  
WITH

Gemma Nelson  
Martine Poppe  
Amy Stephens

PRIVATE VIEW 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2014  
6:30 – 9:00PM

14<sup>th</sup> of February – 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2014

You are surrounded by colour, vivid photographs, vibrant canvases and shiny, copper sculpture. And then, amongst this sea of visual stimulation, there is non-colour, pastel, and cream working their way in, their sheer contrast as striking as their neighbours. Symbols and shapes vie with each other for your attention – some obscured, others arresting, and yet more hidden in plain sight. Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery is pleased to present *Arcana*, a group show bringing together the works of Gemma Nelson, Martine Poppe and Amy Stephens. Running from 14<sup>th</sup> of February – 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2014, the exhibition draws on the mystic origins of the word 'arcana' as a celebration of secrets and mysteries, and a reflection upon positive spiritual sensitivity. Imagine the scene: a lonely fair ground waits patiently in the night, the word 'Balloonride' [sic], lighting up the surrounding desert darkness like a soft beacon of memories and days gone by. Nearby, a tondo painted in vibrant inks is witness to intricate shapes, a myriad of colours and forms blooming across the canvas, stretching out and multiplying to create a psychedelic universe. Hanging in contrast to these bursts of colour are soft, hazy portraits, representational paintings that play on diversity and repetition – the images within them serene, abstracted, floating behind milky veils of paint. While divergent in style, medium and execution, the works are unified by a sense of spirituality and a notion of the revealed and concealed, of portals and the mystical.

For Gemma Nelson, it is the creation of illusory spaces through intricately-constructed and highly-detailed paintings that has become her hallmark. Working in Indian ink and mixed media, she weaves together fairy tales, female sexuality and the idea of webbing, while drawing on the aesthetics of patterning and totemic tattoos. The busy canvases become home to a wealth of visual information, as figures and forms give way to ever newer shapes, mutating, growing, expanding and condensing upon themselves like multiplying cells. In *Arcana*, we are presented with new works for which Nelson has drawn upon ancient cults and rituals, such as those of Baalism, Osirism, and the Cargo Cults of Melanesia. This is in order to create a new mythography through references to sun worship, mimesis of nature, phallic and fertility symbols and intricate patterns. Her works draw on quirky socio-historical practices and stories, like the rituals of the aforementioned Cargo Cults, and how the

detritus that washed ashore from the new world's colonies was seen as gifts from the gods. Or, take the work *Pibloktoq*, referring to the condition that affects mainly Arctic women in the winter months. The affliction causes the sufferer to tear her clothes off and subsequently run naked in sub-freezing temperatures, yet is usually non-serious and wears off when the sufferer collapses in exhaustion. Here too the phenomena, just like the Cargo Cults, is believed to be spiritual and given shamanistic attributes. Elsewhere, stories such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's iconic *The Yellow Wallpaper* further provide fuel for her exploration of patterns, pareidolia and apophenia.

*Arcana* sees Martine Poppe explore subjects that are new to her. "My motifs here are all chosen light-heartedly and I'm trying to add a touch of humour to some of my pieces for the show," she explains. What sets her work apart from her two contemporaries, on an aesthetic level, is a sparing use of colour, her muted canvases expressed in opalescent hues and delicate brush strokes, creating a luminous, floating effect. Working from photographs, which she refers to as "serendipitous rather than staged", Poppe's paintings have a sense of immediacy to their making. Within them, information and sources are both revealed and concealed, creating a distance between the original subject and finished work through a process she refers to as 'analogical change'. She builds on her investigation of diaphora, a process of repetition and layering that is characteristic of her work and her ongoing *Analogical Change* series – from which works will also be on display – play with the idea of 'orthographic satiation', a phenomenon that works with disconnecting from the original source while preserving the meaning, rather like Richter's process. "When I look at paintings, I always think that what they lead to is themselves," she says. "A painting need not be a portal to something beyond the painting itself." The image is copied and recopied so many times that, just like looking at Chinese or Japanese characters for a length of time, the lines become disconnected, the image disintegrates, yet the original idea, the concept, remains. "The actual point of making these repetitions is similar to my decision to paint things that did not conform to a single subject group or narrative in the *Analogical Change* series, only this time I'm being more literal," says Poppe. "The image degrades and moves towards something less recognisable, yet it remains a series of representational paintings of the same photograph. It quite firmly emphasises the formal considerations in the work, the story of the photograph as subject and object, rather than its content."

Finally, Amy Stephens presents all new works that have been inspired by a recent residency in the Sultanate of Oman in late 2013. Working in abstraction, Stephens often creates minimalist line drawings and sculptures that invade and interact with the architectural space in which they are installed. Within the context of *Arcana*, her works respond to the ideas of tradition and myth explored within Nelson's work, while their play on perspective and abstract nature are in harmony with those of Poppe. Here, we see a line drawing protruding from the gallery wall, metamorphosing the boundaries between the two- and three-dimensional. Moved by the many traditional doors painted in an around the city of Muscat, Stephens has created a portal pared right back to a simple elegant copper line. From nearly 100 photographs taken in the Gulf, she has

chosen two images that highlight an open and closed doorway respectively. Furthermore, both the abandoned fair ground of *Baloonrace* and the multi-coloured, painted, locked mountain door from the remote village of Nizwa, are images inspired by Aldous Huxley; in particular, his assertion that "there are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception." Using a range of fabrics and forms, she invites viewers to question this barrier and its in-between space. In doing so, the association of the door as an everyday object is thrown off-kilter, out of context and into a state of flux.

Together, these three female artists create their own arcana, mixing different media – from sculpture and painting to photography and mixed media – just as they weave together mysteries, secrets and visual stimuli. The works, though divergent, call to each other through their shared references to cultural idiosyncrasies, mythographies and mythologies, a rich link that binds them all together, yet allows each to float, separate, a portal, both transporting and calling back to the present.

***Arcana* runs from 14<sup>th</sup> of March – 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2014 at  
Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London**

Information for journalists:

#### **Gemma Nelson**

Gemma Nelson (1984, in West Yorkshire, UK) moved to London in 2003 where she attended the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London and graduated in 2007. In the same year, Nelson's paintings were selected by judges Sir Peter Blake and Tim Marlow in the *Nationwide Mercury Art Prize* culminating in a show at the Horse Hospital in London. The following year Nelson was selected for Charles Saatchi and Channel 4's *4 New Sensations*, leading to a show at Laure Genillard in London with Matt Franks. In 2008 Nelson was selected by Richard Billingham, Ceal Floyer and Ken Lum for *Bloomberg New Contemporaries* exhibiting her work at the Liverpool Biennial Capital of Culture and Club Row in London. In February 2009 Gemma Nelson was asked to provide the front cover artwork for *a-n magazine* prompting high profile shows in London, notably the Saatchi Gallery and internationally in Paris and Temple Bar in Dublin. Since 2010 Gemma Nelson has been represented by VEGAS in East London and had her first solo show, *Hello Carousel* with them in July 2011. She has shown work with them internationally in Amsterdam and Brussels as well as group exhibitions in London. In 2011 Gemma Nelson was selected to exhibit work at the Dulwich Picture Gallery Bicentenary Exhibition. For more information, visit [www.gemmanelson.co.uk](http://www.gemmanelson.co.uk).

#### **Martine Poppe**

Living and working in London, Martine Poppe (1988, Oslo, Norway), received her BA Hons in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London in 2011, going on to receive her MFA in Fine Art from Slade two years later. She has exhibited extensively throughout her native Norway as well as London, with recent exhibitions including the Threadneedle Prize 2013 at the Mall Galleries; *Transient Inhabitants* at Invisible Line Gallery, the Slade MA/MFA Summer Show at the Slade School of Fine Art and *The Immigrant ad Frameless Gallery*, all in 2013. Most recently, she has taken part in *New Order II* at the Saatchi Gallery (2014). Her work can be found in the Saatchi Collection, UCL Art Collection and University of Oxford and she has been the recipient of numerous scholarships and awards, most recently shortlisted for the Contemporary Visions IV, Beers Lambert (2013) and winning First Prize in the UCL Portrait Competition in the same year. For more information, please visit [www.martinepoppe.com](http://www.martinepoppe.com).

**Amy Stephens**

Amy Stephens (1981, London, UK) attended Chelsea College of Art and Design, from where she received her MA in Fine Art in 2008. Prior to this she received her BA (Hons) in Fine Art from the University of Reading in 2005. She has attended residencies in Oman, Ireland, Canada and Iceland, among others, and has exhibited as far and wide as Sweden, Ireland, Italy, Poland and Spain, including the solo exhibitions *A Light Less Ordinary* at the Aldeburgh Beach South Lookout, Aldeburgh, Suffolk, UK and *Catching the Big Fish*, Minibar Artist Space, Stockholm Sweden (both 2013). She has been the recipient of numerous awards and commissions, including the Triangle Network Award, Muscat, Oman, in association with Gasworks Gallery, London, UK (2013) and a four month artist's residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (2011). Her work can be found in public and private collections in the UK, USA, Ireland and Poland. For more information, visit [www.amystephens.co.uk](http://www.amystephens.co.uk).

**About Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery**

Kristin Hjellegjerde opened her gallery in south west London in June 2012 following her move from New York. The Gallery showcases cutting-edge contemporary art from emerging and established international artists, with the central concern to create an intimate space in which an artist could present a coherent body of work within a focused environment. Drawing on her own international background, Kristin Hjellegjerde seeks to discover and develop new talents by creating a platform through which they can be introduced to local and international audiences and encouraging artistic exchange. Kristin Hjellegjerde also acts as an art advisor for both emerging private and corporate collectors. Recent exhibitions include *In Search of Lost Space* with Celina Teague, *For Two Lovers* by Radhika Agarwala, and Chris Agnew's *The Mighty Grip of Fate*, which was selected as Time Out's 'Best New Art' of the week. For more information, visit [www.kristinhjellegjerde.com](http://www.kristinhjellegjerde.com).

For further information and high-resolution images, please contact Kristin Hjellegjerde on [khjellegjerde@mac.com](mailto:khjellegjerde@mac.com).