

The Guardian

Material Environments review - watch art take shape, right before your eyes

The Tetley, Leeds The artists never stop working in a shape-shifting exhibition where everything on show is a work-in-progress

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Fri 25 May 2018 15.44 BST



Bad Shit by Keith Harrison, 2018. Photograph: Jules Lister

In all likelihood the exhibition I saw at the Tetley in Leeds will be different to the one you will see if you are stirred to make a visit. There is a chance Keith Harrison's giant red balloon will have inflated to the rafters, and Phoebe Cummings' botanical clay sculptures may have undergone a growth spurt reminiscent of Audrey II from *Little Shop of Horrors*, while Harold Offeh will probably have collected more vinyl LPs with the title *The Real Thing*.

Material Environments is a work in progress. Rather than its pieces being researched, prepared and concluded ahead of time, they are developed in the gallery, right in front of the audience. The space lends itself to this idea because it is made up of a series of individual rooms, like a corridor of artist's studios where we are invited to pop in and watch

a concept take shape.



A Ripening Surveillance (detail) by Phoebe Cummings, 2018.
Photograph: Jules Lister

Evidence of artists experimenting is everywhere. There are remnants of sugar next to Harrison's piece. Apparently he had recently been refuelling his sculptural distillation process for a special event that weekend. An astral dipole radio telescope is positioned on the roof of the Tetley's restaurant by Serena Korda to add to her audio piece. Cummings leaves footprints and fingerprints all over the clay in her large-scale installation. Her scalpels and moulds sit in a glass-fronted cabinet for all the world to see - there is no secret creative process here.

A number of the artists are here in the gallery. While Harrison wanders around with his sugar, Korda speaks to me about her sound installation Clairaudience, and her visit to Todmorden, a UFO hotspot in Yorkshire where she recorded the piece. The curatorial decision by Ben Roberts to essentially produce a live artist-in-residency was a good one. It removes contemporary art from an inaccessible pedestal - not only can we see art in creation but we can ask the artists about their approach.

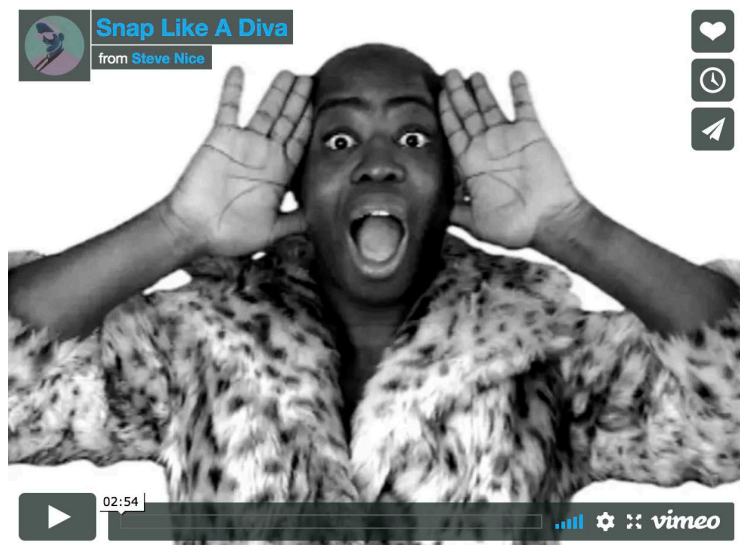


Glass Harp Performance by Serena Korda, 2018. Photograph:
Jules Lister

Indeed, audience interaction is central to the works. The gallery's annual micro-festival, the Tetley Weekender, was this year subtitled Experiments Workshop, encouraging visitors to get involved in the process of creating art. There was clay crafting, science experiments,

glass harp playing and performance. Offeh led Reading the Realness, where participants performed a transcript of a conversation between the presenters of *The Real*, a US talk show, and the former civil rights activist Rachel Dolezal, who caused a worldwide furore when her parents revealed she is white.

The Tetley, it turns out, is a great place for experimenting and researching because it has a history of its own. Once a brewery, it now acts as a starting point for artistic innovation. Harrison's *Bad Shit* reflects the purpose of the old Tetley offices: his red balloon sits passively in the manager's office, pumped up by the distillation process happening in 13 barrels or "worker bees" in the general office next door. And a photograph from Joanna Piotrowska's ongoing series *Shelter* - in which the subject rearranges chairs and desks to create a sort of den - resonates all the more when pinned to the wall of an old office.



Snap Like a Diva by Harold Offeh and Steve Nice.

With UFOs, distillation, nature and the lounging pose of black male singers on album covers in the 1980s as concepts in this exhibition, you'd be excused for struggling to find a thread. Certainly, Offeh's video work *Snap Like a Diva*, which features the artist dancing, snapping and posing in a variety of dazzling outfits, is very different to Cummings' interest in 19th-century rococo-style candlesticks. But the diversity of subjects makes for a truly insightful look at the varied practices of artists working today as they research, experiment, collect, craft and create before your eyes.

At the Tetley, Leeds, until 8 July.