

[\(http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/)



4 May 2014

SEIZE- OVERTIME: Art and The Office

[\(http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/05/04/seize-overtime-art-and-the-office/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/05/04/seize-overtime-art-and-the-office/)



SEIZE- OVERTIME: Art and The Office

|sēz| verb

- to take hold of suddenly and forcibly
- to take (an opportunity or initiative) eagerly and decisively
- to affect (someone) suddenly or acutely
- to strongly appeal to or attract the imagination or attention

As an artist-led group, SEIZE are not noun but verb (a verb in capitals no less); dynamic, active, imaginative. Their latest venture, to 'seize' a vacant space categorically reserved for the world of corporate work and make it a space exclusively for art, reclaims the idea of the 9 to 5 and the place that art has within this dynamic. Anya Stewart-Maggs interviewed two members of SEIZE, Lily Ackroyd Willoughby and Tom McGinn, about the workings behind OVERTIME, what they thought of art in relation to work and play, and their plans for the future of the collective.

In conversation with SEIZE: 'Art never seems to clock off.'

SEIZE is an initiative set up by a group of emerging artists, with the premise to 'seize' empty spaces around Leeds. They draw on the individual aspects of each space, occupy it with art, and reopen it to the public as temporary exhibition venue.

OVERTIME, their second show, took place from 26-29 March 2014 in a disused office space in Wellington Park House, situated within the bustling financial district of Leeds. SEIZE invited 26 artists to make art in response to an office environment; their work scoped through installation, film, sculpture, painting and performance. The exhibition drew attention to the monotonous tasks of a 9 to 5 job, played with the notion of the corporate, and ultimately asked questions of the relationship between art and work.

SEIZE also ran a program of events to accompany OVERTIME including two seminars: 'The Coffee Break' which discussed the line between work and play, led by Derek Horton (Co-Director of &Model Gallery, Leeds) and Bruce Davies (Director of BasementsArtsProject), and the second ran by artists Bess Martin and Lydia Catterall, which centered on 'Art, work and how we as artists fit into current government systems.'

Anya Stewart-Maggs: Why did you choose this kind of space, and how did you go about acquiring this particular one?

Tom McGinn: For some time we had been struck by the surfeit of empty office spaces in the financial quarter of the city. We saw these as an opportunity to curate a show that responded to the ideas of labour in contemporary working society. We approached East Street Arts (an independent arts organisation in Leeds) looking for such an office space. We were shown the Wellington Street property, which we immediately saw as full of potential.

A S-M: Have you found that there are a lot of empty spaces in Leeds? Do you think that the city should make more use of them?

Lily Ackroyd-Willoughby: The inescapable quantity of empty units in the city is what the SEIZE initiative built its premise around. A lot of these spaces have potential that is not fully recognised by many organisations. It is still pretty hard to find a venue where the property agents are willing to let you occupy it for only couple of weeks rent free – and business rates can be crippling. I would like to see private property companies latch onto the potential that pop up events have for rejuvenating empty spaces – they attract attention, add to the city’s cultural scene and raise awareness for the property itself.

However, I do think the city is making moves to address the number of empty spaces. It was the council initiative Leeds Inspired after all who funded OVERTIME with their grant scheme – which has helped similar projects in the past such as those by groups like Pavilion and XO. East Street Arts also has a portfolio of spaces across the city, and they are fantastic in helping small arts groups to use these at very minimal costs.

A S-M: Do you think that social media is your best form of publicity, or are physical flyers and posters still just as valid in gaining attention?

TM: Social media enables us to reach a far wider audience than would be possible if we relied solely on printed material. That said, I often find that an eye-catching poster can talk to you more effectively than a notification or a post on the internet.

LA-W: Facebook, Twitter and most importantly emails, are definitely the most effective form of publicity. Feedback from our open call and from the cross section of people who attended the opening night suggested that Facebook and email newsletters sent out by our partners &Model Gallery and BasementsArtsProject helped us reach most people. Posters took up a lot of the budget and not all shops, bars and galleries accepted them. I’d say networking face-to-face is also very important. Spreading the word by talking to different groups of people and forming relationships with interested parties is invaluable.

A S-M: Do you think art sits well within the office – or does the interest come from the discord between the two?

LA-W: I think it’s more interesting to think about it in terms of the relationship between art and work – where the office or the studio are the sites for either’s production. It’s quite a pertinent issue at the moment – is Art work? Or in other words what is the value of Art in today’s society? The show did not wish to draw any definite conclusions from this juxtaposition – but rather sought to point at possible or further lines of enquiry.

TM: I would say the interest in the office space for me definitely lay in its awkwardness as a site for an exhibition of contemporary art. The carpeted room is something we tried to avoid in our first show back in May 2013, as it seemed the opposite of the white cube or warehouse space. With OVERTIME we decided to embrace it wholeheartedly and see what happened.

A S-M: Do you think that in the art world the lines between work and play are more blurred than in other careers? Do you experience this yourself?

TM: I feel that there is definitely a less clearly defined distinction. There is the saying that people who make a living from doing the thing they love never work a day in their lives, which seems to ring true of art in particular. I feel that as an art student play is rewarded as a valid form of investigation into the way in which the world works, which for me makes it a worthwhile pursuit.

LA-W: In comparison to many office jobs, practicing art is often less regulated– but in many ways it requires you to be very regimented with your time. I’ve found that the difference between work and play can often be very slim – if you enjoy what you’re doing then the work becomes play. Play can also be very hard work.

A S-M: As an emerging artist you often end up ‘working for nothing’ in monetary terms, but reap many other benefits – what have you gained as working as part of this collective?

LA-W: As a group we’ve learnt a lot about the practicalities of putting on a large-scale event – budgets, legal issues such as insurance, rates and rents, and the co-ordination of people and equipment. We get to work with people – in the SEIZE Team and those in similar circles, who are equally passionate and determined to add to the city’s cultural scene and to confirm the relevance and importance of the arts.

TM: SEIZE is something we run in addition to studying and yet it sometimes feels like a full time job! We have the opportunity to develop our skills as arts administrators, curators, marketers, designers, writers and artists, the diversity of which is something I relish.

A S-M: What are the current plans for SEIZE International ?

TM: SEIZE International is an additional project run by two of our members who are on their year abroad in Budapest. As well as developing their practices over there, they also wanted to continue to promote the SEIZE brand. They have begun a programme of exciting events and an exhibition, ‘Pretty Vacant’, taking place on 24th April in the Project Gallery in Budapest.

LA-W: They are also in the process of organising a twin set of talks – one in Leeds, the other in Budapest, centering around the other city’s empty and abandoned spaces and how they are being made use of by the arts.

A S-M: Do you plan to carry on SEIZE after you graduate?

LA-W: Yes.

TM: It is definitely something we would like to see happen, I feel like we're just beginning to develop something exciting that has potential to go further and develop into even bigger things.

A S-M: What other kind of spaces would you like to occupy?

LA-W: I don't want to give too much away about SEIZE's program of events – but we have always wanted to do an exhibition in a shop or retail unit, as well as some more off keys places like a gym or hotel room.

TM: We have a few more pop-up projects in the pipeline and also some unusual ideas. We mentioned a touring show the other day, which would be fantastic!

Robert Scargill also took a trip to the SEIZE 'office' and gave us his verdict.

"You think you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but it's only some bugger with a torch bringing you more work." – David Brent

As a child, my parents would come home from their office jobs looking tired and fed up. My mother would pick me up from school with a permanent frown, in a car always running with the empty fuel indicator on. My father would join us hours later smelling of cigarettes and photocopier ink. I'd notice the indentation left from his thick-rimmed reading glasses that he never wore at home, and he'd quickly go to bed to set an alarm for far-too-early the next morning. This was the early 2000s and they were the office job generation.

Return to present day, and in the heart of Leeds' busy financial district is OVERTIME: Art And The Office, an exhibition dedicated to this generation; its misery, its monotony and its misguided potential. The first thing I note is its location; I have walked up and down Wellington Street twice now and decide to ring a friend to ask for directions. Half way through my conversation, I notice a tiny sticker attached to a buzzer noting the event's hosts, SEIZE; the exhibition is wedged between a letting agents and a travel information centre in a block of offices, I guess I should've known.

I make my way up the stairs to the fourth floor, passing living, breathing offices as I go. There are men dressed in faded suits in each doorway, and I think back to my dad's pale shirts and whacky ties. The first room is extremely spacious and I am met by a circle of grey filing cabinets, each featuring a different piece of work. Atop one is a black briefcase, similar to Pulp Fiction's famous prop, and in another is a pillow with the phrase 'Bed Sheets NOT SPREADSHEETS' hand sewn into the fabric. An interesting addition to one of the cabinets is an original 'warning sticker' from its time of purchase. The typography is red and heavily leaded and its content couples seriousness with the mundane. Surrounding me is a collection of digitally printed photographs of stereotypically baron office spaces, each with simple French vocabulary layered over them. The works aren't hung up in a traditional fashion and are instead leant against the room's edges. A statement of the tackiness a typical office incorporates? With the sickly, pale yellow wall staring back at me, I assume this to be the case.

I walk down a tight corridor, past a broken sink and into another room. Here I find one of the exhibition's most interesting pieces, a manager's office decorated as a motivational shrine to all artists trying to get their foot in the door. Mind-maps line the walls, with phrases such as 'not all artists are "professional"' and 'but that's a hobby isn't it?' written in a rainbow of permanent marker colours. Scattered in draws are blank CVs and job application forms, with bad clip art and boring typography aplenty. I find this room to be particularly engaging as it seems almost participatory; I spend at least five minutes snooping around the room, flicking through the worried thoughts of an artist straight out of university. The next room is upstairs and here I find my favourite work of the show, Phillip Welding's '#officepranks'. It is by no means the most creative, nor the most talented, but it is undoubtedly the most fun and encapsulates what seems to me to be what the exhibition is geared towards uncovering; monotonous excitement. The installations are two desks, sat across from each other in the room. One desk is completely covered in cellophane wrap, whilst the other is surrounded by plastic cups of water. I love the childishness of it all, neither prank is anything more than time-consuming, in the sense that the person on the receiving end would have to spend time reassembling their desk, but as a viewer I am reminded of petty classroom feuds and food fights and to put it quite simply, I want to join in.

In the final room are two desk chairs, ripped and splattered with paint. It reminds me of the numerous times I have sat at my desk and drifted away into my own little world beyond the world of grey and beige. Behind me is a six-painting structure, set up similarly to a clotheshorse. The artist has used fluorescent colours typical of Stabilo Boss highlighter pens to create large, patterned paintings and the effect is a staged, structured piece that gives life to the bright yet also strangely dull colours of the office.

SEIZE invited 26 artists to explore the friction generated by placing creative work in a typical business environment and I believe the show has scratched at the surface of an interesting idea. In my opinion, the installations could have perhaps been developed further, however I don't want to take much away from the work as I believe it was successful in transforming a vacant space into something exciting and accessible to the public. My parents could have benefited from seeing the exhibition all those years ago. You never know, they may have even smiled.

Keep up to date with SEIZE:

Email: seizeleeds@gmail.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SEIZELeeds (<http://www.facebook.com/SEIZELeeds>)

Twitter: @SEIZE_Leeds

RELATED POSTS

[SPACE IN THE CITY \(HTTP://WWW.THESTATEOFTHEARTS.CO.UK/2014/05/04/SPACE-IN-THE-CITY/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/05/04/space-in-the-city/)

[ARTONOMY \(HTTP://WWW.THESTATEOFTHEARTS.CO.UK/2014/04/27/ARTONOMY/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/04/27/artonomy/)

[WHAT MATTERS? \(HTTP://WWW.THESTATEOFTHEARTS.CO.UK/2014/04/26/WHAT-MATTERS/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/04/26/what-matters/)

[FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO YORKSHIRE: THE REMBRANDT EXHIBITION AT TEMPLE NEWSAM \(HTTP://WWW.THESTATEOFTHEARTS.CO.UK/2014/05/16/FROM-THE-NETHERLANDS-TO-YORKSHIRE-THE-REMBRANDT-EXHIBITION-AT-TEMPLE-NEWSAM/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/05/16/from-the-netherlands-to-yorkshire-the-rembrandt-exhibition-at-temple-newsam/)

[BARBARA HEPWORTH GALLERY \(HTTP://WWW.THESTATEOFTHEARTS.CO.UK/2014/05/18/BARBARA-HEPWORTH-GALLERY/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/05/18/barbara-hepworth-gallery/)

[‘DIALOGUE’- CURATED BY YOKE \(HTTP://WWW.THESTATEOFTHEARTS.CO.UK/2014/05/02/DIALOGUE-CURATED-BY-YOKE/\)](http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/2014/05/02/dialogue-curated-by-yoke/)

The State of the Arts

Leeds, West Yorkshire

kate@thestateofthearts.co.uk

Follow

Twitter (<http://twitter.com/tsotarts>)

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/thestateofthearts>)

Information

About (<http://www.thestateofthearts.co.uk/>)

Subscribe

Subscribe to The State Of The Arts to receive the latest news, features, profiles and events.

Name:

Email: