

# Bonnie Camplin



Bonnie Camplin produces drawings, films, performances, musical works, writing, immaterial and situational research. An evolving dialogue with questions of consciousness and reality, her work doesn't occupy set positions. Rather, it harnesses the tools of research and observation in order to shed light on ideas otherwise not visible or widely accepted.

Camplin's practice – what she calls the 'Invented Life' – is best understood as a tactical and resourceful way of surviving 'consensus reality' (defined as the network of belief systems and ideologies that uphold rational, normal and acceptable standards of thought and behaviour). Camplin *invents* artworks precisely to meet consciously with the standardising and limiting principles innate to certain psycho-social and cognitive regimes enfolded in what is known as 'normality', as well as to exercise a healthy scepticism towards many of the

processes by which that major resource called 'consensus' is claimed and secured. Sometimes serious, other times odd and playful, her work is an oblique visionary strategy for negotiating everyday life, as well as for accessing knowledge and information that would otherwise be inaccessible.

*The Military Industrial Complex* (2014), the installation at South London Gallery adapted for this year's Turner Prize exhibition, is described by Camplin as "an artwork that is also a research tool." The project centred around five video interviews in which individuals recalled extraordinary experiences (from encounters with inter and extra-dimensional beings to systematic trauma-based mind-control techniques). Are these individuals crazy? Are the events described entirely impossible or unbelievable? Camplin doesn't think so: "I find that I'm perfectly open to the possibility that



1. *The Military Industrial Complex*



2. *The Pebbledash Swells*

- 1 *The Military Industrial Complex*, Installation View, South London Gallery, 13-15 June 2015  
Images courtesy of Cabinet, London
2. *The Pebbledash Swells* 2012, HB Drawing  
42 x 29.5 cm / 16.5 x 11.6 in  
Image courtesy the artist, Cabinet, London
3. *Bonnie Camplin (far right) and friends at HARDERFASTERLOUDER*, SoHo, circa 1998.
4. *My Name is KoKo* 2001, DVD,  
4 minutes 17 seconds  
Image courtesy the artist, Cabinet, London



3. *My Name is KoKo*

they are telling the truth; that they are not mad, rather than the situation itself may be quite mad." Alongside, books and printouts seemingly evidencing the experiences described in the interviews were collected. Exploring topics such as physics, philosophy, witchcraft, quantum theory, capitalism and warfare, these materials were positioned in a specific way in order to form pattern-based relationships between what, at first glance, are very different ideas. Crucially the viewer was left with the responsibility of

mapping their own meanings onto the diverse materials gathered, an affirmative way of engaging audiences that runs through much of Camplin's work.

After graduating from Central Saint Martin's in 1992, in addition to taking jobs at Parcelforce, McDonald's and as a life drawing model, Camplin operated as a producer of situational experiments in the nightclubs of London's Soho district. Though not yet articulating her ideas formally (she describes

these experiments as "all pre-lingual glamour"), this time proved vital in terms of the emphasis Camplin now places on lived experience in her art. Underpinning the inventive dimension of the *Invented Life* is a profound perceptual and emotional sensitivity to the experience and consciousness of others; a desire to feel and make felt social energies otherwise blocked by the tight prescriptions of consensus reality. This sensitivity informs what Camplin calls the "solitary practice of making artefacts alone in an empty room" i.e. her production of more traditional art-objects – in particular drawings and films.

Inspired by a Tarot reading, *The Pebbledash Swells* (2012) is a detailed HB pencil drawing in which a bureaucratic mythos comes together. In the foreground a figure adorned in knightly garb and sporting the head of a melting snowman (carrot, coals and all) squats before a large bird. Further back, dropped below the image's horizon-line, two suit-wearing, bald-headed, businessmen grimace and gesticulate in some discomfort. Just above them, positioned like trophies (perhaps pillaged by the figure – his bird also proudly wears one), hangs a rack of soberly patterned ties: a signifier of the high abstraction of business and management codes. As Camplin says "I think ties are hilarious. This is to do with the theatre of corporate macho." Funny as ties are, their centrality in Camplin's aberrant and fantastical drawing also reminds us of the insidious and destructive dimensions of acquiescence to particular normalised codes.

Low-fi in their editorial sensibility, making good use of distortion and collage (both of image and sound), Camplin's short, highly-crafted films shift between found offcuts of junky pop-culture and original filmed footage.

In *My Name is Ko Ko* (2002), an initially upbeat start propelled by Sister Nancy's dancehall staple Bam Bam (1982) soon collapses into a sequence of disjointed images. Lab-rats mate; flies stream from a boy's gaping mouth; a man perched on a bridge defenestrates a cat, then suicides himself – all to a haunting soundtrack of slowed-down heartbeats, modulated voice-over and heavy breathing. Decomposing narrative cogency in favour of delivering fractured, eerie, at times even uncomfortable, ambient messages, like all of Camplin's films, *My Name is Ko Ko* is shot through with raw and unvarnished affect conjured through the offbeat manipulation of the temporal and spatial dimensions of the film-form.

Appraising Camplin's work as a whole, getting the sort of traction expected by the conventional interpretative models – be it this text or the Turner Prize itself – is no easy task. As London-based curator Bárbara Rodríguez Muñoz has argued, Camplin's practice retains a defiant "liquid element," one that makes it "impossible to contain within the walls of the gallery or an auditorium, or indeed the lines of a resumé or artist's statement." This chimes with Camplin's own reflections on the question of visibility in her art, what she calls its 'Heathen Principal'. As she has stated: "I do not wish to eliminate the public and visible aspect of my practice. Rather, I believe that the value brought to visibility is amplified by a serious commitment to conscious activity outside of what is made visible." By remaining opaque, composed of open-ended fragments rather than rounded statements, Camplin's work is structured to only reward those willing to make a direct and sustained investment in it.

— Paul Pieroni

**Assemble**



**Bonnie Camplin**



**Janice Kerbel**



**Nicole Wermers**

**TURNER PRIZE**

2015

The Turner Prize will be awarded at Tramway in Glasgow on 7th December 2015, during a live broadcast on Channel 4, to an artist under 50, born, living or working in Britain, for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the preceding year.

An exhibition of work by the four shortlisted artists will be free and will run from 1 October 2015 until 17 January 2016 at Tramway, Glasgow.

Tramway.org  
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#TurnerPrize

## The Artists



### Assemble

For projects including the ongoing collaboration with local residents and others in the Granby Four Streets, Liverpool. Assemble are a London-based collective who work across the fields of art, design and architecture to create projects in tandem with the communities who use and inhabit them. Their architectural spaces and environments promote direct action and embrace a DIY sensibility.

### Bonnie Camplin

Bonnie Camplin has been nominated for *The Military Industrial Complex*, South London Gallery. Camplin gathers her expanded practice under a single idea: the 'Invented Life'. Central to this idea is what Camplin describes as a "myth-science of energy and consciousness research" in which subjective experience is taken as the primary datum of evidence. Her work spans the disciplines of drawing, film, performance, music and writing as well as immaterial and situational research. *The Military Industrial Complex*, South London Gallery took the form of a study room exploring what 'consensus reality' is and how it is formed, drawing from physics to philosophy, psychology, witchcraft, quantum theory and warfare.

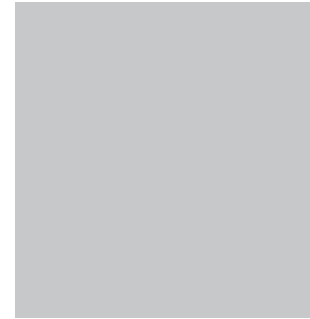
### Janice Kerbel

For her operatic work *DOUG*, commissioned by The Common Guild at Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Kerbel borrows from conventional modes of narrative in order to create elaborate imagined forms. Her precisely crafted works often take the form of audio recordings, performance and printed matter. *DOUG* is a performative work which takes the form of nine songs for six voices.

### Nicole Wermers

Nicole Wermers is nominated for her exhibition *Infrastruktur*, Herald Street, London. Wermers creates sculptures, collages and installations, which explore the appropriation of art and design within consumer culture. Her installation *Infrastruktur* adopted the glossy aesthetics and materials of modernist design and high fashion, alluding to themes of lifestyle, class, consumption and control.

Assemble



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