

Art

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Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's *Radio Mania: An Acoustic War* (2009) with actor Ian Leb den. Concept and idea incorporating Warburton



New media types

The new Samsung Art+ Prize will award £10,000 to one of ten nominated artists showing at the BFI. Time Out talks to three of them about what it might mean to be considered a 'digital' artist

The term 'new media' does not necessarily apply to Forsyth & Pollard, the artistic duo famed for re-enactments of historical moments in culture. Although exhibiting a 3D film for the Samsung Art+ Prize, past explorations have delved into such 'old' media as radio and television. Doug Fishbone is conversely known for his swipes at media saturation, but breaks new tribos in a polemical film, *Elmina*.



Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard

When we began working together, performance art was considered a dirty word, but our work has always embraced a variety of media, from sound to video – we've been called everything. Some artists associate themselves with digital or new media because they like to stand apart from the commercial art world, but it's really an illusion of democracy as the internet has only 30 per cent penetration globally.

Putting something online doesn't automatically make it available to the world, yet in the West almost everyone's lives are touched by digital in some way every day. New media has simply become the new media.

Most of the time, technology should be invisible in our practice; indeed, we've never used any technology – new or old – for the sheer sake of it. The idea drives the work and everything else follows. When we began *Radio Mania* (2009) we didn't set out with the intention of making a 3D film. A long period of research in the BFI archives drew us to Laurens Hammond, famous for the Hammond organ, but who had also invented a 3D moving picture system as early as 1922.

The advances in digital technology are incredible but there have been times when it should have made the process easier, for example in *File Under Sacred Music*, our 2002 remake of a 1978 video of the Cramps playing at Napa State Mental Institute. We filmed the re-enactment at broadcast quality then set about using digital post-production to achieve the noise, static, interference

and degradation of the original. Within an hour we gave up on the digital approach and re-filmed the video on a screen, physically pulling the tape out of the cassette to crease and scratch its surface. We broke three VHS players in the process but achieved the random deterioration we needed.

It's always sad to see media pass into obscurity, because it means there are huge archives of material that are no longer easily accessible, but that shouldn't stop us celebrating new developments. In our studio we play vinyl and use Spotify; one doesn't replace the other. All artists at heart seem to be nostalgic, and we're enthralled by near-extinct and redundant technologies, as well as with the rituals of using them. We're also obsessed with junk science and spend far too much time looking at plans to build your own time machine and other such nonsense, which led us to work with an ex-MOD acoustic weapons developer to devise a machine that purports to communicate subliminally, for *Silent Sound* (2006).

One of the most remarkable things about our recent radio play, *Romeo Echo Delta* (2011), was just how quickly the work was documented and disseminated by the audience. The use of social networks led directly into the work, with a scripted Tweet from @unizowenjourno marking the start of the piece. Throughout the broadcast there was scripted and improvised activity taking place online, so we were able to interact directly with the audience and those that chose to were able to engage directly with the work.



Doug Fishbone

The initial idea for *Elmina* was to insert myself into a low budget Ghanaian film as the lead, without ever clarifying my racial identity, and see what that triggered – to see whether my absorption into an African film could be taken at face value, as it were. I was inspired by the way casting is done in opera, where it doesn't matter about the individual's identity, provided he or she can sing competently. To do this in a black film, in which I was the only white face, posed an interesting challenge. At certain times in the film I speak Twi, one of the local languages, though I do maintain my own accent throughout and even throw in one tiny gap in Yorùbá, just to see if anyone catches it.

I see myself as the animator of the work but I was interested in questions of authorship around the piece, which I see as a collaboration, first and foremost. I was fortunate to work with a fantastic production company in Ghana, Revele Films, which was responsible for writing the script and all the production and editing. It addressed the ambiguity of the casting gesture in a very subtle way, without ever giving anything away.

The key to the project was to mute my own artistic ego and trust their creative efforts so as not to parody the West African film world at all. I think this may be something people assume when they hear the concept, especially if they are familiar with other work of