

THE
BEAU
TIFUL
GAME

TOM BARNETT

The Beautiful Game

Tom Barnett

20 November – 20 December 2013

Hato x Hannah Barry

Colophon

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**The Beautiful Game
Tom Barnett**

Tom Barnett is among the most creatively restless, innovative young artists at work today. This new solo exhibition represents the latest development from his early career as a painter towards an artistic practice incorporating sculpture, live performance, choreography, installation and film. This endlessly resourceful exploration of different media derives from an attitude of constant questioning, the means by which the artist exploits his own doubt as a catalyst for creative reinvention.

These new works can be understood as an attempt to resolve a tension in the artist's practice between instinctive, unmediated expression and the conscious desire to organise and synchronise. In this respect his discipline can be seen as analogous to improvised music, a method of structuring (and thereby provoking) spontaneity. The purpose is to create a physical and psychological environment inside the exhibition space that encourages impulsiveness and creative freedom.

For his live performances, then, the artist adopts the persona of Colden Drystone. Incorporating the recital of poetry and found texts, Dada-esque sound pieces of the artist's own composition and patterns of repetition & feedback created on guitar, drum, radio, a live internet feed, vocals and a loop pedal, the works accumulate rhythms and repetitions from which emerge patterns of sound and language. Moving in and out of sync in a manner that recalls the modular music

of Steve Reich and the defamiliarising sound pieces of Bruce Nauman, the performances seem to dramatise the artist's efforts to develop his own creative vocabulary through the aggregation and harmonisation of influences and inspirations: a condensed history of the creative process. In the course of these live actions he applies pigments, spray-paints and clay to surfaces which survive the event as abstract documentations of it.

In his live works, as in his films and choreographed installations, are apparent the same impulses that continue to drive the artist's work as a draughtsman, painter, sculptor and printmaker. In his paintings, for example, colours are invested with functional associations that not only complement but organise the typically expressive compositions. Thus, experiences are 'articulated before they are fully understood'. Here the artist describes the process with reference to a (hypothetical) painting of an interior:

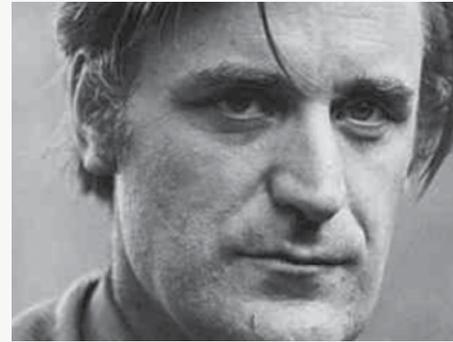
The scale, shape and structure of the room would be described in black and or white, the contents and business of the room in natural pigments, the atmosphere and emotion in silvers and neons and the final lasting action, my presence or my prominent decisions, would be marked with gold.

These parameters give the artist the freedom to work instinctively, without needing to mediate his impulses through conscious decisions during the creative act. Thus the rawness of these paintings and performances is a profession of faith in the methodical thinking that preceded their impulsive realisation. Simplicity and directness is made possible by prior agonising.

The major works in this exhibition can each be traced back to the series of monoprints that Barnett produced in his studio in the 18 months preceding the show. These unique prints (the method produces only a single impression) function as both creative expressions in themselves and



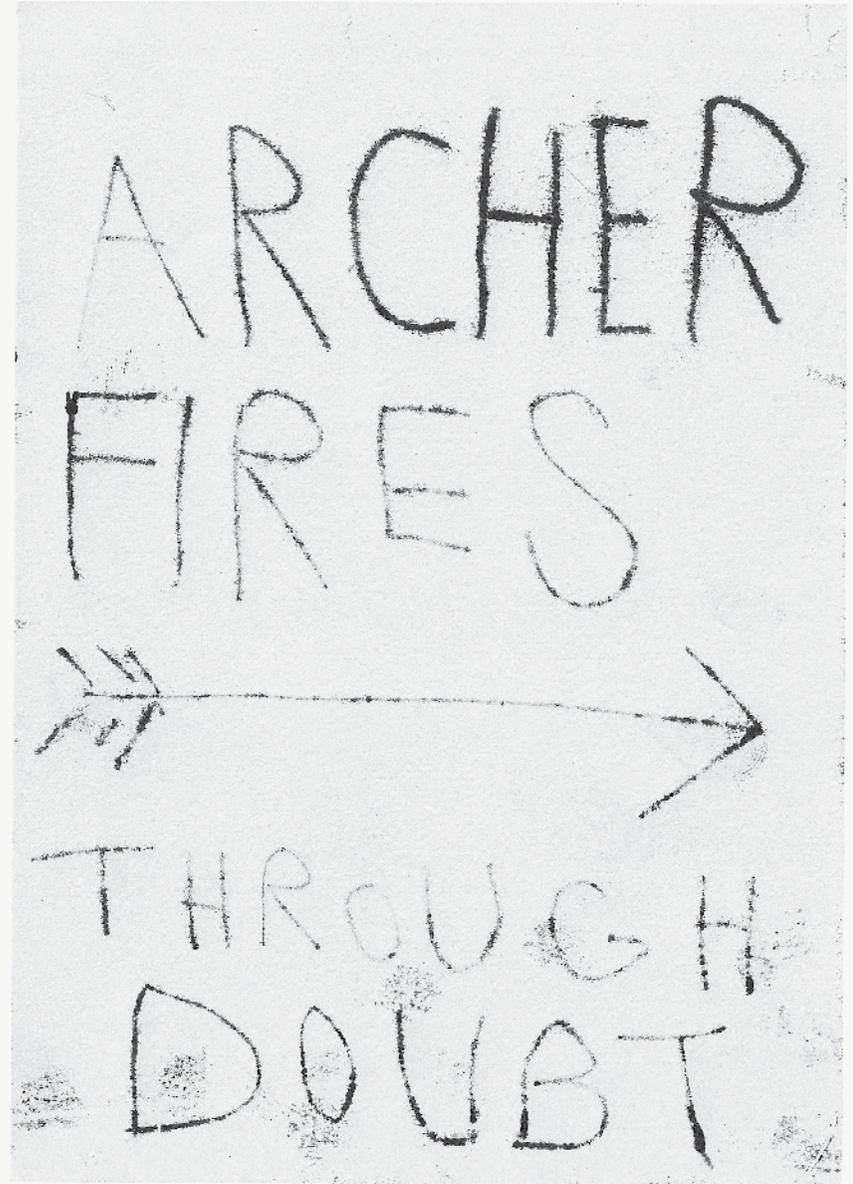
as a means of working through ideas. The spontaneity of the medium, which combines printmaking with drawing and painting, allows Barnett to realise ideas as they occur to him. They form a sketchbook record of the exhibition's gestation: drawings, collages and text pieces. Like all of the works on show, these art works have a dual function: as individual certainties and as contributors to the overarching, three-act structure of *The Beautiful Game*.

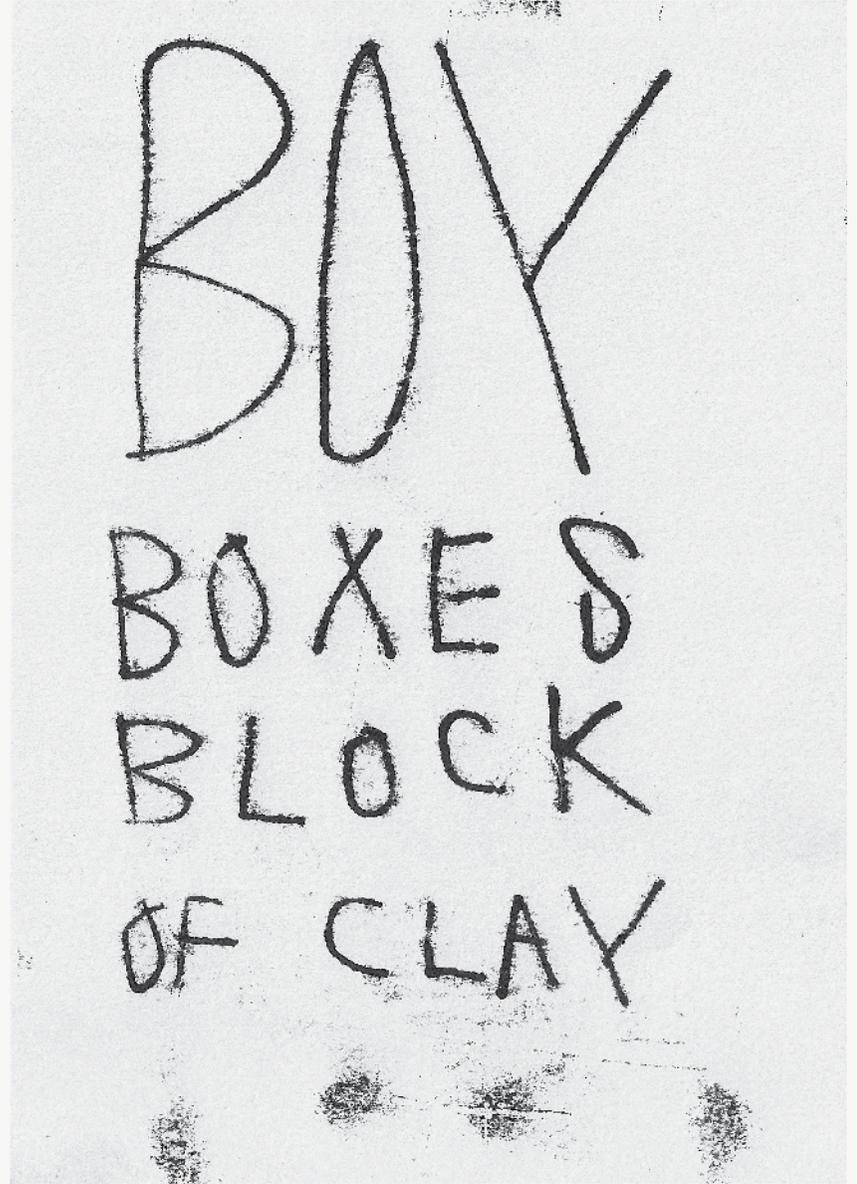
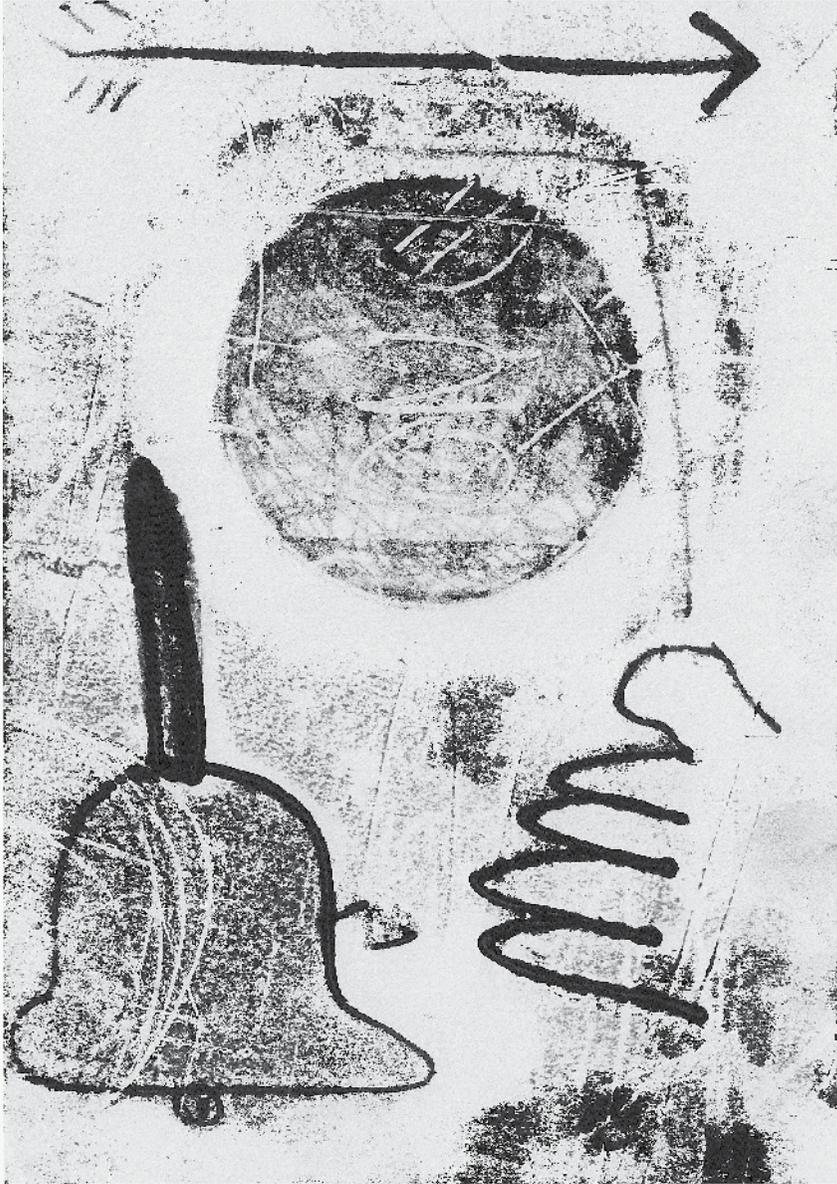


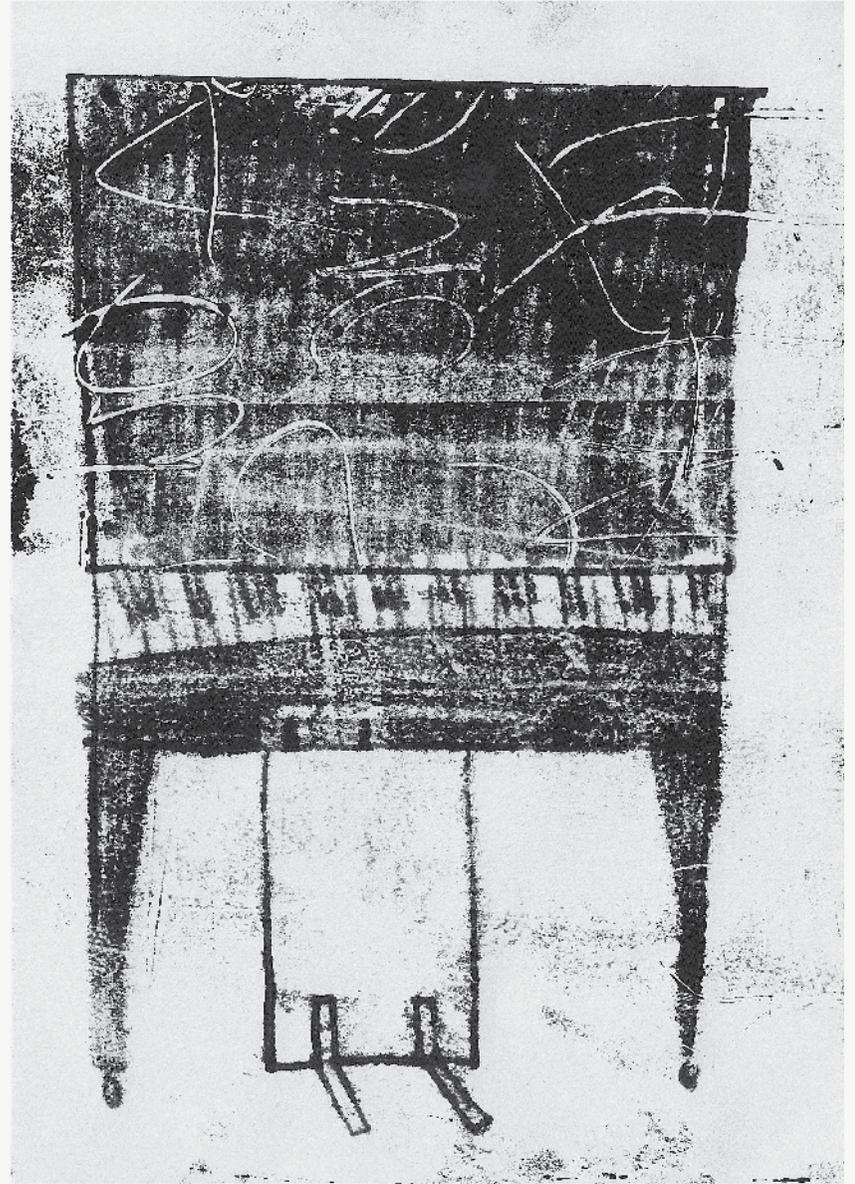
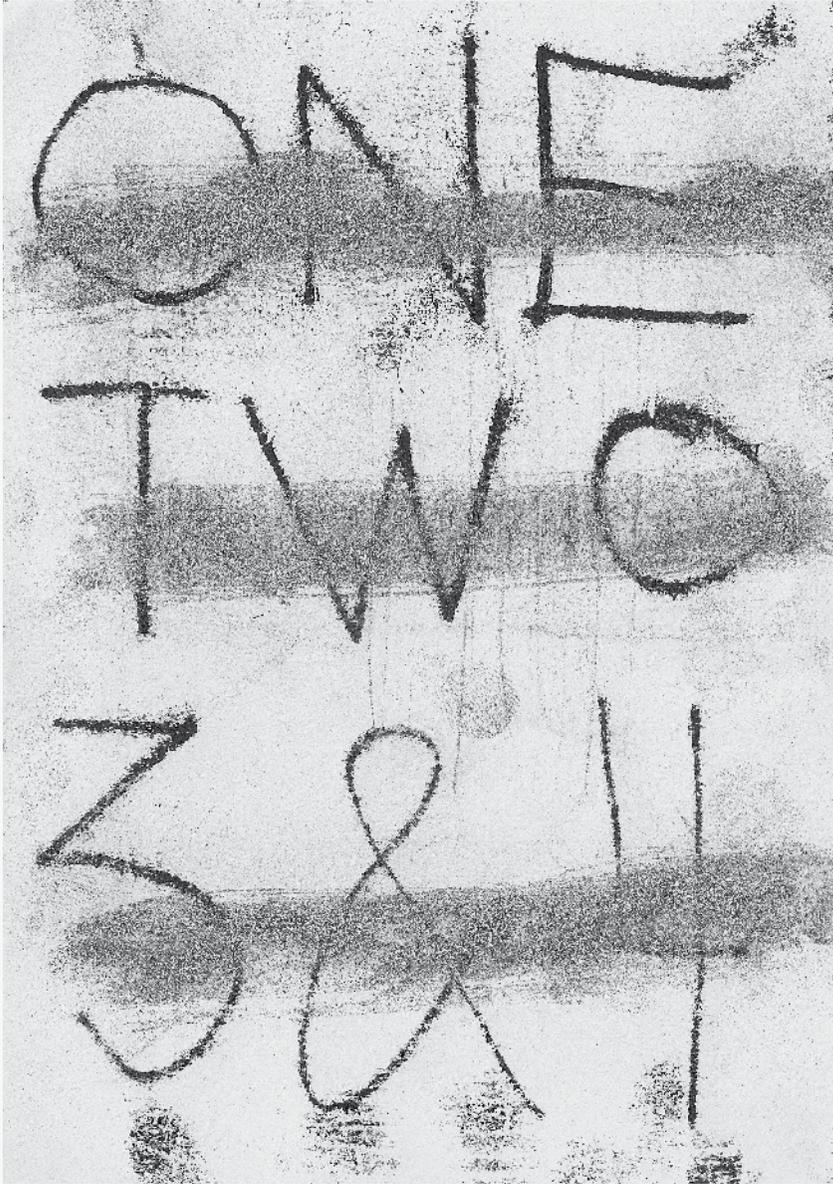
Barnett's previous exhibition of paintings at Hannah Barry was entitled 'Oxenhope', after the village near his childhood home, and that landscape remains for the artist the archetypal creative environment ('Yorkshire', he has said, 'taught me to see.'). Here he evokes that idyllic terrain with a dry stone wall that cuts through the centre of the exhibition space, beneath a mural-sized print of Colden Drystone walking on the moors. This return to nature – Colden is the name of the valley in which the artist was raised – seems notionally at odds with the futuristic aesthetic of the artist's costumes and his employment of contemporary technologies but the combination should be understood as another of the dialectics that create tension in the work and open up the space in which the artist operates. These intellectual and emotional polarities (primitivism / futurism; discipline / freedom; pastoral / urban; confidence / doubt; deliberation / spontaneity) charge the creative process.

These are works of celebratory as opposed to confessional autobiography. Rather than striving, in the style of poets such as Anne Sexton or artists like Tracey Emin, to cast off the roles that we play to reveal a notional, naked 'inner self', Barnett seeks instead to acclaim the adoption of different personae and perspectives through which we can experience the world. He celebrates – by juxtaposing astronauts with the Yorkshire Moors; his beloved Tottenham Hotspur with Kurt Schwitters; sculpture with Scalextric – the Whitmanesque conviction that we each 'contain multitudes', that life and art should be practised expansively.

B.E.









Colden Drystone: Real and Imagined

Who is Colden Drystone?

He is an expression of my imagination, a vehicle for moving between real and imagined worlds that are inspired by memories of my childhood and daydreams about the future. Colden is the valley I grew up in; I love the landscape's dry stone walls and the lines they make – a compromise between the natural world and man's attempt to regulate it. Colden is the physical embodiment of my rural, childhood imagining appearing in the reality of my conscious, urban life.

How does this performance relate to Tom Barnett's practice as a painter / sculptor?

In my paintings and sculptures I am interested in making all my decisions evident and in celebrating the curiosity, confidence and uncertainty that they reveal. I am trying to make images in which contrasting speeds, moods, materials and decisions are the subject of equal attention. The decision, for example, to cross something out, to erase is made explicit. The work records my attempt to seek something out, my behavior in the course of that search. In the live performances I remove any 'delay' between my behaviour and the work. To an extent, the pseudonym compensates for this loss of distance; a protection from self-doubt. The performances force me to have a relationship with my immediate surroundings, but they are still about discovery through action.

Will Colden Drystone interact with the audience?

No.

Why an astronaut's uniform, specifically?

Space is such an abstract a concept: contemplating it marries the human capacity for rational and intellectual thought with wonder, the divine, awe and imagination. Astronauts link mankind to space, the frontier of our knowledge. They represent our curiosity and doubt. They are also a link between deep time and the moment.

You've described the literature you use in performance as 'found texts'. What do you mean by this?

I have used Paul Klee, Barbara Hepworth, Ted Hughes and John Gray, as well as my own notes, random scraps of writing and past correspondence. I've used readymade material too by reciting the alphabet and counting numbers. By 'found' I mean that all of the text I use has been written for some other purpose. Live radio is another source of words and sound that I use, over which I have no control beyond the volume switch. I'm collaging things all the time – live radio and internet streaming adds time to the mix alongside sound, language and form. In these collages I find there are greater possibilities for originality when the material is second-hand.

What is the relationship between found texts and found sounds?

I try to treat them as the same thing – to think of text as speech painted and sound as vision sung. Stripped from their original context they become building blocks, the potential for new forms.

Who are Colden Drystone's inspirations? Can you refer me to other artists / musicians that might help to contextualise the performance?
Yorkshire, Ted Hughes, Kurt Schwitters, Tottenham Hotspur and Tommy Cooper to name just a few.

Artworks

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|---|
| p05 | Moor track near Oxenhope (2010)
Photograph courtesy Nick Seaton | p13 | Beginning (2013)
Monoprint: ink on paper
21×15cm |
| p06 | Future Primitive, detail (2008)
Photograph | p14 | Space is only noise that you can see (2013)
Monoprint: ink on paper
21×15cm |
| p09 | Gazza Wembley triptych (1991)
Film stills from found footage | p15 | Potential (2013)
Monoprint: ink on paper
21×15cm |
| p10 | Audere est Facere (c.1925)
Found image | p16 | My religion (2013)
Monoprint: ink on paper
21×15cm |
| p11 | Kurt Schwitters
Found image

Rocket
Film still from found footage

Ted Hughes
Found image | p17 | Piano (2013)
Monoprint: ink on paper
21×15cm |
| | | p18 | Colden on horseback (2013)
Photograph courtesy Tom Saunderson |

Exhibition History

2013

Girton College Residency, University of Cambridge (ongoing)
Anna Mahler Association Residency, Spoleto, Umbria, Italy
Colden Drystone, Future Primitive, V&A, London
Colden Drystone, In the Making, Art Brussels 2013

2012

New Perspectives, Marcelle Joseph Projects, London (catalogue)

2010

Oxenhope Paintings, Hannah Barry Gallery (solo) (catalogue)

2009

Windows, Hannah Barry Gallery (solo) (catalogue)
Time Flies, Hannah Barry Gallery
The Discerning Eye curated by Jackie Wullschlager,
The Mall Galleries, London
Bold Tendencies 3
To Paint is to Love Again, Hannah Barry Gallery
The Peckham Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale

2008

Future Primitive, Hannah Barry Gallery (solo) (catalogue)

2008

Optimism: The Art Of Our Time, Hannah Barry Gallery



Hatox Hannah Barry