and historical contexts.

Chris Sollars' 79-minute video about his family, *C Red Blue J* (2004), was a particularly poignant work. The divisions within the artist's own bi-partisan family—which also cross gender, sexual and religious lines — are documented in film and video taken since the artist's birth. The family scenes and personal interviews are edited and contrasted with television footage of Republican and Democratic politicians and policies, creating an intimate American portrait of democracy. The genuine honesty of the work elevated the story to one of profundity that inspired some viewers to watch all 79 minutes — a rare accomplishment.

Many works in the show gave legitimacy to recent news reports that the public is distrustful of political information conveyed by the mainstream media. While operating on a small scale, artists are using their creativity to offer specific communities new kinds of information through innovative techniques. After stints in Brooklyn and Queens, the Center for Tactical Magic parked their radical *Tactical Ice Cream Unit* (2005–ongoing) in the Armory drill hall, where visitors were surveyed while being offered popsicles and progressive pamphlets on a range of social issues. Nearby, people could stand on wooden boxes to give impromptu speeches to the crowd as part of Pia Lindman's *Soapbox Event* (2008). Upstairs, Carlos Motta's very effective 12-channel video installation *The Good Life* (2005–2008) presented the political views of hundreds of South Americans on American foreign policy. For an American audience that is not likely to easily encounter such views at home, the work suggested that "the good life" can also be one of willful ignorance.

Center for Tactical Magic, *Tactical Ice Cream Unit, 2008.*
COURTESY OF CREATIVE TIME.

Overall, the mood of the event was one of confused optimism and expectation, the "convergence" similar to a watched kettle of water that is not yet boiling, but close. While individual freedom of expression is the backbone of democracy, systemic American economic problems mean that revolutionary change seems impossible without an organized effort of small groups to coalesce into something bigger. With the recent bank failures and a $700 billion bailout on the mind of everyone at the exhibition's closing, a feeling of uncertainty was palpable. No doubt change is in the air, but the question of when it will arrive or what kind of change it will be is anybody's guess. ▸

IT'S TIME, MAN. IT FEELS IMMINENT.

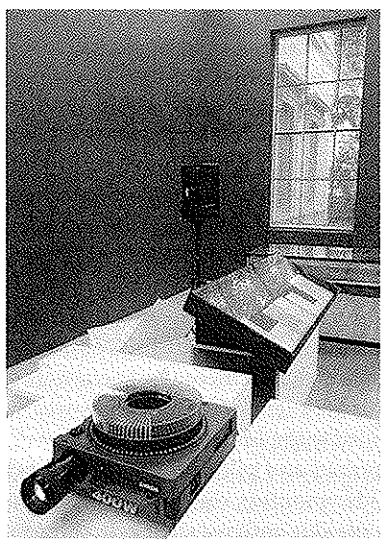
Sarah Pierce, Nought to Sixty Programme, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

by JESSE MCKEE

From May to October of this year, the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London undertook an extended 60th anniversary program. *Nought to Sixty* operated under a straightforward premise:the institution presented 60 projects in six months from artists and art centres based in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The backbone of the program rested on two solo exhibitions that opened every other week, complemented by panels, salons, performances and screenings. To combat the inertia typical of an institution the size and age of the ICA, Richard Birkett, cofounder of Whitechapel Project Space, was brought in to help curate the programme. This move allowed the ICA to quickly tap into networks of independent spaces and emerging practices throughout the UK and Ireland. Rightly positioned as a cross-section, *Nought to Sixty* neither forced a thematic framing of the projects presented, nor did it claim to offer a definitive statement on the scenes represented.

In the summer issue of *Art Review*, Sally O'Reilly wrote in defence of the ICA and the *Nought to Sixty* program, in response to an attack by Richard Morrison, who had written in the *Times* in April that the ICA was an "inconsequential backwater" and called for its closure. In her text, O'Reilly considered the significance of a characteristic evident throughout the program: an overwhelming sense of professionalism, which imbued practices that are meant to be young, vibrant and sensational. She went on to say that the current generation of British Isles artists may not necessarily be seeking to embody what would traditionally be considered avant-garde or radical. After all, in this era of health and safety, today's artists are corralled by laws and regulations, as well as by a need to navigate myriad expectations and the weight of history. So perhaps Morrison's/O'Reilly's criticism suffers from a projected sense of nostalgia of an older generation mourning days gone by.

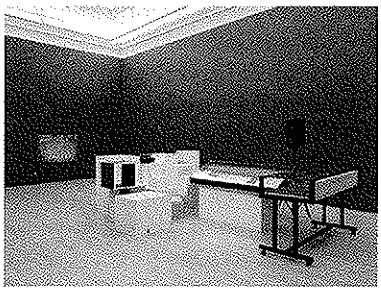
Though any program of this size will be uneven, a solo exhibit by Dublin-based American artist Sarah Pierce towards its tail end seemed to address exactly where artists in the UK and Ireland find themselves today. For the past few years, Pierce has been using the term "The Metropolitan Complex" to describe her practice and body of work. The project manifests itself through talks, discussions, texts, workshops and arrangements of archival material. Pierce then pieces together a serendipitous account of these events by mapping out the chance relationships of the participants connected to each one.



Sarah Pierce, *It's time, man. It feels imminent*, Installation shot, Naught to Sixty Programme, ICA, London
COURTESY OF THE ICA, LONDON, PHOTO: STEPHEN WHITE

The Metropolitan Complex was seen in full force at the ICA, with a three-fold endeavour. Pierce participated in a panel discussion on the topic of the productive potential of education within the art

system today, alongside Liam Gillick, Andrea Phillips, Dave Beech and Adrian Rifkin. She also contributed a text to the September issue of the *Nought to Sixty* magazine, and participated in the exhibition programme. In the first week of September, she framed her research into the ICA's archives via an installation that looked at two events in the institution's history: the London presentation of Harald Szeemann's canonical exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (1971), originally installed at the Kunsthalle Bern, and the 1978 conference *The State of British Art, A Debate.*



Sarah Pierce, *It's time, man. It feels imminent*, installation shot, Naught to Sixty Programme, ICA, London
COURTESY OF THE ICA, LONDON, PHOTO: STEPHEN WHITE

One of the ICA's stately upper galleries was painted a dark charcoal, the lights emitting a hazy orange glow and the windows darkened with black film covering the panes, creating an endless night. The effect was to create a space outside of the flow of time, which allowed reflection on these two events, the institution's history and some of the incidental associations that occur between them. The gallery was mostly filled with plinths from the ICA's storage, upturned and piled on top of each other. A video monitor, slide projector, single audio speaker and two vitrines accompanied the arrangement. Ephemera from the exhibition and conference lingered next to each other — correspondences, budgets, invitations, press releases and photographs — and their loose arrangement allowed for unforeseen and free-flowing associations. The audio speaker broadcast four tracks: the recording of the talk in which Pierce had participated only a few weeks prior, the recording of an on-campus protest at UCLA she had witnessed during the research for this show, on her way to interview Mary Kelly (a *State of British Art* debate participant 30 years ago), the Mary Kelly interview itself and the funk/psych recording "Black Satin" by Miles Davis. The video monitor simultaneously played documentation from a workshop Pierce had given in Dublin, where participants had reenacted the movements and words of the protesters she had observed in California. The slides projected kitty-corner to the video were negatives of the documentation from Szeemann's exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*. The collage of documents, media and contemporary interjections succeeded at creating a lush historical mediation.

Pierce's understanding of what we know today as "cultural work" is a kind of reaffirmation: she exposes the documents and concerns of the recent past, which show the then-present fear of professionalism impeding on art-making and its presentation. In doing so, contemporary concerns about professionalization's threat to art can be put to rest knowing that artists in the past also dealt with it and managed to survive. ▸

MUSHROOM STUDIO

Katie Bethune-Leamen, Toronto Sculpture Garden

by CAROLYN TRIPP

There's an inescapable whimsy inherent to the shape of spores and fungi. Equal parts amusing and sinister, they grow into limbless, fleshy creatures on the forest floor, complete with hats and awaiting stories of miniature, translucent females taking up residence in their stems.

Artist Katie Bethune-Leamen has expanded on this idea. *Mushroom Studio* (2008), an installation that will occupy the Toronto Sculpture Garden until spring 2009, is a giant mushroom constructed especially for the project, complete with an artist's studio built into the structure's stem. Inside, the artist creates new drawings and sketches for future paintings. Bethune-Leamen created the space with conventional studio standards in mind, and often left the door open while sitting inside during the summer months.

For structural reasons, the mushroom-cum-studio's design necessitated symmetry, resulting in a more geometric version of what is generally an uneven shape. Its skin is heavily textured, causing the cap's surface to appear as a dotted Martian landscape. The lamellae detailing is, true to form, a simple linear pattern and perhaps the most affecting, forming a gigantic, comical halo around the stem and studio space.

"The heavy texture was vital to the piece, but it isn't comically out of proportion," Bethune-Leamen explains, "That could have lead to excessive whimsy." The artist is quick to add that there isn't a wooden door on the front with a heart carved in the centre, leaving that portion of the storybook rendering out of the equation. And the windows and door of the studio are more practical, looking staunchly institutional against the contrasting facade.

"The familiarity of a shape like this leads people to be curious. Perhaps more so than they otherwise would be than if the structure were, say, just a small building in the middle of the green," the artist notes. The welcoming nature of *Mushroom Studio* has allowed Bethune-Leamen to meet a good portion of the Toronto populace who might not have otherwise attended a contemporary art exhibition. "I was quickly acquainted with the surrounding residents and passersby, including people who live on the street," she says. "On the whole, people were genuinely fascinated by both the structure and its use. The mushroom shape lends itself to familiar anecdotes, whether or not people are entirely aware of the project's intentions."

The project calls to mind the children's classic *James and the Giant Peach*, and many comparisons can be drawn in structural and literary terms. In the book, the titular fruit is brought down to earth after a terrifying incident in the clouds. Hungry New York City children proceed to eat the huge shape until only the pit remains, readying what is soon to be the main character's new Central Park abode. The parallels with an artist residency are apparent, as are the edible qualities of the sculpture's chosen form. The *Mushroom Studio* differs in that the structure wasn't eaten, but nonetheless it firmly plants itself in unfamiliar territory, surrounded by right-angled bricks, mortar and concrete.

Additionally, the mushroom's scale, standing some 20 feet tall, references the forgotten kitsch of the North American roadside diners that flourished in the 20s and 30s. These giant, figurative sculptures (such as oversized oranges) were popular food stops for a post-World War I road-tripping population. Much like the *Mushroom Studio*, these eateries tended to be caricatures, and served as artful attractions for the increasing number of American motorists. They also merit contemporary interest as

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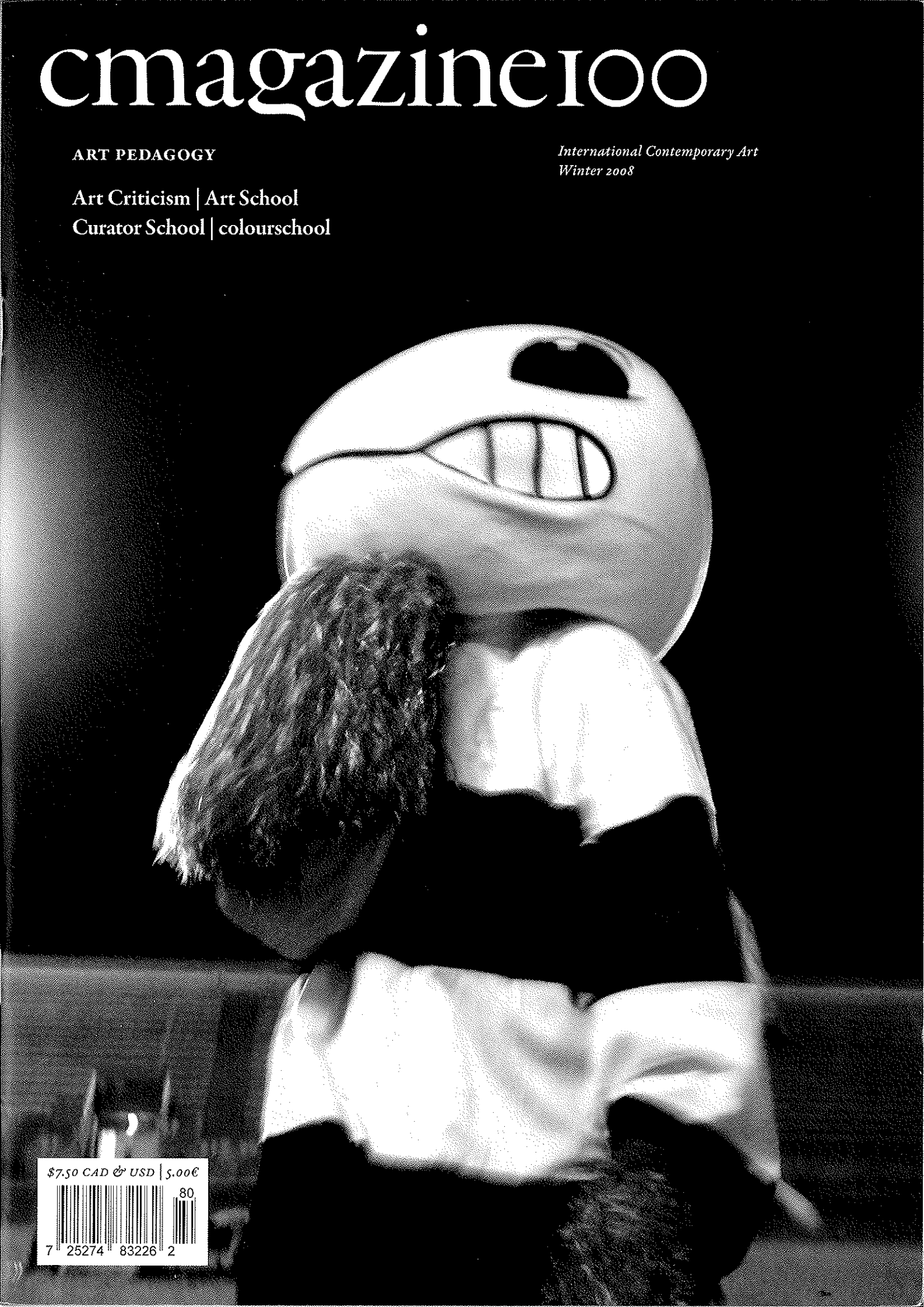

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