

## PRESS RELEASE

### **AUGUST art presents “Institute for Objective Measurement”**

**With artists EA Byrne, Will Cruickshank, & Nina Wakeford**

As a philosopher said “few products of intellectual life are more exhilarating, more pleasing to give and receive, than a good explanation”<sup>1</sup>. It would be pedantic to argue against this, nevertheless it might be interesting to consider what we think makes a good explanation and whether an explanation might be unproductive. Our exhibition “Institute for Objective Measurement” with EA Byrne, Will Cruickshank and Nina Wakeford sets out to explore this.

To set the premise, practical need aside, our need for explanation seems to be psychological. Pioneering psychologist William James observed that when confronted with complex issues outside our area of expertise – be it science, economics, contemporary art ... – we seem to get “that peculiar feeling of inward unrest that is known as indecision”<sup>2</sup>. Having a unified story, a cause-and-effect – in short, an explanation – seems to resolve that unrest.

However, we can get seduced by an explanation, even a bad one. J.D. Trout (quoted in the opening paragraph) finds that people often believe explanations because they find them intuitively satisfying, not because they are accurate. Other research suggests factors of seduction include: use of technical words, even if irrelevant<sup>3</sup>; longer explanations, which people tend to rate as more similar to experts’ explanations<sup>4</sup>; and people’s bias to look for a simple reductionist structure.

The artists EA Byrne, Will Cruickshank and Nina Wakeford explore this balance between the desire to have the unknown explained factually, the unquantifiable measured accurately, and the need to just be fed something that “sounds right”.

Will Cruickshank installs an interactive piece which viewers can pull and tug. The mechanism causes an impact which will not be visible to the person pulling the strings.

Nina Wakeford creates measuring tools: in one piece, helium-filled balloons tie down thermometers whose metrics have never been added.

EA Byrne plots XY graphs of art critics’ comments of artists from Gainsborough to the artist “too cool for Hoxton” according to a proprietary system of calculation.

We are also grateful for the support of Waldner Ltd, designers/suppliers of science lab furnishings, as sponsors. With their help, we will be creating a “lab” in the gallery within which our artists’ tools of objective measurement can do their work.

### **“Institute for Objective Measurement”**

23 Sep to 11 Oct, 2009

We to Su, 1 to 6 pm, or by appointment

**Opening drinks: 23 Sep, 6-9 pm**

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AUGUST art  
With thanks to 

<sup>1</sup> Trout, J.D. (2002). Scientific explanation and the sense of understanding. *Philosophy of Science*, 212-233

<sup>2</sup> James, William ([1890] 1981). *Principles of Psychology*, vol 2. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Chapter 26 (Will).

<sup>3</sup> Skolnick Weisberg D., Keil F. C., Goodstein J., Rawson E., and Gray J.R. (2009). The seductive allure of neuroscience explanations. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 470-477

<sup>4</sup> Kikas, E. (2003). University students’ conceptions of different physical phenomena. *Journal of Adult Development*, 10, 139-150