



## **David Roberts Art Foundation launches its Curators' Series with *At Your Service*, curated by Cylena Simonds**

**Exhibition dates: 17.04.2009– 27.06.2009**

**Opening Reception: 16.04.2009 from 6.30pm**

The David Roberts Art Foundation is delighted to launch its Curators' Series with its first guest curator, Cylena Simonds. The Curators' Series aims to support international curators with unique and experimental vision by commissioning projects for the Foundation. Cylena Simonds, an American curator based in London, will present the group exhibition *At Your Service*.

*At Your Service* engages the concept and dynamics of the service and hospitality industries in today's political and social climate and brings together a wide range of artwork from emerging international artists.

Simonds writes "*Economic migrants in Britain (as well as the rest of Europe) have changed significantly over the past 50 years. Yet what they have in common is that their first, and often only, points of entry into employment are via the service industries. Many contemporary art practices engage in or reflect services that challenge our perceptions of who performs the roles of host and guest.*"

*At Your Service* examines aspects of service industries such as building construction, cleaning and catering as a way of addressing concepts of belonging, patterns of migration and the less-than-distinct roles of host/guest and native/foreigner. The artworks investigate themes within service labour such as routine, invisibility and the mundane. Juxtaposed with these works are projects that explore the notion of contemporary art practice as a service to the public, asking us to examine the kinds of interactions, expectations and desires we take on.

The work in *At Your Service* ranges from sculptural objects to photography and video as well as featuring specially commissioned performances taking place both within the gallery and in public locations. The Foundation is glad to have contributed to a number of these productions. Gaia Tedone, Assistant Curator, David Roberts Art Foundation, assists Cylena Simonds with the exhibition.

The exhibition is supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. The Foundation would also like to thank Rokeby, London and Seventeen Gallery, London for their assistance. The David Roberts Art Foundation is proudly supported by the Edinburgh House Estates group of companies.



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## Notes to editors

Founded by collector David Roberts and directed by Vincent Honoré, the David Roberts Art Foundation is a charitable organisation dedicated to supporting contemporary art through a programme of exhibitions, commissions, acquisitions and collaborations with independent curators. The next curators invited to participate in the Curators Series are Raimundas Malasauskas (October 2009) and Mihnea Mircan (April 2010).

### Guest Curator for *At Your Service*:

#### **Cylena Simonds**

Cylena Simonds is an independent curator working with the politics of representation and the representation of politics within contemporary art. From 2004-2008 she was Exhibitions Curator at Iniva, heading their on-site and touring programme as well as off-site public art projects. Her final show, *States of Exchange*, was the first exhibition of Cuban contemporary art to be shown in the UK since 1997. In July 2008 she co-founded Butcher's, a roving alternative space for presenting contemporary art projects. Working with emerging as well as mid-career artists, she has developed new commissions with Laylah Ali, Meschac Gaba and Idris Khan in addition to presenting several premieres of work never before shown in the UK.

### The Artists:


#### **Raúl Ortega Ayala (Born in Mexico, based in UK)**

Ayala's practice and methodology is based on a 'participant observation' approach towards subject matters where he purposefully involves himself with common yet somehow unfamiliar worlds like that of the office, food and gardening. His ongoing immersion/research into food has included his attendance in cooking and/or butchering courses in Mexico, London and New York. The results of this ongoing series use performance, video, text and happenings to explore food beyond bodily sustenance. Ayala will present a specially commissioned performance and installation of *The Last Supper* (2006/09).

#### **Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson (Born in Spain and Iceland, based in Netherlands)**

Often described as "citizens of the world," Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólafsson utilise different media in order to raise questions addressing social issues and urban politics. The aim of their work is to portray a group of people living in a specific cultural, social and economic environment and mapping the spatial and architectural context where they live. With their "site-related practices," they also actively engage with the dynamics of locality, reactivating and revealing its current concerns. The video *The Caregivers* (2008) investigates a fairly recent phenomenon in the sector of female-labor, that of East European domestic caregivers who take care of elderly Italians in their homes. *At Your Service* will present the UK premiere of *The Caregivers*.

#### **Susan Collis (Born and based in UK)**



Within Collis practice, everyday objects and surfaces are presented splattered and stained with the marks of wear and tear, and the viewer might, upon further investigation, realise that the timeworn flecks of paint that cover an old broom, are in fact delicate and precisely inlaid pearls, jasper, turquoise, garnets and black diamonds. Initially, the demarcations seem to be the accidental results of a service activity, both undervalued and easily ignored. *At Your Service* will present *Waltzer*, 2007 (David Roberts Collection) and works from her 2008 series *Sweat*.

**Yara El-Sherbini (Born and based in UK)**

El-Sherbini's playful and multi-disciplinary approach to art making uses popular culture and humour to make engaging and accessible works that explore contemporary social and political issues. Recent commissions include *Universality Challenge*: a game show exploring universal experiences, and she is currently touring *A Pub Quiz* throughout England and to Australia. El Sherbini will perform her work *Auctions Speak Louder Than Words* as well as create a new installation, *Socially Engaged*, for *At Your Service*.

**David Ersser (Born and based in UK)**

David Ersser produces cold, meticulous models of electrical appliances, tools and domestic objects. Assembled from balsa, the least majestic of woods, in a dead pan and un-dramatic way, the work owes more to the culture of the enthusiast model maker than the great history of carved sculpture. Recently Ersser has begun to create entire rooms or environments from his surroundings, such as the artist's desk from his studio, his tools, equipment, detritus, chair, keys and his half finished artworks themselves. For *At Your Service* the artist will present a new work from his upcoming series developed in early 2009.

**Mauricio Guillén (Born in Mexico, based in Frankfurt)**

Mauricio Guillen is interested in the role aesthetics play in the organisation of social space and the formation of identity. Appropriating and re-signifying existing dominant cultural models, Guillen creates poetic language capable of making visible the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that frame social relations. *At Your Service* will present *Noon* (2008/9), a new series of photographs exploring construction workers on their breaks.

**Graham Hudson (Born and based in UK)**


Graham Hudson's practice involves a variety of media and an ever-evolving array of materials, treading a line between sculpture and installation, his work evolves in response to places and events. Addressing subjects including political and religious ideology, advertising, media, and the nature of the art object, his concerns range from the moral and social, to the aesthetic and the common-place. Continuing his exploration of the tools commonly used in both building construction and sculpture *At Your Service* will present Hudson's *Beginning to End* (2008) a DIY limited edition part of the David Roberts Collection.

**Gayle Chong Kwan (Born and based in UK)**

Gayle Chong Kwan's practice is often the result of a process of working with notional communities featuring elements of photography, video, installation and performance. Her work plays with concepts of communication, participation and authorship through utopian ideas, food, culinary rituals, tourism, trade, memory and the senses. *At Your Service* will present work from the artist's recent series *Green Flash* (2008) which creates soundscapes from migrant workers in kitchens throughout the UK.

**Harold Offeh (Born in Accra, based in UK)**

Harold Offeh employs a range of strategies to assess contemporary popular media representations of race, identity and desire. *Being Mummy* (2004-2007), is a series of



objects, installations, video and performance work, exploring the world of the domestic maid 'Mammy' caricature. In this series Offeh examines the life and career of actress Hattie McDaniel, who famously played and won an Oscar for her role as 'Mammy' in *Gone With the Wind*. *At Your Service* will present objects from the series as well as a newly commissioned performance.

**Nada Prlja (Based in UK)**

Having lived in Sarajevo, Skopje and London, for more than a decade in each place, Nada Prlja avoids defining herself as belonging to a single nation. This unsettled condition defines her practice. Prlja's work deals with the complex situations of inequality and injustice in societies in transition, ranging from political and economic to religious issues. Using different media, her projects are multi layered and 'site, space or condition specific'. The main aim of her work is - through the 're-appropriation' of the art (or art-systems) - to provoke reaction and activate, affect, and modify other, parallel, socio-political systems in society. For *At Your Service*, Prlja will present work from her ongoing series exploring sweat shop labour in the garment industry, this time focusing on the situation within the UK.

**Ana Prvacki, (Born in Serbia, based in Singapore)**

Prvacki often provides services to the public as part of her lifestyle consultancy, Ananatural Production, which she founded in 2003 to explore the aesthetics of consumer goods, as well as the propagation of ideas, brands, or "mantras" that are designed to frame a way of living. Within the context of a global bank that handles millions of dollars each day, Prvacki set up *At the tips of your fingertips*, a money cleaning service that cleanses and "purifies" one note at a time through the use of specially branded wet wipes. *At Your Service* will re-enact *At the tips of your fingertips* performance as well as present a video installation of the piece.

**Manuela Ribadeneira (Born in Ecuador, based in UK)**

Ribadeneira views her artistic work as a social, political and spatial investigation. Her practice is based around constructions of objects and sound, utilising strategies of participation and performance in work that comments or intervenes on social and public spaces. In particular interest to *At Your Service* is her practice as part of the collective Artes No Decorativas (AND) which aims to develop, promote, produce and diffuse all expressions of contemporary art in forms of research, products and services to the public. *At Your Service* will present the piece *Working/Not Working*, 2007 as well as a newly commissioned work.

**Paul Rooney (Born and based in UK)**

Rooney often collaborates with people to engage with their working or leisure experiences, highlighting everyday practices, and peripheral positions, as potential sites for resistance to wider social structures. *At Your Service* will present recent sound work *Words and Silence* (2008), which features the fictionalized voice of a female call centre worker.

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**David Roberts Art Foundation Fitzrovia**

111 Great Titchfield Street, London W1W 6RY

Opening times: Tuesday – Friday 10am -6pm, Saturday 11am – 4pm

[www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com](http://www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com)

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