

Samples

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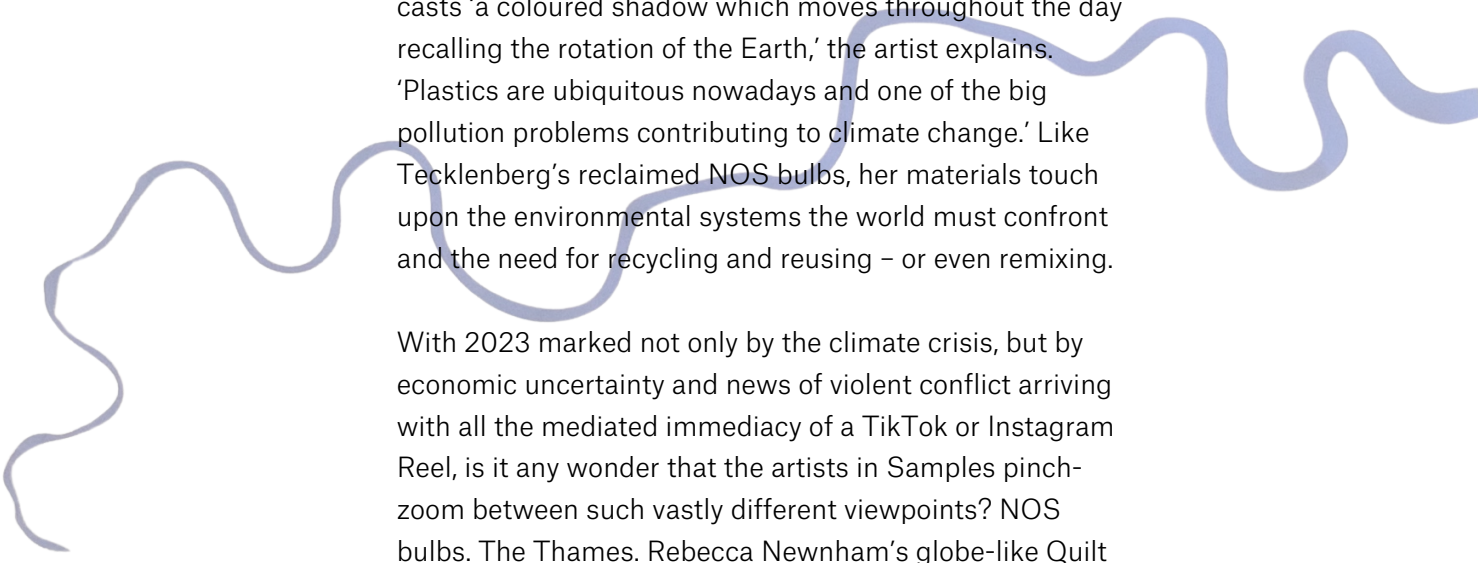


You find samples everywhere from hip hop to test tubes. On the end of cocktail sticks. From surveys to swatches. Spritzed on fragrance strips. Insofar as sampling means trying things out or moving one object from one context to another, you find it in artists' studios too. Samples sees members of the Royal Society of Sculptors sampling everything from the globe itself to a heartbeat.

Officially criminalised as of 8 November this year, the past decade has seen nitrous oxide (laughing gas) in widespread recreational use, with one east London recycling plant collecting more than 16,000 NOS canisters in nine months in 2022. Originally intended for use in whipped cream canisters and cooking sprays, in *Wish you were here*, Paul Tecklenberg recontextualises the silver bulbs yet again, arranging them into an EXIT sign – a nod to their use for escapism. Yet EXIT reads ambivalently (especially mounted on a red board where the viewer might expect to see a green one) and, of course, escape is not always as simple as it sounds. Short-lived as a high, laughing gas will have had a longer life-span as a symptom of young people's disillusionment throughout the 2010s. Tecklenberg, with Wildeian wit ('We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars') suggests that one person's litter is another's lightbulb moment.

London Water likewise sees Nik Ramage searching the streets beneath him for source material. His resin and iron cast mimics the original stopcock 'London Water' covers set into the pavements of the capital and beyond. '[The artist] Tom Phillips thought these covers looked like skulls,' Ramage reflects, 'like memento mori set into the pavement of the city, rushed over unseen by its busy inhabitants'. The gesture of bringing that which is typically under the surface up into new light is one sampled by the exhibition itself and can be seen in the work of Irene Poulissi, Roger Clarke, Emma Louise Moore.





Meanwhile, like Ramage, Ros Burgin samples London's water, only this time from a bird's eye view. Thames Drawing 5 is a transparent blue piece of Perspex in the shape of the famous river. Sitting slightly off the wall, it casts 'a coloured shadow which moves throughout the day recalling the rotation of the Earth,' the artist explains. 'Plastics are ubiquitous nowadays and one of the big pollution problems contributing to climate change.' Like Tecklenberg's reclaimed NOS bulbs, her materials touch upon the environmental systems the world must confront and the need for recycling and reusing – or even remixing.

With 2023 marked not only by the climate crisis, but by economic uncertainty and news of violent conflict arriving with all the mediated immediacy of a TikTok or Instagram Reel, is it any wonder that the artists in Samples pinch-zoom between such vastly different viewpoints? NOS bulbs. The Thames. Rebecca Newnham's globe-like Quilt expands the view still further, to a planetary scale. The title 'reflects the surface of the piece, in which the diamond patterns featured reference worldwide interference patterns,' Newnham says. 'Water, sound, and light all radiate ripples when force is applied to one place. When these ripples encounter other ripples, the resulting waves cross to make a network that eventually encompasses the entire surface.' Indeed, the shallow dimples suggest the marks – called regmaglypts – that form on meteorites as they pass through the Earth's atmosphere. 'This quilted globe draws on physics theory to imply parallels to political actions around the world.'

Roger Clarke, on the other hand, traces the patterns formed by global movement in a way that is much more feet on the ground, belt and keys in the tray. Included in Samples are nine photos from a larger series showing the undersides of the plastic trays used in Bristol airport's security area. 'Each has a different pattern that has developed from the collection of dirt from their movement along the conveyor belt at each security lane,' Clarke says. 'What captured me was the surprise of finding something extraordinary in what could be considered the least interesting environment and that these patterns would normally be overlooked by those using these trays.' Like Burgin, Clarke interrogates the impact of plastic on contemporary life (by demonstrating our quite literal, material impact on it, in turn); like Newnham's work, the

surface ripples evoke time passing and natural processes – water and wind on sand, perhaps. The plastic tray, so often thought of as a chore or an irritant between points A and B or not thought about at all, holds the beautiful, dirty traces of us all in a gesture reminiscent of a Zen proverb on boredom and curiosity.

Emma Louise Moore's *The One* seems proverbial too, a yin-yang of natural and industrial processes. The sculpture 'took moments to carve but a year to make', she explains. The metal piece was retrieved from a London canal and sat on the artist's studio desk for almost a year, awaiting a counterpart. 'I knew immediately when I found the rock, an instinctive awareness of the balance of the two pieces ensued. The stone comfortably holds the weight of the metal piece, and vice versa.' The heaviness of materials is offset by the precision and lightness of Moore's gambit.

Contrastingly, Irene Pouliassi's juxtaposition of two objects (similarly, one natural and one fabricated) is more agitated, not balanced per se but precarious. In *Silicon Valley*, nestled into a breast implant, a swishy plait of hair has more bite than satire and could be venomous – like a scorpion's tail or a snake protecting its egg. Ambiguity and danger are the desired effects: 'the female body has been codified as disgusting, defective, leaking, bleeding, oozing from time immemorial', Pouliassi says. 'I combine monstrosity and sensuality to form beings that attract and repel us simultaneously.'

Just as interested in oozianness, Ever Grainger's practice is alive to the ambiguities of silicone itself – a material that 'is at once liquid and solid, soft and firm', as the artist illustrates in her works *Smoothies* and *A Nice Pair*. 'Because of these unique properties, I feel I can capture the spontaneous moments of making as still tangibly present in the finished work.' What makes Grainger's work feel so eminently sampleable is its insistence that solid categories, such as finished artworks and artistic processes, are more malleable than we might like to think. *Love Bites* is a pair of prints showing a selection of her silicone works that have been 'chopped in half with a kitchen knife.' As Grainger says, 'Each pair is separated but identifiable as a whole. The pieces when cut this way, brought to mind the notion of love tokens, or the emblem of a split love heart, where each half is kept by lovers.' The proposition in Grainger's oeuvre that contemporary life involves the experience of being



squeezed and squashed by the powers that be is inflected with tenderness in Love Bites, like the gentle squeeze of a hand.

Chris Dunseath's print Castle Hill is full of incisions, too. Its view is intersected by a window frame. The landscape beyond is cross-hatched, as if in imitation of the outmoded process of etching, whereby prints were made via incised lines in metal plates. Cutting through the vegetation is a partly concealed trace of the artist's heartbeat in the form of an electrocardiogram. The actual Castle Hill of the title, in Somerset, dates back to the Stone Age, while in the foreground Dunseath samples one of his own works from 2010, a sculpture inspired by Theoretical Physics, leading to a pervading sense of anachronism. The empirical and the fictional tussle in the scratchy sky and popcorn clouds.

Just as a heartbeat pulses through Dunseath's image, Livia Spinolo's Repeat Prescription invokes life's rhythms – in this case, routine visits to the pharmacy. Concerned with mark-making and repetition itself (literally repeating the prescription by reproducing it on tracing paper) the work's delicate materials (tracing paper; graphite) seem at first to speak to diminishing returns (like photocopies or cells). Yet, like Clarke's airport security trays, Spinolo's traces expand an object typically cast aside with little thought, drawing the viewer's attention to the geometric shapes in the crumpled paper bag and the play between two- and three-dimensional shapes.

If Spinolo's Repeat Prescription does what it says on the tin, Rachel Mortlock gives the viewer a look inside it: Party Mix casts classic biscuits – Nice, Oreos, Jammie Dodgers, and Lotus – in tooth-cracking Jesmonite. The brand crossover we never knew we needed, Party Mix invites the viewer to sample its contents more literally than any of the other works in the exhibition, engaging them in everyday pleasures and relationships of exchange, consumption and ritual.



Whether via inhalation, city maintenance, long walks, security checks, magnet fishing, braiding, daydreaming, pharmacy trips, the other works in Samples extend the same invitation. As such, these fragments are a love letter to shared experience – and in a global context that can seem more fragmented and divided than ever, demonstrating the power of switching between contexts, seeing other unexpected viewpoints is no small thing. Pass the Jammie Dodgers●