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**WITHSTORE_001 at Rokeby**

"Off the Shelf: Promises, Intentions, Actions and Objects from the WITH Collective"



Yinan Zhang

WITH were created in 2002 by Alasdair Hopwood, and seem to resolve the philosophical quandary of "if a tree falls in a forest..."; WITH nullify the hypothetical and offer to realize the situation, and in so doing, present a host of questions addressing the fears, anxieties and economies of our technologically and results-driven society.

WITHSTORE_001 is an exhibition that includes a number of "solutions" (for a full list, visit its website). For example, qualms about aging and mortality may be resolved by purchasing *25 for you for 300 years*, which will provide a birthday card proclaiming "WE ARE BEING TWENTY FIVE FOR YOU" every year for three centuries. This and other proposals are accompanied by a disclaimer that evidence may be provided at additional cost, bringing to mind the absurdity of imagined experience, the appeal of vicarious experience, and a nostalgia for one's own lived experience.

Highlighting these sentiments is *we accidentally break a glass on your behalf*, an act (in an edition of 50 in London) witnessed by the commissioner inside a curtained-off section of the gallery, through peepholes in a folding screen. During the opening and in the presence of an audience, the act met a quiet that enveloped the gallery, as well as the collective anticipation of the sound of shattering glass. It was not unlike getting a shot at the doctor's and turning one's head to avoid the sight, knowing all the while that the act was imminent.

In provoking anxiety associated with the inevitable, WITH also activate the seduction of the unknown. The *Promise* series comprises 52 screen prints of the backs of playing cards, each a different promise to be carried out upon purchase. The intimacy of the promise coupled with a desire to know together present a strain of fulfillment that the promise's specific realization perhaps, never could.

WITH's utilization of the colors red, green and blue (and the occasional gold) allows its solutions to appear slick and graphic within the gallery space. Of course, the logic of the R G B color model lies within its potential to produce a broad range of colors through technological devices, and when properly balanced, white. It is with this in mind that although WITH's solutions involve detailed, literal descriptions and documentary evidence of real and imagined scenarios, they remain cloaked in a provocative opacity.

Philippa Warr

This new exhibition at the Rokeby Gallery comes with the subtitle 'Off the Shelf: Promises, Intentions, Actions and Objects from the WITH Collective'. The pieces are transactions where you pay a fee and the Collective fulfils a promise or creates a solution. The transaction requires input from the client either in the form of belief that an action has taken place or in a specified reaction to the solution. Extra proof that the Collective have fulfilled their promise is available but always at extra cost.

The solutions on sale at Rokeby are by turns amusing, sinister and provocative. One promises to turn 25 on behalf of the client for 300 years with three hundred 'Happy 25th Birthday' cards ready to be printed with the client's birth date. Another work offers to take the blame for any of a selection of crimes or shortcomings ranging from mundane shortcomings to corporate manslaughter. For the private view of the exhibition guests could order a glass to be accidentally broken on their behalf over the course of the evening.

A piece which caught my attention was one promising that the Collective would work for free for you on the dates listed in the work, the catch being that you had to pay £500 for this free labour and more for additional evidence. It's a wry comment on the cultural sector's expectation of unpaid work and the value of artists' time (and one which I suspect will resonate with more than a few visitors).

The Collective tap into fantasies of avoiding negative experiences and live risky ones out vicariously. If someone accidentally breaks a glass on your behalf does that mean you will no longer break that glass yourself? Will some future restaurant visit now be untainted by that embarrassing and noisy experience? Does the universe recognise the transaction?

The type of belief involved is not always metaphysical but varies from solution to solution. For example, the Collective being happy for me continuously for a decade is something that I would not be able to convince myself of, but the concept still definitely has power and value.

The works at Rokeby are without doubt a thought provoking mix but there's also a current of humour running throughout which prevents them seeming pompous or dry. A word of warning though: you'll find yourself pondering the pieces long after you leave

WITHSTORE_001 runs at Rokeby until 2nd October. For more information see the [Rokeby website here](#), [withstore online here](#), and [WITH's own website here](#).