

SOUTHWARK PARK GALLERIES

TROUBLE IN OUTER HEAVEN: PORTABLE OPS PLUS

15 September - 31 October 2021

Curated by **Jamie Sutcliffe.**

**Larry Achiampong, Joseph Buckley,
Kitty Clark, Sam Keogh,
Hardeep Pandhal, Adam Sinclair
and Jamie Sutcliffe.**

Featuring The Diamond Dogs Educational Unit:
**Uma Breakdown, Petra Szemán,
Larry Achiampong & Zara Truss Giles.**

'Trouble In Outer Heaven: Portable Ops Plus' focuses on the influence and fan cultures of 'Metal Gear Solid', one of the most popular video game franchises of all time.

Originally developed for the MSX Spectrum home computer by Hideo Kojima in 1987, 'Metal Gear's' enigmatic story has been told through multiple installments over the course of three decades. Infamous for its distinct play style based upon techniques of secrecy, concealment and stealth, the franchise has pioneered boundary-breaking experiments in player participation, while building a global fanbase for its complicated narrative and strange characters.

Exploring the unnerving possibilities of biogenetic cloning, military espionage, off-shore para-states, and the formation of private task forces charged with seizing power from the world's collapsing democracies, 'Metal Gear's' once bizarre mythos feels disturbingly appropriate to the world we inhabit in 2021.



Just as memes of the game's iconic graphics have found their way into the culture wars surrounding the 2016 US presidential election, its prescient themes of behavioural manipulation, gamification, unstable truths and geopolitical subterfuge have been increasingly explored by academics; suggesting that 'Metal Gear's' atmosphere of conspiracy and separatism has come to both predict and reflect our unstable global political climate.

From Seasteading* to the subcultural fracturing of online communities, difficult themes of social division are strangely encapsulated in the game's martial utopia, 'Outer Heaven', an ambiguous separatist state of renegade soldiers and mercenaries. Confronting both the ecstasies and problems of fandom, this exhibition asks if critical counter-languages might be found within the intricate tracteries of 'Metal Gear's' peculiar brand of speculative fiction, its bleak vision of military oppression, and its potent ideas of hope, service, community and friendship.

'Trouble In Outer Heaven: Portable Ops Plus' brings together a group of artists whose early encounters with 'Metal Gear's' unique vision and distinct poetics continue to influence their world-views and artistic practices today. Through performance, sculpture, film, and an education program for young people, the artists explore Kojima's rich yet often troubling games as opportunities for thinking through positions of decolonial critique, ludic defiance, and anti-fascist resistance.

**Seasteading - the concept of creating permanent dwellings at sea, called seasteeds, outside the territory claimed by any government.*

1. MIDlevel x Vandalorum Featuring Mister Ugly Riddles On Back Street

**Commissioned by Southwark Park Galleries and
Borås Art Biennial.**

**HD music video directed by Hardeep Pandhal and
Adam Sinclair, 4 minutes, 45 seconds**

Hardeep Pandhal continues his barbarian deconstruction of the habits of whiteness and instrumentalised heritage through a further descent into the dank underworld of fantasy game worlds, early 2000s racing simulators and warped rap music. Produced in collaboration with artist-animator Adam Sinclair, Dungeon Synth musician Vandalorum, and a mysterious spiteful goblin known only as Mister Ugly, *Riddles on Back Street* (2021) is a music video that anticipates the Uberization of cultural production and an academic job market bizarrely obsessed with personal trauma. *Metal Gear's* sneaking protagonist Solid Snake makes a covert cameo as the artist sings of crawling on shins and knees to obtain opportunities in a cultural sector characterised by its almost conspiratorial precarity.

3. Joseph Buckley plagues, fires, floods, 2021 Courtesy of the artist

Cast plastic, formica laminate, MDF

Joseph Buckley's work brings a formidable knowledge of science fictional premises, traumas and catastrophes into uncomfortable proximity with contemporary class and race politics. Through a critical sculptural practice, he foregrounds the violence of fabrication as an analogue for the social reproduction of inequality, bigotry, and ecological collapse. His phalanx of disturbingly hollow martial entities *plagues, fires, floods* (2021), draws upon the vernacular of private security companies, riot cops, and classical armories to create a composite image of a future enemy whose ancestors are, horrifically, already in our midst. Special thanks to James Miller, Del Hardin Hoyle, and Isaac Soh Fujita Howell. This project was supported by a grant from the Jerome Foundation.

2. Jamie Sutcliffe & Hardeep Pandhal Vocal Cord Parasite, 2021

**Printed poster booklet, edition of 1000,
graphic design by Hugh Frost, published by
Landfill Editions**

Reflecting on the evolving nature of the Military-Entertainment Complex, Jamie Sutcliffe and Hardeep Pandhal present an illustrated publication that considers the cross-contamination of martial agendas with civilian leisure activities. Designed by Hugh Frost and published by Landfill Editions, *Vocal Cord Parasite* reproduces two texts by Sutcliffe that span the last five years and includes a new drawing by Pandhal. Confronting the uneasy ecstasies of fandom, the texts look to *Metal Gear's* strange arsenal of biological weapons, off-shore para-states, and nano-machine infected bodies to make tentative sense of how fan enthusiasms might be manifest - or misconstrued - as forms of rapturous, and yet sometimes harmful, possession. Hardeep Pandhal is represented by Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai.

4. Sam Keogh I Won't Scatter Your Sorrow To The Heartless Sea, 2021

**Courtesy of the artist and Kerlin, Dublin.
Security clothing, plastic, audio track, army
surplus camp bed**

Loosely channeling Southwark Park's history as a munitions depot during the Second World War, Sam Keogh engages the gallery's charged location as an opportunity for covert infiltration and an exercise in the poetics of 'cosplay', a fan activity which sees its participants dress as their favorite video game characters. Adopting the mutated likeness of Big Boss, protagonist of several *Metal Gear* games, Keogh will reproduce the action of sneaking into the exhibition's opening event while ventriloquizing a monologue that reflects on cloned bodies, doubles, and doppelgängers. Weaving the tragic history of the Winchester rifle empire with the circuitries of contemporary cybernetics, and the ghosts of *Metal Gear's* fallen soldiers with the extractive residues of oil and blood, the discarded costume of *I Won't Scatter Your Sorrow To The Heartless Sea* (2021) will then give voice to the complex enmeshment of bodies, technologies and finite resources that form the interwoven agents of capitalist disintegration.

5. Larry Achiampong

Beyond The Substrata, 2020, commissioned by London Borough of Waltham Forest

**Courtesy of the artist and Copperfield, London
HD video projection, 18 minutes, 39 seconds**

Occupying the CCTV screens and vacant aisles of an abandoned supermarket in East London, Larry Achiampong's film *Beyond The Substrata* (2020) borrows its spectral choreography from one of *Metal Gear Solid's* most mysterious characters, Frank Jaeger. More commonly known by his codename Gray Fox, Jaeger is a cyborgian mercenary whose body and mind seem possessed by the terminal dynamism of endless combat. For Achiampong, this sequence of eternally embattled motions becomes an opportunity to think through the confrontation of race as a social construct with blackness as an embodied reality, situating the movements of the work's performers in a distinctly British public environment that has always been, and yet increases to be, hostile to bodies of colour.

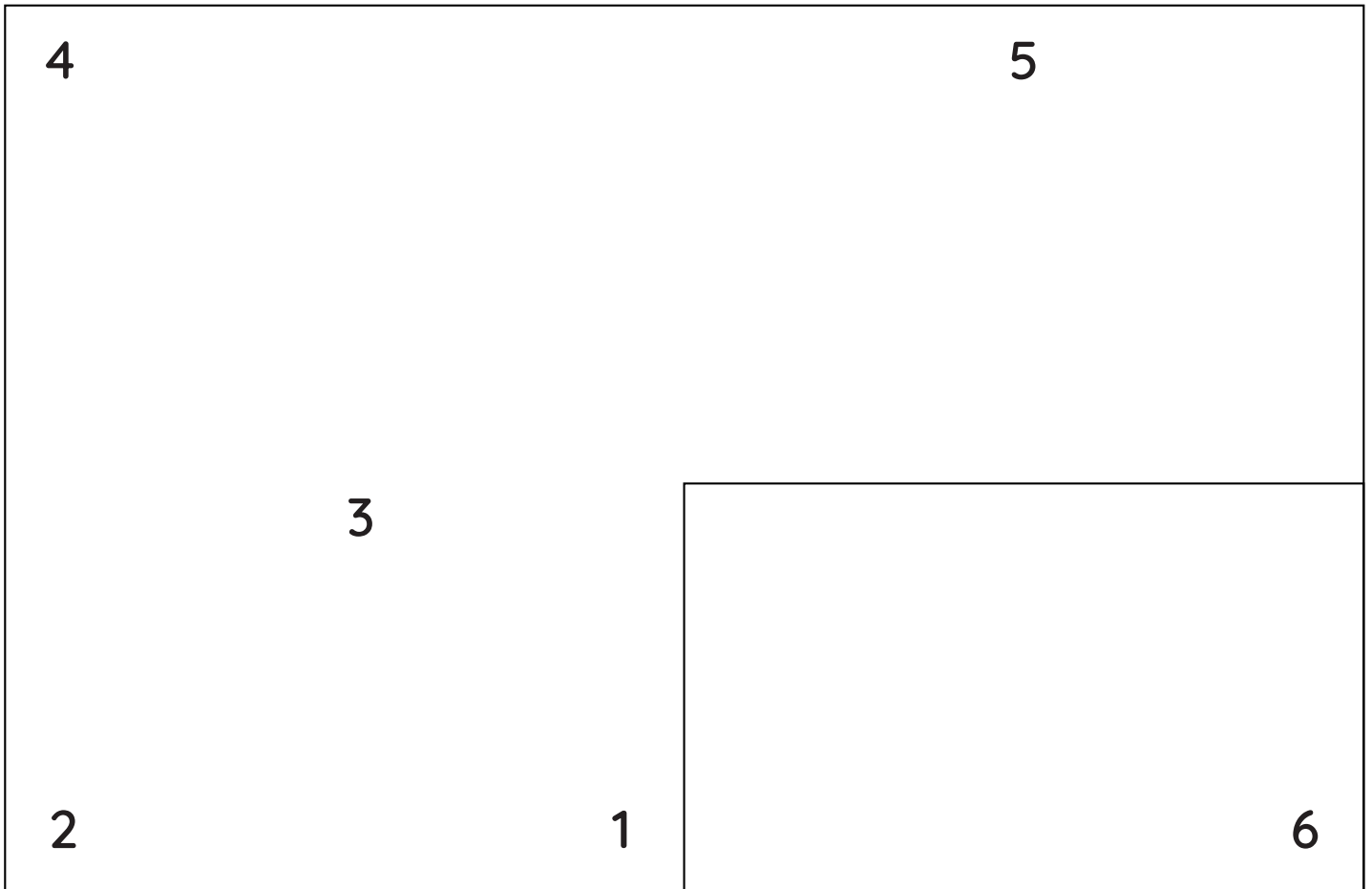
6. Kitty Clark

Only Good Guys Go To Heaven, 2021

Courtesy of the artist

Wood, paper, 8 channel sound, 10 minute loop, starting on the hour

Through stories, environments and digital artifacts, Kitty Clark builds quietly haunting fragmentary game worlds that test our expectations of reality, play and emotional investment. Borrowing the construction techniques and uncanny atmospheres of popular spook houses, dark rides, and dilapidated theme parks, *Only Good Guys Go To Heaven* (2021) recreates and repurposes the air conditioning systems that characterize *Metal Gear Solid's* oppressive architectural environments as a mouthpiece through which disembodied voices might whisper their own peculiar tales, and in turn, be contradicted and contested.



Events

Diamond Dogs Educational Unit // Free Young People's Programme

Saturdays 25 Sept, 2, 9 & 23 Oct //

1-4pm each day // Online and at Dilston Gallery

Free, booking required (see website)

A programme for young people (13-19 years) drawing on the influence of 'Metal Gear' to explore ideas of play, storytelling, animation, sound, and memory. Led by artists Uma Breakdown, Petra Szemán, and Larry Achiampong & Zara Truss Giles, participants will be encouraged to explore their love of films, games, cartoons, and music to inspire their own creative projects. For further information and booking visit our website southwarkparkgalleries.org

Tactical Espionage Action In A Haunted House // In conversation event

3-4pm Sunday 31st Oct // Lake Gallery

No booking required, capacity will be limited

No booking required, capacity will be limited

Join exhibition curator Jamie Sutcliffe and exhibiting artist Kitty Clark for a walk-around conversation of 'Trouble in Outer Heaven: Portable Ops Plus'. Covering the show's themes and works, this informal talk will explore the politics of gaming, the awkwardness of making an exhibition as a fan, and each contributors' personal history with the 'Metal Gear' franchise and other video games of note.

Human Planet User Presents:

A Live Stream of 'Metal Gear' (1987)

8pm on Wednesdays

22, 29 Sept, 6, 13 Oct

Watch live on:

[twitch.tv/human_planet_user](https://www.twitch.tv/human_planet_user)

Over the course of the exhibition, Human Planet User a.k.a Kitty Clark, live streams her playing of Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear*.

About Jamie Sutcliffe

Jamie Sutcliffe is a writer, curator and Co-Director of Strange Attractor Press. He is the editor of Documents of Contemporary Art: Magic published by Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, Berserker, a journal of comics and genre studies, and co-editor with Mark Pilkington of Strange Attractor Journal V. His essays, interviews and reviews have been published by Art Monthly, ArtAgenda, Frieze, Rhizome, and The White Review amongst others, while selected catalogue commissions include The New Museum, New York and the Austrian Cultural Forum, London. His curatorial projects include The Psychopathic Now! at Flat Time House, and The Shadow Moses Incident at Primary, Nottingham.

SOUTHWARK PARK GALLERIES

About Southwark Park Galleries

Founded in 1984 by The Bermondsey Artists' Group, the organisation has commissioned and presented over 650 free exhibitions by emergent, overlooked and established British and international artists.

Formerly known as CGP London, the galleries comprise Lake Gallery and Dilston Gallery. We are a registered charity and Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, supported by Southwark Council and rely on key support from various Trusts, Foundations, individuals, sponsors, donations and venue hire to sustain our free and ambitious programme of contemporary art, community engagement and education work.

'Trouble in Outer Heaven: Portable Ops Plus' is made possible thanks to the support of The Paul & Louise Cooke Endowment, Arts Council England and Southwark Council.

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