

**what
makes
you
upwardly
mobile?**

DEBORA DELMAR CORP.

UPWARD MOBILITY

Upper Gallery

28 March - 17 May

Did you know that 2015 is the 'Year of Mexico in the UK'? This is a project established between the governments of Mexico and the United Kingdom to promote better understanding between our two societies. Cultural organisations all over the UK and Mexico are developing new work and presenting new exhibitions and other activities.

As part of this project, Modern Art Oxford's Curator, Ciara Moloney, was invited to Mexico to meet artists and galleries with a view to inviting an artist to Oxford to make a new exhibition of work. One of our priorities here at the gallery is to create high quality opportunities for young artists.

Upward Mobility by the artist Debora Delmar Corp. is a result of these joint ambitions.

UPWARD MOBILITY

Today we are surrounded by even more images since the explosion of communications technology in the 21st century. Social media, smartphones and ubiquitous wifi have in turn supplied advertisers with greater information on our hopes, fears, desires and dreams - as well as channels through which to reach us.

Working with sculpture, video, digital collage and installation, Débora Delmar Corp. adopts the branding, merchandising and production techniques of global corporations to examine the ways in which commodity culture structures our everyday life and routines.

For *Upward Mobility*, her first solo exhibition in the UK, Delmar reconfigures the familiar iconography of interior design in a variety of witty assemblages. Three vast fabric banners hang from the ceiling of the Upper Gallery. Emblazoned with imagery culled from a variety of online sources including Wikipedia, a celebrity website and the social media page of a bank in Mexico, they are fenced in by a series of fluorescent kitchen countertops, carpet-topped coffee tables and vivid green hedges.

Interspersed throughout the installation are numerous Mexican products and mass-produced objects which the artist collected during a month-long residency in Oxford. Delmar threads this bricolage of references and materials among the leaves and furniture in the gallery, evoking the cycle of consumption in local and global contexts.

In Delmar's world, gin and juice cocktails are transformed from a party drink into the base of a kitchen countertop, a fluffy rug is printed onto flat carpet masquerading as a table top and disposable tabloid imagery is scaled up to create a heroic banner.

Cutting and pasting glossy images from lifestyle websites and corporate advertising campaigns, Delmar draws attention to the manipulative strategies at work in mainstream media today. Stripped of its commercial context and reconstituted within the alternative logic of a public gallery, Delmar questions the codified assumptions around class, economics and ethnicity perpetuated by high finish branded imagery, particularly the equation of material wealth with success.

By scaling up and reconfiguring objects of desire, Delmar highlights the aspirational nature of the deluge of images promoting mass-consumption. Positing these objects within an immersive environment, the artist suggests that the directive to consume has become more intense, operating today across multiple physical and digital platforms at an ever-increasing speed.

Test Run is on view alongside *Upward Mobility* in the Piper Gallery, Project Space, Yard and Basement. This exhibition explores artists' interventions in public space through film, performance and photographs. These exhibitions are part of Modern Art Oxford's 2015 programme which explores the notion of the 'commons' or shared space, be that physical, digital or conceptual, which is freely available to all.

EVENTS

Artist's Tour

Saturday 28 March, 2pm. Free

Join Débora Delmar in conversation with Modern Art Oxford curators Ciara Moloney and Ben Roberts for an introduction to the exhibitions.

LIST OF WORK

1. *Upward Access I*, 2015

Audio, graphite paint, Zuco juice powder, plastic glass, Buxus Sempervirens, plastic bags, bark chips, trolley, fake hair, gloves.

Dimensions variable

2. *Freshly Squeezed*, 2015

Digitally printed on concept flag
700 cm x 400 cm

3. *Kim K: Before and After (Brunette – Platinum)*, 2015

Buxus Sempervirens, wig.

Dimensions variable

4. *John*, 2015

Buxus Sempervirens, fake hair, jute baskets

Dimensions variable

5. *Work and Pleasure*, 2015

Custom made Jesmonite counter top with stainless steel sink and bright steel legs, vinyl, plastic bag, knife, maid's uniform, cardboard boxes, soap, M&S tea cake, T-shirt, plastic lid, faux Ugg boot, clay, silicon, robe, pen, pencil, Itsu container, matchboxes, Jesmonite, Tajin bottles.

Dimensions variable

6. *Potent Potables*, 2015

Buxus Sempervirens, plastic bottles, coffee cup, paper towel.

Dimensions variable

7. *Luxury Study*, 2015

Wood, digitally printed carpet, baseball caps, tennis Shoes, cardboard box, paper, plastic bag, glasses, erasers, glass cup, White Company slippers, Ligustrum jonandrum, Peony and Cashmere diffuser, underwear, hub caps, trash can, Itsu container, Tajin bottle, cigarettes.

Dimensions variable

8. *Green Screen*, 2015

Hedges, wood, bark chips, tablets, video, paper bag, clay, cardboard, Ebbingus ebbingei.

Dimensions variable

9. *Health and Wealth*, 2015

Digitally printed on concept flag
600 cm x 300 cm

10. *Upward Access II*, 2015

Audio, glasses, Zuco juice powder, graphite paint

11. *Discreet Leisure*, 2015

Wood, digital printed carpet, hat, Jesmonite cast of faux ugg boot, coins, plastic bags, tumblers, fake hair, Zuco juice powder, paper

Dimensions variable

12. *Future Living*, 2015

Hedge screens, hub caps, wood, bark chips, paper bags, Tajin bottle, pink baby grow, plastic ribbons, british curly kale, White Company toy rabbit, faux pearl necklaces, Custom made Jesmonite counter top with stainless steel sink and bright steel legs, black champagne glasses.

Dimensions variable

13. *Artificially Contained*, 2015

Paper bag, plastic container, Zuco mango and orange juice

Dimensions variable

14. *Vanilla Essence*, 2015

Digitally printed on concept flag
750 cm x 260 cm

15. *Raising Awareness*, 2015

Wood, digitally printed carpet, cardboard box, Jesmonite faux Ugg boots and fabric, glasses, paper napkins, Jesmonite Zuco juice powder, Styrofoam, mannequin heads, plastic cutlery, plastic cup, plastic bag, Jesmonite and wood stick, paper bag, T-shirt, cigarettes, water tank, funnel.

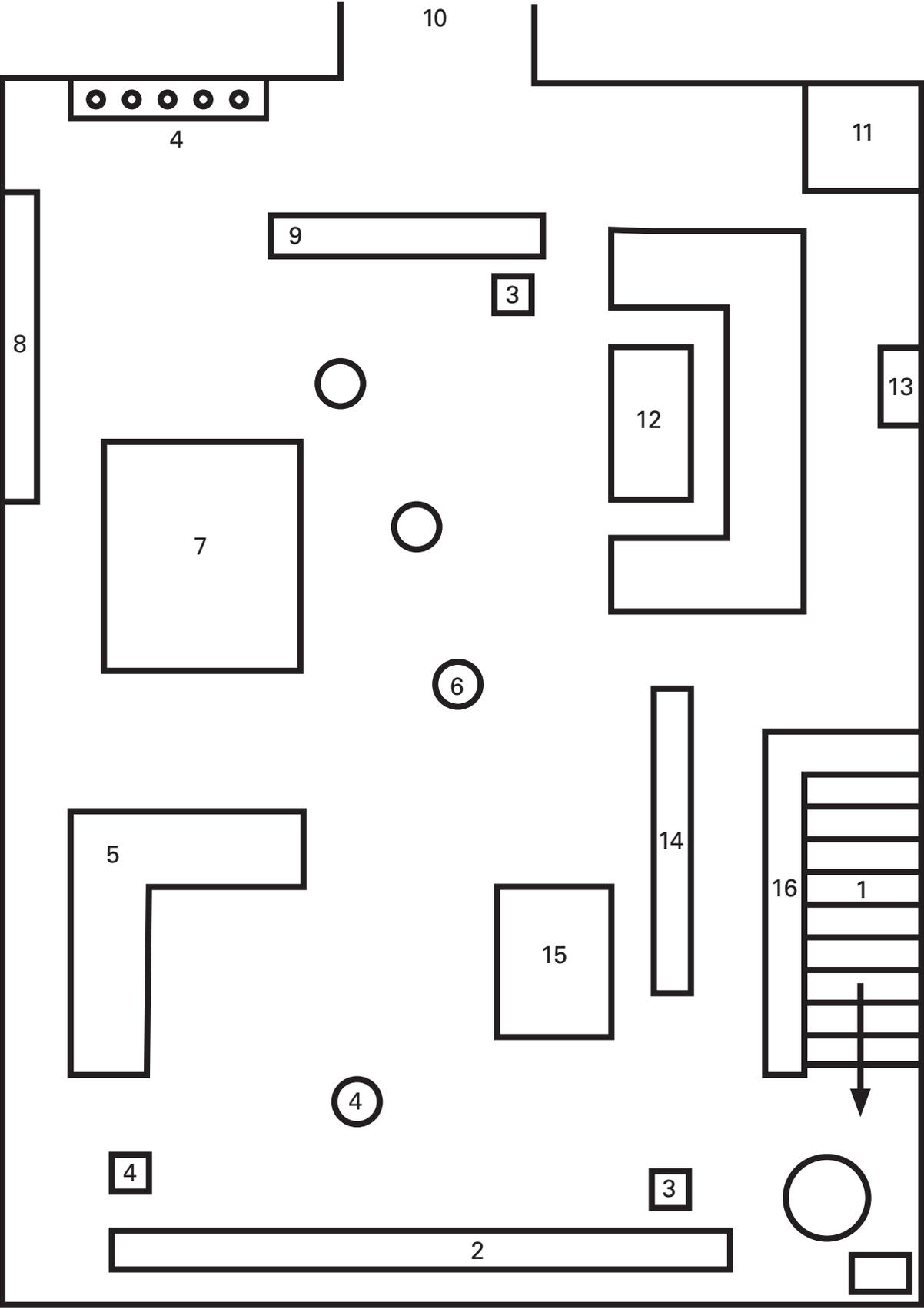
Dimensions variable

16. *Welcome Screen*, 2015

Hedge screens, wood, New York beanie, chop sticks, cardboard, bracelets, plastic juice bottle, embroidered crests, magazine.

Dimensions variable

UPPER GALLERY PLAN





Thursday, March 19, 2015 – 4:04 PM ☆

Inbox x



Ciara Moloney (Curator of Exhibitions and Projects, Modern Art Oxford)

Let's talk about your new show at Modern Art Oxford, *Upward Mobility*.



Debora Delmar (Debora Delmar Corp)

I have been working with ideas of lifestyle and '*aspirational aesthetics*' in my work for a while now developing different sub themes that comment on very specific trends and forms of branding in contemporary capitalism. *Upward Mobility* is a show that combines many of these elements, focusing on how lifestyle is nowadays, sold as a way to achieve a higher status in society. Many of the elements in the show like 'green juice' are symbols and signifiers that represent this contemporary concept of a 'good life'.



Ciara Moloney

This proliferation of imaging has intensified with the advent of the internet...



Debora Delmar

Well, yeah, because branding is perfect for the internet. Pages like Google can track things that you are interested in according to your searches and even to your Facebook profile which makes it easier for brands to advertise specifically for you in the same space where you are interacting socially with other people or while you are reading an article, etc.



Ciara Moloney

Could you talk about the way your social media profile forms an extension of your practice?



Debora Delmar

I started using Facebook in 2006. It was just a social platform and then little by little ads started popping up. Now ads show up on your page depending on who you are and what your specific interests are. People started complaining about it but I found it pretty interesting.

I started working under the name Debora Delmar Corp. in 2009 when I was in NY going to School of Visual Arts, thinking of how artists work as brands more and more because of the internet, Facebook, Instagram etc.



Ciara Moloney

Let's talk a bit more about the works in the show - you've created a series of sculptures...



Debora Delmar

Well, I was thinking of these images of countertops I found online - a lot of them have glasses of orange juice as part of their display and orange juice is a classic 'good lifestyle' morning drink, so I was trying to combine them both.

I decided to make the three as different gestures: one marbled - so it still talked about the aspiration of a marble countertop, one spilled onto the countertop - again like stock images I had seen and then a gradient one.



Ciara Moloney

What's the significance of the gin and juice mix which forms the base of the countertop?



Debora Delmar

I liked that gin is a British drink, a local product and I like combining local vs global as a site-specific thing being in Oxford, exploring elements of this culture that you can find in other places. Juice is funny because it has become a high end commodity in places like NY or LA.



Ciara Moloney

The countertop stands on a vinyl (printed with the image of a silver tea tray) and are surrounded by green manicured hedges - are those intended as similarly British references?



Debora Delmar

Yeah totally but, also seen from an outsiders perspective - like a silver tray is something every woman might aspire to own. The hedges come from the idea of British Royal gardens and how the middle class has appropriated this aesthetic in their own living space.



Ciara Moloney

Are you interested in how status symbols change meaning depending on the national context?



Debora Delmar

Totally, I really think context still makes a difference - even though you can find a McDonalds everywhere in the world it has different connotations depending on where you are.

But nowadays, information goes faster and we can have access to the same products as people around the world - but only for the privileged group that have access to the internet.



Ciara Moloney

So that leads me to the Ugg boots which make an appearance (or two) in the show...



Debora Delmar

I was more interested in fake Ugg boots - I liked that it has become a look which went from preppy / celebrity to accessible for all. It's not only that cheaper versions are being made - like the ones that i'm using in the show which I bought at a supermarket in Mexico - high end brands are making their own versions - like the slippers in the show from the White Company.



Ciara Moloney

You have included the real boot and a cast of the boot...



Debora Delmar

Yeah it's like a whole cycle from the internet to real life to copies of the real objects to the idea of people manufacturing these objects to be sold in different contexts.

Like the transformation from the idea of an object to the actual object itself, I like the idea of how advertisements create the illusion of fulfilling an ideal but that in the end when you purchase the objects it is never actually as exciting.



Ciara Moloney

You mentioned how shops manipulate visitors with environmental factors like music, smell, lighting. Can you talk about the ways in which *Upward Mobility* adopts that methodology?



Debora Delmar

The whole show is designed in that way, creating paths for people to walk on, manipulating emotions through happy colours, giving a sensation of being in nature with the plants inside the gallery - also employing elements of smell with Mexican brand powder juice.

The entrance is designed like a high end store with the type of sounds stores use to attract customers, also video is used in the same way like a subconscious kind of thing.



Ciara Moloney

So the videos are to be seen in our peripheral vision the way we would consume advertising- almost without paying attention?



Debora Delmar

Yeah like the way videos are used in airports, banks, malls etc. It's interesting how screens have just become part of our regular life.

EXTRACT FROM 24/7: TERMINAL CAPITALISM AND THE ENDS OF SLEEP BY JONATHAN CRARY

It is obvious how important the concept of reification, or some closely affiliated account, remains for any understanding of global capitalism and technological culture.

Whether one's vantage point is Marxist or not, there is no evading the extent to which the internet and digital communications have been the engine of the relentless financialization and commodification of more and more regions of individual and social life. This has created a field of conditions markedly distinct from several decades ago.

As late as the 1960s, numerous critiques of consumer culture outlined the dissonance between an environment saturated by images and products and the individual who, though ensnared in its shallowness and falseness, grasped even dimly its essential discrepancy with their hopes and life needs. One endlessly consumed products that inevitably failed to fulfil their original, if fraudulent, promises.

At present, however, the idea of a divergence between a human world and the operation of global systems with the capacity to occupy every waking hour of one's life seems dated and inapt. Now there are numerous pressures for individuals to reimagine and refigure themselves as being of the same consistency and values as the dematerialized commodities and social connections in which they are immersed so extensively.

Reification has proceeded to the point where the individual has to invent a self-understanding that optimizes or facilitates their participation in digital milieus and speeds. Paradoxically, this means impersonating the inert and the inanimate. These particular terms might seem deeply unsuited to providing an account of emulation and identification with the shifting and intangible events and processes with which one becomes technologically engaged. Because one cannot literally enter any of the electronic mirages that constitute the interlocking marketplaces of global consumerism, one is obliged to construct fantasmatic compatibilities between the human and a realm of choices that is fundamentally unlivable.

There is no possible harmonization between actual living beings and the demands of 24/7 capitalism, but there are countless inducements to delusionally suspend or obscure some of the humiliating limitations of lived experience, whether emotional or biological. Figurations of the inert or inanimate also operate as a protective or

numbing shield, to evade recognition of the harsh expendability of life within contemporary economic and institutional arrangements.

There is a pervasive illusion that, as more of the earth's biosphere is annihilated or irreparably damaged, human beings can magically disassociate themselves from it and transfer their interdependencies to the mecosphere of global capitalism. The more one identifies with the insubstantial electronic surrogates for the physical self, the more one seems to conjure an exemption from the biocide underway everywhere on the planet. At the same time, one becomes chillingly oblivious to the fragility and transience of actual living things.

In the contemporary marketplace, the many products and services that promise to 'reverse the aging process' are not appealing to a fear of death so much as offering superficial ways to simulate the non-human properties and temporalities of the digital zones one is already inhabiting for much of each day. Also, the belief that one can subsist independently of environmental catastrophe is paralleled by fantasies of individual survival or prosperity amid the destruction of civil society and the elimination of institutions that retain any semblance of social protection or mutual support, whether public education, social services, or healthcare for those most in need.

Jonathan Crary, extracts from 24/7: Terminal Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep (Verso Books, 2013) pp. 99-101.

WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE IN THE NETWORK SOCIETY BY STEVEN SHAVIRO

So this is what it means to live in the network society. We have moved out of time and into space. Anything you want is yours for the asking. You can get it right here and right now. All you have to do is pay the price. First of all, you must pay the monetary price, since money is the universal equivalent for all commodities. But you also have to pay the informational price, since information is also a universal equivalent. Information is the common measure and the medium of exchange for all knowledge, all perception, all passion, and all desire. The universal equivalent for experience, in short.

In the network society, experience will be digital or not at all. But this also means that what you get is never quite what you paid for. It's always just a tiny bit less. The mystery of the extraction of surplus value, unveiled by Marx in the context of nineteenth-century capitalism, applies to the information economy as well. The one real innovation of the network society is this: now surplus extraction is at the centre of consumption as well as production.

When you buy something from Microsoft, or DynaZauber, all the formal conditions of equal exchange are met. And yet there is always something extra, something left over, something that is missing from your side of the equation. A surplus has leaked out of the exchange process. What's missing is what is more than information: the qualitative dimension of experience or the continuum of analogue space in between all those ones and zeroes. From a certain point of view, of course, this surplus is nothing at all. It is empty and insubstantial, almost by definition. For if it did exist, it could easily be coded, quantified, and informatized, to any desired degree of accuracy.

It is not that there is some hidden essence, basic to human existence, that somehow cannot be rendered by information machines. It is rather that information can all too well account for everything; there is literally nothing that it cannot capture and code. But this nothing is precisely the point. Because of this nothing, too much is never enough, and our desires are never satisfied. This nothing insinuates itself into our dreams. It is what always keeps us coming back for more. And that is 'the dirty little secret that corporations know'. [...]

Steven Shaviro, extracts from Connected, or What it Means to Live in the Network Society (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) pp. 131-3, 249-50.

KEVIN BRENNAN, CEO AND LOUISE MELCHIOR, BRINKWORTH, LONDON BASED DESIGN CONSULTANCY: INTERVIEW BY CIARA MOLONEY, CURATOR OF EXHIBITIONS AND PROJECTS

CM: Could you walk us through the process, from meeting a client to a finished interior?

KB: People come to us because the sales are not working. The initial meeting is about making them look at themselves, where they were and where they might have lost something. Ben Sherman has a fantastic heritage that got taken over by some sort of laddish, football thing. There's a lot of British brands that that happened to, Burberry and Fred Perry. Ben Sherman's eye for detail and their dogtooth designs became their trademark and we wanted to focus the brand on that. It was a British Mod language and so we looked at trying to recreate a social, level playing field for it, like real public spaces, toilets, pubs, bars, the Underground – that sort of aesthetic.

CM: So they asked you to redesign shops or multiple platforms?

KB: It was “give them an identity”, it was a brand experience, which is a dirty word for an interior designer. But it was, “give us something to focus on as a platform”, which is a flagship in Covent Garden, in Carnaby Street. So it was back to the home of the Mod. Then we developed an interior language, based on those public spaces, so and from that the palette came out, a palette we thought was appropriate. Interior design for retail is a lot like theatre design because most of the time it's not real. It's all about surface and some people don't get that.

Architects and intellectuals think it's not important. But it is really important because it's commerce and it's how we roll.

CM: Do you develop that language in collaboration with the whole team?

KB: Yeah, we fill the space with imagery. I would explain my experience of that brand. I explain the attitude of it, show some films, trawl through what they're about and not try and blinker them. You collectively put together a mood board.

CM: Do you use images from all sorts of sources online and in magazines?

KB: Everywhere. Art is a great source of ideas... We encourage Pinterest, we've got our own website,

Instagram, anything like that. We're a team of visual people. We are very much image-led and we sell ourselves on image. From this we show them that thought process so they feel involved. If they don't believe in it, then we part company rather than compromise it. If you choose the right material, it's appropriate. Every material has a reason for being and the art is when you juxtapose it and how you put it together.

With Karen Millen we nailed a material that was a piece of glass, we called Vegas mirror. That against concrete just set up this language of a Karen Millen girl, a certain edge and a bit of bling. It was a perfect marriage and it got the brand absolutely perfect.

CM: You talk about the Karen Millen woman, was that something they articulated to you?

KB: They didn't have a specific vocabulary because they spoke through their clothes; you can spot a Karen Millen girl a mile off, high end but not high street. It's a girl who would spend a month's wages on that dress. It's changing now as a brand, it's much more international and shopping is changing. Our new Karen Millen shops are much more sophisticated, even though materiality-wise, they're less precious. They're more like a gallery, a showroom. You let the product breathe a bit more. Times are changing and we change with that brand.

CM: Debora wanted to know more about how you design space with a person in mind. Ultimately are you trying to encourage people to feel comfortable to want to shop?

KB: Yeah, it's all about pace and light and dark. You can apply material that gives pace, you know you want to move through somewhere. It is this sort of sublime in a sense and very controllable. You can dictate anything you want. There are sort of rules that you obey, especially in retail, where the cash desk goes, how many changing rooms, where it fits.

CM: Is there any particular environment that you feel was particularly successful?

KB: Carl Freedman Gallery, which was a very difficult building. What his requirements were for the gallery to work, was a fascinating journey for me to learn.

CM: Did you have a different approach to that space or was it like a store because that gallery still has a

selling function. Did it still operate in a similar way?

KB: It's totally different. With a gallery, it has to accept anything, doesn't it? The gallery almost protects the public from the art. In retail, there is the product and product is king. The actual customer is anonymous but you generally know who they are, and with Karen Millen, we know exactly who the type of customer is entering those shops.

CM: Does the client tell you that or do you determine this?

KB: They do, through their visual language and their collection. Designers do, now and again, want to change their direction suddenly. They want to be seen as more sophisticated. So they want all the shop materials to change also. It's subliminal, working with the brand. They're not gallery spaces. Retail is always so pinpointed – it has to be or else it fails and you lose your job, whereas galleries are something else.

Materials are seen very differently in different countries. A wood floor wouldn't work in Moscow because they expect marble or glass or mirror. Muscovites wouldn't tolerate shabby chic. Working in the Middle East for the first time, was interesting because Karen Millen there don't want fitting rooms because the women don't try anything on. They buy everything, stick it in the car, go home and try it on there. In those territories, there's no dwell time.

CM: Have you ever work with other environmental factors like temperature, sound or smell?

Louise Melchior: No, but they do it themselves.

KB: Quite often it's a cedar scent because that kills moths. Traditionally all wardrobes were backed with cedar. Working with shadow and finding the light and dark, that's what is always done – the ying and yang space. We did a jeweller's shop once and that was really just pinpoint lit, the focus was on the property. Saying that, Abercrombie and Fitch – you walk through the shop and it's completely dark like a pumping nightclub.

CM: How have you seen the industry change over the last 20 years with the rise of digital media?

KB: I don't think it's changed at all. There's that whole "death of shopping", it's like the music industry thinking it's going to be dead and it

isn't. It's just a different format. We've never been petrified by it, mainly because our high street clients know their business. They just saw it as another opportunity. They've realised it's about scale and architecture and captivation.

All Saints made these vast, big statements like flagships and people just came as tourists and bought online – the stores supported their online experience. They became theme parks, in a sense. Rather than four or five shops in a neighbourhood, they had one massive one on Regents Street. It was all about that brand experience. Really the only difference is that the shop assistants got better educated and they had to capture that person. The spaces have to perform better because it's the actual experiences that people remember. Being more generous with fitting rooms and lounging time and dwelling time – Top Shop are good at it, aren't they? With nail-bars and cake shops and all this stuff. That keeps tills banging out.

LM: There are a lot of coffee shops tied into retail experience at the moment that didn't happen five or ten years ago. A lot of us like the experience of the store, the floor under your feet that you don't necessarily mentally notice but you feel it, you're aware of it. Part of the seduction of shopping is being in an environment.

Kevin Brennan is a CEO of Brinkworth, a London-based design consultancy established in 1990 and working across a range of disciplines including architecture, interior and brand design. Kevin's work has been widely featured in national as well as international press, including The Telegraph on Saturday, German AD, Architecture Today, Frame, Blueprint, and Harper's Bazaar.