

# London Performance Studios

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Penarth Centre, Penarth Street  
London SE15 1TR

## *BLANKS*

Sam Cottington

April 17, 2024 – April 28, 2024

London Performance Studios is pleased to present *BLANKS*, a major new commission by Associate Artist Sam Cottington, in which the languages of sculpture and performance are brought into counterpoint with the apparatus of the exhibition and the theatre. *BLANKS* can be understood as an exhibition in a series of acts—a series of actions, or sleights of hand by the artist—as well as a piece of theatre, in which objects and staging act as stand-ins for various modes of discursive production and the publics that such discourse might bring to life.

First, Cottington seems to present the viewer with an enumeration of readymades. However, as the viewer approaches these found objects for a second look one, and then another, of a series of found telephones begins to ring. The suite of assemblages is now an environment-cum-scenography for four plays written by the artist, and performed by actors somewhere on the other end of the line.

Performed live over the phone, each play perverts the status of the objects staged for exhibition by inviting listeners to engage with a series of unclear relationships and scenarios, invoked and mediated by contemporary communication technology.

As sculpture becomes prop, viewer becomes audience, and exhibition becomes stage, Cottington explores what critic Sianne Ngai has called the 'gimmicks of production': those moments when an object or person performs too much or too little—when it's too easy, undeserving of praise or overly produced, trying too hard, camp—and how in those moments, the sublimated labour in everyday judgements of taste or aesthetic value are revealed. In setting the sculpture within the language of the readymade and materiality of the assemblage, and against the made reality of the theatre—sculptural realism against theatrical melodrama—*BLANKS* asks us to deconstruct how the discursive lines of aesthetic acceptability, propriety, decency, and criticality are shored up by a policing of the suspension of disbelief, in whatever genre of 'real life' scenario they are encountered.

Scripts from the four plays presented in *BLANKS* are collected in new publication *Phone Plays*, which accompanies the exhibition. This is the first publication in *Scores*, a new imprint co-commissioned by Montez Press and London Performance Studios, that publishes scripts and performance texts by artists, theatre-makers and performance-makers working between the visual and theatrical arts.

Sam Cottington (he/him): is an artist and writer based between London and Frankfurt. His written work takes form as plays, novellas and short stories and his artistic work spans painting, sculpture, video and installation. He studied Art and Art History at Goldsmiths University in London and is currently studying Fine Art at Städelschule in Frankfurt. His first novella *people person* was published by JOAN in 2023. Recent exhibitions included *zaza*, Milan (2023), *Ginny on Frederick*, London (2022) and *Yaby*, Madrid (2020).

Valerie McCann (she/her): is a performing artist, movement director, yoga instructor and embodied researcher. Originally from New Hampshire, Valerie graduated from the now-defunct College of Santa Fe in 2002 where she studied theatre and dance. She holds an MFA in Movement Directing and Teaching from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Valerie works collaboratively with artists and ensembles across the US, UK and Europe. In Los Angeles Valerie was a founding member of ARTEL (American Russian Theatre Ensemble Laboratory). She trained extensively with SITI Company in New York City and collaborated with company members and associates on several new works. Valerie was a member of the international ensemble *Dynamika Metamorfozy* with NetTheatre at the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw, PL. She assisted director Samantha Shay/Source Material in the creation of several new works, including the premier of *A Thousand Tongues* at the 2016 Theatre Olympics. She has a decades long collaborative relationship with the artist Than Hussein Clark and is a member of The Directors Theatre Writers Theatre. Valerie's recent solo performances are inspired by her teachers Deborah Hay and Mary Overlie.

Martin Edwards (he/him): is an OFFIE-nominated actor who has performed at various venues including Trafalgar Studios, Soho Theatre and Southwark Playhouse. As a playwright, he graduated from The Central School of Speech & Drama after completing the MA in Writing for Stage and Broadcast Media. His end of year writing project (a feature film) placed in the top 10% of all scripts submitted nationally as part of BBC Writers-room's Open Call, 2023. He made his Radio 4 playwriting debut in 2020 with his play *Death Knock*, based on his time as a crime reporter in the early 2000s.

Joanna Holden (she/her): is an actor based in London. Most recent productions include *Pinnocchio* Hull Truck Theatre, *Lets Build polka* Theatre and Bologna Festival, *71 Coltman St* Hull Truck, *Get Happy* director `Told by an Idiot, *Bananas in Pyjamas* Clowns without Borders, *The Firebird Bamboozle* Theatre Company. The Xmas Cracker, Hull Truck, *The Tempest* and *Bleak House* Creation Theatre Company, *Peter Pan* Hull Truck Theatre, *Rising Up* English Folk Expo, *Twelfth Night* Lyceum/Bristol Old Vic, *Where There's Muck There's Bras* Northern Exhibition and has also worked with York Theatre Royal, Bristol Old Vic, The British Library, Manchester Royal Exchange, Live Theatre, Northern Stage (Founder Member) Svenska Theatre Finland, Soho Theatre, Keswick Theatre by the Lake, Bush Theatre, The Royal Court, Bolton Octagon, RNT, Sheffield Crucible, Perth Rep, The Gate, The Tricycle, *Polka*, *The Gilded Balloon*. Companies include *Vamos Theatre Company*, *The Northern Exhibition*, *Told by an Idiot*, *Kneehigh*, *Clowns without Borders*, *Cirque Du Soleil*, *Cartoon de Salvo*, *Vtol Dance Company*, *RSC*, *North East Theatre Consortium*, *Bamboozle Theatre Company*, *The Ding Foundation*. Film includes: *An interview with a Hitman* and *The Enormous Turnip*.

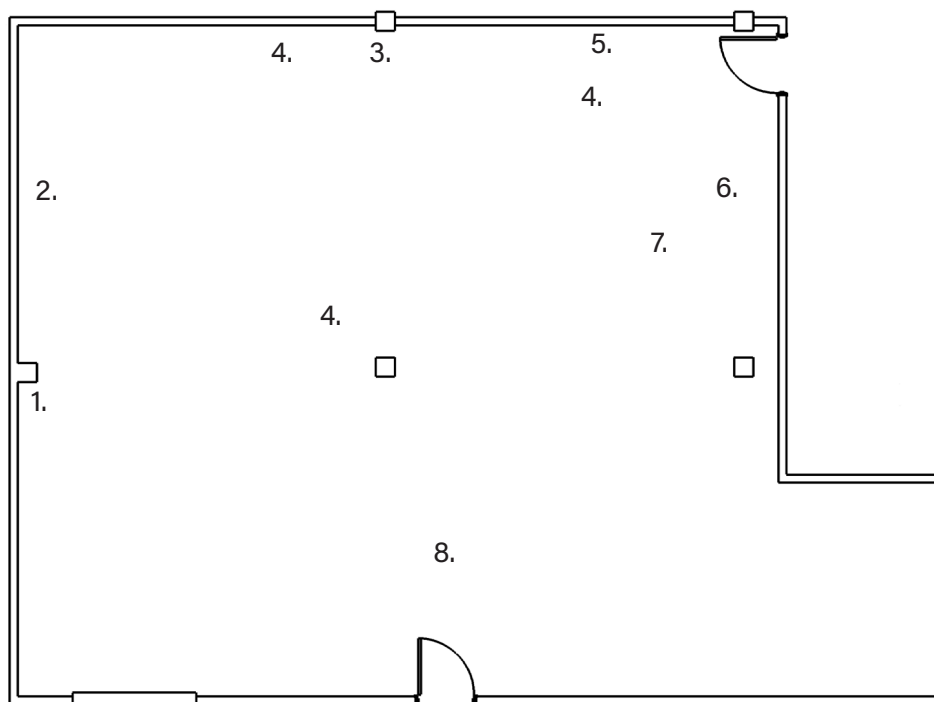
Biz Lyon (she/her): is an actor and director based in Central London. She has trained at The Juilliard School in New York and received her MFA in acting from East15 Acting School in London. She recently played the title and multiple roles in *'Yaga'* at The Drayton Arms, an Arts Council funded thriller revolving around the folklore of Baba Yaga. Biz' most recent directing projects were for Little Lion's "Stories from the Past" and "Stories from Home" series for which she directed *'The Florrons' Cake*, *Mrs. Kray*, and *'Across the Causeway'*, three new plays from Canadian writers.

Montez Press was formed in 2012 and has since commissioned & published over 500 experimental works by artists, writers and thinkers, with a focus on queer and intersectional feminist practices, through the lens of artists' writing. The name Montez draws from three iterations of the spirit of Lola Montez: a dancer, lover, stubborn and ambitious free spirit anticipating modern female self-determination in the nineteenth century. In the mid-twentieth century, Maria Montez—naming herself after Lola and known as the Queen of Technicolor for her many roles in costume adventure films—was said to be a seductress and terrible actress but gained cult status for her glamour. Lastly, it was Mario Montez—an underground trans actor, who became famous for roles in movies by Andy Warhol and Jack Smith—who named himself after Maria.

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1. Sam Cottington  
*a woman with a dead horse,*  
*a man with a toddler,* 2024  
stage made of wood, dimensions variable
2. Sam Cottington  
*Me and all hotels will centre*  
*At all You had it*  
*Its image of him living appears,* 2024  
bikes, mugs, bed sheet, vinyl text,  
sports bottle, dimensions variable
3. Sam Cottington  
*Get,* 2024  
lime bike, bedsheet, dimensions variable
4. Sam Cottington  
*Blanks, Plague, Women & Angels,*  
*Central Auto,* 2024  
plays performed over the phone
5. Sam Cottington  
*Tallulah (Lora, stopover, small part cult),* 2024  
bikes, vinyl text, dimensions variable
6. Sam Cottington  
*Week 1,* 2024  
sofa, bike, helmet, dimensions variable
7. Sam Cottington  
*Week 2,* 2024  
sofa, lime bike, vinyl text, dimensions variable
8. Sam Cottington  
*Untitled,* 2024  
bed sheet, mirrors, dimensions variable