

English artists take on country music in transatlantic art show

Nashville's best-known export is the jumping-off point for an intriguing transatlantic cultural exchange opening at SooPlex gallery next weekend. A former Nashvillian now living in London, curator Veronica Kavass invited four artists based in England to use the language of contemporary art to talk about country music.

Kavass hasn't lived in Nashville for the past six years, but she says she still feels connected to the city. "I strongly identify with being from Nashville, which is strange because neither of my parents are from there, or from the U.S.A. for that matter. I have a romanticized view of the city, and I realize that outsiders do, too."

Given the subject matter for the show — which is titled *A Church, a Courtroom and Then Good-bye* — it's not surprising that sound and video works figure prominently.

London-based Sam Burford has created an audio installation in which he takes recordings of the word "love" from various songs, then edits them together to create a sort of dialogue in which men's and women's voices alternate, then overlap and build in intensity.

Haroon Mirza, also from London, crafts pieces that not only produce sound, but also are intended to be viewed as sculpture. Made from electrical wire, speakers and circuit boards, these works emit minimal pulses and clicks, embodied in humble installations that strip away the mystique of perfection that surrounds popular music and home audio equipment.

Like Kavass, Corinne Mynatt is a former Nashvillian now living in England. The Newcastle-based artist's outspoken video piece *Universality of Fundamentalism* (Courtesy of Red, White, and Blue) questions whether there's any difference between American fundamentalism and Islamic extremism. Are our own impulses for retribution, she asks, that far removed from those of any zealot who might want to wreak destruction on a nation of infidels? Mynatt doesn't offer easy answers, but she uses the example of Toby Keith's song to make plain her disgust with blind patriotism.

The fourth artist in the group, Phill Wilson-Perkin, is a performance artist. "Human attire, like caps and jackets, frequently pop up his work, or in its remainders," Kavass says. The title of his work in this show sounds fairly self-explanatory: *AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE THE SPIRIT OF DOLLY PARTON IN THE FORM OF A DENIM JACKET*. For the viewer's further edification, Wilson-Perkin offers Parton's "Jolene," a song riddled with ache and anxiety, as his artist's statement.

A Church, a Courtroom and Then Good-bye opens with a reception from 5 to 9 p.m. July 8, and the show will remain up for at least a week. It's a rare chance to engage with the work of artists who live thousands of miles away, yet share some of the same concerns and aesthetic sensibilities we find in our own community.

"I think the exhibit really embodies the contemporary art scene in London," Kavass says, "and I think the interpretations and experimentations the artists are doing with country music are very clever — some quite heartfelt. I know that people here in London want the show to travel back here with a response from Nashville."

—JONATHAN MARX, STAFF WRITER