



[Favela At The Royal Standard](#)

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) May 2012

' [The Royal Standard](#) was established in 2006 by four Liverpool-based artists in response to the need for a new artist-led organisation that would operate somewhere in between the city's grass-roots DIY initiatives and the more established arts institutions. Originally housed in a former pub in Toxteth, in 2008 The Royal Standard undertook an ambitious relocation and expansion into a larger industrial space on the Northern periphery of the city centre, re-launching to acclaim for the 2008 Liverpool Biennial.

[The Royal Standard Website]

It has been a great time for The Royal Standard. [Emily Speed](#)'s installations at the [Topophobia exhibition](#)

at the Bluecoat were the most successful pieces at that event. Studio member Laurence Payot won a Sky Arts Ignition Futures Fund Award and the organisation is to be featured in this year's [Liverpool Biennial](#)

, where its artists will mount a ten-week programme "exploring notions of both private and public hospitality within the context of a biennial structure and the role an artist run space performs within this as an autonomous Organisation".

Favela, a two day exhibition at The Royal Standard's home in Vauxhall Business Centre, Liverpool, offered the public an opportunity to experience some of the art and thinking behind works by Royal Standard artists and guests.



The first work I came across was a video installation by Oliver Laric, [Versions, 2010](#). The piece deals with the question of original work. In art, we are led to understand, everything has its original template. This is not simply a recent view of art, the video calls on historical sources to make its point. Opening with accounts of the persecution of Christians in the East by the Iconoclasts, and the destruction of images of worship that were seen by the Moslem rulers of the time as heretical, leading to the creation of works without faces, But we also find similarities between Ancient Greek and Romans sculpture and we are even brought closer to home when we see likenesses in the 20th century animation of Friz Freleng and Walt Disney.

Whilst much of the discourse of *Versions, 2010* seems convincing, it seems to rely on those universal themes that have run through history. The Madonna and Child image is one that has endured to our present time from those found in the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome, which dates from the 2nd century A.D.. Yet this idea of art lacking originality ignores the ideas that may lie behind an image. Early portrayals of the Madonna and Child may well have been the product of Christian faith but today the image is just as likely to illustrate concerns about [breast feeding](#)

. Even Eugène Delacroix's
La Liberté guidant le peuple

could be said to be drawing on the same source, with the bare-breasted Liberty nourishing the revolution.

Laric's work is certainly provocative and it is a credit to the curators that this is the first work we really get to see. It is quite a brave move as it forces us to confront the question of originality as we move around the gallery.

In Room 2 Adam Cooper had created a work from a two-track and cassette recorder on a loop that combined two sounds into one. This was a very basic set-up and shows the possibilities that exist for creating sound sculpture. Whilst Liverpool artist Janek Schaefer chooses to embody the sound within another work so that the work appears to be the source, Cooper prefers to show the production of the sound through its source. We are thus intended to appreciate the piece with our ears only. And yet there is something ambient about the sound that suggests we should not notice it.

Matt Welch's *Diagrams* (2011) are beautiful meditations on how we perceive things. There is a gradual blending of colours. At first glance you might think of Kandinsky or Rothko but the approach is far more subtle and seems to draw upon the shading chart of Photoshop to drag the viewer in. The single work exhibited is from a [series of three](#) and is, I feel, the most basic of the trio, yet it has so much in it.

Upstairs, I found the work of Henry Finney to be quite captivating. Though *A Lion Against The Breast Of Battle* see
med, perhaps ironically, empty, the work seemed to be concerned very much with shading, as dark colours overwhelmed the few brighter colours in the work.



[Hanna Bitowski](#) 's *Masque* portraits are a study of a form of identity. The detail is so precise and the complexity is drawn out in such intricate detail that it is hard to see them as works of the imagination - they seem to resemble technical drawings. What the works seems to illustrate are portraits, not of a particular person but of a particular personality. At first it is hard to decide whether (in these times of profiling and genetic mapping) to view these works as **humane**

. But whilst there is something almost mechanical about them, the fact that each work has its own identity provides a sense of warmth to them, and this is brought out by the particular shades, that remain within the primary colours.

In one of the rooms an area is given over to ***Jamalaya***, two stages laid with objects by [Kevin Hunt](#) and Sam Venables. One of the stages is dominated by the upside-down arches of McDonalds as well as other seemingly related objects, such as a pickle jar. Hunt and Venables hold up Claes Oldenburg as their hero. Personally I felt that the irony of Oldenburg came over as smugness, and I think that this display lacks imagination as it has been overdone in the political as well as artistic world.

The works of fine artist [Madeline Hall](#) are some of the most captivating I have seen. “[Her] work explores the idea of placelessness and transience through the creation of drawings and ‘drawn objects’. These objects often contain appropriated imagery, discarded books and objects, and mythological symbolism, to create works that are both evocative and fragile.” For me, each work felt like a snapshot of memory. The fact that Hall works with a range of materials only seems to reinforce that feeling.

Unlike the *Jamalaya* piece, which felt too restrictive and prescriptive in its approach, the works that I saw in [Linny Venables](#) studio used found objects to emphasis a sense of openness and adventure. A jar full of matchbooks from all over the world suggests a Tardis effect with the world crammed into a small space.

[Hamish McLain](#)’s studio contained interesting work where space finds room for itself in greater spaces which act as frame. This creates a great depth to the work and draws the viewer into the painting, never quite allowing it to share any secrets. This could be frustrating, but I find that the artist, by appearing to be evasive, forces us to delve into ourselves so much more.

Jim Busco's work is interesting in that it plays with our perceptions. In one picture we see a woman wading through a stream in what looks like a beautiful oasis. But the woman could almost be in a supermarket - she shows no pleasure in her surroundings. In another we see a young man crossing a road. There is no traffic; he looks at us nonchalantly, with his hands in his pockets. The setting is suburbia, yet it depicts avenues of extremely tall palm trees.

There was something quite voyeuristic about entering the **Royal Standard** artist studios. It was almost as if we were being invited to open the artists' mail and read it. Some of the workspaces had beer cans, food wrapping or dirty mugs lying around. There were books on shelves, suggesting influence and the tools of the trade. This part of the exhibition seemed to ask us to understand the creators and not just their works.

And it would be easy to point to many of the works and see the influence of other, well known, artists guiding the hands of those hoping to make their mark on the world. That is the beauty of this exhibition - it dares us to dismiss the works. But these are not copies; they may not be wholly original, but isn't that what Oliver Laric's installation is telling us? For me these artists are calling on the authority of their predecessors to find their own path.

Favela was more than simply an art exhibition - it was a confirmation that the future of the art world looks somewhat rosy. It shows that there is a determination on the part of younger artists to have a go and stamp their personality on the world. I was told by one of the organisers that *Favela* was put together because there was an open space in the exhibition calendar. I think that exhibitions of this sort are important and allow us to glimpse the future of art, and I hope the Royal Standard will hold more events like this.

Editor's Note: The process of producing Art today is an important issue for the Manchester Salon, and will be the focus of a public discussion on 10 September - click on this [Are the Arts having a Renaissance?](#) link for more information.