

Lap Pool Contract, a one day exhibition by Mark O'Donnell and Daphne Simons, explores and subverts the typical notions of agency and spectatorship that exist within the infrastructure of the contemporary gallery.

Halfway between lawyers and lifeguards, the artists stage an absurdist intervention, bringing a plastic swimming pool into the gallery and then barring guests from accessing it unless they sign a contract. This contract stipulates that once a guest enters the pool, they must remain there until they are replaced by another gallery visitor; failure to comply results in a ban on the use of the pool for the remainder of the exhibition.

The intervention heightens the artificial and performative nature of spectatorship; by thrusting the viewer through a series of transformative encounters that reconstitute the spectator as a participant, the intangible codes that govern social behaviour are drawn above the surface and renegotiated.

All visitors to the gallery are recorded, ostensibly for the purpose of artistic research. If the gallery experience didn't already prompt an uncomfortable self-awareness, the knowledge that the experience is being recorded invariably does. In addition, once a visitor enters the pool, they become part of the spectacle. Having signed a contract to gain entry, their behaviour suddenly seems forced and unnatural. Most lean against the sides, or walk the length of the lanes; no one swims.

As such, the artists are able to generate a new, imbalanced power structure in which agency is renegotiated through an arbitrary and absurd intervention into a preexisting structure, and in doing so uproot the unwritten codes that mediate social life, parodying and exaggerating them in search of some new kind of social space.

By Arron Santry