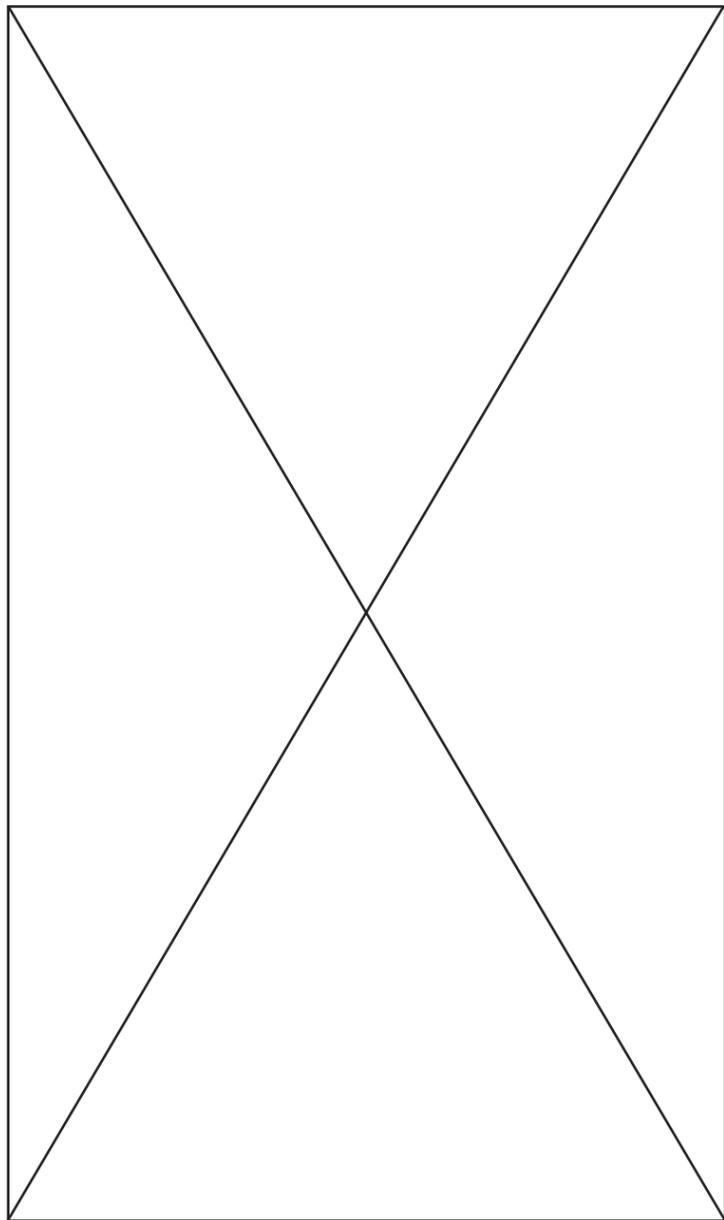


AV referendum: Voting about voting



There are some clear links here with Joanna Phelps' paintings at SW1 Gallery, which depict shapes teetering on wires, a trapeze that hangs holding a stacked pyramid of what look like juggling balls – if it starts to swing, the balls would surely fall to the floor. Sam Zealey's spinning top is also engaged in a balancing act, and may fall at any time.

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The other idea that springs from this newspaper article is one of boundaries – those clear lines that political parties draw in the sand, before everything gets washed away with the incoming tide. Negotiations between the two parties forming this coalition are ongoing, so which other policies that they campaigned on will be sacrificed, compromised, pushed aside? Clegg recently described how, when he and Cameron sit down to discuss an issue, they normally begin with disagreement. It's as if the two parties were having an ongoing tug of war, with the 'centre line' of the rope in constant flux.

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JUST before the turn of the year, on 31 December 2010, there was an editorial in the Guardian newspaper about the upcoming referendum on the alternative vote (AV). Because the referendum was called by a coalition of two different parties, with differences of opinion and ideal, the results are hard to predict. The prime minister and his deputy have each said publicly that they want the vote to go in different directions (David Cameron wants a "No"; Nick Clegg wants a "Yes").

But here's the interesting bit: historical precedent tells us that when a government is pursuing unpopular policies, the public turns against them and returns a "No" vote at referendum – regardless of the subject. Right now, the editorial describes, we are in the midst of budget cuts that are unpalatable to many (opinion

polls show a drop in support for both parties of the coalition). As a result, both the prime minister and his deputy may decline to campaign too vigorously on AV for fear their efforts will bring about the opposite result. The two leaders may stay quiet, thinking that the more they say, "Vote yes!", the more likely the public will return with a "No" (and vice versa).

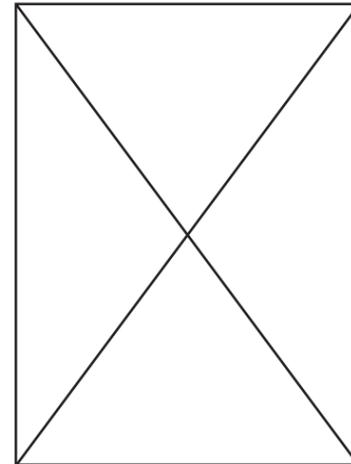
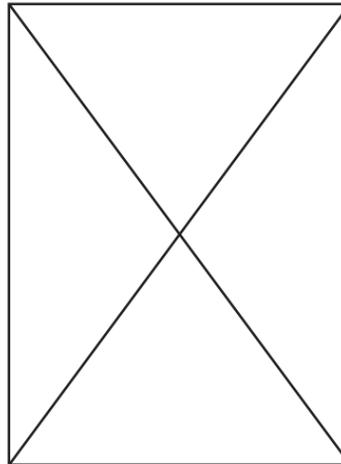
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What I like about this article is that it shows the normal rules to be topsy-turvy. Two leaders of our government campaigning against each other? Strange. Each campaigning against his own preference, by staying silent? Stranger still!

It feels as if both parties are engaged in a precarious tightrope walk – one of them has to fall, but onto which side?

In another work, Gavin Weber disrupts the space of the gallery. He draws a translucent line from floor to ceiling, and from the edge of the space cutting into the gallery area. For me, thinking of boundaries, I see this act as something that completely alters the gallery interior – as if it were about to be divided in two. The work also draws my eye to that other border line which is a mixture of strength and fragility: the large expanse of window running along the external wall of the gallery. Did you notice your reflection, jumping from pane to pane, as you approached the door? Did you mistake your reflection for a figure already moving inside the space, or become more aware of being outside it?

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On the brink | Heading for a fall
Close to collapse | Teetering on the edge
On the verge | Hanging in the balance
Treading a fine line

And finally, Russell Terry's work makes me wonder: how strong is a skull anyway? This shell separates our brain from everything external, and in Terry's sculpture the skull retains its form but is made with paper and peppered with holes. The boundary line between our interior and exterior worlds has never seemed so fragile.

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This tabloid sheet is an artwork by Emma Leach, created for the exhibition 'On the Brink' at SW1 Gallery, 3-26 February 2011. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to tear off a page and leave it in a newspaper for others to find. This is part of a series of artworks where Emma feeds off current news articles, writing new texts that end up as interventions served up between the pages of newspapers.

The opinions expressed in this work are those of the artist, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of SW1 Gallery.

www.sw1gallery.co.uk
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