

Lloyd Corporation:

the Politics of
Urban Ephemera

Words: [Augustin Macellari](#)
 Images Courtesy of: [Carlos/Ishikawa London](#)

To get to Lloyd Corporation's studio by bike from central London, you pretty much have to go through Vauxhall. It's a horrible and dangerous place to ride a bike; since the Elephant and Castle roundabout was retrofitted to promote cycle safety, Vauxhall has become an unparalleled hazard.

It's a hodgepodge of development and industry. Bonnington Square's housing co-operative survives, thanks to squatters in the 70s, as a reminder of Vauxhall's terraced past. Then huge, grey, abandoned-looking blocks loom. A restaurant in a Georgian manor hovers incongruously on the edge of the roundabout, beside expensive and distasteful riverside glass developments. The M16 building from the *Bond* films is there too, bristling with CCTV cameras and made up like a techno-fortress. There's the New Covent Garden Market, which on Sundays becomes the Vauxhall carboot sale. And, also on Sunday, Horse Meat Disco DJ in a pub down the road.

A system of mutually independent, highly fluid and weird economies and industries, placed side-by-side with no obvious logic or structure, the area nicely reflects the themes and issues explored by the Lloyd Corporation in its practice. Lloyd Corporation are Ali Eisa and Sebastian Lloyd Rees. They've been working together since the financial crash, which broke when they were studying art together at Goldsmiths and seems to have made an indelible impact on their field of interest.

I meet the duo in their studio, a unit in a little cobbled industrial courtyard in Clapham, and I'm interviewing them

off the back of their installation for London's Frieze Art Fair, where they exhibited at the Carlos/Ishikawa stand. A small, important gallery tucked away in a courtyard off Whitechapel Road, Carlos/Ishikawa represent a stable of artists mostly born in the 80s. For Frieze, Lloyd Corporation ran a set of simulations. Divided into three discrete sections, their work *A Search for Lost Causes and Impractical Aims* pulled no punches, interrogating global issues like migrancy and cybersecurity through an intimate and familiar framework. The performance that ran throughout Frieze was a living statuary of characters: street vendors, human billboards, information points. It also featured two computers sat in an authentic reconstruction of the bleak-looking internet zone found at the back of some corner shops.

It was authentic down to the insecurity of the browsers, as the artists had to disconnect both hard drives from the internet after getting a virus. The two desktops on display were loaded with a collection of stock images and a bunch of emails – important emails – hacked by Russian spies from insecure, non-governmental servers. Hillary Clinton's emails.

"In some ways you could just look at it as a sculpture, and I think 80 percent of people engaged with it as a sculptural object," Ali says of the installation. It was, however, interactive. The email archive could be searched by keyword or just scrolled through voyeuristically. The archive engaged users with a very current – and at the time unfolding – political situation.





A Search for Lost Causes and Impractical Aims (Leaks)



The Saga of the Costume Continues

“We’re interested in value in terms of counterfeit – how value is attributed between the brand and the real product, and then really bad, cheaply made counterfeits”

The final part of Lloyd Corporation’s installation was simply a door, again authentic, acquired from a corner shop and complete with fly posters, ads, Lebara signs and DHL stickers. These simulations, or reconstructions, of familiar situations and environments, serve as an access point for the much larger issues Lloyd Corporation are interested in exploring.

Metonymy is a rhetorical device that describes a thing or set of things through an associated thing. For example: the crown is a metonym for the royal family, but one that also encompasses the royal family’s assorted administrative and symbolic attachments. Lloyd Corporation use metonyms as a shortcut, a way of accessing larger, or wider ranging, issues and themes. So where they have a door covered in fly-posters and Lebara vinyl, they also have: a street in London; the community that gathers around the shop; the culturally disparate needs and desires that the shop services; the informal labour that runs the shop; the informal economies that operate around the fly-posters; migrancy.

“I suppose one of the things that runs through that project, and also through a lot of the work that we’ve done over the last five years, is finding situations or objects or things that really stage this kind of distance, but also connection, between really personal things and wider structural issues,” Ali explains.

In the course of their research, Lloyd Corporation highlight marginal or so-called ‘grey’ economies. Informal economies are by definition untaxed,

and unmonitored. Their turnover is not logged in the nation’s GDP, so it becomes impossible to know what their revenue is, or how they reward the people operating within them. With the performance element of their work at Frieze, actors were employed to perform the roles of actual employees of the informal economy – most strikingly, bootleg designer bag sellers.

Lloyd Corporation’s interest in the bag vendors was, they say, initially piqued by the bags themselves. “We were interested in the whole thing about value in terms of counterfeit,” Ali explains, “because it seems like quite a complex global thing – how value is attributed between the brand, the real product, certain levels of fake goods and then really bad, cheaply made counterfeit goods.”

Whilst the performers echo the logic of the other pieces, their function as institutional critique can’t be ignored. The fact is, the sight of BAME men flogging knock-off Louis Vuitton bags – the economic imbalances it represents – at an art fair that costs three times the price of admission to any show at Tate is necessarily critical and political. The presence of the marginalised figure who engages in the hand-to-mouth informal economy of bag sales in a place where people are spending millions on nothing more than contemporary art is loaded with critical resonance.



I used to work for DHL back in the 90s...



A Search for Lost Causes and Impractical Aims



A Search for Lost Causes and Impractical Aims

CARLOS/ISHIKAWA

As Ali tells me, the performance reached its apex on the last day, with the spontaneous creation of its own informal economy. Left with spare tickets to Frieze, the artists got one of the actor-vendors "to go and tout them outside Regent's Park Station. He sold like six free entry tickets to Frieze on the last day". The duo's at times wide-eyed manner masks a steeliness in their work, a propensity for mischief making, though neither of them would officially recognise their naughtiness.

With art that engages this directly with political issues and systems, rather than more abstract things like ideologies or feelings, I often find it tempting to ask: What's the point?

The fields of enquiry the artists have set in their sites have such clear and conventional frameworks for investigation in the world – through academia, economics, journalism, etc – that to hope to conduct any sort of incisive research through the notoriously wishy-washy lens of contemporary art seems madly optimistic, at best.

The answer must be that at the same time, numbers are cold. They make few allowances for subjective human experience or empathy. Art may not be as rigorous or objective in how it analyses the large systems Lloyd Corporation are concerned with, but it

also doesn't profess to reach the same conclusions or offer the same insights as academic examination. There maybe little meaningful impact – in the form of social change, or even just action – but then maybe there's little poetry to economics.

In exploring informal economies, as well as engaging with largely ignored communities, the artists also aspire to extrapolate information about wider systems of governance. The artists find a way to show us the personal, at the same time as they expose us to the breathtakingly impersonal wider structural issues of globalisation.

Their research might not resolve itself in objective data, but data doesn't matter anyway. It's not reliable; no one trusts experts any more; 'post-truth' is 'word of the year'. Instead, Lloyd Corporation leverage the micro against the macro to offer insights into systems of order that are becoming ever more opaque by the day. "It's not scientific study," Ali concludes, "but it's one of those things that I always really like about making work. That it allows you to have certain moments of clarity, before things are confused and obfuscated again."

carlosishikawa.com/artists/lloydcorporation



A Search for Lost Causes and Impractical Aims (No CK No B.)