



**Shana Moulton**

***Pristiq***, 2012, pharma logo felt wall hanging, bamboo rail, 178 x 137 cm.  
Courtesy Gimpel Fils, London



# Shana Moulton

**Shana Moulton: *Prevention***  
Gimpel Fils, London  
9 October – 17 November

The first series of *South Park*, aired in 1997, featured an episode in which the young Stan's grandfather makes the case for his own euthanasia by locking him in a pitch-dark room and forcing him to listen to the sounds of Irish musician Enya's *Orinoco Flow* on repeat. This, he says, is what old age feels like. Having grown up in a trailer park for senior citizens called Whispering Pines, the American artist Shana Moulton, I would guess, would not need such a lesson in the experiences of the elderly, and this background, alongside a stint as a 'house organiser', has clearly given her a highly developed sense of the genuine surrealities relating to the faith that people put in objects, actions and remedies in her home country.

Moulton has investigated such subjects over the years in her performances and videos, which chart the experiences of her alter ego, Cynthia, a perpetual patient plagued by ill health and minor complaints who behaves and dresses rather older than her years, and who searches for answers in countercultural and alternative sources. Moulton's films comedically splice the hackneyed imagery of joss-stick-and-crystals spiritualism, the crummy aesthetics of cheap ads for haemorrhoid creams and diet pills, digitally rendered psychedelia and the soundscape of, yes, a synthy, quasi-spiritual choral music reminiscent of Enya, which conveys a kind of purposeful, searching quest for enlightenment and wellbeing.

Moulton's exhibition at Gimpel Fils, which takes its name from an American health magazine title, conveys the foreboding sense of a lifelong battle against death and ill health. We are introduced to the artist's concerns with the assistance of a set of sculptures, each titled *Medical Dreamcatcher* (all works 2012). These are rather chilling items, each made from a stability crutch or Zimmer frame that has been wrapped in stripes of coloured wool and hung with pill dispensers and beads to create an object that might be a dreamcatcher, a spiritual staff or an occult sculpture. Fear of death, illness and disability, these suggest, leave us prey to the suggestions of magic, charms and miracle cures, which conceal the ugly truth and the grey, soft plastic feet of standard-issue walking sticks.

The central works are two films: *Lyrice*, in which a headless goddess-type figure carries out painful-looking treatments on Cynthia's back, which has clearly been rendered in a soft sculptural material such as clay or plasticine; and the stronger *Restless Leg Saga*, which sees Cynthia lying in bed plagued by 'restless legs syndrome', watching commercials advertising supplements and cures for this complaint and reading magazines that do the same. The logos of pharmaceutical and health-supplement brands often feature abstract imagery of figures dancing or jumping in glee, and in a genuinely funny sequence, Moulton brings these figures to life as soft spongy characters that dance in a sinister fashion in front of our poor protagonist. These dancing, leaping bodies more effectively represent the pharmaceutical and supplement industries (described by Moulton as 'omnipresent and aggressive') as powerful, embodied deities that promote fear and inadequacy. Funny as the films are, the real quest here is one of knowing one's enemy. As Stan's grandfather knows, it's not death, but all the rest of it.

**LAURA MCLEAN-FERRIS**

# Trevor Paglen

**Trevor Paglen: *Geographies of Seeing***  
Lighthouse, Brighton  
6 October – 4 November

'It's the oldest question of all, George. Who can spy on the spies?' So asks Control of Smiley in John le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974). Is there a real-life version of the omniscient John Tracy, stranded in splendid isolation on Thunderbird 5? Trevor Paglen looks a strong candidate for this mission, should he choose to accept it. High-quality surveillance work preferred. This show provides the evidence and features three aspects of Paglen's work, a video and examples from two photographic projects. As with the paranoid aesthetic of novelists Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, or the pencil diagrams of Mark Lombardi, we are firmly encamped in a geography of dangerous times. This is a place viewed by the Eye of Providence where the soundtrack is SIGINT – signals