Karen Mirza & Brad Butler: Hold Your Ground

Until Sun May 27 *Screen located at far end of the ticket office,* Canary Wharf Screen, *320 Cabot Place, E14 4QS* Full details & map

Art:Galleries: East FREE

Still from 'Hold Your Ground' - Photography by Alan Cook. Courtesy of Film and Video Umbrella

Time Out says ★★★☆☆

By Helen Sumpter   Posted: Mon May 14 2012

At the same time as acting out a series of emphatic gestures - clenched fists, a dismissive sweep of the arm, a hand placed protectively over the heart - the black female protagonist in this ten-minute film, 'Hold Your Ground', vocalises strings of phonemic sounds. 'Ed-ed-ed, ed-ra, ed-ra, ed-ra-ha, ha, ha'. Shown against a white background, the woman appears to be both learning a language and trying to speak it. The film might simply be about forms of communication, if it wasn't for the uncaptioned film clips of public protests past and present that are interspersed throughout. Their inclusion associates the woman's utterances and body language with civil unrest, although any precise meaning and context is, at least partially, lost in translation.

For Mirza and Butler there is a specific background to this work: the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt in early 2011 and an illustrated pamphlet produced in Cairo for pro-democracy demonstrators, titled 'How to Protest Intelligently'. This included instructions on subjects such as how and where to assemble and what accessories and clothing to bring. That the pamphlet was about communication among a mass of people has its own poignancy in relation to the public venue for this work, the concourse of Canary Wharf tube station, as part of the 'Art on the Underground' programme. One might assume that the film would be playing to its own crowd, in the form of hundreds of passing commuters. But the huge screen is placed at an end of the station which, on my visit at least, wasn't a main thoroughfare. This made the woman's actions seem even more urgent, not just trying to communicate to a crowd but also trying to attract one.

Canary Wharf Screen details

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Canary Wharf Screen
320 Cabot Place, E14 4QS

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