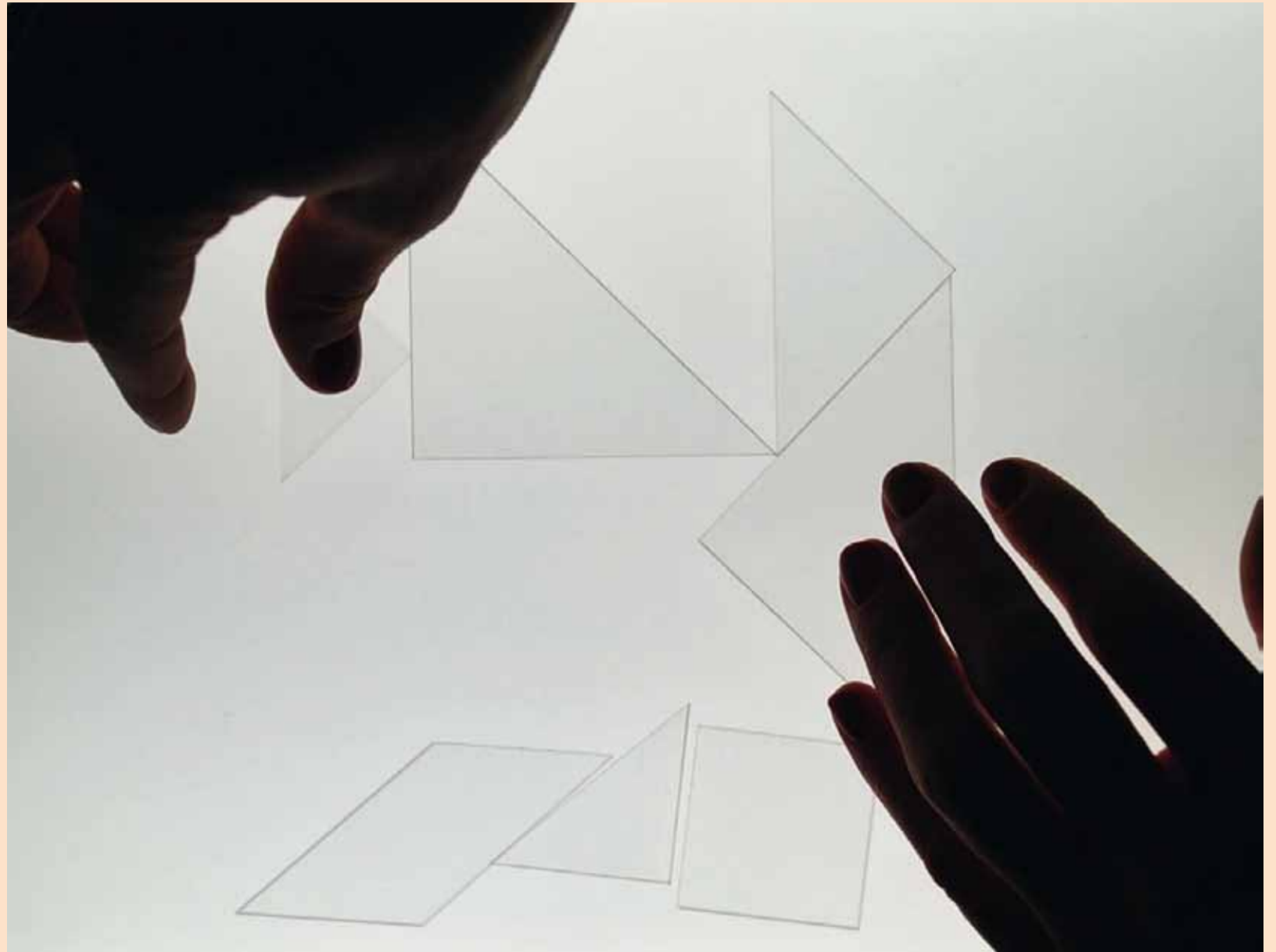


Anna Barham

Whether working in film, sculpture, drawing or performance, Anna Barham often dramatizes the interplay between a system and the paradoxical freedom and potential it engenders. In 2007, she began what has evolved into a sustained investigation into the anagram as a poetic take on this theme. Starting with the name of the ancient Roman city Leptis Magna, she drew long sequences of its two-word anagrams in sprawling, biro grids in an attempt to visualize the graphic relation between the words when considered formally as different patterns of letters. The artist's interest was not only the fact that Leptis Magna yielded an unusually high number of permutations ('magenta lips', 'elating amps', 'pliant games', 'plant images'), but that the very concept of the ruined Roman city was conjured as a sculptural equivalent to the idea of letters as building blocks, each sharing a capacity to construct fantastical visions.

This plastic idea of imagination was also present in models that Barham made of the theatre at Leptis Magna, *Pliant Games I-III*. Constructed from discarded packaging and plaster, the models oscillated between illusion and materiality, resembling the crumbled stone of the original



Magenta, Emerald, Lapis, 2009. Still from digital projection. Silent, 30 min.



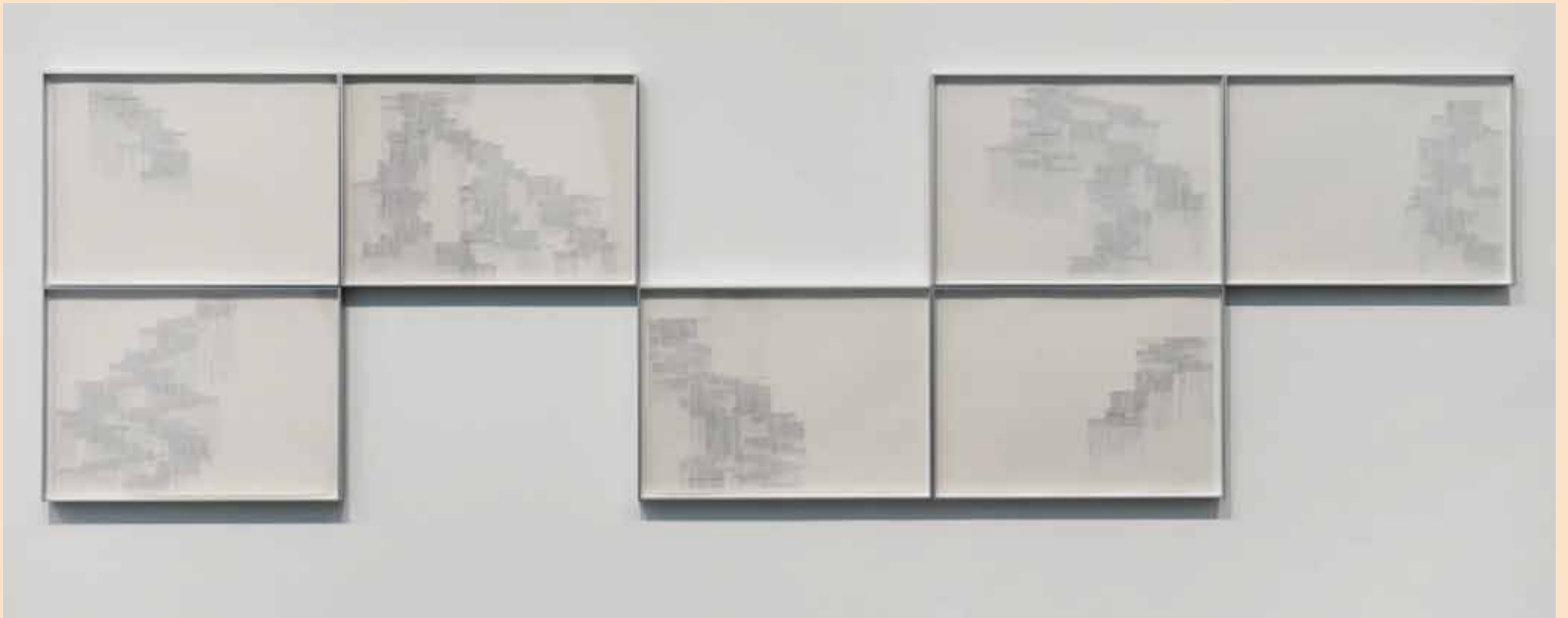
7 (The Round Room), 2009. Performance, 20 min

while resolutely revealing their constitution from studio detritus.

In 2008–09, Barham added four letters to Leptis Magna to create the phrase 'replanted images', from which she generated more than twenty-five new drawings. Rather than ordering words solely according to the contingency of spelling, she began to use the computer as a tool with which to 'mine' sense. From the nearly 67,000 possible three-word anagrams of the phrase, she made deliberate and charged choices, set in sequences that created allusive or rhetorical resonances (SPIE GENTLE DRAMA / SIP ELEGANT DREAM / NEGATE DREAM SLIP / INGEST DREAM LEAP / MAD STEERING LEAP). Barham describes her interest in anagrams as a way of seeking out the 'unconscious' of a word, as though its set form is simply the skin on a teeming proliferation of alternative possibilities that might be conjured if it loses its shape.

In a performance at Arcade, London, in 2009, Barham set up a configuration of sculpture, film, performance and spoken word that brought together the different

Spied Elegant Arm

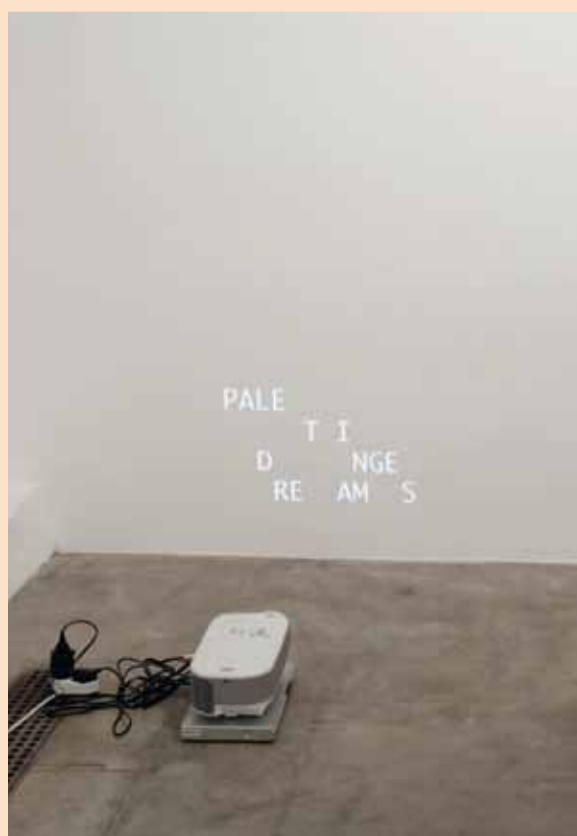


Spied Elegant Arm, 2009. 7 drawings, biro on paper, aluminium frames, 315 x 91 x 4 cm

Slick Flection



Slick Flection, 2009. Performance with Derek Hartley, 10 min



Time Slid Me Again, 2008. Digital projection, 1 minute loop



Pliant Games I, 2007. Plaster, clay, cardboard, glue, wood, sellotape, plastic 40 x 30 x 20 cm

aspects of her practice in a single event. The space was filled by a multi-level structure made from tangram shapes, which acted both as sculpture and as seating for the film *Magenta, Emerald, Lapis*. For the performance, Barham used the construction as a platform, from which she read *Slick Flection*, a text based on tap-dance instructions substituted with other syllables, sometimes making sense and sometimes just creating a rhythm. A projection of a disc of light 'beat' out the original tempo of the instructions as a male tap dancer moved with an insistent but irregular rhythm in and out of the beam of light across the platforms. Typical of Barham's aesthetic investigation, the three systems were choreographed with an impression of chance resonance so that sometimes they were in synch, and at other moments obliterated each other.