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## artsfirst night

# Dairy arts centre opens with a bigger splash

A new gallery welcomes all-comers, says **Rachel Campbell-Johnston**

### Visual art

**John Armleder**  
The Dairy, WCl

★★★★☆

A brand new art centre opens today, bang in the middle of Bloomsbury in London. It is the brainchild of two art-mad entrepreneurs: Frank Cohen, the exuberant DIY magnate from Manchester, and his less ostensibly overstated but equally committed collaborator, the Danish collector Nicolai Frahm. Together they have created the Dairy: 12,500 square feet of not-for-profit, no-frills space carved out of an industrial wedge of a building that in the past served as the Express Dairies milk depot.

The aim of the Dairy Art Centre is, apparently, to bring art to the people. And in service of this all-embracing cause the inaugural show is by the Swiss-born artist John Armleder, a once fêted but now largely forgotten member of Fluxus, an international network of 1960s creators. They took their name from the Latin for “flux” or “flow” and worked in a fluid mixture of media and disciplines.

What is art? What is the difference between high culture and home decoration? Where do the boundaries between the practically functional and the purely aesthetic lie? The sort of questions which Armleder’s work tends to ask make a pretty good launch pad for a space that sets out to lure the art neophyte as much as the connoisseur.

Drawing heavily from their own private collections, Cohen and Frahm launch the Dairy with what feels broadly like a survey show. Here are Armleder’s huge pour and puddle paintings: the former made by slopping materials — paint, resin, vinyl and glitter — that are not supposed to go together onto a flat surface and watching the chemical reactions; the latter by pouring pigments down a vertical canvas (*Campanula Persicifolia*,



above). There are his pattern pictures. Duchamp meets Andy Warhol in these gridded repetitions of commonplace images. Here is one of Armleder’s furniture pieces: a mirror-plated electric guitar which, paired with wall mirrors, plays on the boundaries between function and non-function. There is a gallery which brings together a jumble of neons. The same fluorescent tubes that light up the gallery are also piled like pick-up sticks on the floor. Why is one an art work, the other a practical tool, asks the artist. What is the difference between an object and its representation?

The questions pile up like his repeating patterns. Like the white-on-white teardrop designs of a wall painting that spreads onto a window and casts its shadows on the floor, what might seem merely monotonous repetition mutates into something teasing that asks the spectator to think.

For the initiated there are layers upon layers of art historical reference: the resonances of anything from the traditional Dutch still life to Donald Judd’s minimalism may be detected. For the newcomer there’s the feel of rummaging around in some mysterious old storehouse and stumbling across all sorts of strange oddities. This show sets an optimistic precedent for a new art space which sets out to open its doorways as widely as possible.  
**Dairy Art Centre (020-7713 8900)**