



Everything London Artists Magazine
NUMBER FOURTEEN • JUNE-JULY 1994

£1

Listings

June-July

ACAVA Central Space Gallery

23-29 Faroe Road, W14

Tel: 071 603 3039.

Two Installations:

Brian Wesbury/Chris Marshall

Until 16 June. Tue-Sat 10-6

Anderson O'Day

255 Portobello Road, W11

Tel: 071 221 7592

Dennis Masi. Until 16 July

Thur-Sat 12-5.30 & Mon-Wed by appointment

Anthony d'Offay

9, 21, 23 & 24 Dering St. W1

Tel: 071 499 4100

Georg Baselitz

Recent paintings and sculpture. Until 1 July

Also Yukinori Yanagi. Union Jack Ant Farm

June/July. Mon-Fri 10-5, Sat 10-1

Anthony Reynolds Gallery

5 Dering St. W1

Tel: 071 491 0621

The Curator's Egg.

70 works selected by 70 galleries

Until 2 July. Tue-Sat 10-6

Atlantis Upper Gallery

146 Brick Lane, E1

Tel: 071 377 8855

Whitechapel Open

Until 26 June. Daily 10-5

Atlantis Middle Gallery

All details as above

David Fusco. Recent works.

Until 2 July

Avivson

73 Northchurch Rd. N1

Tel: 071 435 1993

Guy Batey. Paintings

Until 30 June

Beardsmore Gallery

22-24 Prince of Wales Rd. NW5 3LG

Tel: 071 485 0923

Soizick Freeman: Paintings

Lesley Millar: Tapestry on the theme of the

Madonna. Until 9 July

Mon-Fri 10-5, Sat 10-4 or by appt.

Ben Uri Art Society

4th Floor, 21 Dean St, W1V 6NE

Tel: 071 437 2852

Recent acquisitions including works by Auerbach,

Kossoff and Kitaj. Until 24 July

Mon-Thur 10-5, Sun 2-5

Brixton Art Gallery

35 Brixton Station Rd, SW9

Tel: 071 733 6957

Brixton Artists Collective: Sister to Sister,

Brother to Brother. Until 25 July

Mon-Fri 10-6

Cafe Gallery

By the Pool, Southwark Park, SE16

Tel: 071 232 2170

Vajira Sugathadasa: Recent Works

Until 26 June. Wed-Sun 11-5

Chisenhale Gallery

Chisenhale Rd, Bow, E3

Tel: 081 981 4518

Simon Patterson

Until 31 July. Wed-Sun 1-6

Candyman II

Building C, Tower Bridge Business Complex 100

Clements Rd. SE16

Tel: 081 969 2623

Matthew Arnatt, Mathew Collings, Justine Daf,

Robert Davis, Mareike Schulz Foking, Mathew Luck,

Galpin Runa Islam, Toby Mott, Sher Rajah, Giorgio

Sadotti, Bob and Roberta Smith, Jessica Voorsanger,

Piers Wardle, Elizabeth Wright.

20 June-15 July. Mon-Fri 10-5

Curwen Gallery

4 Windmill St, W1P 1HF

Tel: 071 636 1459

Paul Ryan. New paper pulp paintings

Until 9 July. Mon-Fri 10-5.30, Sat 10.30-1

Diorama Arts Centre Ltd

34 Osnaurgh St, NW1 3ND

Tel: 071 916 5467

Mandy Holland. Out To Lunch: Photographs

Until 30 June. Mon-Sat 11-6 (disability access)

East West Gallery

8 Blenheim Crescent, W11

Tel: 071 229 7981

Julio Lavallen. Paintings

Until 6 July. Tue-Sat 11-6

The Economist

25 St James St, SW1

Tel: 071 839 7000 or 071 930 5346

Katherine Gili, Oliver Barratt, Phillip Medley.

Until 16 July. All day, everyday

Angela Flowers at London Fields

282 Richmond Road, E8 3NJ

Tim Lewis, sculpture

Until 26 June.

Tue - Sun 10-6

(continued on page 23)



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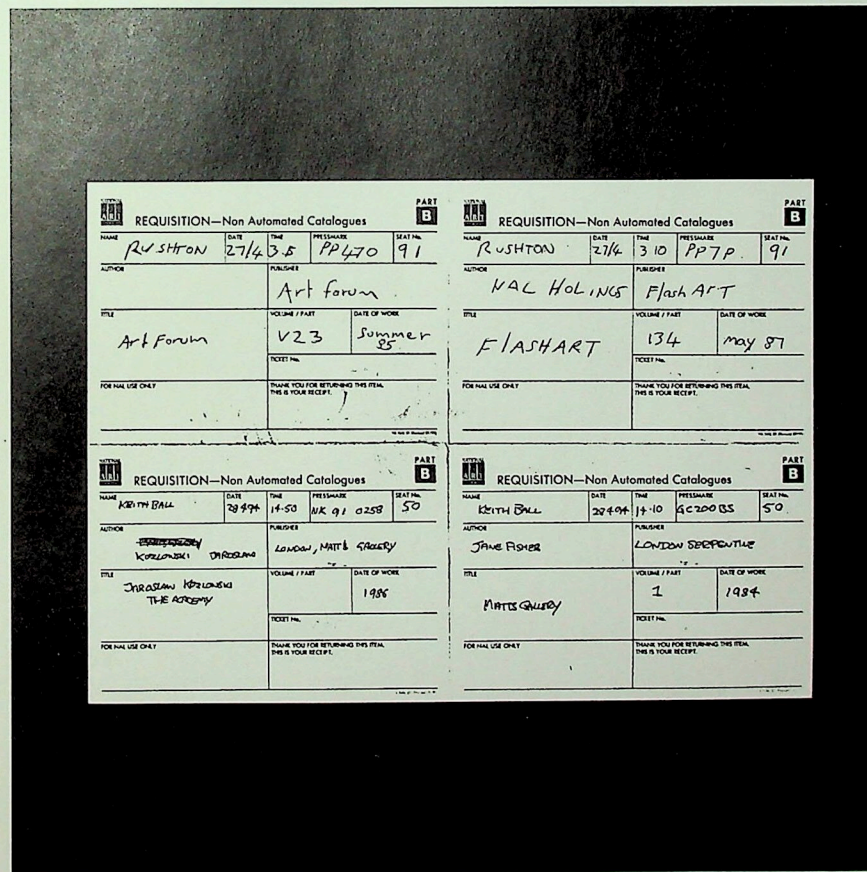
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everything
London artists magazine

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everything is an independent, artist-produced magazine for London. It is compiled and edited by Keith Ball and Steve Rushton and produced by everything Publications, The Bombshelter, Old Spitalfields Market, 21 Steward Street, London E1 6AL. © everything editorial.

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everything is supported by: London Arts Board; the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham;

the London Borough of Camden; Chelsea CAD; Riverside Artists Group; Spitalfields Arts Project; The Small Mansion Art Centre, and The Foundation for Sport and the Arts.

We welcome your letters and comments which may be printed in future editions. Please send your contributions to everything editorial at the above address.

Design and production by Ben Eastop. Printed on 100% recycled paper by John Franks Printing Ltd.

Cover image: Klassnik and Kozlowski – Warsaw, some time ago. Photo: Hanna Luczak.

Art Articles

Something's Wrong at the Tannery

Some of the artists represented in 'Something's Wrong' will be showing in Candyman II, see listings for details

The press release makes it clear that the artists are working in a ropy space under adverse conditions. You are invited to contribute to a 'fill-in-the-gaps' review; "I advise the public to _____" etc... The reviews are nailed to the flaking walls of the Tannery.


The pieces from different artists intermingle with Victor Mount's shrine to slightly tarnished cultural heroes which flashes lights and blares out banal tunes which bleed into the sound of a recording of the rock band Codeine playing on the floor above. Jessica Voorlager has collated three months worth of the band's fan letters. All over the place are these free standing wooden structures by Bob and Roberta Smith, each covered with misspelt texts taken from a variety of sources; pornography, art history; the things that might be said in institutions. The whole thing is kind of mashed together and is reminiscent of a forlorn end of the pier curio museum. So it's all a bit of a joke.

Or is it, Vic?

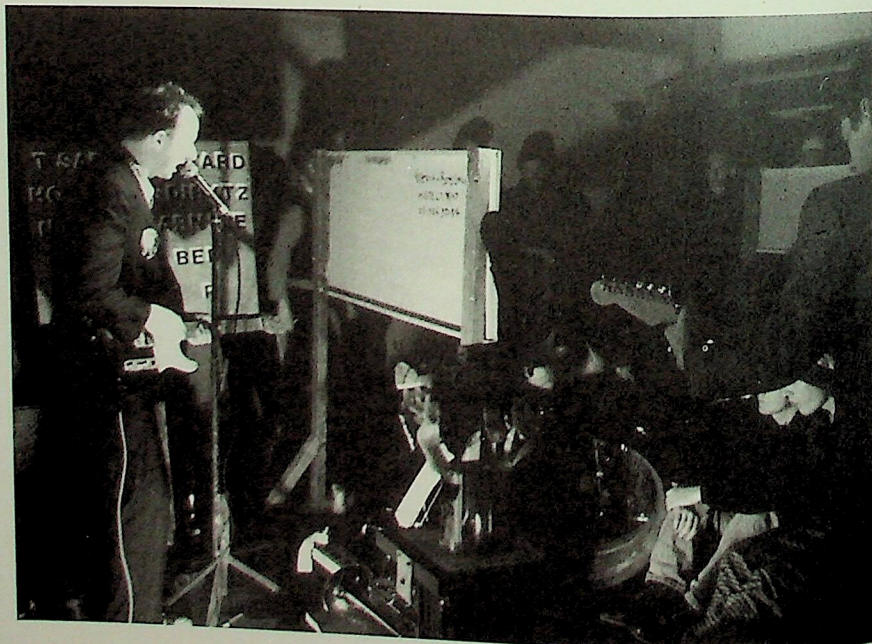
It's desperately and enthusiastically dumb and it seems to me to be right on the money. Something's Wrong is the latest in a distinguished line of daft ideas. For instance who would want to show in a regimental armoury? Those Dada shows were a total mish-mash; the stuff was piled all over the place and that Hugo

Ball was a complete nutter. Warhol's factory events weren't too concerned with making any serious concessions to the white-walled gallery either. 'Something's Wrong' is also playing with the convention of the artist-run shows which are a constant feature in London and has fun with the possibility that there is life after the Warehouse.

One might imagine the work currently existing in this damp, draughty anti-chamber is awaiting validation by being transported into the more pristine environment of the gallery. Good shows, like reputations and memory, grow with time gathering significance around them. 'Freeze' for example is an oft-talked about exhibition, but it's interesting to remember that it was reviewed only twice (once in the Guardian and a year later in Art and Design).

Non-gallery shows sometimes conform to a rule of inverse perspective – they get bigger the further away you get from them. Sometimes whole galleries disappear (like Nick Wegner's The Gallery which was set up in the 70's) and then reappear when somebody writes about them (see Depart from Zero: N Wegner). So you never know, 'Something's Wrong' might end up a bit like the first Sex Pistol's gig which everybody of a certain age claims to have seen. If you didn't see this show – you missed it. But never mind you can always check out 'Tight' which is also in the Tannery in July. 

© Art Articles 1994.



Bob and Roberta Smith 'singing' with the Ken Ardley Playboys at Nose Paint in front of a sign saying 'T sad bastard hoo masdibyts in t ovarnite stday bed'.

INTERVIEW

Everything talks with Karsten Schubert



Anya Gallaccio 'Couverture' 1994. Photo courtesy Karsten Schubert

Karsten Schubert has shown work by artists including Rachel Whiteread, Alison Wilding, Anya Gallaccio, Keith Coventry and Angus Fairhurst. The Gallery's group and one-person shows continue to be seen as a barometer of the art scene.

e It would be impossible to discuss the nineties without first discussing the eighties when British Art gained much more of an international profile, particularly in the area of sculpture. I suppose that a lot of that was down to the influence of the Lisson Gallery.

KS I think you can even go further and say that it

was all down to the influence of the Lisson Gallery. British art of the eighties was what happened at that gallery and there was nobody else around. Nicholas Logsdail had the run of the field which was both a very privileged position and yet at the same time a difficult position to be in, because you had no alternative debate so it was

Karsten Schubert Ltd
are at:
41 Foley St W1
Tel: 071-631 0031

* *Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art*. Editors: Liam Gillick and Andrew Renton. One Off Press/ Thames and Hudson 1991.

very easy for certain people to deny the power and strength of what was happening.

e On the other hand it does allow for a certain force of argument. Given that it's a place which shows a great proportion of a particular kind of work which collectively becomes a recognisable and coherent voice. It becomes emblematic, in a sense a corporate identity.

KS Yes, it does make for a certain strength but it's like one-stop shopping: If you were a writer or a curator you went there and got all the information you needed. At a certain point it denied artists' identities because you had this label attached to it. When you looked at individual positions they were quite wide-spread and diverse and I think this got lost, at the beginning at least. But, yes, initially this was helpful even though the artists moaned about it.

e You said in *Technique Anglaise** that there was a point in the early eighties when art criticism became too narrow a platform and that the market began to lead. Can you go into that in a bit more detail?

KS There was a funny moment in about 1982/3 when the critics realised that their endorsement did not matter – it did not carry any weight. The market was a powerful mechanism to do it on its own – to the point where you had the perverse phenomenon of the critics denying the validity of certain works and the market going for it regardless. That was a quite dramatic change because before that point the two were pretty much in tandem.

e After leaving the Lisson Gallery you were working with Richard Salmon. How did that partnership start and how did it end?

KS It began in 1987 and ended seven years later. I suppose it ended because we did not see eye to eye any longer on many issues that are central to running a contemporary art gallery.

e When did the boom in the art market end?

KS The funny thing was that the peak and the

collapse were so close together. The peak was November/December 1990 and by May 1991 the market had collapsed.

e Why?

KS Essentially there were too many people in it for a quick buck and there came a point when it became obvious that speculators constituted by far the largest fraction in the market place. Whenever this happens any market will collapse.

e Since 1988 there have been a number of shows (Freeze, Modern Medicine, Gambler, East Country Yard Show) which were initiated by or included many of the artists you have subsequently shown. These artist-run exhibitions were part of an explosion of activity, the effects of which, in one sense, are still reverberating and in another sense have become established. How did you get involved in that scene.

KS The original wave of 1988 was due to the fact that there was an amazing concentration of very interesting artists at Goldsmiths College who were ready and wanted to show what they were doing and saw that there were very few outlets in London. They were definitely not willing to wait for people to make up their minds about them. The classic pattern is that you are watched by dealers for a while and get an occasional studio visit and a pat on the back and these artists were not willing to play the game this way, they wanted to change the rules and take the initiative. You can't blame them, because there was something very patronising about the old way. They did it incredibly well on their own and the big surprise was that everybody who mattered paid attention. All this shocked a lot of people because the pace previously had been very leisurely and predictable and suddenly these artists were forcing the agenda. It was very exciting and slightly anarchic – and it felt good. At that time we were looking after two UK artists, Bob Law and Alison Wilding, but shortly after we started working with Gary Hume, Michael Landy, Mat Collishaw, Angus Fairhurst, Rachel Whiteread, Anya Gallaccio and, a little later, Keith Coventry.

e There started to be a flexibility of artists showing in different places; commercial galleries, independent spaces and such...

KS Suddenly there was the idea that you did not necessarily need a gallery. Actually I always thought that was putting a brave face on the fact that there really weren't enough galleries who were prepared to take on young artists.

e There is a different situation operating now than to a similar phenomenon which occurred in

the sixties with Air and Space who set up a successful gallery and studio organisation. The difference this time round is that the current generation don't seem to have any antipathy to the art market whatsoever.

KS There was an antipathy to the market because there wasn't much of a market. It is quite soothing to express disdain for what you can't have.

e So the market is currently in a pretty healthy state? Despite what appears the continuing dissolution of Cork Street?


KS What we have witnessed in London over the last four years is the emergence of a new art scene. It is quite apparent that it is no longer the old guard only. It is new people and new faces and new ways of doing things and they have been successful because they have not been encumbered by their own history. These people can develop new models of how to deal with things. Look at Jay Jopling; this idea of a small space in conjunction with temporary large spaces is a very novel approach.

e As we have said, a lot of artists we have been talking about were graduates of Goldsmiths in the late eighties which seems to have been the training ground for a generation of artists and curators. What appears at first sight to be a network may actually be a closed system; a clique in which artists are showing their mates who in turn show their mates and it all goes around in a neat circle.

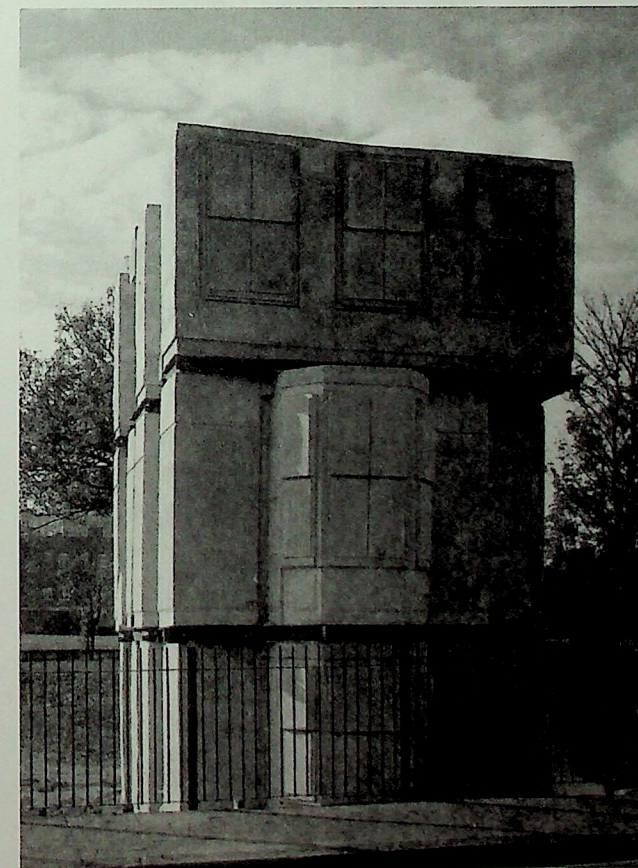
KS I think that's a bit unfair. I do not believe that there is a manipulative urge behind it. These artists are talking to each other and stick together because they share certain convictions and ideas. There is a time-honoured tradition to this, I mean, look at Cubism for example. You would not describe Picasso and Braque as a little cliquey, would you? All I can see is that there are people who share agendas and of course they should get together and talk and in this way further the debate. If you have anything to say in that context they would be very willing to take you up and include you. I suppose that the accusation of a closed network is unavoidable because the art world is so small. It is easy to say that it is the same fifty or so people over and over again, but this is not surprising because it is a very specialist occupation. If you talk about nuclear physicists, actors, athletes or whatever, it is also the same old faces again and again. I think people bring this up as a way of dismissing a whole set of concerns. I'd rather have people talk about the work, which is not easily dismissable, because if it was people wouldn't get so

worked up about it.

e Do you think that the debate about Rachel Whiteread's 'House' generated more heat than light?

KS It is very difficult to gauge the success of the debate in absolute terms but if we look at the number of people who felt it was necessary to participate in it I think it was a triumph. There were people coming out of the woodwork who I thought would not waste a second thought about art but felt compelled to declare themselves very publicly. It was not the classic situation where you had the Philistines on one side and The People Who Know on the other, and it wasn't a negative debate. Of the 120 or so press cuttings I've seen only about a fifth were negative. If you make a comparison too with the controversy that surrounded Carl Andre's 'Equivalent VIII' it definitely marked a progress and I am sure that any future debate will in turn benefit from the debate 'House' engendered.  **© Interview Steve Rushton 1994**

Rachel Whiteread.
House, 1993.
Photo: E Woodman.



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INTERVIEW

Green

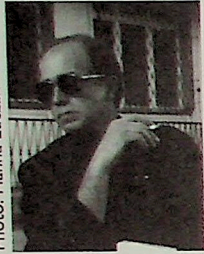


Photo: Hanna Luczak

everything
talks with
Jaroslaw
Kozlowski

Jaroslaw Kozlowski is well known for his association with independent or alternative exhibition spaces in Poznan, Poland. He also ran the Academy of Fine Art in Poznan for six years and organised the exhibition programme at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Warsaw for a period. His most comprehensively documented activities centre around Gallery Akumulatory 2 which he started in 1972. Everything talked with him during a recent visit to London.

e Long before you started Akumulatory 2 you were associated with Gallery OdNowa in Poznan. How did that association come about?

JK I was asked to become involved. The gallery had been opened as a platform for young artists and Andrzej Matuszewski asked me if I would be interested in helping to run it, he gave me the opportunity to create an entirely new programme.

e That was presumably a great leap for you. You were a student at the time, weren't you?

JK Yes, I was, and of course for me it was a most important lesson. I got much more from working for Gallery OdNowa than I ever did from studying at the Academy; especially because OdNowa was part of a very interesting network of galleries that existed across Poland from about 1956, when the first alternative space, Krzywe Kolo Gallery began in Warsaw after the period of social realism. In the meantime there had been others such as the Krzysztofory Gallery in Crakow, Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, and the Mona Lisa gallery in Wroclaw. These galleries had been very active and had somehow created a very new situation for art in Poland. Because of the political situation there was, of course, the "official" art establishment which dictated the correct way to view art and cultural life. The alternative movement was created to oppose this situation. The most important work which was addressed right from the beginning with all of these alternative spaces, including Gallery OdNowa, was the question of responsibility. It was the personal responsibility of the gallery organiser. The gallery programme, the structure, its function, everything was one person's vision.

e Was that not part of the problem with the official galleries?

JK Yes, of course, but what was different was not only that the new spaces were being run by

artists but that they were also avant-garde artists. And at this time avant-garde had a meaning. Another thing about these galleries was that the emphasis was not solely on exhibiting. In between exhibitions we organised discussions, meetings, seminars. There were lecture programmes etc. and the gallery became a meeting place to talk and think about art away from the isolation of one's own studio.

In this sense it was fulfilling something which was lacking at the Academy. Such discussions at the Academy, at that time, were not easy to find.

e And the work you exhibited at OdNowa, was that, as with your later works, built within the space?

JK Yes it was. I showed there twice and the first time was in 1967. I did what you would now call an installation. I think I called it an arrangement.

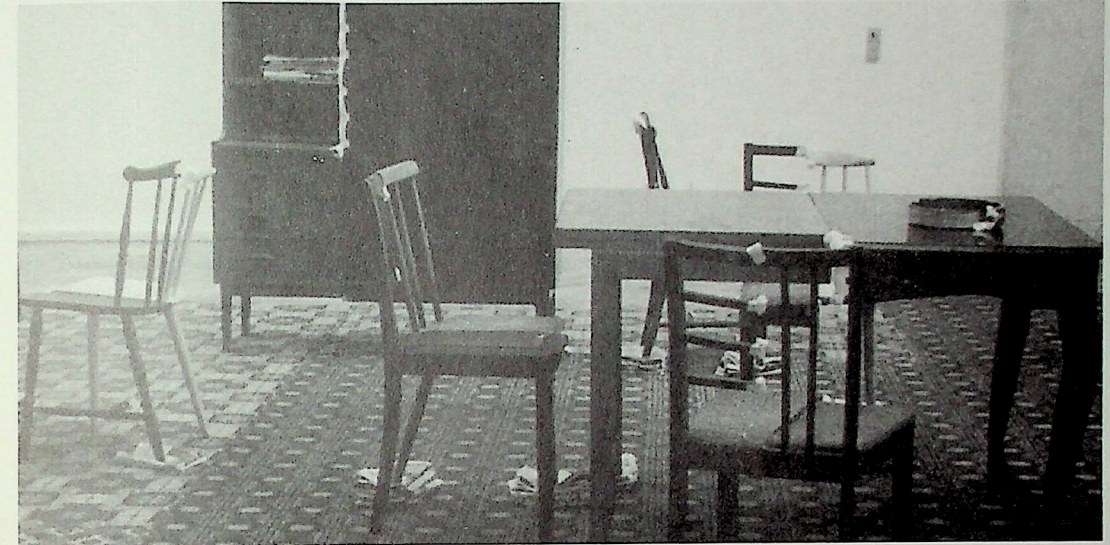
e What happened after OdNowa?

JK OdNowa closed down in the early 70s because of political reasons. In 1971 or 72 my friend Andrzej Kostolowski and I wrote a kind of manifesto called 'Net'. We sent out to artists all over the world to invite them for exchanges of ideas which ignored the existing gallery situations. A kind of alternative network of artists. A list of all the artists involved was also sent out. After one year I decided, because I had received so much information in response, to make some kind of exhibition of this material in my home. I invited ten people to see it. The police came, somehow they were already prepared with some sort of interpretation of what I was doing; that I was involved in some kind of anti-communist political structure. They nearly had me thrown out of the academy. Then for one year I was under very heavy investigation by the secret police and for five years I was not able to leave the country. They took my passport.

e Were you stopped from exhibiting?

JK No, that was OK, they didn't go that far. I started Akumulatory 2 just because I had no alternative. I could not exhibit in my home anymore because they somehow destroyed my privacy. They went through all of my books, my papers, everything. It was really a very heavy experience for me for the first year, but I decided to ignore it and continue the activity in a more neutral space. I started Akumulatory 2 in a small room in the basement of the students' hostel. We used this space for a few days each month.

e Can I ask you about your works of 'No Political Context'? Were they done as a response to treatment by the secret police?



JK These works were from the green series. I started the first ones with some green paper I found and I first cut out the shapes of different objects from it. They were called 'Green Object out of any Political Context'. I then showed the rest of the paper which was called 'Green Context of the Green Object out of any Political Context'. This was the beginning. It was a very strange time in Poland, at the beginning of martial law. The galleries were all closed for a few months and many artists decided that they would not show even if they were to open again. To me this was ridiculous because art is to be seen and artists should be active. So I made the Green exhibition when the gallery reopened under martial law. I built the wall in the middle of the gallery's space and it was called 'Green Wall out of any Political Context'. There was also a painting called 'The Green Picture of the Green Wall out of any Political Context, but Blue', and so on up to 'Green Wall out of any Political Context, but Upside Down'. It could have been a response to earlier events but at this time I was becoming more involved with works relating to language, logic and paradox. It was deliberately provocative work.

e You were running the Academy in Poznan between 1981 and 1987. In the light of what you've been saying that must have been an unusual appointment. How did it come about?

JK I was elected, mostly by the students. That was the first and only election at the beginning of '81, before martial law. There was a board of 90 people, one-third professors, one-third young

teachers and one third students. It has never happened again.

Now the situation is very different.

e It's interesting that the 'alternative' spaces were set up in Poland as a reaction to the degree of government control and here as a reaction to market control.

JK Yes of course, there are many similarities. Somehow the power of the free market plays the same function as cultural politics in power. But of course the free market is much more sophisticated. Our situation was simple because the rules were very primitive and it was easier to find ways to subvert them. The free market is in some sense more perverse, it can make you happy.

e In your book 'The Academy' you ask a series of standard questions about art and the artist on each page, alongside a section of an image of which we never see the whole. Your last question, on the final page, is; "How much is the frame?" This seems like a comment on the arbitrary nature of financial values placed on art as product, whilst at the same time broadening the question to; "How much is the context?"

JK It's very much about the context of art, about how artists are and how they are expected to be, and about what art is. We go to the gallery for some culture or some thinking. "Academy" is asking those questions; where does art start, where does art finish.

How much is art?



© Interview Keith Ball 1994

Jaroslaw Kozlowski.
'Soft protection –
Danish Version'.
Charlotenbourg,
Copenhagen 1994.
Photo courtesy
Jaroslaw Kozlowski.

THE RAG SHOW

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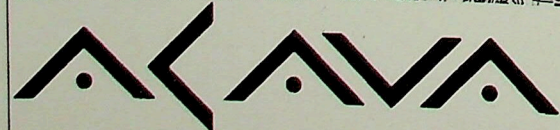
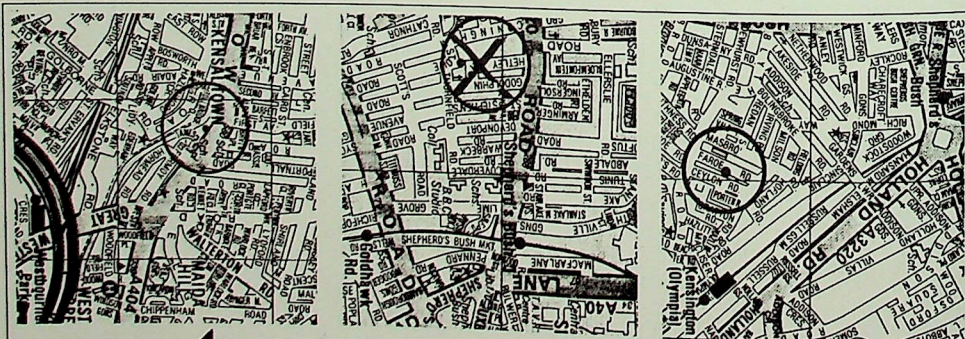
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INTERVIEW

Yellow



Photo: Hanna Luczak

Everything
 talks with
 Robin
 Klassnik



Robin Klassnik, 'Yellow Object Sculpture'.
 Photo courtesy the artist.

Robin Klassnik turned his studio into a gallery back in 1979. Since then Matt's Gallery has become recognised as a leading exhibition space for artists showing work which many mainstream galleries would find difficult to accommodate. Klassnik's interests always put the art and the artists before commercial concerns. The result has been to make art accessible which would otherwise have remained hidden. Klassnik's close working relationship with artists and his determination to show new work by side-stepping the main stream has influenced many of the artist-led spaces which now exist in London.

e Where did you study art?

RK I studied Fine Art at Hornsey College; I did two years there and three years at Leicester, and graduated in 1968. There was a lot of conceptual stuff about but I wasn't particularly involved with that. I studied painting which I gave up the day I left. Then I got a Space studio in St Katharine's Dock. That's really where I started again.

e What made you give up painting?

RK I couldn't paint. Nobody ever really told me at college that I just wasn't cut out to be a painter. I think as a painter, even though a lot of the work I show is quite sculpturally orientated. I see things in the flat but I think I've got a kind of spatial dyslexia. I can't for instance read an A to Z because I have a real problem locating things in space; the space we're sitting in now, for example, [Matt's Gallery] grew from a collaboration with the architect. It was a very similar process to putting on a show. The architect came over from France and sat in the building for six weeks with his drawing board. We worked on it together, the architect, myself and Alison [Alison Rafferty is the gallery administrator – without whom, Klassnik says, things would just fall apart].

I couldn't paint. Nobody ever really told me at college that I just wasn't cut out to be a painter. I think as a painter, even though a lot of the work I show is quite sculpturally orientated. I see things in the flat but I think I've got a kind of spatial dyslexia.

The architect could read the space and kept assuring me that it would look fine. I couldn't accept that, because I couldn't visualise the plans as a reality. Alison and I actually got huge rolls of newsprint and made all of the new walls in paper. Some of these walls are 35-40 feet long, and we cut out the doors so I could walk through and visualise it. It looked very Japanese.

e Given that you think as a painter, what kind of painting were you doing and was the decision to stop a conscious move toward working three dimensionally?

RK I don't know. I was painting these kind of

abstract, Matisse-like.. snail-like paintings. I did it for three years and I didn't know why.

e But you were allowed to just continue?

RK Yes I was allowed to and I got a 2:1, or a 2:2, I don't remember, and right at the end I had a typical art student "I'm not going to show" syndrome, and I got these big bales of coloured polythene and put them in my space just before the graduation show. I didn't know why I was doing that, but then I didn't know why I was painting either. When I left, I came to London and got the studio. I can't remember how. It was one of the first Space studios. Shortly after that, a colleague of mine from Leicester called Peter Moderate and I were asked to do something in Croydon for an organisation called Pavilions in the Park, who invited artists to make works in a series of portable structures. We worked together, that was my first collaboration with another artist, and we made a walk through painting.

e So that wasn't just the beginnings of working collaboratively, it was also to do with working with space?

RK Yes, the whole thing was very much about the space and the cross-over of art forms.

e A piece of yours that I always remember is 'Yellow Objects' which was instrumental in making your contact with Jaroslaw Kozlowski.

RK Yes, that's right. The 'Yellow Object' sculpture was originally shown at the ICA in 1972 and then in various other spaces. At the ICA it was shown in the corridor which had been converted into five shops, and five artists were invited to do things. I think the artists involved had all been working in shops.

Earlier I had rented the window of a book shop in Hornsey and invited people, at random, to participate by contributing objects out of which I could make an object. I distributed large brown envelopes with my name and address on through peoples doors in Crouch End, and received 1,231 objects from posting about 4,000 requests. Every day I would just put another object in the shop window. There was no system or aesthetic judgement to it and this is where, in retrospect, I came to a dead end. It looked like any Oxfam Shop.

I decided that for the ICA show, I had to make some sort of qualitative decision so I chose a colour. There was no particular reason for choosing yellow, it was just a means of unifying it. Again, in retrospect I think it was a mistake to go into an art gallery to build a shop, but that's what I was asked to do, and of course I wanted



Photo: Robin Klassnik

to be in an art gallery, we all do. And the ICA wasn't a bad place to be. Because there aren't too many houses around the ICA, I put the envelopes, this time around 8,000 for which I think I got sponsorship, in the car parks. They found their own way all over the world. So to come back to your question about Jaroslaw, he must have got hold of one, and he sent me five or six bobbins of yellow thread. In 74 or '75 he started writing to me and told me that he'd started a gallery called Akumulatory 2 in Poznan. He invited me to make an exhibition, and that was another turning point in my way of looking at things. Jaroslaw and I struck up a friendship from then. One of the things that impressed me in Poznan was the way that I was treated. I was in a completely alien land in Eastern Europe which had even more severe economic problems than today. But there was a one-to-one relationship. When I had put the show up, I was wondering if anyone was going to come, and nobody turned up. Then Jaroslaw walked in and said, "Are you ready?" and I said: "What do you mean, ready for what?" He said: "Are you ready for people to come in?" This was the policy: until the artist is ready and satisfied with the work the public can wait. He opened the doors and forty or fifty people

walked in. If I had said I wasn't ready he would have gone out there and said: "He's not opening up – he doesn't want to do it." And I think that was something quite touching.

e Akumulatory 2 became the model for Matt's Gallery didn't it?

RK Yes, I showed there four times, and then I think I started to run out of ideas, or at least, out of ways to articulate them. At that time I had the studio in Martello St, and in 1979 I opened it up as a gallery. I'm not really sure why. I had had experience of organising open studios in '75 for Space with Alexis Hunter, and enjoyed that process; but what I didn't like was, again, something to do with quality. There was something lacking and I had some sort of need to... unify things in some way. The need for quality became important.

e Your approach to the gallery was in many ways similar to that of Kozlowski and I suppose one might say that there was a meeting of minds between you. Where do you differ?

RK I think Jaroslaw and myself have got a similar role. I think we have very similar ideas, though I think we are very different in our approach in how things should be articulated, and may have differing perceptions on the role of the artist-

curator. But Jaroslaw was the catalyst which generated Matt's Gallery.

e Both Akumaltery 2 and Matt's Gallery sort of subverted the idea of the gallery.

RK Yes, Jaroslaw was using a small room rented from the students' union. Can you imagine that in the West? I used the studio space and, yes, I suppose I was subverting the idea of the gallery, but I didn't intend to. A lot of what's happened to me wasn't intended. It just happened naturally. I've always been a gallery and it was just allowed to develop. I've got more skilled at it and I've learned more about how galleries and institutions operate, but I'm not really interested in that. My idea is just really to show art and in some way, to have a one-to-one relationship with the artists I show. That's very important to me. I'm not an administrator. If I get asked how things are made for Matt's Gallery... it's just something that develops. I guess I'm supposed to bullshit and tell people the reasons why, but I really don't know. I never gave it any thought.

e Isn't that the way that any art-form develops? The precise root to something and its specific outcome may be unknown at the outset, but the underlying concept which shapes it is thought out in some depth. That's partly why exhibiting is necessary to the artist, to see how the specific results are measuring up to their broader concerns.

RK Yes, you have to have some notion of what you're doing. You have to have some idea. If we go right back to the first exhibition that David Troostwyk made, you've just reiterated something from our press release which I think stands true today.

David and I wrote that this was a show that would be on for a week for those who wanted to see it and that it was as much for the artist to see what he'd actually done. I forget the actual words, but it said that the work was there in a sense to be tested, and then maybe changed. That is one of the good things about Matt's Gallery; it allows artists that time for the work to develop and change. You can be here for three months and can sort things out before you open. Sometimes changes are made because something doesn't work. Some things have been radically changed from the way they started out. Much of the work I show, especially the kind of work that in the end I've gained a reputation for, desperately needs this extra time. Now this reminds me of something I read which was said by Nicholas Serota, along the lines that the difference between showing art in a gallery and a performance at the theatre was that in a gallery there are no dress rehearsals. At Matt's Gallery

we have dress rehearsals. Now that we've two spaces it's much easier because one exhibition can be opened whilst the next is being developed. It's something that became necessary. This amount of space at the beginning would have been wasted because I wouldn't have known what to do with it.

e You've said before that in some sense Matt's Gallery at Martello St was a white cube that could have been anywhere in the world. Is the same true of the new space? Aside from issues of sheer scale, it couldn't be in Cork St for example could it?

RK No, when I think about it, I don't think I could be in the centre of town, partly because of the person I am. I don't go into town. I don't go to clubs or restaurants or to private views, it's another place. When I do go it's to see an exhibition. I come here and I go to Walthamstow where I live. When I tell people that, I have to explain that it's on the Victoria line, the other end from Brixton. But this is an area I'm happy with and understand. The Galleries on Cork and Dering St have to be where they are for commercial reasons. International buyers can hop on a plane, hail a cab, do their shopping and be off again in a few hours.

e Has it also become a matter of principle for you to avoid those areas?

RK Probably it has... I don't really know because I don't have to be anywhere else. I'm not a commercial gallery in that sense and I'm happy with our audience. We have an enormous audience here, probably no smaller than the galleries I'm talking about; only they have more of a peripheral lot of bods dropping in on a lunch time, more passing trade. People have to make a bit of an effort to come over here.

e What about the teaching? You have given up full time teaching in London and have been teaching in Oslo for some time now, haven't you?

RK Yes, I've been teaching in Norway for the past five years for just 25 days a year in the sculpture department of the Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo. Over here I still regularly visit art schools and am an external assessor at Dublin, Newcastle and Brighton on BA and MA fine art courses.

e Do you find any difference between teaching in Oslo and London?

RK You can go into any art school anywhere, the internal politics are the same, the students are the same, their work is the same, and the messages on the wall are the same: **e** "I'm in the bar".

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Matt's Gallery

Mel Jackson

September 1994

Reiner Ruthenbeck


overturned furniture 1971-94

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GOETHE-INSTITUT

REVIEW

Wooden Concepts: Rocks in the Road



Graham High on Reiner Ruthenbeck at the Goethe-Institut and 'Rock my World' at the Independent Art Space

Reiner Ruthenbeck, 'Overturned Furniture' 1971. Photo courtesy Goethe-Institut.

The installation "Overturned furniture" is the first of a series of one-person exhibitions entitled "Conceptual art in Germany since 1968".

It is a reprise of a work (same idea, different furniture) first installed in Bremerhaven in 1971 and it is difficult to decide if the exhibition is reaffirming the continued validity of the work as concept or as a current installation or as a moment in the past now seen as influential. Somehow, conceptual work re-created seems an anachronism. The Goethe-Institut, being concerned with the German cultural inheritance, treats the show as an exercise in preservation, aiming "to focus on major contemporary German artists whose work has been seminal through the seventies and eighties in Europe, though little of it has been seen in Great Britain". Conceptual art fought for many different freedoms at once. In Britain as much as elsewhere, it tended to pull two ways. While some eschewed aestheticism and the fetishism of the art object by dint of logic systems and philosophy (art-language), others repudiated all discussion of art, working with objects and materials according to no preconceived philosophies and as far away as possible from the art history machine (Long, Fulton). Ruthenbeck's work has elements of both these positions. It aims to be elusive and indefinable and intends the "expulsion of language from art".

There were always going to be rocks in the road for conceptual art when it came to do its deal with history, particularly those artists whose work was most ephemeral and who most repudiated the idea of art history, even, like Bruce McLean, renouncing the title "artist", but Ruthenbeck stands outside such arguments. He works through genuine plastic qualities (gravity,

tension, configuration, harmony, and polarity) not tied up in any particular physical medium but intrinsic to the postulates of his ideas. Even so I left the Goethe-Institut feeling that I'd witnessed the re-enforcement of a cultural moment rather than a vital piece of work.


• • •

The IAS logo of the Independent Art Space is knowingly understated like that of some multinational conglomerate. Currently showing are four American artists, distant beneficiaries perhaps of Ruthenbeck's generation, and their heritage.

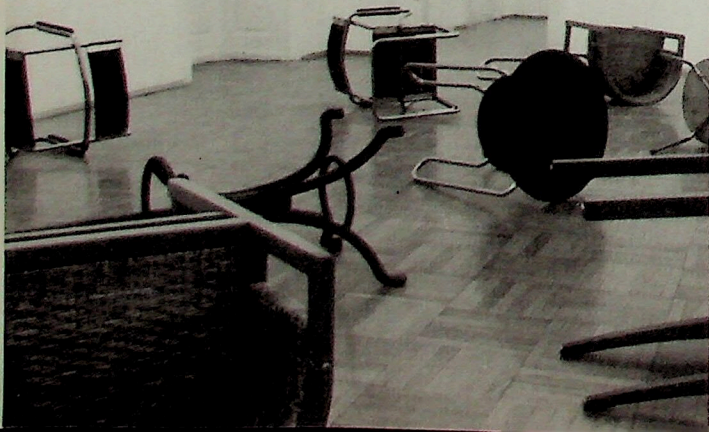
They are having a bit of fun in a sloppy, more or less conceptual, way with much exuberance and sense of freedom.

In art terms total freedom is proving to be a tricky beast to ride - its progress most often typified by bursts of random energy and no apparent sense of direction. As with the Serpentine's show "Some Went Mad, Some Ran Away..." (where basically all the artists ran away) there is no-one here prepared to make a stand for anything, and the atmosphere is a simple celebration of "anything goes" underpinned by tongue-in-cheek "keys to understanding" texts pinned to the walls.

The hand-written press release, perky and unpretentious, does no more than list the things there are to see and do, and since a critical appraisal is hardly relevant here, I shall do likewise. Tin ceiling panels nailed to the floor crackled underfoot in competition with amorphous music amped up to bass response; plaster ducks nestled on a grey cloth; bird shit and feathers lay in a tray beneath a sheet of stretched rubber; desultory photo-docs of the artists elevated nothing to nothing much; shoes were stuck to the windows, and a constellation of flexible door-stops protruded from the wall. If any furniture was overturned/subverted it was probably by accident since the most pleasurable feature was the free beer and genuine street-party atmosphere.

A plethora of supporters' video cameras added to the impression of a happening scene and when, rocks to impede the traffic having been placed in the road, the desired pay-off of a visit by the Bill occurred, they were used to the full. And who knows whether, in 20 years time, the whole show may not be re-created, rocks and all, by some culture-funding institution. Unlikely perhaps, but doubtless all concerned have their video footage labelled and waiting. 

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INTERVIEW

By Digging You Discover

Everything talks with Richard Wilson



Richard Wilson, 'Watertable', 1994. Photo: Stephen White, courtesy Matt's Gallery

Richard Wilson had been preparing for a show in Ireland. The walls of his studio were covered with working drawings and models of his past interventions into architectural space, including: 20:50, 'She Came in Through The Bathroom Window' and his most recent project at Matt's Gallery, 'Watertable'.

ewe've come full circle. The first review we did in Everything was the ice piece 'A Fresh Bunch of Flowers' which commemorated the tenth anniversary of Stephen Cripps' death. I'd like to begin by talking to you about your collaboration on that piece with Anne Bean and Paul Burwell and also your work with them with the natural sound ensemble Bow Gamelan.

RW 'A Fresh Bunch of Flowers' was seen as a

performance piece without performers, where these tributes were emerging as the ice melted, of course, there was a moment when the whole thing collapsed and there was what looked like seaweed everywhere. Accompanying that piece, which was the Slow Event, was the Fast Event which was not quite a Gamelan show but a three minute hard hit with pyros, drums and sculptural sound effects.

Margin notes describe works referred to in the interview. A 'Fresh Bunch of Flowers', (Serpentine, 1992). 32 large blocks of ice each containing a memento: a bottle of Bourbon, a drawing by Stephen Cripps, children's paintings, auto parts, flowers, cacti etc. In the hot June sun the ice melted.

I've known Anne and Paul since 1976 and it's always been an incredibly rewarding experience working with them because they have always been creative and active in their own areas and it's developed out of a genuine friendship.

Sheer Fluke 1985
(Matt's Gallery)
Aluminium, Soot and
Blue light.

An aluminium mould was constructed, under a wooden scaffold which spanned the length of the gallery. Aluminium was poured into the mould. The mould and scaffold and all evidence of its construction was removed. A fluke was painted in soot covering the wall at one end of the space.

Although the Gamelan still operates, my last gig with them was in Dublin for the festival in 1990. There is a new audience for my work some of whom are unaware of my participation in that band. My awareness of sound as a sculptural element became quite important to me during and after that period. You can see it in works like 'Hopperhead' for instance in which I projected a jet of water, pumped from a swimming pool, through a hole in the window, 30 feet across a room into a giant hopperhead. There was this white noise, plus a sense of performance, this sense of motion and the sense of the piece operating specifically within its own time. On dismantling that show the Gamelan had a four-day stint at The Place Theatre and we turned the Hopperhead into a massive megaphone as part of the introduction to our performance. We made a huge record player, and cut a four-foot disc of steel which had a groove which Paul and I made with a grinder and we used a six-inch nail for a needle.

e What sort of row did that make?

RW A sort of continuous scratch. It was very, very loud – in keeping with the Gamelan tradition of natural acoustics. You can either amplify electronically or you could just put a bloody great megaphone on it – which is just as good.

e A little more cumbersome perhaps?

RW We seemed to like that. We always joked about the Gamelan being ten years of being broke and standing in mud at the side of rivers or being cast adrift on boats. I do miss it but the demand for the solo stuff means that all my time is taken up with research and coming in on deadlines, and that's internationally, I can't really make more than five or six pieces a year it would be impossible to do more. The prime reason for that is that I like to be involved in every project. I'm currently involved in this project in LA where the whole thing is being made for me, it's about preconceiving an idea and sending information and letting a team of sixteen people build it, so I'll arrive and see this piece by this person who happens to be me. Well I've always enjoyed the idea of being the person who conducted the piece through its manufacture, which meant that I could make adjustments, go with the happy accident or glean information which would spark the next idea off and having that contact meant that there were changes from the

original notion. So now I have to be incredibly clear in my head and on paper about a piece that won't be made for another five months. So in one sense it can be frustrating but I don't want to abandon this way of working because if it works it means I could answer a lot more offers and it could have a positive outcome but I'll have to go into a kind of training to make that sort of adjustment.

e Staying with that idea of what informs your work; I was wondering to what extent the American artist/architects like Gordon Matta Clark and Robert Smithson set an example.

RW Obviously fantastic artists and people who I have always quoted as being influential, but to say that I sat down and studied them and found my path in art through them would be an exaggeration. I was doing this sort of stuff before I'd made any real headway in researching Gordon, although I was certainly aware of his work from very early on. It was more a case of seeing particular pieces of work by him in Studio International and thinking: "Who is this guy? I've never heard of him – but this is a great piece of work." It was only more recently that the information has been compiled and I was able to read his writings that I found lots of parallels to what I was thinking and doing. It's good to know one has allies. Quite recently somebody was talking to me about Watertable and I remember being moved by a Barry Flanigan piece called 'Hole In The Sea'. Barry arrived on the North Dutch coast with a Plexiglas tube, stuck it in the sea and began to bale out the water – it was a very economical piece that said so much more about Holland's fragility than some of the massive hits with artists' materials and money.

e I'd like to talk about your use of aluminium, particularly with pieces in the late '70s and early '80s like 'Heat Wave', 'Viaduct' and 'Sheer Fluke'. It seems to me that you have a very different relationship to process than say, Richard Serra who's lead works were purely to do with process whereas your pieces seemed to incorporate ideas about history.

RW Both myself and Serra, who you so kindly placed me with, were in one sense dealing with similar issues. Although Serra was dealing with process, you know the list of verbs, cutting, folding, stitching, he was also dealing with action which relates back to action painting. Where I picked up was really trying to locate pieces into spaces – to announce the fact that they could not have been brought there. I figured that the idea of the foundry and pouring seemed to pick up on many levels; notions of sculptural activity,

mould-making, construction, excavation, building something and leaving something else which is the complete opposite. Just prior to this I had been doing explosion pieces, burning pieces and soot pieces and the foundry idea was a connection to that. I couldn't fashion it too easily because the technique provided a distance. I was trying to allow something of the piece to fight back and make its own character.

These things took five or six days to make, with the foundry running eight hours a day, and so each subsequent application of metal would be measured in the form of strata. People would enter the gallery, see these vast beams of aluminium and say: "What must have gone on in here?" I liked the idea of announcing that the installation was about being on site. They did take from certain issues; 'Sheer Fluke' was analogous to the Great Whale being built in the Natural History Museum in 1928. I was entranced by the idea that the whale was a kind of installation sculpture, being built to fit the room. It was also a metaphor for scale, and the flukes [whale's tail] made out of soot alluded to the idea that we could be dealing with mammal which could soon be fossilised.

e There seems to me to be other implications in the work from that period; this idea of how we position ourselves in the present; that some things which we think are modern have been with us for ever.

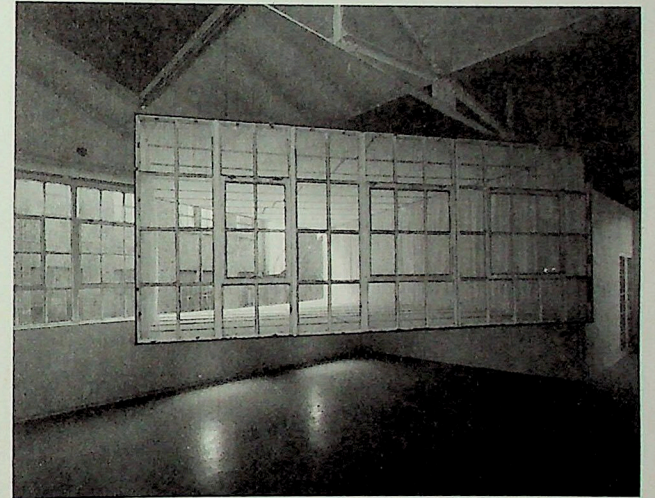
RW Well the big joke we had about Gamelan was that we were always patting ourselves on the back for re-inventing the whistling kettle, there was everyone working with computer disks and we were busy trying to find out what we could do with the steam engine. 'Viaduct', to take another example, picked up on some architectural points within the space but it also eludes to the 19th century romantic engineer. Brunel would work on a grand scale – grandiose, inventive, thinking. You don't invent objects now, you invent components that fit into each other. It's gone too far, we've got to wait for the new engine or levativity so that we can get inventing again.

e I'm interested in this idea of transformation. With '20:50' for instance is made of oil, which is seen as industrial and contemporary, and yet oil is not something which we have invented.

RW I've said before in an interview: what better way to deal with the idea of transformation than to deal with a material that has been through its own transformation? Oil is also very much a material of our century. It has a strange wealth which is recognised – wars have been fought over it. I was also interested in using a material

which was so anti sculpture, a material which you could be fined for if you poured it down the drain. It had all those environmentally unfriendly connotations. It brought me right back to the perfect solution to making a piece of work which is almost invisible. This followed on from the aluminium pieces except that in this case the room was the mould and the liquid remained liquid. It was a totally psychological experience: I watched some people go into that room and walk halfway up the corridor and grab the sides – they thought the floor had gone. They got oil on

She Came In Through The Bathroom Window. 1989 (Matt's Gallery) Glass, steel, soft board, PVC material and tungsten halogen floodlights. Window projected into the gallery space. See illustration below.



them – but that described to me an inefficiency between the eye and the brain – like when you're on a train and the train next to you moves off. You think you're moving, then you glance at the platform and see that you're not. Another thing about 20:50 was that, for its time, it seemed to touch on its immediate past: Op Art, Land Art, Field Painting, – so many of those other "isms" from the sixties and early seventies were suddenly pulled together.

e '20:50' has had various incarnations: firstly at Matt's then in Edinburgh, then at the Saatchi's and more recently at Mito in Japan. I was wondering what Charles Saatchi was buying: is it, in a sense, similar to the relationship between Richard Hamilton's 'Large Glass' and Duchamp's 'Large Glass', a record of the original event at Matt's?

RW It's an intriguing one which, I must admit, I haven't been able to answer satisfactorily, perhaps because Charles and I have never sat across a table and discussed it. What he actually bought were the rights to that piece of work which meant that every time it is shown it has to be rebuilt. Each time it is shown the focus changes.

'20:50' 1987, (Matt's Gallery, Edinburgh, Saatchi's, Mito) used sump oil, steel and wood. A mould of the room (or tank within it) reaches to about waist height, a corridor tapering inward and inclining upwards slightly comes to a dead end within the room.

It can only be shown with the owner's permission and in every case so far it has had my agreement. I'd have to say that my favourite was the first one but in every place it has shown it has worked for me, it is very much a chameleon piece.

e Looking at your drawings I can see that there are some pretty drastic changes which have gone on between the idea on paper and the final thing. I wondered to what extent Watertable underwent similar changes?

RW 'Watertable' isn't a process piece but it suggests that all sorts of procedures had to take place. It started off as a completely different work but it has always been fundamentally about burying something in the ground. I wanted the gallery to be the focus so that you could go into the gallery and think "This is the room, but where's the work". This is a way of announcing the new space, which has no ghosts in it, the new piece would reflect something of the thinking of how that space would operate in the future. It was going to be an inverted chalet, three metres deep so you were standing at the base looking down to its roof. The first influence on changing the piece came from Robin [Klassnik] who was worried about what he was allowed to do and he needed confirmation from his landlords as to whether we could dig the floor up. They said it was OK as long as a structural engineer would give it the go-ahead, so that the landlords would be legally covered. The structural engineer came down and checked the pads that the building sits on – they were incredibly shallow and then he decided to dig for water he found the water table was three metres down. If we had gone with the original idea we would have been far too close to the pads of the room and we would have had to build a coffer dam and pump out the water to make a dry space – which put an end to the idea. What that meant was going back to the drawing board with a richer understanding of what I was dealing with. Before, it was hypothetical and by digging you discover, and I got closer to this idea of connecting tables. There's the hole that I dug and the hole that has been argued out by the structural engineer. That could have been the piece of work, but it needed more so I started to think about connecting one table with another. The idea of a billiard table was perfect because billiard tables and watertables are both about the science of levels. People who install billiard tables level them off with water levels, ironically, you should never put liquid near the baize or that would be 350 quid down the drain. Later on, the piece developed through models, drawing, digging and playing. The influence of the room was

important, because the room was doing all the informing ie. the pads, the water table. I was making aesthetic decisions about what kind of rubber gasket was needed at the top of the pipe. In the process of all this information gleaning I discovered two things from the London Rivers Authority: one was that in the last century every factory that had a steam engine drew water from the watertable which powered their machinery. The second thing was that the chief registrar keeps a check on London's water table. He dips sticks 300 wells throughout London and the level is rising to a critical level because no industry is taking from it. It's a nice idea that what one is looking at takes place in the real world.

e What about the future? Presumably there will be something going on at Matt's Gallery?

RW Matt's is my only outlet in London at the moment, principally because I'm given the freedom I request. I haven't thought of the future, beyond the shows in LA and Ireland. I'm rather worried because audiences get into that whole English thing of waiting to see if I can go one better. It's a terrible pressure to live with; building this backlog of trying to outdo myself. I think I did it with the oil piece and then 'Bathroom Window' and now with 'Watertable', but it can be counter productive in the end, both for me and the London venue.


e Because people are expecting wizardry, do you think?

RW If you get a gallery allowing you to make a hole in it, people think "What's he going to do next?"

e I suppose they expect you to make another hole.

RW I'm toying with other ideas which are not strictly installation. I'd like to work with objects and film and there's this whole area of sound work to include drums and explosions which would be interesting to explore further. When we were working with the Gamelan, one of the main reasons for using pyrotechnics wasn't in order to play with fire works, but to explore an area of sound manufacture. There are only five ways of making sounds, but there is an uncharted sixth area; through burning, exploding and lighting things and allowing the chemicals to oscillate which makes a whistle, a rattle, a bang or a whoosh. You can start to direct these sounds.

One of the problems with a tiny black box, like the one you're holding, is that you don't really know where the sound is coming from, or how it's produced- it's mystified.

e We've come full circle... 

© Interview Steve Rushton 1994

STRUCTURES

Sites of ideological conflict



John Timberlake on municipal spaces

John Timberlake, panels from 'Insertion', Oldham Art Gallery, 1991.

way. Municipal spaces are a place of fracture between discourses of art and a wider world. All too often another discourse comes to the fore, however: an outcry similar to that over Andre's 'Equivalent VIII', but on a smaller scale perhaps.

The arguments take on a particular form based around issues of public money and perceived issues of "accountability". The crude "Is it Art?" debate (and its relative "Why should X spend money on this?") of course has a parallel and attendant function in the world of private galleries. It takes the form there of a half-staged debate within the media and functions to legitimise purchases. The status of "Art", once confirmed, assumes (in the hands of critics who play along with such a debate) a transcendental, mystical character: it assumes a higher universal truth or beauty and flows directly from idealist myths of originality and individual authorship.

The mirror image of such a debate with respect to municipal spaces tends to be more prone to political point scoring, as Phil Riley pointed out. Politicians in charge of such spaces find themselves with a vulnerable looking scapegoat speaking a language they think the electorate won't or can't understand. It's tempting to argue that the municipal space holds out the promise of an emancipation from commodification processes referred to above – if only one can get beyond this immediate politically opportunist myopia – to see the municipal spaces as "disinterested";

Phil Riley recently used these pages to deliver an effective defence of Centre 181 Gallery which is to close (since the appearance of that piece the gallery has been given a three-exhibition extension) and talked widely about issues relating to spaces under the control of local authorities.

In his conclusion, he identified – rightly in my opinion – the real impoverishment caused by 181's demise as being the denial of access to contemporary art for "everyday people". This is something I'd like to look at in more detail.

I think it's important that, as artists, we examine and discuss the phenomenon of municipal spaces. The forces that act upon them and the contradictions they embody highlight a number of issues related directly or indirectly to the consumption of all art in society.

The local municipally supported gallery is the conduit through which a large proportion of contemporary art must pass, in order to reach a wider audience. If municipal spaces are in the process of extinction, then it is with their dying glow that other processes within the art world are in some senses thrown into relief.

I for one feel there's always a particular awkwardness, a particular challenge about showing work in these places. There's a cold light there,

not so much of public scrutiny, but rather "incidental" public scrutiny. Often

because of the siting and nature of these spaces, work has to face not only the gaze of people who come in to look at art but also those who went in to do something else. So placed, work testifies to the pointlessness of doing work for anyone other than ourselves: the wider audience, unknown, unprepared and unexpected, can only be guessed at. Yet the challenge of all that often proves irresistible. Most of us jump at the chance to show work this



BRIGHTON BEACH BY MOONLIGHT
(Detail)
by J. Atkinson Grimshaw
1867

Oil on board: 24 1/2" x 36 1/2"
Signed h.r. Atkinson Grimshaw
Inscribed verso Brighton beach by moonlight

An early example of the type of painting for which Grimshaw was to become famous during later years. The painting was known to have been shown at Leeds in 1869, but remained untraced until the late 1970s. Recent X-ray analysis reveals a figure, thought to be that of a woman, originally included on the pier, looking towards the boat.

freed from commercial pressures, an independent haven, if not arbiter, of culture.

This illusion has to be countered with the point that municipal spaces are subject to very specific ideological pressures, as well as economic. The agenda may be different, but it is defined and determined nevertheless.

The first generation of municipal spaces arose from specific social, historical and economic factors. They were launched on a specific trajectory with a specific goal, determined by ideological considerations that have since been challenged and undermined.

The closure of municipal spaces, whilst in individual instances hinges on immediate issues such as funding, short-term political decisions and so on, in general signals a change in bourgeois attitudes analogous to those which have led to changed emphasis in education (training for the needs of business etc) or scientific research.

The galleries and museums built to show art in the nineteenth century – as the ‘first generation’ – were conceived in an educative role by the bourgeois benefactors who argued for and commissioned them. If we take one example, that of Manchester, the argument for the establishment of a city art gallery was couched in quite specific terms:

“The position of the Arts and Painting and Sculpture in England is very ludicrous. On the life of the people they have no effect... Painting and Sculpture are above all the arts of the teacher (...). If Art can raise the life of a people, we know too well that its aid is needed in Manchester... The museum which I ask you to help me in forming will show I think that Art can again be made a teacher.. very little use has been made of the true selling power of a series of pictures. I believe the Hogarths in the National Gallery are more looked at and remembered than any other there...”

This is from someone called Thomas Horsfall, in a speech made in 1877 at Altrincham. In the same speech he saw painting as being pivotal in showing the masses “the most beautiful places around Manchester”. Resting crudely on the merits of narrative painting and sculpture, it’s easy to see how the original ideological roots of such public galleries were displaced by the triumph of modernism: galleries no longer existed to use art as an educational tool to teach about the outside or transcendental worlds (a different function to that of private galleries): they existed now to “teach” about art itself. The educative role survived the transformation as a suppression: despite the rupture the pedagogical tradition lived on.

I think its true to say however, that in this new

phase the “use” of this educative role now (transfigured) became less self-evident, that is to say more detached from the agenda prescribed by the needs the bourgeois required of its workforce. As a result, the structures built around the municipal gallery – specifically the curatorial and managerial – henceforth faced a struggle to ensure their own survival. The tempo and intensity of this struggle has been co-determined by additional factors such as the growth of other mass cultural forms, the neo-liberalism of the 1950s economic structures and so on.


Municipal spaces are in part defined by their wider audience. The class dimension has remained central throughout their history, despite notions of greater social mobility fashionable in the 1980s. I think this again can be seen as flowing from their original function, through the transformations of the past century. The issue of class has remained a central theme in justifying the spaces and often is in the case of public spaces in general.

It’s interesting that Bill McAllister as director of the ICA in 1985 replied to the “uproar” over Les Levine’s ‘Blame God’ project with: “The half-a-million people who visit the ICA do not come from SW1, but rather from Battersea, Paddington, Hackney etc...”

Such perceptions of accountability have made municipal spaces the focus of wider conflicts even before the present battles over cuts. They are sites of ideological conflict as well as economic. At least three interests can immediately be discerned: the national social elite and its political executive; the municipal gallery curatorial, administrative and management structures, and the audience itself, who are, of course, not a passive, solely receptive entity.

But in concluding I want to argue that to leave it at that not only over-simplifies the issue but also ignores the fact that the artist him/herself, and the work s/he produces, enters this melée not as an *additional*, but as a constituent element. An artist’s practice does not lie inert on top of the structures created by this balance of power(s). Municipal spaces are never simply a showcase of talent. The placing of modern work in these galleries not only exposes the problematic inherent within the existing structure, it actually activates it.

It must be with some relief that the closure of municipal spaces is being watched from some quarters: repositied in private spaces or not shown at all, radical modernist work does not then chafe against the historical cracks and ruptures of the prevailing hegemony.

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Listings

Angela Flowers Gallery

5 Silver Place, W1
Tel: 071 287 8328
Humphrey Ocean: De-mystifying Humphrey Ocean.
Until 8 July. Tue-Fri 10-6

Houldsworth Fine Art

13 Old Burlington St, W1
Tel: 071 969 8197
Matthew Radford. New Work
Until 25 June. Tue-Sat 11-6

Francis Graham-Dixon Gallery

17/18 Great Sutton St, EC1
Tel: 071 250 1962
Willard Boepple: Recent Sculpture
Until 25 June. Mon-Sat 11-6

Gallerie Besson

15 Royal Arcade, 28 Old Bond St, W1
Tel: 071 491 1706
Shiro Tsujimura. Until 1 July
Tue-Fri 10-5.30, Sat 10-12.30. (Mons by appt only)

Gallerie Matisse

Institute Francais
17 Queensberry Place, SW7 2DT
Tel: 071 589 6211
Alain Kirili: Sculpture.
Until 13 July. Mon-Fri 9.30-7, Sat 12-4

Jill George

38 Lexington St W1
Tel: 071 439 7343
Fraser Taylor. Recent work
Until 8 July. Mon-Fri 10-6, Sat 11-4

Rebecca Hossack

35 Windmill St W1P 1HH
Tel: 071 409 3599/436 4899
Emily Kngwarreye. Until 2 July. Mon-Sat 10-6

ICA

Nash House, The Mall SW1
Tel: 071 930 3647
Charles Ray. Until 14 August
12-7.30 (Late Tuesday 12-9).

Interim Art

21 Beck Rd E8 4RE
Tel: 071254 9607
Gillian Wearing.
Until 2 July. Fri Sat 11-6 and by appointment.

5-6 Hoxton St,

Old Street, N1
'Liar', Jake and Dinos Chapman, Anne Eggebert, Cerith Wyn Evans, Sadie Benning. (A Place Called Lovely). Until 25 June
Wed-Sat 12-6

Lisson Gallery

67 Lisson St NW1
Tel: 071 724 2739
Art and Language. Until 9 July
Mon-Fri 10-6 Sat 10-5

Matt's Gallery

42-44 Copperfield Rd E3 4RR
Tel 081 983 1771
David Troostwyk
New Figurative Works. Until 7 July
Wed-Sun 12-6

198 Gallery

198 Railton Rd, SE24 OL
Tel 071 978 8309
Ben Jones. In The Spirit. Until 9 July.
Tues-Sat-12.30-5.30 and by appointment.

Raw Gallery

7 Gainsford Rd, SE1 2NE
Tel 071 357 7570
Joe Walker, Lisa Wright, Tessanna Hoare. Ewen Henderson.
Until 10 July

Saatchi Collection

98a Boundary Road
Tel 071 624 8299
Young British Artists 3
Simon Callery, Simon English, Jenny Saville.
Until August.
Fri-Sun 12-6
(Sat and Sun £2 admission)

Karsten Schubert

41/42 Foley St, W1P 7LD
Tel 071 631 0031
Meg Cranston. Until 2 July
Tues-Fri 10-6, Sat 11-3

Serpentine Gallery

Kensington Gardens W2.
Tel 071 402 6075 (071 723 9072)
Here and Now. Survey of British Artists
Until 10 July.
Daily 10-6

The Showroom

44 Bonner Rd, E2
Tel: 081 983 4115
Sam Taylor-Wood
Installation. Until 31 July
Wed-Sun 1-6

Small Mansion Gallery

Gunnersbury Park, W3.
Tel 081 993 0312
Riverside Artists Group Show
Tues-Sun 12-4. Also at **Watermans**. Until 12 July.

