

Art

MONTHLY

OCTOBER 05 / No 290 / UK £3.90 US\$6.50

The Art of Skill

Dave Beech

Robert Smithson Now

Joseph Masheck

What is the Alternative?

Martin Herbert

Very Rough Guides

Jonathan Harris



■ Go Between

Magazin 4 and Palais Thurn & Taxis Bregenz

July 17 to September 4

Sex, *Todestrieb* (death drive) and lakeside strolling; folk architecture, coprophagia and torture – it must be summer in Bregenz. 'Go Between' was a collaboration between curators who like their art provocative in disregard for social and aesthetic codes. As director of the Bregenzer Kunstverein, Wolfgang Fetz has been organising shows in Austria for over a decade. Peter Lewis has been active in London since the late 80s, most recently running *Redux* in Spitalfields. Fetz and Lewis's partnership has extended across six exhibitions with Lewis switching roles as writer, artist and curator, or in this case combining all three. Much of the content of 'Go Between' was the kind notably missing from a lacklustre Venice Biennale, whose surfeit of commodity feminism would have found its nemesis in these libidinous, if sometimes atavistic, preoccupations.

These large concept-driven summer shows derive from Fetz's earlier 'Kunst in der Stadt' initiatives (I exhibited in the 1999 version), which for four years entertained and antagonised this Austrian resort with site-specific installations. Most unconventionally, Fetz has treated these as experiments in curating, welcoming artists' responses that challenge the organising principle and presentation conventions. Opportunities extended to some London-based artists (BANK, Julian Opie and Simon Patterson all showed in Bregenz) increased dramatically under the Fetz/Lewis partnership. Well over half of the 25 artists in 'Go Between' work in Britain. Grouped together in two large venues, the work could readily be evaluated under the show's premise that artists are intermediaries prising open working space within institutions or between representational systems. In his catalogue essay, Fetz's explanation of the show's guiding concept envisaged a metaphor enhancing art's engagement with life by reaffirming its difference from that life. For the curators, this

idea of an interstitial role helped explain art's dispersal into innumerable social operations while retaining distinctiveness as object or event.

Research paid off well here, with extensive projects like Walid Raad/Atlas Group's *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines*, 1996-2004, and Rut Blees Luxemburg's *Liebeslied/My Suicides*, 2004, looking all the better for their depth of enquiry. Both opened up rich seams in which practice could thrive. Raad's 100 Beirut car-bomb photographs, posing as straight documentation, effectively problematised its associations from 'pataphysical absurdity and habituation to violence, to heavy-metal sculpture and terrorism aesthetics. Luxemburg's mini-opera with its libretto about photography by Alexander García Duttmann and score by Paul Clark was a smart way to transform a practice, where her enlarged photographs served as images integrating convincing lyrics with memorable music (see AM282). Also persuasive was Jalal Toufic's video '*Ashura: This Blood Spilled in My Veins*, 2002, which documented Shia mortification rites, shown alongside his movie posters, modified with Islamist statements. Interrupting the bloody images were sequences of Toufic lecturing on memory, Gilles Deleuze on mourning and Jacques Derrida on crying, adding complexity to an emotional narrative.

Such installations gained distinctiveness through calculated surrender to strong external material. With Terry Atkinson and Bruce McLean, however, the defining pressure was reflexive, as we would expect from conceptual practices emerging in the 70s. Atkinson's genuinely weird paintings were the more discomfiting for his persistently shoddy workmanship. Digital screens were awkwardly embedded into monochrome canvases on which propositions and images were inexpertly pencilled and collaged. Scrolling painfully slowly up one screen was a lengthy analytical reflection on language's circumscribing of avant-garde production, with frequent self-deprecatory asides and listless references to the object-status of the paintings themselves. Hats off to the thoroughness of this *Bartleby*-like response to the allure of the world, upheld in a rather different manner by McLean's 1972 text/performance work *King for a Day* with its frequently

Klaus Pobitzer
Don Giovanni 2005
video installation



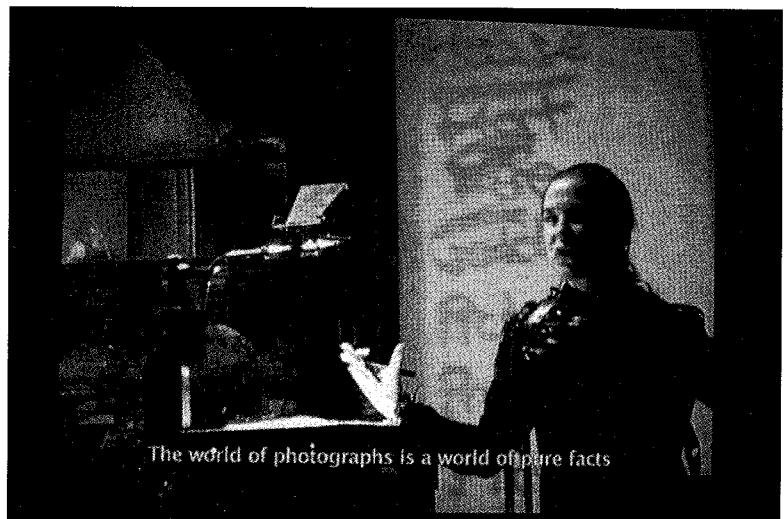
ludicrous 999 listed studio instructions; for example: *688 Soot art*. Nice work, but wouldn't their strenuous avoidance of interstitial practices disqualify both artists from 'Go Between'?

Different misgivings arose from artists playing fast and loose with visual culture and conceptual strategies. As relentlessly as Doug Fishbone's *Towards a Common Understanding*, 2005, served up coprophagic imagery, so it knowingly fed us crapola, impersonating the style of an educational video. He also showed a box ostensibly containing sand from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This tactic of blasé critique required different company to show off its merits. Also straying into the wrong exhibition was Martin Sexton whose post-punk *Prada-Meinhof* project and video juxtaposing clips from *Bay Watch* with *Triumph of the Will* skated on thin ice indeed. Other casualties of over-tolerant curating included a disappointingly economical logo video by Liam Gillick (whose catalogue entry promised so much more) and Shezad Dawood's axiomatic acknowledgement of pan-African imagery in Black soul music, a hyperbolised installation of scattered vinyl and Disneyesque voodoo idol, which may have worked better in its original London milieu.

Where a lax approach paid off, though, was with Jimmie Durham's video performance *Smashing*, 2004. In suit and necktie, impassively seated behind a desk, Durham used a rock to smash all objects brought before him. Mocking relational practices, this arbiter of reverse creativity issued the same sentence on all submissions from the real world by reducing them to debris.

The painters were surprisingly effective go-betweens, suggesting that the medium's stolid materiality might have advantages over video in mediating distance from its subject. With compelling recourse to alienating effects, Wolfe Lenkiewicz's large monochrome paintings used grisaille treatment to render bizarrely sadistic emblematic imagery. The bricolage surfaces of Hilary Koob-Sassen's floor-to-ceiling construction imagined a literal evocation of future biological and cultural structures and was accompanied by a video whose painterly image-processing ironically outlined a schema for German pop songs based on narratives of social and ecological trauma. Roger Cremers' delicate watercolours, inventively rearranging fragments of industrial residue, were there in sufficient quantity to demonstrate an unusual visual language. However, Diann Bauer's single small painting was no substitute for her more familiar mural installations. Her inventories of hyperactive graphic imagery as an erotics of self-immolation really need scale if they are to lure us into admiring the spectacle of our own violent death.

Lecturing once on art and pornography I would get inured to such imagery, but I am still taken aback by the prevalence of sexually-charged work in these shows. It never seems to bother the



Rut Bles Luxemburg
Liebesleid/My Suicides 2004
video still

Austrians that much though, with posters featuring the lesbian romp from Klaus Pobitzer's *Don Giovanni*, 2005, saturating the town's billboards. This two-channel video was shown on large plasma monitors opposite continuous screenings of Alain Robbe-Grillet's 1974 film *Playing with Fire* whose Sadeian tableaux of beautiful young women stripped for sexual pleasure needed further contextualising to avoid dismissal as period sexism. Apart from its unaddressed racial politics, Edgar Honetschlanger's elaborate restaging of an early love affair with a Japanese woman gratuitously included hardcore closeups detracting from an already indulgent installation. And Richard Hoek & John Miller's appropriated billboard just happened to show a blonde babe in a thong gazing out at the spectator. In all these cases the casual enthusiasm with which sexually-charged imagery had been incorporated into the work overshadowed other content. The curators' declared interstice of art and pornography was really addressed only by Cosey Fanni Tutti's magazine images which, in any case, have been widely re-circulated since the late 90s.

For all its perplexities this was nevertheless a valuable show whose missteps came from a commitment to launching new ideas and avoiding sycophancy that Fetz and Lewis have made their distinctive *modus operandi*. I'd rather have one of the Kunstverein's experiments anytime than the tentative and predictable initiatives that pass for most institutional curating these days. ■

MARK HARRIS is an artist living in London and Cincinnati.

Art Sheffield 05 Spectator T

October 28th -
November 27th
2005



The Henry Moore
Foundation

Francis
Langdon

illuminate

The National Lottery

M

A city-wide contemporary
art event which takes place
within Sheffield's major
galleries, project spaces,
non-gallery venues and
public sites.

Venues include:
Arundel Works, Blee Space,
The End Gallery, Millennium
Galleries, St Artspace
Site Gallery & Sylvester Works.

Spectator T Symposium
Friday 28th October
1.30-5pm. Speakers include:
JJ Charlesworth
Steve Button
Becky Shaw
Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan
Gavin Wade

Spectator T
contributing artists:

Simon & Tom Bloor*
Robin Glöse
Gordon Dalton*
Graham Fagen
Ben Fitton

Josephine Flynn
Ryan Gander*
Gelatin

Gifts to the City of Sheffield:*

Anthony Gross
Kirsten Lyle
Lisa Mahony
Luke Oxley
Mark Pearson
Jen Wu
Dan Griffiths
Matthew Harrison
Christian Jankowski

Juneau Projects*
Camilla Lyon
Matt & Ross
Jim Medway
Jo Mitchell*
Heather & Ivan Morison*
Damon Peckard
Joanna Rajkowska*
Savage*
Becky Shaw*
Joanne Tatham &
Tom O'Sullivan*
Laureana Toledo*
Bedwyr Williams*
* new commissions

Opening Event Thursday
27th October

For more information on the context for the event
written by artist curator Gavin Wade, the programme,
symposium and other contemporary art in Sheffield
go to: www.artsheffield.org



COVER

Robert Smithson

*Floating Island to Travel
Around Manhattan Island
1970/2005*

01 FEATURES

The Art of Skill

The negation of skill in art is impossible without skills of negation argues Dave Beech

07 Robert Smithson Now

For all its environmental theoretical and literary significance Smithson's work was above all visual insists Joseph Masheck

13 What is the Alternative?

Martin Herbert finds grounds for cautious optimism

18 COMMENT EDITORIAL

19 NEWS ARTNOTES

22 REVIEWS

EXHIBITIONS

Go Between

Mark Harris

24 Carsten Höller

Gilda Williams

25 Oliver Payne & Nick Relph

Peter Suchin

26 Omer Fast

Lisa Le Feuvre

27 Mark Dion

Ann Coxon

28 Diana Thater

Eliza Williams

29 Hallucination

Jennifer Thatcher

31 Fiona Crisp/Matthew

Tickle/Phillip Warnell
Sarah James

32 Extreme Abstraction

Graham Parker

34 Do you Like Stuff?

Adam E Mendelsohn

37 ARTISTS' BOOKS Proposals and Scripts

Stephen Bury

38 BOOKS

Very Rough Guides

Jonathan Harris

40 REPORT

NET WORKS

Media Ecologies

Michael Gibbs

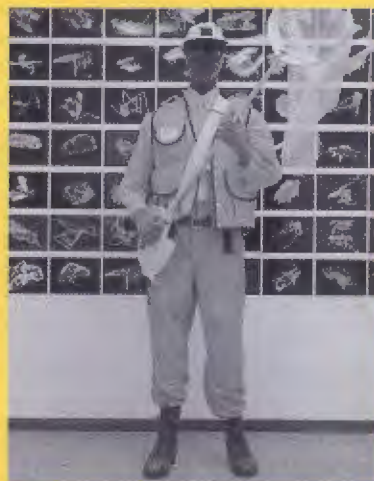
41 ARTLAW

UK Artists' Resale Right

Henry Lydiate

42 LISTINGS

EXHIBITIONS



Art Monthly
4th Floor
28 Charing Cross Road
London WC2H 0DB
United Kingdom

Telephone
020 7240 0389
Advertising
020 7240 0418
Fax
020 7497 0726
info@artmonthly.co.uk
www.artmonthly.co.uk

ISSN 0142 6702
Art Monthly is published
10 times a year

Editor
Patricia Bickers
Managing Editor
Letty Mooring
Deputy Editor
Andrew Wilson
Editorial Assistant
Frederika Whitehead
Listings
Chris McCormack
listings@artmonthly.co.uk
Advertising
Matt Hale
Chris McCormack
ads@artmonthly.co.uk
Subscriptions
Brendan Fan
subs@artmonthly.co.uk
Distribution
Brendan Fan
Publisher
Jack Wendler
Design
Area



Published by Britannia Art Publications Ltd. All editorial, advertising and subscription enquiries to *Art Monthly* 4th Floor, 28 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0DB, T 020 7240 0389, F 020 7497 0726, info@artmonthly.co.uk. Printed in Great Britain by Brown Knight & Truscott, North Farm Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 3BW. Bookshop/Gallery Retail Distribution: Central Books Ltd, 99 Wallis Rd, London E9 5LN, T 020 8986 4854, F 020 8533 5821, E orders@centralbooks.com; Newstrade Distribution: Comag Specialist Division, Tavistock Works, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, Middx UB7 7QX, T 01895 433 800 F 01895 433 801, E Andy.hounslow@comag.co.uk; USA: Ubiquity Distributors, 607 Degraw Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217, USA, T 718 875 5491.

Art Monthly (USPS No: 009-857) is published monthly except Jul/Aug and Dec/Jan combined issues and distributed in the US by DSW, 75 Aberdeen Road, Emigsville, PA 17318-0437. Periodicals postage paid at Emigsville, PA. Postmaster: send address changes to *Art Monthly* c/o PO Box 437, Emigsville, PA 17318-0437.

The views expressed in *Art Monthly* are not necessarily those of the Publishers or Editors. Articles submitted for possible publication and accompanied by SAE are welcomed, but it is advisable to contact the Editorial Department beforehand. While every effort will be made to safeguard unsolicited mss, photos and other material submitted, the Editors will not accept responsibility for loss or damage. *Art Monthly* is available on audio tape for the visually impaired from TNAUK, T 01435 866102. The electronic version of *Art Monthly* is available on the *Art Index* <http://www.hwwilson.com>. © No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced in any way without permission. *Art Monthly* has been set in Art Monthly Sans and Art Monthly Serif.

