

flashing but atemporal digital clocks and photographs (perhaps the real clocks): 'On 30th August at 12:43 I climbed up a hill ...', 'Yesterday at 12:44 I decided to meditate ...' or 'At 12:00 I lit a cigarette ...' introduce latter-day existentialist narratives, chance encounters and their inconsequences. The characters and places seem as remote as a collection of dead butterflies: out of time.

This exhibition provides an international modernist approach to space and time. At a time when globalisation has become such a contentious issue, the underlying politics could have been brought out more fully by the inclusion of such projects as the Nanostate ([www.nanostate.org](http://www.nanostate.org)), which explores the interstices of time and space, territory and power. Instead, we are left with On Kawara's date painting, *May 7th 1991*: this is only complete when it lies, unseen, in its custom-made cardboard box, accompanied by a cutting from the newspaper of the city where the artist made the painting. But does it then exist? ■

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## ■ Birmingham

Ikon Gallery Birmingham July 18 to September 2

Birmingham, the former centre of Britain's manufacturing industry and now in the process of major architectural change, is the focus for new work by five prominent international artists. The exhibition boldly titled 'Birmingham' approaches the daunting task of defining the city via an examination of its inhabitants, the various constituencies that daily walk its streets, push through doorways, sit next to you on the bus, crowd outside bars or grab fast food on the go.

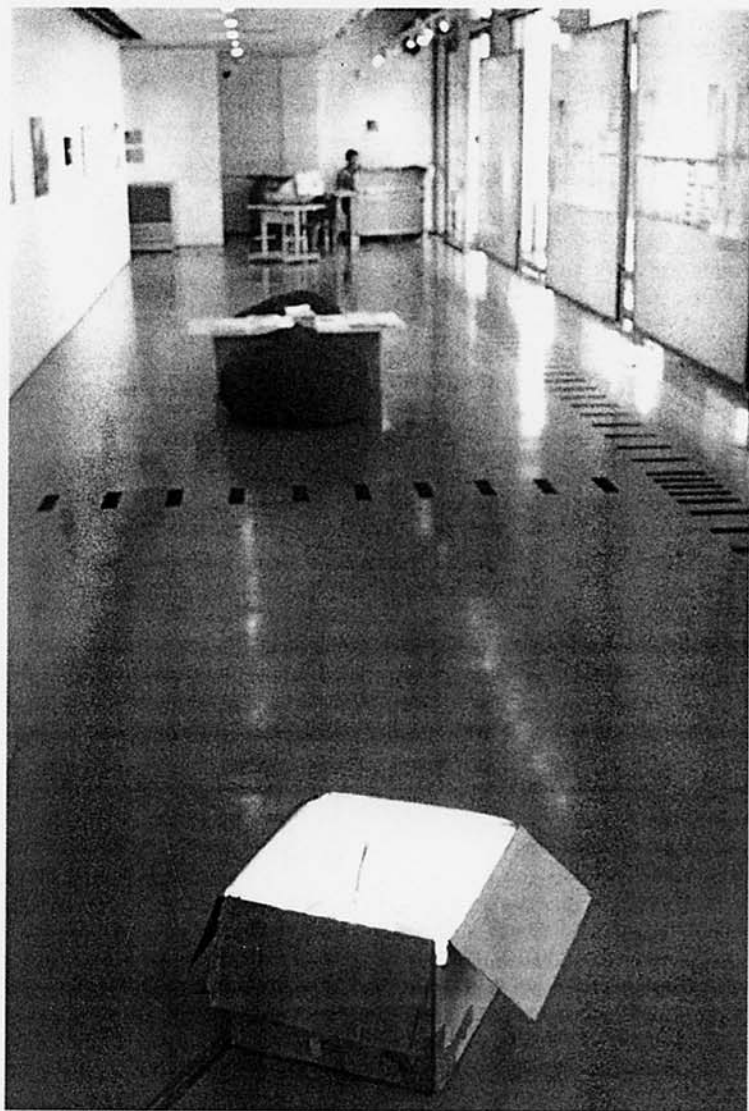
In the first of the lower galleries a grid of ink jet photographs of Birmingham students occupies one of the walls. Beat Streuli's vivid portraits show a cross-section of students caught out of the classroom and casually posed against a blurred background of urban parking lots and school playing fields; the photographs occupy a space somewhere between Gap advertising and school portraiture. The reaction of the students is mixed, fluctuating between moody popstar cool, bright humour and questioning compliance. The proliferation of hooded tops, camouflage prints and baseball caps reflect an assimilation of global pop and hip-hop culture rather than mark any localised inflection.

A further video work, *The Pallasades, May 26, 2001*, 2001, captures the stream of human traffic that daily descends a shopping mall ramp-way. A closely cropped, fixed-frame format again reveals little of the context drawing our attention instead towards individual figures within the crowd. Small movements are discernible: the cautious demeanour of a man clutching a mobile phone or the flirty self-awareness of a girl with bleached hair. As you are caught within this silent hypnotic network the anonymity of the crowd makes way for moments of intimate revelation.

As Streuli employs the revelatory power of the crowd, Pierre Huyghe's video installation *Concrete Requiem*, 2000, sombrely records the point at which the crowd (in this case the consumer) has moved on. Seen in its day as a leading example of progressive urban architecture, the Bull Ring markets contained the social heart of the city as well as providing cheap fruit and veg and the occasional rare vinyl moment. No longer in step with the civic aspirations of the city as 'Europe's Meeting Place' the Bull Ring has been ripped out to make way for a grand new design and the injection of upmarket retailers. *Concrete Requiem* captures the last days of the City's infamous 60s shopping complex. The stroll around documentary style camera work reveals boarded up shops, grim interiors and deserted concrete corridors.

Beat Streuli  
*Birmingham Portraits*  
2001





installation view

*Print – Donald Judd and Flight Times: London to ...*, 2001, a digital print of all possible direct flight-times from London to airports listed from A to Z (Aarhus to Zurich), were themselves produced at the London Print Studio workshops. Indeed McCrea's box of neon signs is the only three-dimensional work in the exhibition: there is something ironic in the exploration of the fourth dimension through just two.

Even cyberspace is two-dimensional, visible only on a flat screen. Laura Ruggieri's *Singen. Which?*, 2000, again recreates an earlier work, this time for the international exhibition, 'Hier, Da und Dort', in Singen, Germany. The electronic disturbance, the creation of fictional web-sites – [www.singen.dk](http://www.singen.dk), [www.singen.it](http://www.singen.it), [www.singen.cz](http://www.singen.cz), [www.singen.at](http://www.singen.at) and [www.singen-heidiland.ch](http://www.singen-heidiland.ch) – destabilises that city's symbolic economy as expressed in its website ([www.singen.de](http://www.singen.de)) which conveniently ignores its forced

labour camp history and dependence on guest workers, and forgets the industrial sprawl separating it from Lake Konstanz. At this venue this is supplemented by digitised postcards from each of the Singens, pinned to a cork message board you might well have in your kitchen.

Two of the works take a book and make it (more) two-dimensional. Matthew Higgs' *Seven Wonders of the World*, 1998, began as an Imprint 93 project for the 'NoWhere' show at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humleback: 28 people, from Fiona Banner to Elizabeth Wright, suggested their alternative candidates for the classical seven wonders of the world – interestingly both Ceal Floyer and Simon Periton chose the seven days of the week. Here, the later A3 Book Works version, designed by Scott King, is pinned broadside-style to the gallery wall: ten individuals had been invited to suggest a further ten to supply their equivalents of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus or the Colossus of Rhodes. The physical fragility of the monumental is suggested by the ephemeral nature of taste/judgement.

46LiverpoolSt.org ([www.46LiverpoolSt.org](http://www.46LiverpoolSt.org) – where you can see photographs of the London Print Studio installation) – are Tim Brennan, Geoffrey Cox and Adrian Ward. On (or around) February 24, 1848, at a printers in 46 Liverpool Street, London, the Workers' Educational Association published in German (and in a Gothic font) *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Here, an i-Mac gives access to their web browser which electronically affects what is browsed, overlaying the present with the past, or the past with the present. There are also two display cases with variant editions of *The Communist Manifesto*: each different type-face, size, language, book cover design and scholarly (or otherwise) apparatus suggesting different receptions in place and time of the work. However, a continuity of text, from 'A spectre is haunting Europe' to 'Working Men of All Countries, Unite!', persists. A free, single-sided A4 sheet, provides a condensed English version of the text: illegible without magnification, it connotes loss and mystery, as if one would have to recreate the circumstances of its original production to understand it now.

These two works are the most obvious juxtapositions of past and present. The press release talks of the non-spaces of airports, motels, theme parks and shopping malls where time and place are equated and annihilated, but the exhibition does not really address these subjects: yes, there is a reference to airports in Whittlesea's temporal co-ordinates of Heathrow or in the international graphics of Liam Gillick's pictographic *Design for a Roundabout in Karow Nord, Berlin*, 1999, but the ambiguity of non-places is not satisfactorily explored. Gareth Jones' *Meadow*, 1994-96 is an attempt to depict the ideal landscape: a bleached green, yellow, black and blue photographic print has trees and flowers and dimly (at the right centre) there is a power or telegraph pole which subverts the naturalness of it all – *El in Arcadia ego ...* Stefan Nikolaev's *Meditation Rock, 307, Two Pounds and Sixty Four Pence*, all 2000, are wall text-pieces that incorporate



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Vece (*The City of Dreams and Hope*, 2001) nor is it as abstract as Absalon's *Bataille*, 1993. Yet, they are all fascinated by the idea of one's own space, which is essentially singular and only momentarily plural.

Richard Sennett has written eloquently of the horrible toll on the social texture of urban life wrought by ethnic and class segregation. Against all expectations, so-called 'mixed' residences have scored high among city dwellers. While people don't feel the need to get too close to their neighbours, they do not necessarily wish to live exclusively among their own kind. While there is real potential in the idea of artists coming to grips with real problems, the result of this encounter is far too often self-congratulatory. There is precious little understanding of social life outside the artistic ghetto in the whimsical escapes that reproduce what is essentially our idea of the artist's life.

This artistic practice is also outside the realm of studio and gallery space, which paradoxically makes for an interesting museum experience. It's out in the open; free to wander, like Richard Long or Hamish Fulton used to be. But it is also the sustainable engineering of the Dutch collective Atelier van Lieshout, with their utilitarian motto 'You can have fun as long as you don't harm or disadvantage our turf'. These modern urban nomads inhabit a stupendously fluid space, which can also be profoundly lonely. Their point seems to be that the only way to 'plug-in' is to 'un-plug'. Of course, mobility presents big problems for cities and nation states. Forced migration, a kind of un-Romantic mobility, creates seemingly insoluble problems. Like the desire for a homeland. And then the whole cycle of nationalism and exclusion begins all over again.

But even when a population is stable, problems arise when diversity emerges or the differences that have peacefully co-existed for generations suddenly become unbearable and threatening. Walking around this particular German city, seeing three iron cages suspended from the belfry of a church in the center of Münster, reminded me of that. These were reserved for the Anabaptists, who were placed there and allowed to rot in public because of their religious beliefs. It was nasty, very secure and very private. Some of the works in 'Plug-

In' reminded me of those cages, but also of the kind of intolerance that the exhibition aspired to exorcise through imaginative design and planning. Uprooted populations, forced economic migration, mass 'illegal' immigration and asylum-seeking: ours is truly the age of migration. It's the new human tragedy of countless populations moving across every political border for every conceivable reason. However, I could not quite see past the artists' allegorisation of the dispossessed to make out the bright and shining world of the future, in which people enjoyed the freedom to stroll. ■

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## ■ A Timely Place, or, Getting Back to Somewhere

London Print Studio Gallery July 13 to September 22

A cardboard box lies on the floor. Inside are four jumbled-up, illuminated neon signs, each in a different colour, denoting the 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s, the four decades through which Ronan McCrea has (so far) lived. *Everything*, 1998-2000, references an earlier installation in which the four neon signs were hung on separate walls and the spectators invited to 'bask in the glow' of the colour of their favourite decade – red, blue, green, yellow (in chronological order). Artworks, like everything else, are subject to time, and the sad, discarded box is an elegy both to the 20th Century and to the neo-conceptualism of the late 90s.

'A Timely Place, or, Getting Back to Somewhere' is the first of a series of projects – 'Printed Space' – curated by Paul O'Neill at the London Print Studio Gallery, which continues its revival begun by his predecessor, Deirdre Kelly. O'Neill is also the curator/artistic director of Multiples, Dublin. The theme of 'A Timely Place' is, unsurprisingly, space and time, explored through print or text-based works. Ian Whittlesea's immaculate *Studio*

'A Timely Place ...'  
installation view

