Inbetween Spaces

Cooinciding with Look 07, Inbetween Spaces is at various billboard sites around Manchester. It is an exhibition exploring the idea of the advertising billboard as a potential channel for artistic communication.

The project arose out of Inés Rae’s book publication Kurl up n Dye which explores the vernacular in the British high street. Her series of photographs and typography set out to examine the pockets of creativity and spontaneity in some small businesses, and an element of this survives here with one image carrying a reference to the word play and visual puns on the backstreets.

The project was then expanded to include artists whose work could have a dialogue with a billboard site and whose work is, in some way, marginal. Some of the artists achieve this through reference to specific issues, while others are more playful, from a portrait of a sales assistant in the retail district to an image of how the city is becoming the entertainment centre of the North. Ultimately the images put on the advertising billboards are of things we would not normally expect to see there, challenging some assumptions about the use of such spaces. The work of five artists is featured; Joe Devlin, John Goodwin, Pam Holmes, Inés Rae and Suzanne Smith.

The sites can be viewed from the road or by pedestrians, making the work accessible to anyone taking a particular route around the city, either to and from work, while shopping, or purposefully following the map enclosed.

The project takes place over different sites in diverse and sometimes marginal locations and consequently the spaces between the billboards become part of the exhibition, heightening our awareness of our urban habitat and our expectations of images.

LAUNCH AT CUBE, FRIDAY 27 APRIL, 6-8.30PM, 113–115 PORTLAND STREET MANCHESTER M1 6PB. T. 0161 237 5525 Bus tours will take place at the launch (6.30pm and 7.30pm). Maps will be available on the opening night and at www.myspace.com/inbetweenspaces07

Joe Devlin
The present is known as the present only through the evidence of a past that was once a present.

Joe Devlin’s practice employs the use of marginalia. Working in libraries over the years has led Devlin to search for clues relating to past readers interaction with books. Devlin reads the library rather than just the books contained in it. For the billboard project he will be showing a blank, yellowed, dog-eared page taken from a book by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida.

John Goodwin
Recently included in East International 06, Goodwin submitted photographs of his family as they grew up in Manchester, these intimate images he sees as a kind of horror vacui between moments. He is interested in the fatigue of the image and a continued fascination with other people’s snapshots. Former international rugby player (toured with England 1975) turned pantomime artist, I’m Fine Art Manchester. Currently Fine Art Tutor at Plymouth College.

Pam Holmes
Gives graphic docudramas. The work is a critique of cultural constructions and aims to challenge context and provide conversations with the audience, the images act as mirrors to allow the viewers to project their own personal narratives.


Inés Rae

Suzanne Smith
Some things are never appropriate and they are the best. Sometimes graffiti feels like boys taking back the streets from The Man and making them more intimidating for The Ladies. Sometimes you get angry and sometimes I think we down and out of my bottom freak funny but who gives a shit.

Born 1976, Nottingham.

Graduated from the Fine Art at Manchester Metropolitan University. Recently exhibited in Kiasma, Helsinki 2006 and The Lowry, Salford 2007.

Inbetween Spaces Artists have often used billboards as a device to politically charge a privately owned advertisement space, within a public arena. Billboards provide a rare opportunity for individuals and groups to claim back spaces, which are more often than not, for the sole use of private corporations competing for public attention. In an attempt to infiltrate these spaces, artists have temporarily bought billboard sites, interrupting the supposedly seamless surface of capitalist imagery. However if we take a cursory look at some of the most effective and effective billboard artworks in recent history, we can see that the seams of advertising space are teaming with artists’ interventions.

New York City has been the location for two important, personal transformations of the billboard site. The increasing amount of electronic advertisement hoardings has been an invasive and strangely exciting development in even the most peripheral city. In Spring 2006, Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist was commissioned by the Public Art Fund to make an artwork to occupy the Panasonic Screen in Times Square. Rist’s proposal was Open My Glade, an individual invasion of this iconic public space. The painful dislocation of individuals was symbolised, through technology, in a visceral way. Passersby and tourists increasing screen images. In the early nineties Felix Gonzalez-Torres produced his billboard projects, such as the black and white photograph of an unmade bed, Untitled, at 32–33 Second Avenue, Second Street, New York and, again installed at the bequest of a mega-art institution, The Museum of Modern Art. Like Rist he spoke of a wish to infiltrate the urban space in a similar way to a virus. And yet again in the United States, between 2004–2005, the Walker Art Centre Billboard project commissioned five artists to make work whilst the main building was closed, on a 14-by-48-foot billboard located northeast of the Walker and the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden in downtown Minneapolis. Takashi Murakami, Yoko Ono and Matthew Barney were amongst the artists approached. Like advertisements, these artists attempt to draw the viewer into their work engaging with them on a personal level, in an attempt, not to sell to the public, but rather to provoke a shock, that there is no commercial intention behind it. Of course this is to ignore the fact that artists have a commercial stake in the world, especially when backed by a mega bucks institution. It is interesting to note that more and more advertisers are adopting campaigns, which keep the consumer guessing, alluding to a product in increasingly esoteric ways, baffling this consumer at least.

It seems that these advertisers are aping the strategies of artists, so that purpose is the only differentiating factor.

Bringing this short text back to the North West, there have been many instances of artists ready, willing and able to explore this heavily chartered territory of the billboard, Inbetween Spaces being the latest in the line. What is anticipated through the bus and walking tours of the various sites around Manchester, Salford and Bexwick, is that the journey will be an important element in the project. The billboards will provide both sentences and punctuation in an essay of the marginal in and around the urban sprawl.