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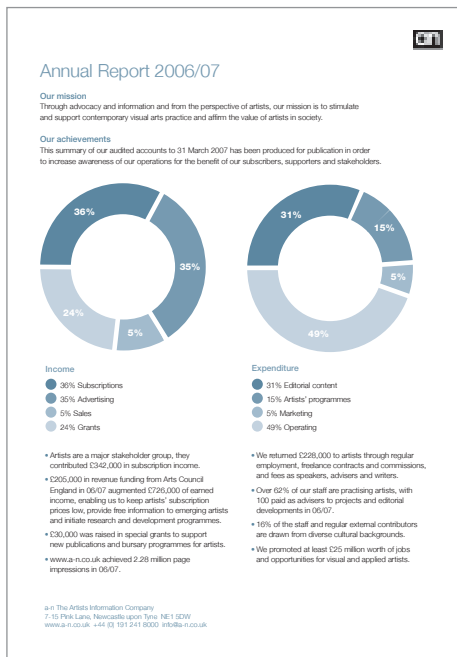
Stimulating and supporting contemporary visual arts practice

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On the cover

Fiona Curran, *Some Kinds of Weather Create Situations*, acrylic on linen, 2007.
Photo: Peter Hope

"The subject matter and motifs within my work have developed from an interest in the social and psychological spaces we inhabit as viewers. I utilise pattern, colour and landscape imagery to conjure up imagined spaces that play with notions of the real and the artificial. Recent works have evolved from research into 'scenic wallpapers' from the nineteenth century that took a new approach to the idea of interior decoration. Instead of patterns in repeat these papers utilised the walls' surface as a space to bring the outside in presenting panoramic views for consumption; walls became a site of escape, a place to travel to an exotic 'elsewhere'.

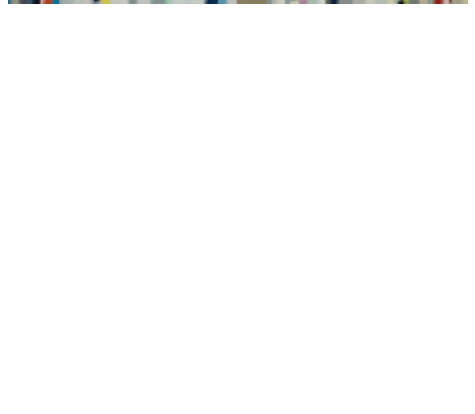
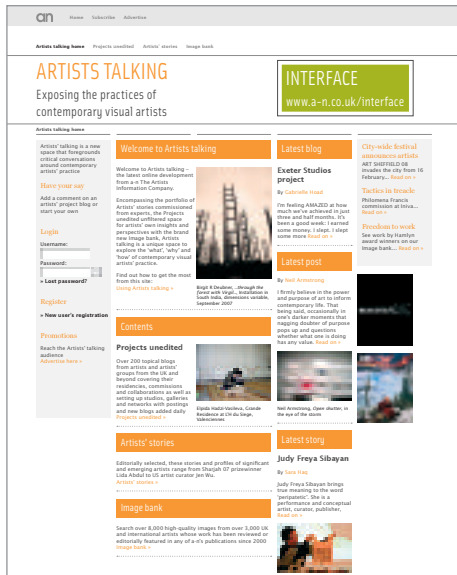
"A series of recent collages utilise commercial paint colour cards produced for the domestic interiors market. Colours are given seductive names – Cloudy Heights, African Adventure, Himalayan Musk – equating colour with real and imagined places. Using these images as starting points my current paintings derive from digital fabrications that reconfigure the initial compositions into abstract forms. The allusion to the landscape is however, still present and provides the viewer with a trace of the familiar."

For further information see www.fionacurran.co.uk and see review on page 8.



Artists talking

Projects unedited; Artists' stories; Image bank
Exposing the practices of contemporary visual and applied artists.



Fiona Curran: The World is Larger in Summer

MAC, Birmingham

28 September – 10 November

Curran's work is partly inspired by mid-nineteenth century scenic wallpapers that often revolved around the dialectic of man and nature. The work from which the exhibition takes its title is a large sheet of paper onto which small pieces of cut-out paper have been glued, forming a colourful landscape of plants and trees. It is an attractive and stimulating piece, keeping the eyes busy while leaving room for the imagination to try to piece together what's what – are some of the leaves birds in flight, bluebells or butterflies, undergrowth or woodland creatures?

This delicate and dainty piece from 2006 is tinged with chinoiserie, an undercurrent continued in the collage diptych *Desert Island Discontent* from the same year. Here the exotic imagination is given more to feast on, with densely layered paper leaving little of the support showing. This strange and luscious landscape provides plenty of visual information about the flora depicted, giving any proficient horticulturalist a sporting chance of identifying the diverse species. The colours are vibrant, with luminous yellow clouds contrasted against rich blue tree trunks, crimson treetops, pink flowers and khaki foliage. Such combinations really shouldn't work together, but Curran pulls it off with conviction.

The artist's interests extend beyond the figurative



Fiona Curran, *Desert island discontent* (detail), collage, 2006.

into abstraction in a series of five small gouache works entitled *Compositions I-V* (2007). Comprising a plethora of angular shapes in myriad colours, the effect is like looking into a diamond or an explosion of crystal cut glass. Rendered with painstaking precision, they offer a charming and intriguing exploration of space, shape and colour. These preoccupations are developed on a larger

scale in several acrylic on linen works, combining opaque and translucent brushwork in interlocking tesserae of varying shapes and sizes in such a way as to create a lively, technicolour dialogue between the flatbed plane and three dimensional form.

Matt Price is an editor and writer based in Birmingham and London.

Neil Webb: The stars in us all

Bloc, Sheffield

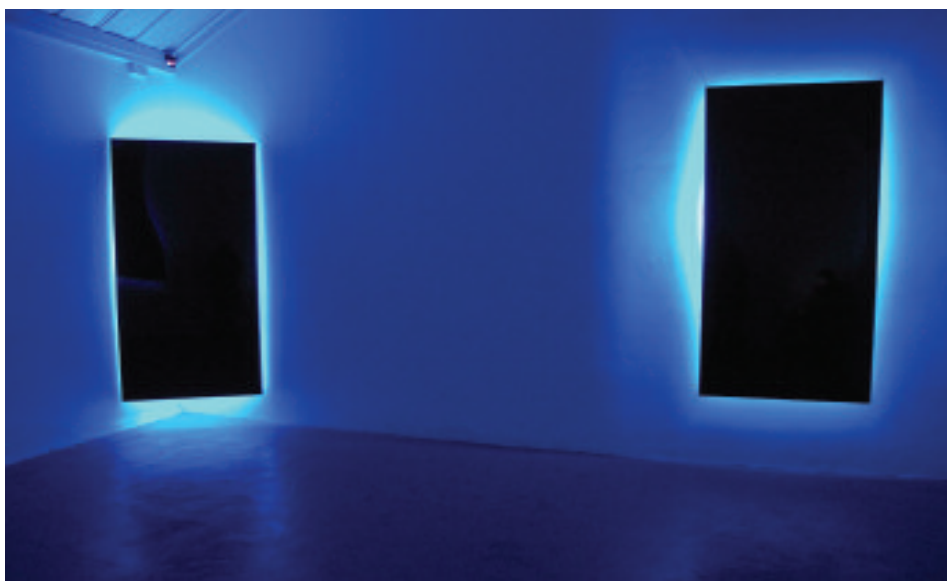
3-18 November

The simple power of a bold and pure vision. In Stanley Kubrick's '2001: A Space Odyssey' the monolith encountered by Dave Bowman has become a classic of contemporary iconography – a symbol for what we do not and may never know. It places us on a threshold of awe and wonder.

In the latest of a prolific series of installations Neil Webb invites us to take this as a starting point. He uses resynthesised versions of Bowman's final transmission ("My God, it's full of stars") to deliver a striking example of spatial aesthetics which considers the interrelationship of objects within given dimensions. The aim is to encourage reflection and the inner quiet espoused by authors like Paul Wilson in 'The Quiet', and feed the imagination so vital to David Lynch in his treatise on transcendental meditation 'Catching the Big Fish'.

The first point that strikes the visitor is the unconventional symmetry. Webb has worked his design to suit the space. Three large glossy black aluminium panels dominate the walls and a wooden resonating bench, which gives the feel of a sanctuary or a chapel rather than a gallery.

This is definitely a strange, imposing but ultimately uplifting experience. The steel black panels framed in a thin glowing band of neon blue-white light initially offer us nothing, standing resolute, unscrupulous – daring us to gaze at them as our eyes adjust to the light and the portal-like reflections in



Neil Webb, *The Stars in Us All*, backlit aluminium panels with surface-exciting speakers, each panel 2x1m, 2007. Photo: Christiane Thalmann

the panels, whereby our imagination may look into or pass through. The overall experience is one of looking outward rather than inward. We soon begin to realise that it is the panels that are alive – transmitting the sound by vibration.

Objects are sonified. The panels shape the tone of the sound, giving a metallic alien sheen to the human sound elements – voices in choral form stroke the walls with spaced intervals like controlled breathing, while a heartbeat gently throbs inside the bench.

Although his approach is musical, Webb is not a typical sound artist. He is approaching work where sound

is part of a total artistic vision and a transmitter of ideas. Here he is dealing with the spaces in between places, words, thoughts and actions – the territory between inertia and activity where energy forms.

Immediately on leaving the gallery I received a text from a close friend telling me that his father, after a prolonged struggle, had finally passed on. This is what we all must come to. As I dip my head against the biting cold I can only hope that, as he stood on the threshold, all he saw was stars.

Ron Wright is a sound practitioner in film and art, and is Senior Lecturer in Sound at Sheffield Hallam University, Northern Media School.