



# Live Culture



MODERN

TATE

Live Art  
Development  
Agency



## Specific Rona Lee

### More of a medley than a survey

My selection for this programme, despite a debate with myself about achieving what might be described as 'representative sample', has been more eclectic than systematic, and arrived at through a serendipitous process. I have seen none of the works 'live', some were chosen 'blind' on the basis of something seen or heard; with others I know the maker well.

The brief was to assemble a number of works under the title – *Specific* – 'site specific performance works made in, through and for particular locations'.

Rona Lee *Present*



sitespecificsiterelatedpublicnewgenrepublic  
communitycontextrelatedinterdisciplinary  
combinedinteractiveconvergentfinevisuallive  
performancebodybritscicontemporary...  
add.your.own...ART

Thankfully it is the specifics of the works,  
which have risen to the surface.

If I began writing this with the aim of achieving  
an overview or formulating a debate, what has  
become important instead is to reflect  
something of the way in which a 'particle'  
of each work has lodged in my mind's eye –  
setting off trains of thought, suggesting  
strategies, stimulating the imagination.

They have become for me at least, a set –  
like the coloured pencils I played with as  
a child, endlessly arranging and rearranging  
them in different combinations, or a deck  
of cards – I keep reshuffling.

Forming collectively a medley – a playful term,  
evocative of the feeling I have of putting  
together a kind of compilation album, each  
track resonating through and with the others:

the scale and ambition of Station House  
Opera's *Bastille Dances*<sup>1</sup> – as first  
encountered in a photograph circa 1990 –  
its absolute privileging of materiality and  
offer of liberation from narrative structures  
and representational devices

dustwhiteclimbdarklightbalancefallchange  
tiredbreathmadtyrannicalgracefuloperatic  
gothicmanneredspectaclepersistent

Fiona Templeton's *You – The City* (1988)<sup>2</sup>  
– intriguing, evocative – a piece formed  
in my mind until now, by report – its twists  
and turns somehow anticipated in response  
to the conceptual strength of the work

the possibilities opened up by the way  
in which the piece collapses the roles  
of performer and participant

the uncertainty and discomfort it provokes  
even when viewed on video

cornerridestairreversediscomfortfearthrill  
reflectionmeyoupowershiftoutsideinside  
followleaddisorientateshift

Kirsten Lavers' *pyr(rh)ic solution # book two*  
(1998)<sup>3</sup> – her capacity to connect different  
aspects of her life and experience, the  
satisfaction I derive from the poetic and  
material balance she achieves between

**Station House Opera**  
The Salisbury Proverbs (1997)

**Kirsten Lavers**  
*pyr(rh)ic solution # book two* (1998)

**Fiona Templeton**  
*You – The City* (1988)

**Anna Best**  
*PHIL* (2002)

**Rona Lee**  
*Present* (1997)

preservation and destruction, constituency  
and disenfranchisement.

the space afforded to me by the understated  
character of the work

pressburnsmellturnorderspeaknametestament  
informalheardeafeatstruggletidyorder

the wit and simplicity of Anna Best's *PHIL*  
(2002)<sup>4</sup>

the excitement I feel as each of the monitors  
comes to life – an opening to rival any musical  
finale

the pleasure of a work, which so deftly  
combines lightness of touch with subversion

culturehomenicevisitpoliteanticpateperform  
orderpartydisipatethankswithdrawpolite

my own experience of making *Present* (1997)<sup>5</sup>  
– the way in which the cultural politics of  
the commissioning process forged a new  
understanding of the need for work to operate  
reflexively – to address and redress  
the functions of art

poisoncontaincontrolset-upreturndues  
falsuccessjokerepeatprize



1) The work shown in this programme is *Salisbury Proverbs* (1997) a later work in Station House Opera's series of breezeblock pieces.

'For *The Salisbury Proverbs* the company built a temporary and ever changing monument to celebrate Salisbury's most famous and permanent one Salisbury Cathedral. The piece involved 25 performers, singers and musicians, the Salisbury Festival chorus and over 10,000 breezeblocks. The performance itself consisted of a network of proverbial and allegorical narratives – a version of Breughel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* – given an architectural and sculptural form'. *Notes received from the artist by e-mail 2003.*

2) 'an intimate Manhattan wide play for an audience of one', first created in New York in 1988, and in London in 1989. It was both site-specific, using about 14 locations and the routes between, and radically interactive, taking only one client at a time on the journey, who was directly addressed by each performer. The video shows the client's-eye point of view, although the aspect of response is lost in the document. *Notes received from the artist by e-mail 2003.*

3) '*pyr(rh)lic solution # book two* – The Boots Library, Nottingham. A five day performance involving the recorded reading and burning of individuals' names, from a notebook used to document the nightly events within an emergency winter nightshelter for homeless people, sited in a disused library. *Notes received from the artist by e-mail 2003.*

4) '15 London Philharmonic Orchestra Musicians played their part of a Mozart Serenade in a Phil's home and this was filmed on video. These separate performances were then reunited for one evening in the form of an orchestra of televisions in the Beaufoy Institute'. *Notes received from the artist by e-mail 2003.*

5) *Present* took place in Beverly Public Library and Art Gallery and incorporated archival material about the donation of the building to the people of Beverly. The central action was the attempt over three days to paint a perfect circle – a 'gift' attributed to Giotto and regarded as a sign of his genius. At the end local arts officers were invited to select the twenty best, which before being donated by the artist to the permanent collection, were hung opposite the twenty paintings that had formed the original bequest.

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## Screen Blast Theory

### Gob Squad

Where Do You Want To Go To Die? (2000)

### Mike Stubbs

The Sweatlodge (1991)

### Mark Gaynor

In a Network of Lines (1993)

### Blast Theory

Can You See Me Now? (2001)

At a time when the body has been neglected and/or rejected as a serious instrument of knowledge for so long, the physicality of these new media has been grossly overlooked.

Bill Viola

There is an inherent contradiction between *Live Culture* and works made for the screen. But as Philip Auslander argues, there is less of an ontological divide between liveness and mediatized works than common sense might suggest. TV, for example, is transmitted live and thus is vulnerable to interruption or breakdown, like a performance. Furthermore the advent of live video screens at sporting events and pop concerts has merged the live and mediatized in unexpected ways.

The pathways between Live Art and the screen are well worn in both directions. Mike Figgis' work with the People Show segued into feature films such as *Leaving Las Vegas* and *Timecode*. Another 1970s pioneer, Sally Potter found arthouse acclaim with *Orlando* and Annie Griffin's *The Book Club* is a hit for Channel 4. Peter Greenaway has made the transition in the other direction, making installations involving live performance.

In *In A Network Of Lines*, Mark Gaynor juggles with these oppositions and correlations: live performance, pre-recorded video and

(ostensibly) live transmission intercutting one another, vying for pre-eminence, each laying claim to authenticity. As Gaynor bursts through the exit doors of the performance space and into the night, he appears as a talking head on a screen, soothingly engaging with the audience at the same time as pounding the streets in paramilitary garb.

*Where Do You Want To Go To Die?* by Gob Squad also plays knowingly to camera but here the video is part of an installation. The video shown as part of the *Live Culture* event was originally made to be projected onto the windscreen of a van aligning the viewer, who sits inside the van, directly with the point of view of the camera. From that vantage point we see eight moments of abandon performed on the streets of Berlin. Accompanied by cheesy pop classics the work slides from parody to pathos, and is at once laughable and profoundly moving.

As artists moved ever more freely between disciplines in the 1990s the exchange between live and visual artists became pronounced.