

THE SHEFFIELD PAVILION

The Sheffield Pavilion is a project designed to take advantage of a *harmonic convergence of super exhibitions* – The Venice Biennale, Documenta XII and Skulptur Projekte Münster 07 – in June 2007. This nexus of projects falling together (an event which only occurs once every 10 years) offered a unique opportunity to symbiotically present the work of Sheffield-based artists and promote the contemporary art activity taking place in Sheffield in an international context.

The Sheffield Pavilion is a new variation on a small series of city or region-specific interpretations of the national pavilion construct of the Venice Biennale; from the Manchester Pavilion's art-free bar to the New Forest Pavilion's more formal exhibition venue. These pavilions perhaps aim to challenge the notion that art practice in non-metropolitan areas operates on a provincial or parochial level or conversely suggest that the international art world is simply another such parish.

However the Sheffield Pavilion is a new format for a city's involvement in events such as the Venice Biennale. A pavilion in book form is a structure curiously attentive to the roots of the word, in the Latin for butterfly, and in its subsequent usage to signify a tent or temporary structure used for leisure, entertainment or exhibition. The Sheffield Pavilion is similarly airborne and nomadic: a peripatetic exhibition in book form or a paper-based architecture for art.

The selected artists have presented new projects designed specifically for the book form. **Tim Etchells** has worked on a text that bears the marks of his changes to it, as it mutates through several colour-coded versions, **Penny McCarthy**'s drawings include a facsimile of a letter from the NASA archive drafted should the crew of the first moon landing be lost in space, **Matthew Harrison** documents the production and progress of an unsolicited desk nameplate for Professor Colin Pillinger of the ill-fated UK Beagle 2 Mars probe, **Farhad Ahrarnia** presents a collage of extracts of articles and drawings by writer/journalist Maggie Lett for Tehran Journal in 1969, **Neil Webb** has produced a spectrographic and sound mapping of a microcosmic selection

of Sheffield urban terrain, **Maud Haya-Baviera** collects a series of illustrated short stories about a protagonist called Liberty, **Katy Woods** displaces and re-presents an intriguing collection of found images and text, **Sarah Staton** offers a photograph of a building in Sheffield whose collision of styles, age and function in one structure reflects the city as a whole, **Meriel Herbert's** photographic imagery of a human gesture was made as a direct response to the physicality of the book, and **Host Artists' Group** presents a curated exploration of multiple artists' responses to the notion of beauty. If it is difficult, within these descriptions, to find a common thread to the activity, perhaps this conflictual diversity is the point.

The Sheffield Pavilion is designed by the city's renowned **The Designers Republic** and the artists' broader practice is represented on a DVD presented alongside it. The book is not intended as an audit of artistic practice in Sheffield, but the first of, hopefully, many different ways of presenting aspects of the Sheffield art scene to a wider audience. The aim is that the project will act as a portal to contemporary art in Sheffield, representing artists' work, practice and methodology as a vital part of the city and making Sheffield-based artists more visible to an international network.

– Jeanine Griffin *Manager* – *Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum*

The Sheffield Pavilion was selected and produced by Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum – a not-for-profit company working to further the presence and awareness of contemporary art in Sheffield through joint programming, audience development and profile raising activities. The forum also runs the ART SHEFFIELD festivals. The directors of the company are representatives of Bloc Studios, Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust, Sheffield Hallam University, Site Gallery, s1 Artspace, Yorkshire ArtSpace Society, and independent artists and practitioners. www.artsheffield.org

“We Shall Devote To Them A Future Work”

By Maria Fusco

1 – *In which*

“I have to tell you something.”

When I first moved to Sheffield to study art in the early nineties, I lived on Ecclesall Road, just a few doors down from Phil Oakey, lead singer of The Human League. Being the younger sister, of one of the only two New Romantics in my hometown Belfast, I can earnestly report, this constituted a cataclysmic event in my hitherto little life.

2 – *In which*

“Here is an arrow whose flight would consist in a return to the bow.”

Umberto Eco has observed in a recent collection of his essays *On Literature*, that creative works of fiction – or art for that matter – hold a factual authority that cannot be challenged within average perimeters of common sense. “As far as the world of books is concerned, propositions like *Sherlock Holmes was a bachelor*, *Little Red Riding Hood is eaten by the wolf and then freed by the woodcutter*, or *Anna Karenina commits suicide* will remain true for eternity, and no one will ever be able to refute them... There is little respect for those who claim... that Superman is not Clark Kent. Literary texts explicitly provide us with much that we will never cast doubt upon, but also, unlike the real world, they flag with supreme authority what we are to take as important in them.”

This deceptively simple observation – from the great Semiotic brain who has written about his difficulty of fitting into tight blue jeans – challenges us as viewers / readers into an intimate and suggestive relationship with the saponaceous object that is a work of art. For, if we are to participate with the irrefutable precision of the art work, then we must accept these rules of engagement of close-looking, along with the invitation to dream. What better way to accept this invitation is there, than within the easily comprehensible boundaries of a book, whose very physical structure determines the exact location of its reader, whilst simultaneously plunging us into plumbless territories? And again, what better form of book for this activity is there than the artist's book, whose meta-critical properties warrant that we can never be quite sure what we are really looking at anyway?

3 – *In which*

“Uplifting illusion is dearer to us than a host of truths.”

So then, coming to considering where the best site is for the shimmering particles from the swaying flux of daily lives to be preserved, trapped, unpacked and shared: I for one, believe that this potential universe of quotidian culture belongs in books. Or rather, whilst it may belong in books, that anything may in fact be a book – this much we all know from the genre of artists’ books – for it’s clear to me that it’s the sorting, the paring and the examining that constitute ‘a book’, and not the simple presence of a spine, contents and colophon (although such things do generally make them easier to sniff out).

This particular book therefore, will ask you the following questions, plus some more, of course, that I haven’t thought of yet: What am I? Where am I? How might I be read? Will you take me home? With our eyes, head and heart open then, it’s exactly this kind of leaky intercourse that will guide you through this book and invite you into a dialogical relationship with its contents, helping us all to get back to dreaming.

4 – *In which*

“The sudden, intolerable knowing that everything is alive.”

Have a feel of this book’s cover with your eight fingers. Use your thumb to flick to another section. Close it. Put it down. Slide it onto a shelf. Put it onto a pile to read later. Open it up again, when you are safely indoors.

The book you are reading now, the object you are holding in your hands, is an aggregate, a compound, an “atomization of the absolute” as Michel Tournier might have it. This book has been made by many people. By those both inside and outside of what you are looking at this very moment. This book is a consumable, its contributions as diverse as the people who tailored them and as varied as those who now read it. Specific fixed texts such as catalogues, dictionaries or manuals are, of course, prescriptive in their ordering mechanisms, ensuring that we know exactly what we are looking at, and what we are looking for, when we pick them up.

We do not read a book like this the whole way through. We pierce its contents for connections in order to connect with it. The dimensions of this book (148 x 210MM) traverse the geographic volume of Sheffield. Other than that, you’re on your own.

REFERENCES

- 1 – Doris Lessing *London Observed*
- 2 – Jacques Derrida *Politics of Friendship*
- 3 – Aleksandar Puskin *The Hero*
- 4 – William Burroughs *Ghost of a Chance*

Maria Fusco is a Belfast-born writer and lecturer based in London. She studied Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University from 1991–1994. She contributes to a broad range of visual culture journals and magazines including Art Monthly, Art On Paper, dot dot dot, Flash Art, Frieze, i-D, o32c, Sexymachinery and Tema Celeste. In 2004, she edited Put About: A Critical Anthology on Independent Publishing, also convening an accompanying conference at Tate Modern. She is currently developing The Happy Hypocrite, a new journal for and about experimental writing within contemporary visual art.

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**THE
SHEFFIELD
PAVILION**

An Artists' Book & DVD
Presenting work by Sheffield-based artists
Distributed at the Venice Biennale and Documenta XII 2007

Produced by –
Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum