

# go EAST

**EAST International is one of the biggest events on the region's art calendar. Jo Davidson went to Norwich Gallery to meet its curator and three of the artists involved. Main photo by Dougal Waters.**

**L**ynnda Morris, curator of Norwich Gallery welcomes me by apologising for her age (she is only a little over fifty) and by saying, 'There is a sense of Norwich being the end of the line, as one hits the bumpers.'

But there is nothing end of the line about EAST or the innovative curator who is now putting on her twelfth international art show.

With the support of a dynamic young team and funding from East England Arts, Morris has created a cultural event which shows you do not have to go to London, Amsterdam, Paris or New York, to see the very best of contemporary art.

This year's EAST exhibition, which attracted more than 1300 entries from 38 countries builds on this reputation of Norwich being an intrinsic part of the international art scene. The exhibition has been selected by Lawrence Weiner and Jack Wendler and embraces many themes ranging from evidence of presence, the urban landscape and interiors to travel.

The six week exhibition every summer is an important springboard for many young artists and has already acted as a tremendous launch pad for the careers of Matthew Hicks and Martin Creed, to name but two of the many who have benefited from such early exposure.

How is it possible to get a true impression of the art and the quality of the art form when judging the applicants from slide images? I wonder? Morris believes that such tactics have freed the gallery to take a far more ambitious approach to the whole selection process.

'We argued that an artist's work is known through still images and therefore selecting on this basis began to make sense.'

It means that there is a far broader range of art as a result of such an open approach, making it easier for artists from abroad to submit work and creating the potential for greater diversity. I went to Norwich Gallery for a preview of the work by three of the artists in this year's show.

Gaia Persico originally comes from Rome and is now studying art at Farnham whilst working as

an air hostess for British Airways. Two completely incompatible careers, one might think - and yet she has managed to combine these interests so that they neatly dovetail together - satisfying her obsession with travel and places with her artistic impulse.

Gaia has used the Lonely Planet Guide as a base from which to launch her interpretation of the places she has visited, the hotel rooms she has occupied, combining sketches with the use of computer graphics to produce some wonderfully original work.

Her art installation for this show is based on a room entirely in white, down to a replica of her own BA uniform.

**Beike Klusman** has created some hauntingly beautiful images with her site installations.

She has turned her whole studio in central Berlin into a camera obscura which looks outwards and inwards and then attached it to the outside of the building to look up and down, incorporating the exterior landscape, resulting in some remarkably beautiful images which are produced with great patience and skill. There is a randomness with a long exposure technique and the result is starkly dramatic. This pin hole technique of photography is a means to an end and it is the end product, an inverted and distorted world which are her primary concern.

**Clare Iles** incorporates the same quality of randomness and chance in her work. An MA graduate from the Norwich School, she specialises in the retrieval of unwanted objects and materials from waste sites, skips and by bays. Her work is certainly eye-catching, assembled on wasteland, beside roads and next to railway lines.

For this year's EAST Clare will be creating a number of images made from discarded objects which have been assembled at various sites within different council housing areas in Norwich. She will also be making an installation out of the images (that she refers to as her 'shanty gallery').







Due to the spontaneous nature of her work, Clare was still in the planning process when we met, but she showed me a selection of photographic records of past installations ranging from a disused washing machine spilling objects into the countryside to an open ottoman, partly obscured in the fog.

Although she is positive about the aspect of recycling discarded objects, she is appalled by the sheer waste she comes across in her search for sites and materials.

'It makes me angry,' she says. 'People just do it for the next update.' She successfully harnesses incongruous objects to her creative purpose - so that there is this sense of regeneration, albeit transient.

The challenges such work presents are enormous but she seems unfazed by the prospect of her constructions being dismantled or changed - or even removed altogether, during

the course of the six weeks. 'That's fine, I get used to that - it just changes,' she says, with admirable pragmatism.

She seems relaxed about the likelihood of her installations being moved along by council refuse trucks and ending up in landfill sites, a pale imitation of the life human life cycle. She regards this as all part of the process - which is an underlying theme of many works in this year's show, where the marriage between intent and chance events create some exciting and spontaneous images.

These three artists give some indication of the broad range of work chosen by the panel of selectors. Indeed the role of selector is the key to the spirit of the exhibition. Lynda is shrewd in her belief that it is possible to ask a steering committee to agree on one but not two selectors and therefore this results in only one being

appointed and choosing who to collaborate with 'much more ambitious', Lynda believes.

When Conrad Fischer, the legendary conceptual art dealer from Düsseldorf was a selector for the first show in 1993 he was working with all the key figures in conceptualism which shaped the subsequent focus of EAST.

Academic and commercial links with Amsterdam, Düsseldorf, Brussels and Rotterdam have made the logistics of moving the art relatively easy. One lorry can then be despatched to round up all the work and bring it over. Indeed, Amsterdam is only forty minutes by air from Norwich, making it closer, in a sense, than London.

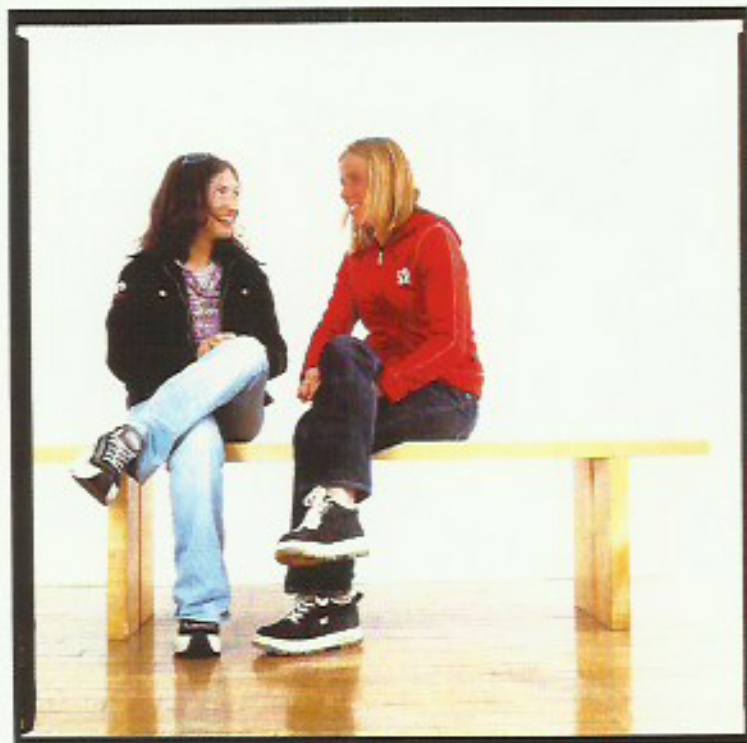
Networking obviously is second nature for Lynda Morris and something she regards as vital for the further development of East. She is already looking to next year and has been to Vancouver and Los Angeles to look at how other galleries operate and build on working relationships with curators and institutions. She is fired with enthusiasm at the prospect of finding a curator in Los Angeles who might like to explore the link between rock and roll and art schools for next year.

'After all, look at our own tradition - Damien Hurst plays in a band...'

None of this would be possible without the vast site offered by this particular venue which incorporates both the gallery and its basement and waterside studio with the Norwich Art School.

This allows for great scope when it comes to exhibiting the vast variety of art - from installations, video, sculpture, drawing, painting, where space is so important. One artist will be recreating the metro from Mexico city in the vast basement beneath the gallery, with all its sounds, whilst across the road in the entrance of the art school there will be an interpretation of the Jubilee line escalators. The exhibition will also make use of the twenty artists studios in the school which allows them their own personal space.





Left to right: Heike Klassman, Gail Perkin, Clare Fox

Catherine Moseley who is part of Norwich Gallery's young dynamic team, focuses on ways of marketing the show. Her main concern is finding ways in which to raise the public's level of awareness in the region with regard to this cultural gem on their doorstep. She admits:

'There is still much more we can do in terms of marketing to reach a local audience.' She would like to see coverage on local television to make it more widely advertised to those who perhaps would not normally attend such an event. This was helped last year when Norwich Council distributed leaflets to every household which was a reaction to the awareness of the increasing bias towards cultural tourism.

She cites the sense of collaboration the show encourages and the resulting cross-pollination of ideas as the driving force which makes East such a successful show.

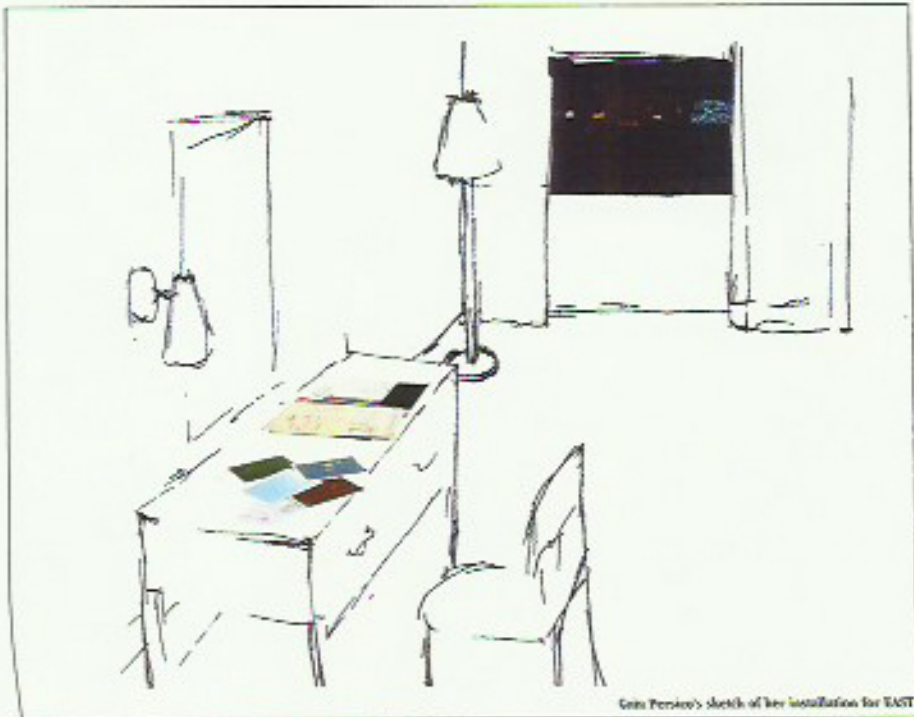
'It's the wonderful energy of artists from all over the world, from as far away as Argentina, all working on site for a week...from incredibly diverse backgrounds...it's this diversity and international flavour which makes it very attractive, harnessed with the academic training and prestige of the Norwich art school.'

Lynda Morris has worked hard at building relations with other cities through the network of art schools and galleries and her contacts extend around the world by virtue of her ability to look outwards.

'I also wanted my children to have the same experience of contemporary art as children do in Düsseldorf or Amsterdam...' she adds.

This particular event enables the people of Norwich to have a contemporary cultural experience which looks forward more, moving away from the sense of history there is in Norwich with its Cathedral and castle which encourages us to look back at the past.

Morris's view of the wider picture has resulted in a wonderful annual display of some of the best international contemporary art which rivals any London show. There is also the opportunity to buy art for pleasure and as an investment at



Gail Perkin's sketch of her installation for EAST

reasonable prices because a commercial gallery is not taking a big cut. This has been made more possible by East England Art's free art incentive which offers interest free loans of up to 90% of the purchase price spread over ten months.

Ultimately she sees the focus is directed more towards Europe and the challenge of trying to work internationally as a region.

'A lot of the ideas about EAST are about not being part of London but being part of the region trying to work internationally in the regions and it has come to be seen as a showcase that curators come to...around 50 curators visited the show last year.'

Morris is also aware of the wider implications of such shows for the area as a whole, with

Norwich as a visual arts city which needs an art economy. This can only be done by creating the climate for a thriving art industry through funding artists to undertake projects, hopefully educating the public who will go on to purchase it, and showing the public services the intrinsic value of artists working within the community. Having had a sneak preview of EAST, I am sure she will succeed. ■

EAST International 2002 is at the Norwich Gallery and Norwich School of Art & Design, July 6 - August 24. For information call 001603 610561 or e-mail [east@norwichgallery.co.uk](mailto:east@norwichgallery.co.uk)