



Above left: Daniel Milohanic and Dirk Paschke, *Tentacles*, installation at Cherry for park, Norwich, 'EastInternational', 2002. Photo: Paul Stone. Above right: Clare Iles, installation view, 'EastInternational', 2007. Photo: Paul Stone. Opposite page: Matt Davis, *Football ground 3*, enamel paint on board, 122x122cm. Courtesy: the artist.

# Go east

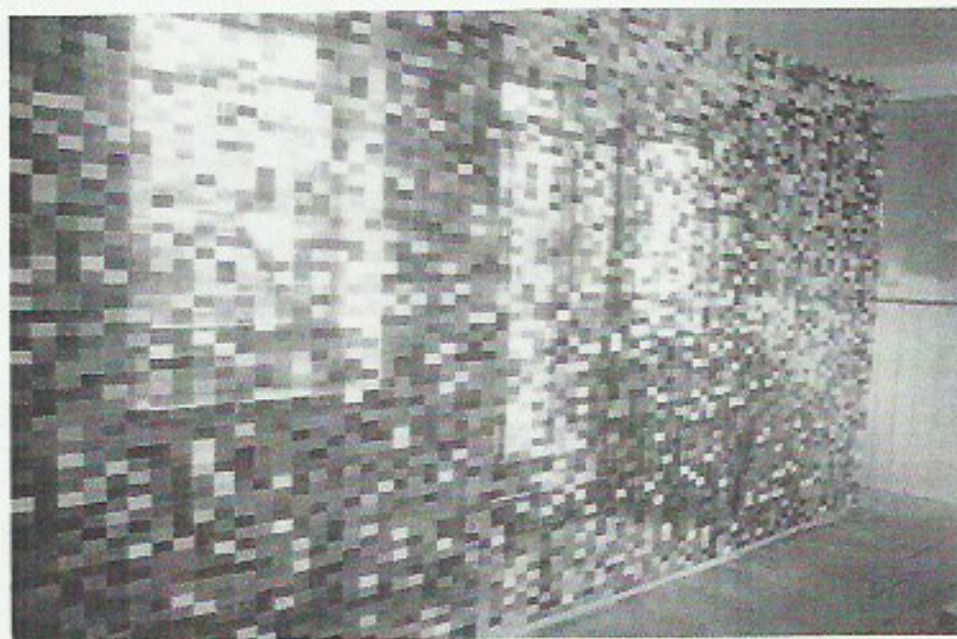
Every summer the spotlight falls on Norwich and 'East international'. Arguably the most prestigious open submission exhibition in the UK, curators, dealers and others visit from far and wide and many of today's well-known artists launched their careers as a result of participation in 'East'. But what of the artists for whom the city is home? Paul Stone visited Norwich to find out more.

THE RATIONALE BEHIND 'EAST', according to Norwich Gallery curator Lynda Morris, was "to reinvigorate the possibility of [an open exhibition] being done intelligently." The gallery is located within Norwich School of Art and Design (NSAD) and the timing of 'East' over the summer allows the use of the college's empty studios as exhibition spaces. Since its inception in 1991 'East' has always had two selectors: an artist alongside either a curator, critic, dealer or arts policy-maker. This year, over 1,300 entries from thirty-eight countries were whittled down to twenty artists from six countries to form a show that dealt with themes of the urban landscape and interiors, mapping and travel. The £5,000 East Award was divided equally between Adam Blumberg and Jessica Jackson Hutchins (USA), German duo Daniel Milohanic and Dirk Paschke, Hiraki Sawra (Japan) and Essex-based Clare Iles (a recent graduate from the NSAD MA course). The first ever Eastwork Public Art Commission was awarded to Matthew Houlding, based in Todmorden, Lancashire. Five locally-based artists will work with Houlding on the realisation of the project, to be unveiled at the opening of next year's 'East', thus providing much-needed training opportunities. The process will be repeated the following year with an artist selected from 2003's 'East'. Additionally, four artists from the 2003 and 2004 exhibitions will be commissioned to produce multiples. For Houlding: "The best thing is that it provides a set amount of money solely for the production of work, possibly something more adventurous and challenging." Houlding was also selected for 'Mostyn 12' at Llandudno's Oriel Mostyn Gallery (see 'Something in the ether' in May [a-n] MAGAZINE). As Houlding stresses, such shows "...enable you to show your work at a higher level and to a greater audience, which is important for someone who lives in an

area generally isolated from the contemporary art scene. The most important thing is that these shows have confirmed my belief in what I am doing". Norwich is one of twelve UK cities bidding to be European Capital of Culture in 2008. At the time of writing the bookies rank the bid at eleventh place. Whatever the odds, artists I spoke to felt that the visual arts are under-represented in comparison with other artforms. In terms of public galleries the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, located within the University of East Anglia's edge-of-town campus, boasts a collection covering 5,000 years of fine and applied arts from around the world alongside a temporary exhibition programme featuring national and international contemporary art. Norwich Castle contains a permanent collection including the nineteenth century paintings of the Norwich School as well as temporary exhibitions, recently featuring work by the Norfolk Contemporary Crafts Society and Norfolk-born artist Colin Self, an ex-NSAD student and influential figure in the British Pop movement. But, for many artists in Norwich, the relationship with these two galleries is one of a passive observer. The use of temporary spaces and the café/bar circuit as spaces to show is well-established. There is a history of artist-led spaces in the city – most notably Context and Atom galleries in the nineties. However, these were relatively short-lived, even by artist-led standards where momentum is difficult to sustain in the face of lack of resources. Two current artist-run spaces in Norwich are The Queen of Hungary and Frontier Gallery, both set up in 2001. Artist Stephanie Douet was offered free use of city centre premises comprising of a nineteenth century shop with a medieval cellar, lumber room and 1920s rifle range. With only £200 funding from the city council and the in-kind support of local busi-

ness, according to Douet the aim was "to give interesting site-specific artists the chance to experiment freely in an unusual space. I also wanted to introduce artists from outside the area, building links". However, the gallery is currently dormant, though another artist may soon take on the running of the space. Douet is presently concentrating on other projects, including 'Field Day', a cross-disciplinary event and part of the Norwich Fringe Festival, for which she is a member of the visual arts committee. Located in the same building as his studio, NSAD graduate Phil Gardner set up the Frontier Gallery – so named because "Norwich is a bit of an art wilderness" – to show artists based in or connected with Norwich. Like The Queen of Hungary, the gallery is self-financed and the audience for shows is largely that attending the private view, followed by a few days of viewing by appointment. What both The Queen of Hungary and Frontier Gallery share is that they are primarily one-person operations and have been careful to operate within their limitations. Whilst they have made vital contributions to the local art scene, Douet is first to admit that "Norwich could do with a good centrally located artist-run gallery which could lay on events, training and networking opportunities". Of course, this also requires commitment from funders. In terms of a wider group identity, the emphasis (and money) in Norwich is still largely attached to a studio culture. Founded in 1981 in a derelict church, St Ethelreda Art Studio (SEAS) provides workspace for nine artists and is Norwich's longest surviving studios. A registered charity, studio members are involved in a number of community projects and have participated in exchanges with artists from Estonia, Lithuania and Romania. Studio members are also involved in The Arts Education Exchange, the main aim of which is to 'create net-





Ally Wallace, *Aviation*, suspended lighting grid, installation at The Queen of Hungary coinciding with the opening weekend of 'East International', 2001. Courtesy: the artist. Opposite page: Matthew Houlding, *Exclusive waterfront development opportunity*, 'East International', 2002. Photo: Paul Stone.

works through which resources and practice relating to artist-led education can be shared", primarily through the AccessArt website. As SEAS artist Mandi Roberts showed me around the studios she outlined plans to develop both this online resource and – the National Lottery willing – upgrade the fabric of the building. Another current project, *The Sculpture Chain*, involves working with children in Bosnia-Herzegovina in collaboration with Sarajevo-based artist Dragan Andjelic who previously lived in Norwich. SEAS and AccessArt were approached by Cambridge Sculpture Workshops – who initiated the project in 2000 – to bring their Eastern European contacts to the project.

Warehouse Artists' Studios was set up in 1990 and provides twenty-nine studio spaces, a darkroom, communal kiln, resource room and a flexible space for exhibitions and other activities. The studios also operates an associate membership scheme giving discounted access to these facilities and other benefits. As well as contributing to the running of the complex, studio members are also actively engaged in organising exhibitions and other activities. Located close to NSAD, Muspole Workshops is a popular base for part-time MA students there. Providing nineteen studios and established now for almost twenty years, it possesses less of a collective identity, believing, in the words of co-manager Gary Tanner, that "it is individuals that generate stuff". One artist based there and making a name for himself is recent NSAD MA graduate Matt Davis. With his paintings of football grounds based on pixilated images from the internet, Davis has this year shown in London and the regional 'Kettle's Yard Open' and – along with Matthew Noel-Tod, an up-and-coming filmmaker also based in Norwich – the national 'Peterborough Prize' open show, winning the £5,000 prize for the latter. Another believer in the need for artists' self-determination, Davis is also behind nfolk, a website detailing cultural activity in and around Norwich, an undertaking he describes as a 'confidence building' exercise for the local art community.

Another Norwich-based artist managing to establish a profile is Kaavous Clayton whose household objects and other items made from recycled materials have been featured on TV's *Big Breakfast* and in the pages of *Elle Decoration* and can be bought via his Kaavous Re-use website. Clayton is also behind

'Neighbourhood Watch', a cross-artform project where participants will open their homes and present their work to the public over the weekend of 5-6 October as part of the fringe festival.

It is clear then that Norwich and its artists are taking a pragmatic approach to challenging the city's somewhat sleepy image. As Lynda Morris acknowledges: "Norwich is in an isolated part of the country, which no one passes through by accident." However, she also points out that a long history exists of connections with other countries, especially northern Europe – highlighting that to fly to Amsterdam is quicker than a train journey to London – and that "this geography is built into the exhibition policy [of Norwich Gallery]".

It's not easy for a UK regional city to escape the disparaging definition of being 'provincial'. One way to overcome this is to think internationally. Norwich Gallery promotes this year-round through its exhibition programme – 'East' being only the most visible aspect. It also acts as a vital hub for the local artistic community, providing them with employment and networking opportunities. In Europe and the USA especially, the combination of active art schools (with a gallery) and the physical activity of artists provide the foundation of a well-established model for regional cities to assert a presence.

Returning to 'East', London-based artist Stuart Taylor chose to recreate three previous participants' work, including Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol's A proposition for reclaiming a space from 1997, itself a recreation of the facade of Konrad Fisher's gallery – where 2002 co-selector Lawrence Weiner first exhibited in Europe – which was incorporated within the facade of the Norwich Gallery. As well as acting as a metaphor for the desire to reach out beyond the boundaries of one's immediate locality, the work also functioned as a reminder to those closer to home of the continuing significance of 'East' and Norwich Gallery's role in the city – both for its artists and those entrusted with raising its cultural profile. As Bik is quoted in the 'East' catalogue: "Galleries are for the people who live and work near by, it is for them to engage with the space and create platforms, or nothing will happen. We have to engage with the people around us to create a discourse."

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**The Queen of Hungary**  
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**Warehouse Art Studios**  
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E: studios@artists.plus.com  
www.warehousearts.co.uk

**Muspole Workshops**  
25/27 Muspole Street  
Norwich NR3 1DJ  
T: 07773 146939

### WEBSITES

**Nfolk**  
www.nfolk.co.uk

**Kaavous Clayton**  
www.kaavousre-use.co.uk

**Norwich Fringe Festival**  
http://uk.geocities.com/fringival/  
Festival runs 27 September – 13 October

**AccessArt**  
www.accessart.org.uk

**Cambridge Sculpture Workshops**  
www.cambridge-sculpture-workshops.co.uk