

ill communication

25 January – 23 March 2003

'The artist picks up the message of cultural technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs.'

This exhibition looks at contemporary artists' responses to how we talk to each other, highlighting some of the more absurd or neurotic aspects of human interaction. With a range of works that use various systems and technologies, including telegrams, a computer programme, advertising, magazines, liquid crystal and LED displays and, of course, speech, the exhibition aims to reflect something of the impact of the dramatic developments in the media used to bring us closer together.

From the entrance, **Gallery 2** is dominated by 'Steam Powered Internet Computer' a work by **Jeremy Deller** and **Alan Kane** realised with the help of the Scottish Model Engineering Trust. The work makes a direct and usable link between the technologies of the industrial revolution and the current revolution in information technology. This is one of several collaborations between Deller and Kane that cross social and cultural boundaries and break down distinctions. See, for example, their on-going, on-line 'Folk Archive': www.folkarchive.co.uk

'Our electric extensions of ourselves simply by-pass space and time and create problems of human involvement and organisation for which there is no precedent. We may yet yearn for the simple days of the automobile and the superhighway.'

Also looking to the past, 'concerningnowethematters..' by **Liam Gillick** consists of a transcription from the trial of the Catholic martyr Sir Thomas More. More, the author of 'Utopia', was tried for treason in 1534 when he refused to take an oath acknowledging Henry VIII as head of the Church of England. During his lengthy interrogation and subsequent trial

attempts were made to trick More into making treasonable statements. His words are run together to create a continuous stream of letters, difficult to make sense of, reflecting More's confused state of mind. This work is one of a number by Gillick in which sentences are compressed to resemble a German compound word.

Hugging the ceiling above the entrance to **Gallery 1** is **Philippe Parreno's** 'Speech Bubbles' a mass of helium-filled balloons that make a three-dimensional cartoon space. The bubbles are left blank offering scope for many imagined conversations, thoughts, comments and remarks.

'More and more we turn from the content of messages to study total effect.'

Works by **Jenny Holzer** and **On Kawara** distributed around the gallery provide important precedents to more recent works in the exhibition, using as they do familiar means of communication. Holzer's 'Truisms' (compiled 1977-79) consist of nearly 300 aphorisms or slogans, which play on commonly held truths and clichés. Initially, these were infiltrated into the public arena via stickers, T-shirts and posters. Later, Holzer started using electronic displays. The 'Truisms' are deliberately challenging, presenting a spectrum of often-contradictory opinions. Holzer hoped they would sharpen people's awareness of the 'usual baloney they are fed' in daily life.

On Kawara's series of framed telegrams are just a small selection from a long-running project begun in 1970. His news that 'I am still alive', the most basic communicative statement, was sent by the artist to friends around the world using what was until relatively recently the quickest way to disperse important information and is now completely obsolete. On Kawara's assertion should be unambiguous and yet it tends to suggest the opposite, that perhaps he has survived something harmful. His telegrams acknowledge the non-private nature of the telegram – that, like a postcard, many people might have read it before it reaches its intended recipient. His messages

are therefore always rather neutral and objective in tone, the opposite of the usual messages delivered in such a way.

'It was not until the advent of the telegraph that messages could travel faster than a messenger.'

Liam Gillick's 'Stable Block #1' is similarly ambiguous, hovering between form and function, sculpture and container. Gillick describes such structures as being a 'central region where discussion, delay, negotiation, and conciliation takes place'. Two further works, taking the form of vinyl text, occupy both large end walls of the gallery. The works, in conversation with one another, remind us that prior to relatively recent electronic innovation all long distance communication had to pass through urban centres.

Laura Horelli's semi-sociological works investigate our surrounding environments. She has presented the results of her investigations as maps, recorded *vox pop* interviews, documentary photographs and videos. Laura Horelli's work reflects her interest in modes of communication and in different infrastructures. Horelli's video installation 'Japanese English Advertising Slogans' presents a dramatisation using the banal sentences found on Japanese product packaging. The slogans, which are in English, are often used as graphic devices on the packaging rather than to convey any clear message about the products. A further work by Horelli 'Helsinki Shipyard/ San Juan Port' features short extracts of interviews with workers in Finland who design and build cruise ships. This footage is interspersed with glimpses of the completed ships in Puerto Rico from where they operate.

'It is the artist's job to try to dislocate older media into postures that permit attention to the new. To this end, the artist must ever play and experiment with new means of arranging experience...'

Chris Evans is in the process of establishing a company - 'Radical Loyalty' with the sole purpose of constructing a

sculpture park in Järvakandi, Estonia. The board of Radical Loyalty is being composed of directors of large corporations who are each asked to design sculptures with assistance from Evans. The first three proposals are presented in the gallery – depicted individually, as etchings, and collectively in an incomplete oil painting, an ‘artist’s impression’ of how the completed sculpture park may look.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer questions the very structure of language with his ‘33 Questions per Minute, Relational Architecture No.5’. This dysfunctional computer programme uses grammatical rules to combine words from a dictionary. It has the potential to randomly generate 55 thousand million unique questions. The automated questions appear on LCD screens at a rate of 33 per minute, at the threshold of legibility. Hemmer describes the work as exhibiting ‘machine irony.’

‘With electric media Western man himself experiences exactly the same inundation as the remote native...’

A work that will spread far beyond the gallery is **Aleksandra Mir’s** ‘Living & Loving: No.1 The Biography of Donald Cappy’, a free publication available to take away. Mir’s project disseminates the story of a fairly unremarkable man with a remarkably accelerated life in a format that recalls ‘celebrity’ magazines such as ‘Hello’ and ‘OK’. The content of the biography also reflects a variety of other magazine subcultures.

‘Man is more complex and less specialized than a dinosaur.’

All quotes taken from Marshall McLuhan, ‘Understanding Media, The extensions of Man’, 1964

For more information about the artists in the exhibition, please visit the **Information Room** just outside the gallery entrance where you will find books, articles and reviews of their work.

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