

Opposite page: Daphne Wright, *Still Life – The Green House*, 1995 ('Private View' at Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle). Courtesy: the artist. Below left: Antony Gormley, *Insider VI*, 1998 (cast iron). Exhibition 'In the Freud Museum', 2002, curated by Darian Leader. Photo: Michael Molnar. Below right: Anya Gallaccio, *As long as there were any roads to amnesia and anaesthesia still to be explored, seven felled oak trees*, 2002. Tate Britain Sculpture Commission. Photo: Steve White. Courtesy: Lehmann Maupin

INHABITED 5 SPACES

Old spaces for new art

Penelope Curtis explores how 'installation art' has affected our readings of art, artists and curators.

I
The term 'installation art' has come into use at the same time as 'sculpture' has been less clearly identified with the object. The crisis of the latter has promoted the rise of the former. Yet both terms have fallen prey to a similar problem in that their descriptions, by being increasingly elastic, are increasingly imprecise.

'Installation art' has its own meta-history, and, at different times and in different places, has meant very different things. It has connoted both the very permanent (Judd at Marfa) and the very temporary (Gallaccio at Wapping); the ideal or the circumstantial. It has embraced the primarily spatial, and the primarily conceptual; the physical or the political. It may have operated as an intervention, unasked for and unwelcome, or as critique 'by invitation' on the part of a host institution. It has been both absolutely site-specific, and infinitely mobile. It has involved using the contents of the site, whether made or unmade, material or artefact, or has rejected them. It has suggested that the qualities of the space in which it is displayed are crucial, or more recently, are irrelevant. It is a soft term which means everything and nothing.

While there is no one thing that is sculpture, sculpture remains a category. While there is no one thing which is installation, I would propose that installation

art can not in fact be presented as a category, or a type. Rather, it is a state; the state of being exhibited. Throughout the twentieth century artists were increasingly concerned about the ways in which their art was shown. In the closing years of the century this preoccupation took over from the fabrication of artworks to the extent that the conditions in which the artworks were experienced were understood to be the artwork.

The importance of 'installation' – of specific hanging and placement, entry, egress, lighting, labelling – has long entered the mainstream. Any serious gallery from the artist-run space to the national institution knows its importance. The conditions of display are carefully discussed with contemporary artists, or researched in the case of redisplaying earlier works. 'Installation' is a complicit recognition, largely undisputed, of the importance of presentation. As many artworks now only exist during their presentation, we might suggest that installation is, in fact, exhibition.

(The 'art' of installation is premised upon an understanding of how art will be seen. In the recent past, the 'how' has largely been concerned with where; in different ways, site-specificity has been all important. Increasingly however, the how has less and less to do with where, as contemporary art (or installations) moves to become primarily self-referential, creating

or inventing its own site, rather than referring to that in which it is sited. This relates rather closely to the 'how' of video installation; the dark space which contains its own spectators within it. Whether we look at the fictional narratives of Ilya Kabakov or Mike Nelson, the fabricated interior worlds of Gregor Schneider or John Bock, the symbolic sites of commemoration of Thomas Hirschhorn, or the composed structures of Tomoko Takahashi, we see a common strand towards an interiority which pays little heed to the space in which it is sited. These installations absorb us within their own space, a fabricated and fictional space which tends towards darkness rather than light, turning all the old conditions of 'installation art' almost literally inside out.)

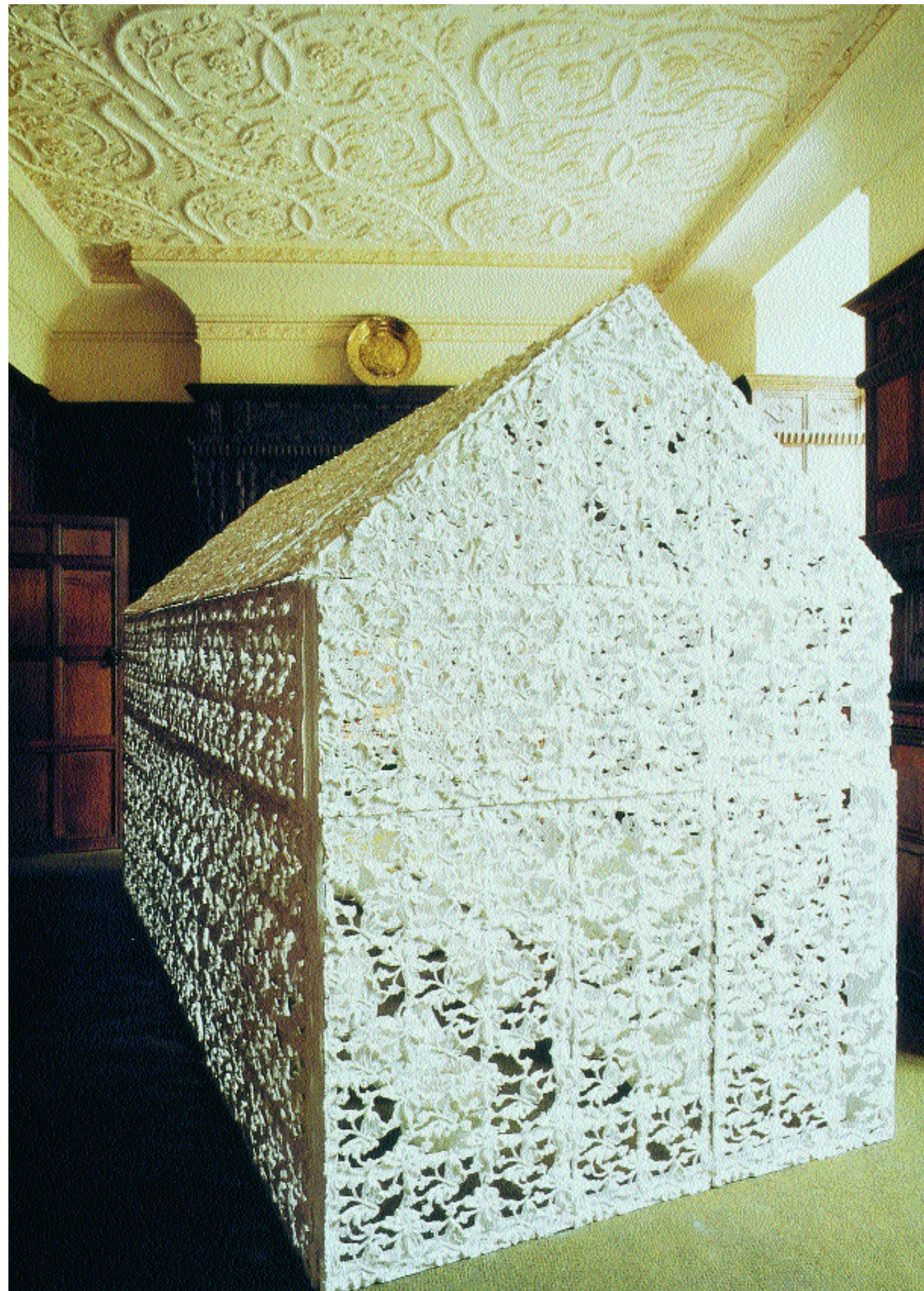
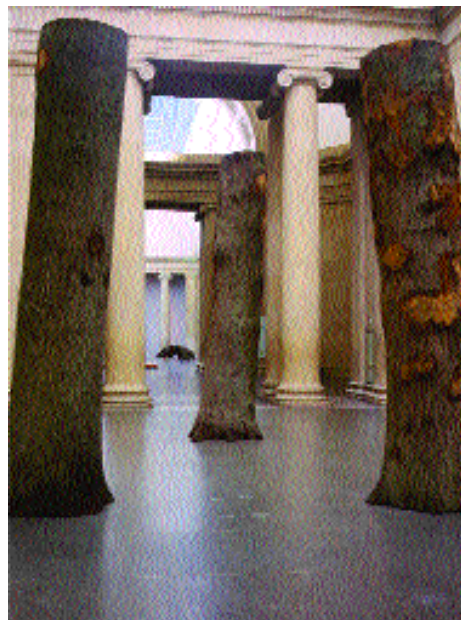
II
The combination of non-art spaces and contemporary art can be identified with three kinds of location: disused spaces resulting from inner city decline; historic interiors and exteriors; and museum collections.

The availability of cheap space, combined with a curatorial interest in using the non-art space, has encouraged artists: to make studios and studio complexes by taking over disused spaces collaboratively; to use large spaces to show their own work, to 'curate' their own shows; and to choose the formal characteristics and/or historical associations of a place as the starting point for new work.

Curators have been similarly encouraged in this direction, thus setting up a curious dialogue in which artists borrow from curators and vice versa. This has allowed curators: to buy from artist-curated shows, thus circumventing traditional galleries; to seek out atmospheric places and match them to artists; and to use artists to invigorate museum collections.

Can we determine some of the results of the above? We might conclude that: the traditional gallery system – for good and for bad – is somewhat weakened. The role of the strong gallerist, who helps develop artists and a space for a dialogue with art, is jeopardised; weaker artists feed off strong places to make work which relies for its effect on its place; poorer curators (financially or conceptually!) feed off artists in occasional attempts to enliven their collections.

Though on occasion the tendency has brought us to see extraordinary artworks, more frequently however we see extraordinary places. In London especially, our geographical parameters may well be defined by the places where we have seen art,





Above: Cecile Johnson, *Coffee Set A & Bowl*, 1994, *Five Pitchers*, 1992-93 ('Private View' at The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle). Photo: J Hardman Jones. Courtesy: the artist. Below: Mona Hatoum, *T42*, 1998 (fine stoneware in two parts). Exhibition 'In the Freud Museum', 2002, curated by Darian Leader. Photo: Michael Molnar

which were frequently the emptied-out structures of Victorian industrial power or social control (Wapping Power Station, Clink Street Vaults, The Greenwich Seamen's Hospital, Holborn Town Hall, Homerton Hospital, etc). One could well argue that this kind of practice has now fed back into the establishment with results such as Kapoor and Gallaccio's recent projects for the entrance halls of both London Tates.

A number of museums have adopted an almost routine practice of introducing artists into their collections, and these are by no means only art

galleries, indeed perhaps least of all art galleries. At present there is an on-going series of artists' projects in the Science Museum, the Wellcome Museum for the History of Medicine, the Maritime Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Freud Museum. The V&A and the Serpentine recently joined forces. Stately homes – furnished (the National Trust's Osterley Park outside London) or unfurnished (English Heritage's Belsay Hall outside Newcastle) – have joined the game. Why? And for whose sake? For the artists, or for their various publics? The trend would put the lie to the idea

that contemporary art is obscure or obfuscatory. If National Science Museums use artists within their educational displays it is in the belief that artists can speak to their audiences as well or better than they can. And do the quaint museums, who may feel somewhat marginalized (such as the Freud or the Soane) use contemporary artists so as to have their own slice of the action? To increase or alter their audiences, to gain some press coverage?

Art about the space in which it is situated was as dominant in the UK in the 1990s as art about issue – gender and race above all – was in the 1980s. The situation is probably already reversed; witness Documenta 11, which may have been about place, but was certainly not about the place of the exhibition. It was issue-based in a way that returned us, in a sense, to the 1980s. What are the reasons for bringing art to the non-art space? My concern centres on whether we know what we are looking at. Hence my doubts about sculpture parks, in which it is easy to mistake the experience of landscape for the experience of art. Sculpture parks were part of a developmental shift in the status of sculpture between the 1950s and the 1960s. And perhaps the re-evaluation of the inner city as witnessed so spectacularly in 1980s' Britain again allowed art to question the nature of the gallery, but this time in relation to a non-art space that was largely interior, rather than exterior. When sculpture began being made for sculpture parks they no longer functioned as a revelatory space, and when art was made for the disused urban space, the dynamic becomes equally uncertain.

We know that modern art can be good for changing the image of run-down, regional cities; witness Liverpool, Glasgow and Walsall in the UK never mind Bilbao in Basque Spain. But is the fabric of the industrial city good for art? Might we be right to ask whether 'art' has been led down something of a blind alley in this willing cohabitation between artists and curators to inhabit the space of the city?



Do we put our delight in one-off and largely nostalgic inhabitations of unexpected spaces because of a fundamental lack of security in more permanent projects? Is there a correlation between our nervousness about building collections – our unwillingness to assert a canon – and the currency of more romantic artist-led projects? We flirt with bringing municipal collections (long under-funded and under-curated) to life by inviting an artist in for a month or two. The security of those Victorian founders who set up museums in the UK's regional cities has never since been matched. Their collections have never been equalled by anything like the original investment; few if any art galleries outside London have been able to build collections of any seriousness in the last fifty years. Instead we bring the power of the Victorian space – the carpet factory or the museum – to contemporary art, and indulge in a little romanticism.

Putting art in disused industrial spaces is hardly the preserve of artists. But artists have played an important part in the move – and particularly noticeably in Britain – away from building new galleries for contemporary art and towards adapting existing industrial architecture. This has something to do with artists' dismissive attitude towards the architects of art galleries, but something also to do with the essentialist character of non-art buildings which has been deemed to assign something of quality to the art placed inside. Nicholas Serota took to heart his experience of asking practising British artists which contemporary art galleries they most liked and disliked and from learning that the favourite was the gallery at Schaffhausen, followed by the De Pont at Tilburg, both modest conversions of light industrial architecture. The result of such a preference is Tate Modern, another neutral (but more powerful) empty industrial building which lends its weight to the experience of contemporary art.

Do we put art in non-art spaces because of a lack of conviction about art? We are now so conditioned to seeing such spaces in terms of contemporary artistic practice that we will find it hard to separate out the two, and assess the quality of one without the other.

III

I speak from my own experience to extend the point. In Liverpool, where I began working in 1988 at the new Tate Gallery, modern art and industrial heritage clearly came to belong together. The point was particularly clearly made here in that their marital home on the Albert Dock was independent of the City of Liverpool and instead directly accountable to central government. In 1994 I moved on to work alongside the Henry Moore Sculpture Trust, then best known for its projects with artists such as Giuseppe Penone, Jannis Kounellis and Richard Long in an old carpet factory in the small industrial town of Halifax. In the late 1980s Dean Clough was a space unlike that provided by other established galleries in the UK, and the flagship of the Henry Moore Foundation' which had been set up in 1977 and which itself, through its donations programme, substantially supported project-based (and thus site-specific) art. But now, over a decade later, we question the usefulness of even spectacular industrial spaces such as Dean Clough because of their unavoidably prescriptive nature, and because their own meta-artistic lineage will tend towards a certain kind of production.

Art may on occasion tempt a sophisticated cosmopolitan audience away from the capital to discover that the rest of the UK has some sites of interest, but this audience knew that. They know that the art projects are temporary, and that the places, of natural or historical interest, will still be there without them. Taking art to unusual places, inter-

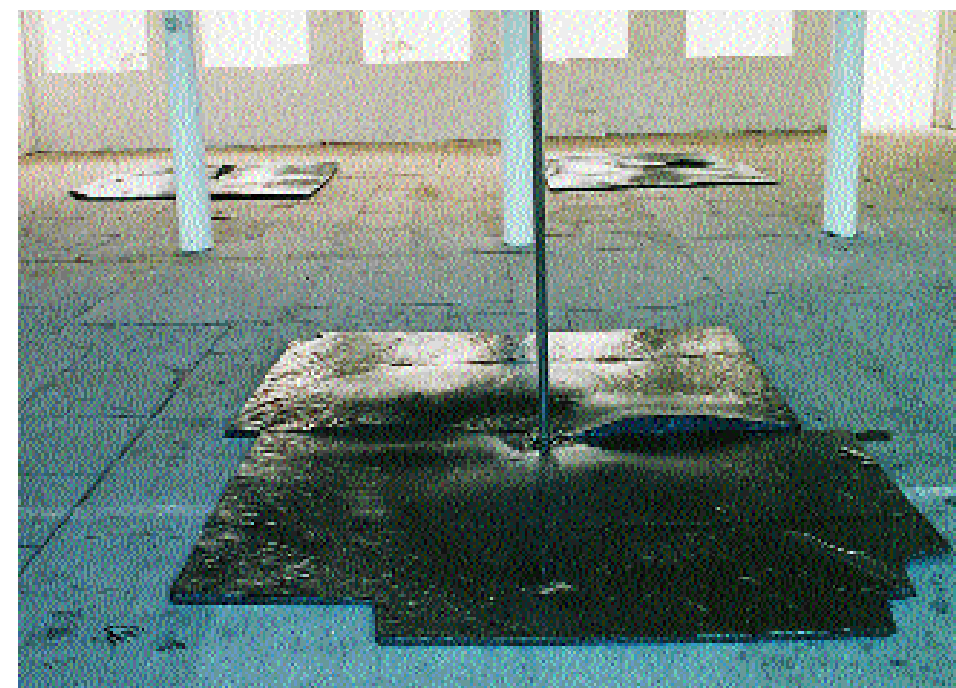


esting each in its own way, can disguise and reveal intrinsic weaknesses in the art itself.

I'd like to make one further personal reference. 'Private View' at the Bowes Museum (1996) placed works by thirty-two contemporary artists into galleries which also housed a diverse permanent collection. My point is not that this was new (it wasn't), or unusually good (though people still talk about it), but that most commentators assumed that it had been done by artists rather than by curators. The assumption that the 'exhibition' had been created by artists derives from the fact that we have become used to understanding exhibitions as installations. I remark on it because I think it pinpoints the fact that a job which a curator can do perfectly well has to such a large extent been taken over by artists that it was a matter of surprise to an artist to see how well a curator could manage.

If in doing the curator's job well curators allow artists to do something different from curating, art might perhaps turn away from installing itself. As it is, the concern with control (understandable on the artist's part) may well have closed down some of the possibilities for the future life of the work, in the collection, in the museum, and in the hands of the curator.

PENELOPE CURTIS IS CURATOR OF THE HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE IN LEEDS.



The Henry Moore Foundation is one of the largest grant making charities for the visual arts in Britain, distributing up to £1 million annually. The Foundation helps many institutions with small grants, rather than a few with large grants, and being project rather than building-based means that it has come to reflect the broadening definition and shift in art practice within the British artworld. www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk

Further information:

The Freud Museum holds regular exhibitions of contemporary art, British & international. Dreams and the unconscious are central to both art and psychoanalysis. From the very beginning Freud's work inspired artists and Freud himself was inspired by works of art. The Museum aims to continue a creative interaction between the two fields as a source of inspiration both for the Museum itself and the artists involved. www.freud.org.uk

Private View – Contemporary Art in the Bowes Museum, published by Henry Moore Institute, 1996, is available from Henry Moore Institute.

Anish Kapoor's *Marsyas*, the third in The Unilever Series of commissions for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall can be seen until 6 April 2003, www.tate.org.uk

'*Inhabited spaces*' is devised and commissioned by Deborah Smith in collaboration with [a-n] MAGAZINE. The series complements and enhances existing editorial taking us on a journey through innovative practices exploring definitions and reinventions of our ideas of expression, looking at the shift in language and discourses of art. In the last of the series in the March issue, Lars Bang Larsen investigates 'vision' industries. Deborah Smith is an independent curator and co-director of smith + fowle.

Above middle: Anish Kapoor, *Marsyas*, installation at Tate Modern, 2002. Photo: Marcus Leith and Andrew Dunkley. Copyright: Tate Photography. Below: Giuseppe Penone, *Contour Lines*, 1990, Henry Moore Studio, Dean Clough, Halifax. Courtesy: the artist and The Henry Moore Foundation