

ARTnews

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Liverpool Biennial

Liverpool

The third Liverpool Biennial, "International 04," might be seen as symbolic of the city's recent renaissance. An increas-



Valeska Soares, *Swirl*, 2004, mirrors, velvet, and crystal chandeliers, dimensions variable, installation view. Liverpool Biennial.

ing number of ingeniously recycled warehouses, innovative contemporary structures, and magnificent, newly refurbished buildings testify to Liverpool's Victorian heyday. But the organizers' claim that this extravaganza was "Great Britain's largest and boldest art event" was a heavy bit of hype. Nonetheless, the citywide event demonstrated an impressive range of achievements. Curated by Sabine Breitweiser, Yu Yeon Kim, Cuauhtémoc Medina, and Apinan Poshyananda, the biennial's most memorable projects were commissioned, site-specific works.

Jill Magid spent a month working with Liverpool's City Watch, England's largest video-surveillance system, to produce *Retrieval Room* and *Evidence Locker* (both 2004), two short films in which she stars. They show her moving through the city's streets, tracked by concealed cameras and identified only by her red raincoat. Singled out from urban anonymity, she appears as an oddly solitary, dispossessed, "victimized" pedestrian. *Retrieval Room* was shown at Fact, a state-of-the-art center for new media, while the Tate Liverpool showed *Evidence Locker*.

Also at the Tate, Satch Hoyt's playful *Labyrinth* (2004), a gigantic spiral constructed of raw cotton, addressed Liverpool's history as a center of trade, while Valeska Soares's mirrored, velvet-draped ballroom nodded elegantly to the city's music and dance heritage. Elsewhere, among dozens of shows organized by

artists and independent curators, which was billed as "Independents 04," the quality was rarely as high. The hodgepodge approach of the main independents' show, housed in a former warehouse, resembled a Red Cross

Christmas bazaar.

A noteworthy exception was provided by "Ten," a ten-week show of ten abstract paintings by ten British artists at the recently opened Loop Gallery. Curated by photographer Ian Johnson and painter Arthur Roberts, the show alluded to its great modernist predecessor, "0.10: The Last Futurist Exhi-

bition," staged in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1915. With a range of works by established British masters such as John Hoyland and Maurice Cockrill as well as inspired newcomers like Craig Atkinson and Julie Jones, "Ten" unequivocally demonstrated that abstract painting remains a dynamic force in Britain today.

For more radical approaches, viewers could sample "New Contemporaries," a biannual show of works by recent art-academy graduates. A jury that included Jake and Dinos Chapman ensured that there was a vigorous, irreverent, multicultural, multimedia mix here. Better proof could scarcely be found to support the claim that "Brit Art" has far from exhausted its resources. The same can be said for the up-and-coming Merseyside metropolis of Liverpool.

—David Galloway

Roni Horn

Hauser & Wirth

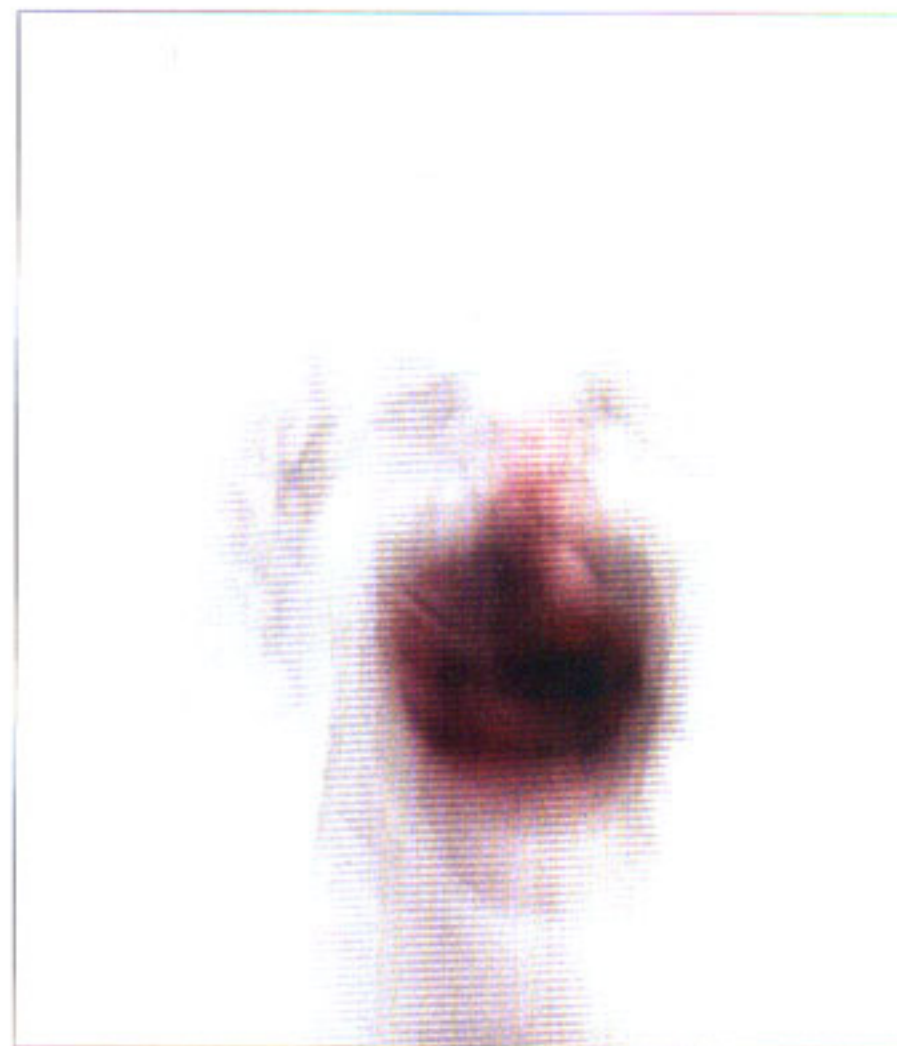
London

The venue—a former bank, wood-paneled with empty vaults left intact—gave Roni Horn a place to establish her work in an unaccommodating setting. That suited her. She covered the ground floor with sand-colored rubber tiles, some of them inlaid with aphorisms borrowed

from the Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. A vault contained three-dozen C-prints of a fully made-up clown going through a complete repertoire of facial expressions, and a signboard with a close-up photo of an owl attached.

Evidently, Horn wants to achieve mood through association. Shoeless (so as not to soil the flooring), the visitor tiptoed, literally and metaphorically, between words and images with expectations that were raised, and then quickly lowered. Upstairs, in former managerial suites, more signboards presented images that countered one another: Icelandic icebergs, Icelandic youth, volcanic mudflats. Several photos of birds of prey intervened here and there. Adding this whole lot up, the viewer could, given adequate goodwill, deduce some sort of emotional landscape.

Deconstructing, or deconstructing, such work involves quite a commitment to this form of display. For rather than simply



Roni Horn, *Cabinet Of* (detail), 2001, 36 C-prints, 28" x 28" each. Hauser & Wirth.

puzzling it out, the barefoot viewer was expected to appreciate the reflection of one phrase or image in another. But, toes curling, my reaction was to try and work out the motivation. Why choose such sayings as "You are a form of my being me, and I am a form of me being you . . ."? (There is more of this, considerably more, but you get the drift.) Naturally, Horn does not want to present her work with on-the-spot interpretation. But there would have been nothing wrong with a bit of preemptive rethinking. It's not the aspiration that failed, it's the deployment of too little too glibly. —William Feaver