

# **Martin Boyce** When Now is Night

## **Ross Sinclair** Journey to the Edge of the World

Visions for the Future: part 1  
25 September – 13 November 1999  
Exhibition Guide

### **Martin Boyce (lower gallery)**

**In the title sequence of the Alfred Hitchcock film North By Northwest (designed by Saul Bass in 1959) a black animated, linear grid appears over a green background. As the green fades we discover that the grid has been tracing the facade of a glass, modernist office building. Saul Bass's cinematic credit sequences and graphics include Otto Premingers' The Man With The Golden Arm and Anatomy Of A Murder, Alfred Hitchcocks' Psycho and Vertigo, and Martin Scorsese's Cape Fear. What is fascinating about all of these works is how, through an incredibly economic use of images, colour and typography, the setting and atmosphere for the film is perfectly established. Back in North by Northwest we find ourselves plunged into the modern city, the ultimate site where romance or desire lie just over your shoulder, and adventure and danger lurk around every corner. It is this title sequence that became the starting point for the wallpaper work When Now Is Night.**

Wallpaper became the perfect vehicle for a work to articulate the textures and sensations of the city at night. When installed it completely surrounds and towers above you, the diagonal white grid accelerates the movement of the eye around the space, while the grey linear shapes give it subtlety and complexity. It is cinematic in scale and by its very nature is repetitive and becomes part of the architecture.

The wallpaper work When Now Is Night is not, however, pictorial. It does not simply depict the glass skin of modern architecture or trace the grid many cities are built on. It operates as a graphic soundtrack for the generic metropolis.

*"The deeper1 the building the more it depends on artifice for its servicing. Air is injected into its interior, used (ie. turned into poison), and extracted: the inside core, inaccessible to daylight is lit by fluorescent tubes (gases in a permanent state of explosion.) A 'deep' plan suggests a condition where the distance between the core and the facade is considerable."*

(Extract from "Last Apples" S.M.L.XL - Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau 1995)

This quote became very interesting to me in relation to the wallpaper as it drew us 'deep' into the city's interior landscape. The other side of the glass facade where fluorescent light and air conditioning replace day light and fresh air. In the second room, adjacent to the wallpapered room, suspended above the viewers

heads are a series of fluorescent light fittings drawing out a graphic representation of a spider's web. The tension between the natural and the artificial struck me further when one day I noticed a spider had spun its web on the window in front of my desk. It was a perfect diagram of a web, exactly as you would draw one. It was then, with its order and repetition, that I noticed its similarity to the grid. The web was a tiny detail in relation to the scale of the city, yet like the city it was well used as dramatic and potent image.

The third room shows two sets of photographs, Red Disaster (In Advance) and Black Disaster (In Advance). The first set shows a chrome and red leather chair designed by Charles and Ray Eames wedged under a door handle, jamming the door closed. The second shows a similar scene but this time an Arne Jacobson chair performs the function of the wedge, effectively protecting itself and the interior from an unwanted but inevitable intrusion. Both chairs were designed between 1951 and 1952 and represent classic examples of mid century modernist design. They, in their original incarnation, reflect an ethos of functional, affordable, well designed objects. Now, however, as the objects have passed through time the aesthetic has collected its own ethos based on pecuniary notions of taste and exclusivity. Here the 'Eames Dream' has been de-narrated and a new darker narrative has taken its place with the viewer as protagonist and the artists, objects and their histories as the co-authors of the experience. The photographs are shown as double images. Unlike Andy Warhols' Electric Chair silk screen prints, however, a banality does not set in through the repetition. Instead a heightened concentration happens as the eye darts from one seemingly identical image to the other.

*Are they the same photograph?*

*Is one image seconds after the other and seconds closer to the moment of awaited violence?*

*Or perhaps they are two separate but identical rooms in separate but identical houses.*

*One real, and one imagined...*

*(Text by Martin Boyce)*

### **Ross Sinclair (upper gallery)**

**Until its evacuation on the 29th August 1930, St Kilda was the most remote inhabited part of the United Kingdom. It lies 50 miles west of the most distant, Outer Hebridean island of Uist, seventeen hours by boat from Oban, on the Scottish mainland. The community of St Kilda had survived alone for two thousand years. They climbed the highest sea cliffs in Britain to hunt for the many seabirds, which were the staple of their existence. Everything that was gathered was shared equally. The unique Soay sheep provided the wool for their clothing. St Kilda had a parliament which met every working day to make all the important decisions for the community. There was no money system, no police, no crime, no clocks, no calendar. The islands had no trees, and its inhabitants had never seen a rabbit, a rat, a pig or a bee. It was a cold harsh, inhospitable**

**place nevertheless filled with a barren melancholic beauty. But the people had songs, laments, poetry, dances and a history together in this epic wilderness. The islanders of St Kilda had more in common with the inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha or Tierra Del Fuego than with the urban city dwellers of Edinburgh or London.**

The way of life on St Kilda had been virtually unchanged for two thousand years. However, by the 19th century, pressures from the outside world over religion, money, education, welfare had combined to throw into doubt the St Kildan's way of life. As this contact with the modern world increased the spirit of the community weakened. This society, which had stayed trapped out of time for a thousand years was all but destroyed in 150 years of contact with the modern world, its religion and its money.

When the St Kildans finally left on the 9 August 1930 they lit their fires which they had stocked well. The chimneys were still smoking as the SS Harebell pulled away to take them to a new and uncertain future. When these last fires finally died down and went out it was the first time there had been no fire burning on the island for a thousand years.

Sinclair's project engages in the continuing fascination with the history (factual and fictional) of utopian societies which has previously been addressed in his works, *Real Life Rocky Mountain* (CCA Glasgow, 1996 – left) and *A Dream of The Hamnavoe Free State* (The Pier Arts Centre, Stromness, Orkney, 1998, and *The Agency*, London 1999). In the former he constructed a slice of mountain landscape in the gallery which was constructed entirely from artificial materials – plastic grass, fiberglass trees, polystyrene boulders, stuffed animals, and electronically controlled waterfalls. Sinclair himself sat in the middle of this ersatz landscape, his tattooed back – bearing the legend *Real Life* – turned away from the audience, singing a selection from 300 years of popular Scottish music. In this work he sought to refocus a cultural history of a small nation through the songs which have been popular over its modern history. In the *Hamnavoe Free State* project (above) he recreated a poetic impression of a Free State in the fictional place of Hamnavoe (the old name for Stromness) which actually never existed in the first place. One of the many things this work addressed was the ultimate failure of a 60s radicality which has moved through the excesses of the 80s into a new millennium - new conservatism.

In this project, *Journey to the Edge of the World*, Sinclair employs the idea of St Kilda as a microcosm of the troubled relationship between self determined communities and the inexorable rise of the modern world. Sinclair seeks to address the many complex reasons why we as individuals are continually drawn to our own little piece of Utopia, whether that is a real place or a hypothetical space of the imagination from where to escape the pressures and disappointments of everyday life. This work offers various interpretations of the story of St Kilda and how it may, or may not, have a relevance for us today. The layout of the show encourages the viewer to wander around the installation constructing their own version of the incredible story of this community and its head on collision with the modern world.

*Visions for the Future is a project initiated by The Fruitmarket Gallery to commission substantial new bodies of work by young Scottish artists over the next three years. This exhibition is the result of the first commissions, and was selected by Norah Campbell (Director of An Tuireann, Isle of Skye), Trevor Cromie (Exhibitions Director, The Lighthouse, Glasgow), Euan McArthur (Head of Historical and Theoretical Studies, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Fine Art, Dundee) and Graeme Murray (Director of The Fruitmarket Gallery).*

*The exhibition is accompanied by two publications about the artists' work.*

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