

# ArtReview

## Features

### Installation Art

*Michael Petry visits 'Hotel' by Marty St James and Anne Wilson at Air Gallery, and 'Petroleum' by Max Couper at Unit 7 Gallery*

*Inszenierung* is a German word meaning a setting, the potential to happen, something which holds the promise or possibility of happening. It connects two visually different installations with a similar conceptual ideology. 'Hotel' at Air and 'Petroleum' at Unit 7 are both sites where you feel anything could happen. The Air Gallery has been transformed into the Eastbourne Grand Hotel, complete with piano bar, ballroom, bedroom, lift, guest lobby, shower unit, reception and TV lounge. We are invited to stroll about and make ourselves at home. We can even watch a video about the Hotel made for Channel 4. Everyone is treated as a 'Guest' and requested to register. Once this is done we can wander at our leisure around the Hotel's three spacious, and grandly appointed floors. If we like, we can listen to John Tilbury, the resident pianist in the 'Aquarium Bar'. We can take a video shower or a video kip. Everything is as cosy as a tea kettle cover made by your gran, yet everything is turned on its head. You get the feeling the artists have a real love/hate relationship with English seaside kitsch. The walls are covered in that 3-D plastic wallpaper and in every corner you find tasteful dried flower arrangements. Velvet chairs for your comfort, tropical fish, Fosters ashtrays, white plastic bedroom furnishings and a disco floor John Travolta would die for, provide for the complete holiday fantasy. I have to admit I have stayed in similar hotels in Bournemouth, which were not nearly as 'nice'.

Only the 'Art works' bring the artifice crashing down. It is a shame that the chic frames on the drawings for the installation, which litter every room, are 1) so bad, and 2) framed and displayed to look self-consciously as if it is the *real* art in a kitsch surround. For it is the kitsch installation that is the true art, not the dull working drawings or passably boring videos that make this show work. All in, however, it is a good installation.

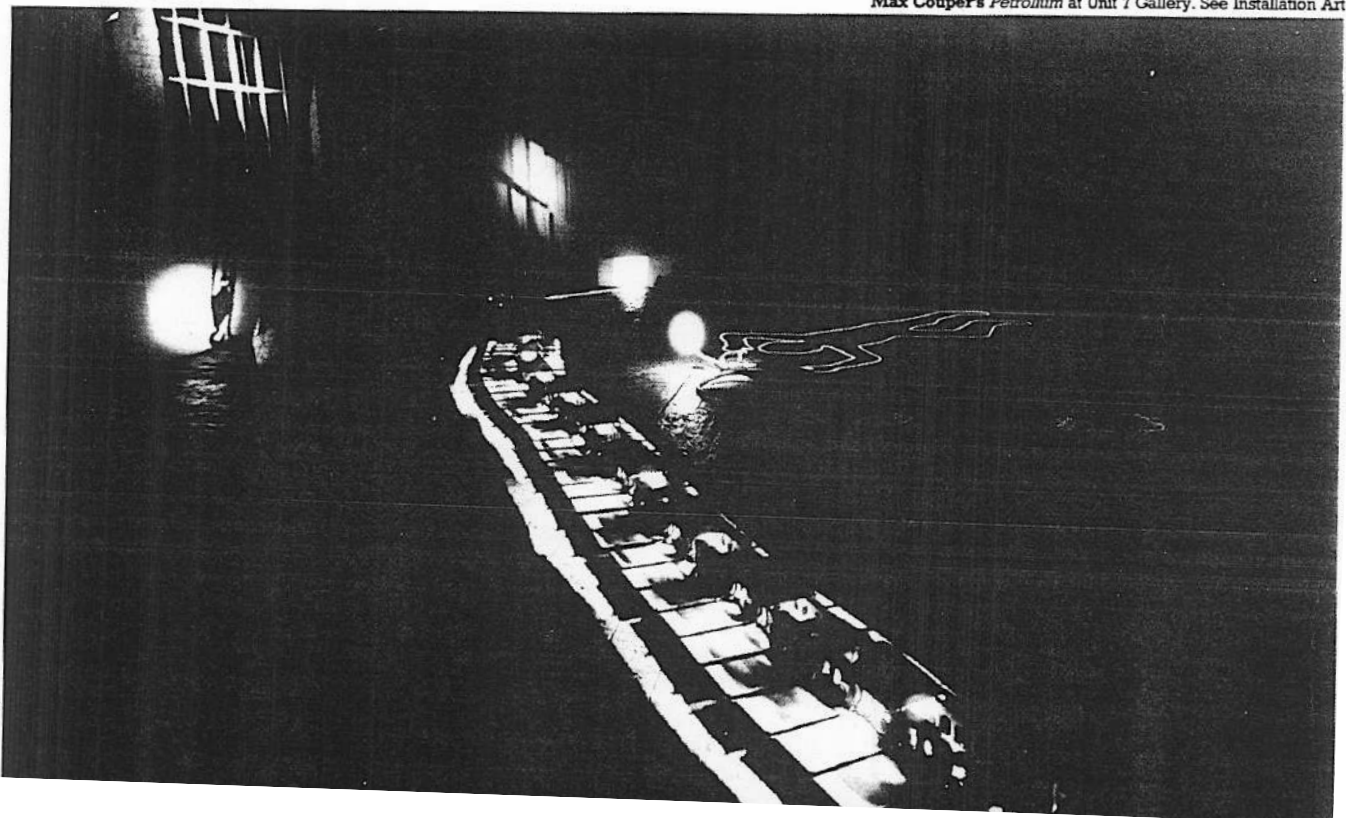
'Petroleum' is an even better one. Here, an Englishman has re-created a stark and visually superb if not disturbing vision of Dallas. It certainly shrieks 'Art'. Everything is placed just so, and so be it, to great effect. A gasoline pump from Shell mysteriously grows from the centre of the gallery and from its dirty nozzle a live flame spits out heat and light. A huge tractor tread snakes across the floor lit by triangles of metal light as it ominously mauls the floor as it marches, like a Nazi Panzer, towards the focus of the installation: a white outline of a man on the floor. You know those lines they trace in the street around dead bodies, well one is painted on the floor, and another is projected over it. Double trouble, double dealing and double death... A soundtrack blares away. The installation is terrifying in its calmness, its resignation, its uncoseness. Two views of the modern world waiting for *inszenierung*, waiting for the spectator to explore them. Do. MICHAEL PETRY

*Latin Ballroom dancing takes place at the Hotel at various times, call for details; and the Petroleum Conference performance will take place February 18, 8.00pm. 'Hotel' is at Air Gallery, 6-8 Rosebury Ave., EC1 (01-278 7751) to Feb 26; and 'Petroleum' is at Unit 7 Gallery, 36-38 Peckham Rd., SE5 (01-708 3187) to Feb 20.*

### Stage Design

All his composing life it was Verdi's ambition to write an opera based on Shakespeare's great play, King Lear. But, despite early success with Macbeth and late ones with Otello and Falstaff, the Lear aspiration remained unfulfilled, largely it seems because of the composer's confessed inability to find an operatic solution to the Storm scene. Benjamin Britten likewise expressed a desire to make an opera of Lear, without ever achieving it. The German pianist turned composer, Aribert Reimann, previously accompanist to the great singer, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, has however suffered from no such inhibitions. Ten years ago his operatic version of Lear had its world premiere in Munich, was greeted with much approval by its German audience, and since then has had a formidable number of productions elsewhere in Germany and Western Europe. Recently, at the Coliseum, English National Opera gave Reimann's Lear its

Max Couper's Petroleum at Unit 7 Gallery. See Installation Art



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