



Outsiders give the art festival its edge

It's not just the galleries that matter at Glasgow International. Jack Mottram explores the delights of off-site shows

IN ITS first year as a grown-up biennial, the Glasgow International arts festival has lost none of the energy of its original incarnation as the underground upstart offshoot of the staid annual Art Fair. This is mostly thanks to a glut of off-site projects, shows that have escaped the confines of the city's galleries and set up shop in unusual venues, from the hushed halls of the Mitchell Library to private homes and near-derelict abandoned buildings.

The fun begins in the west end, at Douglas Gordon's townhouse on Woodlands Terrace, which plays host to a series of video works by Adel Abdessemed. At first glance, Abdessemed's documented actions can seem a little slight, but the best of them offer arresting images that linger in the memory. Also Sprach Allah sees the artist engaged in a peculiar ritual, hurled repeatedly into the air from a blanket, gamely attempting to write the titular phrase on a carpet nailed to the ceiling. In *Helikoptere*, Abdessemed employs an even more extreme barrier to creation, trying to draw while suspended by his ankles from a helicopter in flight.

Down the hill at the Mitchell, Calum Stirling's use of video couldn't be more different. His complex, engrossing installation *Rostra Plaza* consists of a huge canopy sheltering a screen that shows slowly shifting scenes in extreme close-up. The source of this

surveillance footage is a set of five curious little dioramas mounted on rotating platforms, spied on by miniature cameras which turn their attention to particular scenes, seemingly at random. The vignettes range from arrangements of modernist architectural models to dinky maquettes of artworks, and the result is distinctly Ballardian, with Stirling creating an urban landscape in miniature in order to observe its mysteries.

Just off Sauchiehall Street, the basement of the State Bar plays host to group show *A Stranger Home*. Rather than using the room to mount an exhibit, the eight young artists here, working under the guidance of curator Alhena Katsos, have carefully insinuated their work into the fabric of the space. Stina Wirfelt's brass plaque demands that visitors watch the pub telly, and consider whatever programme they might see a work of art. Baldwin Ringsted has coated various objects – a chair, a bottle of whisky, some books – in glamorous aluminium. Grier Edmundson's quietly altered photographs line the walls, with subtle etching and painting on the glass of their frames. Best of all is Kevin Pollock's lovingly hand-crafted, fully functional urinal, carved from MDF and burnished to a high sheen. It's a neat, witty tribute to Duchamp's *Fountain*; a complete reversal of the readymade and – thanks to its position in the gent's loo – one of the best evocations of



ENGROSSING: A detail from Calum Stirling's Ballard-esque installation *Rosta Plaza*, on display at the Mitchell Library. Pictures: Alan Dimmick

the GI's loose "public/private" theme to be found in the city.

Across town, there's a cluster of shows between Trongate and the Saltmarket. On Osborne Street, Wilhelm Sasnal has taken over a dusty, claustrophobic shop basement to screen his specially commissioned short film, a decidedly bleak piece in which Polish band 19 Wiosen perform *The Other Church*, a hymn to the memory of murdered student Angelika Kluk. The group are joined by a naked woman who mouths the song's lyrics, at times defiantly, but for the most part she is huddled in the corner of a dilapidated room, very much like the one in which the film is screened. That might sound

exploitative, but this powerful piece of cinema is nothing of the sort, offering a moving tribute to Kluk, underpinned with barely repressed anger at her fate.

Around the corner, the proposed installation at the Bath House by Turner Prize-winner Simon Starling has run into some trouble. At the final stages, Starling's attempt to fashion sculptural forms from the surface of silver gelatin photographic prints, using high-tech 3-D imaging techniques, was beset by technical difficulties, but will apparently make its delayed debut before the festival ends next Saturday (April 27). In the mean time, the artist is showing *Autoxylopyrocloboros*, a slide-show documenting

his voyage across Loch Long in a wooden steamboat, its engine fuelled with wood cut from the boat's hull as it sailed – an oddly elegiac reworking of slapstick cartoon violence that nods to the tension between the loch-side peace camp and the nuclear naval base at Faslane.

ON THE Saltmarket, Dani Marti and Katri Walker have risen to the challenge of presenting video work effectively, cramming a disused shop with their films, with work projected on big screens, hidden away in cupboards and stuffed into box-rooms. The result is a little overwhelming, as pieces compete

for attention, flickering away in peripheral vision, but allow your gaze to settle and you're rewarded with thoughtful, innovative video portraits from both artists. Marti's David casts an unflinching eye on a young homeless man, slipping in and out of consciousness, and hanging on to his begging cup for dear life. Walker's *Senor Celestino on the Edge of Heaven* is another highlight, offering a glimpse into the world of the 80-year-old Celestino and the open-air church he has carved into the rocks near his home.

Kalup Linzy's video work at Washington Garcia's temporary space in a retail unit on the Trongate is less satisfying. The New

York artist is a low-budget auteur, writing, directing and starring in scrappy little films that pastiche the high melodrama of daytime soap operas and telenovelas, poking fun at the art world in the process yet also examining harder issues, from race to sexual identity. Linzy is a gifted comic – his turn, in thrift-shop drag, as a struggling, dim-witted artist is laugh-out-loud funny – but as these films unfold, they edge perilously close to becoming that which they parody.

Other events include *The Secret Agent*, Raydale Dower and Judd Brucke's mixture of street performance and psychogeographic dérive, and a stramash of art, music and conversation at *The Local*, a temporary artist-designed pub at the SWG3 Studios in Finnieston. Consider all of these together and Glasgow International begins to look less like a festival in the ordinary sense and more like a new thread woven into the city's cultural fabric. It's a shame we have to wait two years for the next edition.

The off-site shows of Glasgow International run until April 27. For more information and venue details, visit www.glasgowinternational.org.



WEE JOYS: Kevin Pollock's homage to Duchamp, right, and a scene from Simon Starling's almost slapstick voyage across Loch Long.

