

INTERVIEW WITH IAN MILLISS

Tim Johnson:

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Q. *Not a great deal of your work has been shown in public but would you describe what has as "situational"?*

A. It's completely involved with any given space and using it some way, hopefully to make it a real space - that is more real than it already is.

Q. *By adding a foreign element to the space?*

A. Yes, but I'm getting right away from that so there's nothing at all in the space. I'm doing it by just telling people to move around in the space. Rather than just looking at something or even just thinking about something like in conceptual art, I'm becoming more and more involved with using the body.

Q. *Would the work you exhibited in this year's **Young Contemporaries** exhibition be of this type?*

A. Yes. I was worried that people wouldn't take any notice of the words "walk here" but there were always people walking backwards and forwards and I think the work was a success. My most successful works so far have been the most "material" ones - and the paintings of my own that I like best were the most idle-object like - just paint on canvas with nothing more, where the paint was paint rather than colour. I'm more involved with making things completely physical and I've now reached the stage where I don't put anything into the real space except the spectator.

Q. *Do you choose this space?*

A. Generally yes, there are quite a lot of them made for a certain space even if there isn't any hope of it ever turning out. I tend to think of a given space. Even in Survey 10 where I moved the screen to create a sort of corridor - that was thought of long before I knew about the show.

Q. *Do you document this sort of work?*

A. I want as little documentation as possible. I'd rather just do it at the time and not be followed by it later - it's just so much dead weight hanging around. I'm a bit scared of documentation proliferating - so that you end up spending more time taking photographs than working. I want people to see the work and not take the photographs as the work. Even that work in the **Young Contemporaries** I didn't worry about photographing it - I just let **Marie de Teliga** tear it up and throw it away. I've always had this attitude. When I have taken photographs they were taken because I wanted to play around with photography. For instance I took photographs of the empty space in **Watters Gallery**.

Q. *Couldn't you learn from a record of your earlier work?*

A. What I learn becomes integrated in everything that I am doing so that for me it's unnecessary to record - the only art that I am interested in is art that's a tool for experimenting with life and its useless having the thing hanging around afterwards cluttering up the place.

Q. *What about a work as a permanent installation?*

A. Oh that's alright but I'm not going to go to ludicrous lengths to preserve the thing - someone else could make the bloody thing in concrete - I wouldn't mind that, but I wouldn't waste my time doing it.

Q. **Do you see painting as something quite separate from what you're doing?**

A. Yes, I see paintings that I like a lot but I'm just not involved in it. For me it's now not only totally irrelevant but totally redundant - but that's only on a purely personal level.

Q. *It's easy to determine the function of painting-decoration, so what would be the function of your art, to educate?*

A. That gives it a wider didactic purpose - all I can say is that it's purely for me - so what they think about it - they can see it in terms of decoration, I don't particularly care. All I am interested in is what it does for me - that might be the same thing that it does for other people - well that's good news - when it comes.

Q.- *Why then do you exhibit your work in the gallery system?*

A. Because that's the only way I can do it - there aren't many things that I can build in this house - I've just got to get other space to work in.

Q. *What about the letters that you send to people with for example some minute wording in one bottom corner?*

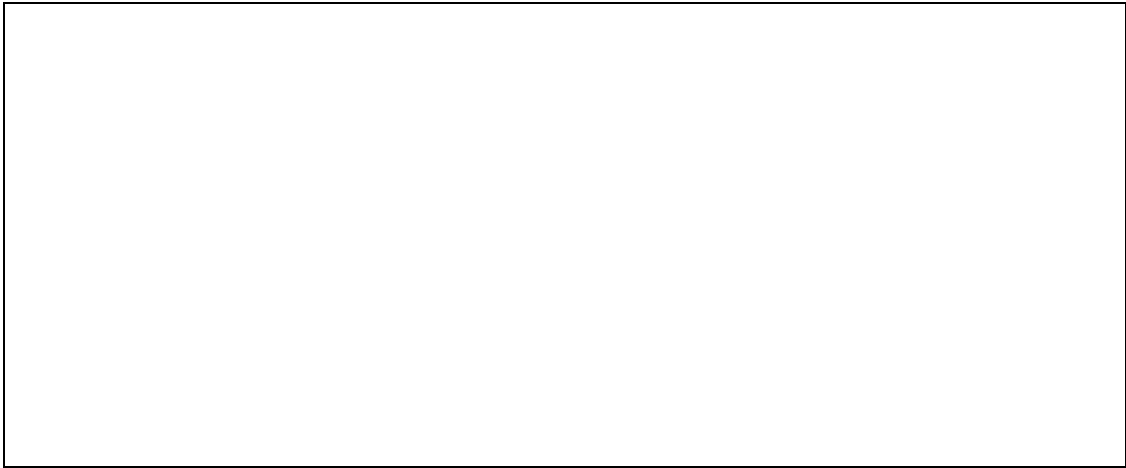
A. The letters are related to the other work that I'm doing but they're ideas I have that are better done in little works plus the fact that I'm interested in giving away work - just posting them out to people. It doesn't cost me much money and I don't see why I shouldn't do it. I've had some quite beautiful responses actually - the one I like best was from **Neil Evans** who sent me a Xerox copy then burnt the original. I like that. There's more to it than just each letter in itself because they unfold over 5 or 6 letters - they've only just started - they go in different phases so that whatever you think you've arrived at so far - there's another one coming that will change all the back ones - plus odd ones in between that have nothing to do with the series. That whole thing has only just started.

I try to make works that need the smallest possible means to bring them into existence while at the same time having a lot of implications. An example is four numbers on a piece of paper - the telephone number for time.

I've been trying to work towards an open ended situation - trying to get away from any situation at all that could stop me from doing everything - one of the things that worries me is appearing dada - so right now I'm trying to find a way of doing just about everything without appearing dada. I don't want to restrict myself to one little idea. I'm happiest when I'm covering a lot of things and jumping backwards and forwards so that only over about 500 works does it all knit together.

When I thought of dealing directly with real space - that became related to dealing with other situations besides space - like time. What I first thought of was works such as having a clock that was so many minutes out or that worked at the wrong ratio so that it lost so many hours per 24 or like declaring so many hours invalid so that inside a certain space when you walk in you're back 6 hours. If you did that to a gallery - put it back 12 hours - let it open from 11 o'clock at night till 6 in the morning -things like that.

The following page is a work by Ian Milliss



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