

Cardiff's Artstation marries computers, craft and cybernetics to create strange, umworldly paperworks,

# Paperweight Lighthouses

AT ITS ENTRANCE, Brighton's Ship Street Holy Trinity Church gives only scant information about what might be inside. Dilapidated outer walls and a few posters hint at its contemporary deconsecrated role: home to Fabrica, the city's leading artspace, with a rolling timetable of innovative cross-media gallery set pieces, installations and, occasionally, exhibits.

Even if you know something of the work that goes on inside Fabrica's building, the first time you step across its arched doorway is something of a revelation. There in the pewless hall is a remarkable space, retaining much of the stillness churches are imbued with. The aged wooden floors, high ceiling and looming empty room amplify the ambience. For the most part the atmosphere is a fine backdrop to the exhibitions that find their way within Fabrica's four walls. Chris Drury built one of his vortex willow-works at the room's centre a couple of years back. Bill Viola's *The Crossing* showed here in 2001, and soon after, the gentle organic curves and waves of Japanese fibre artist, Machiko Agano, wove a web spread the length and breadth of the gallery. For all these, the space was central to the making of the work.

In the order of things, Fabrica's next set piece after Viola and Agano was entitled *Pulp*. It brought in an art partnership whose *modus operandi* extended this so that buildings and structures became the canvas of their work. Artstation, the Welsh-based duo of Glenn Davidson and Anne Hayes, has for many years been wrapping the interiors of buildings in extraordinary forms, somewhere between giant organic creepers and internal digestive systems, which issue from the ground up, curving round pillars and ballistrades, reclining the length of a room and confusing the sense of floorspace as they burst through from one level to the next. In 2000, the two constructed a series of organomorphic bones issuing out of the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall. In Brighton, their contribution saw a partial snail's shell curving out of the font at the end of the Fabrica space into the air. Since Brighton there's been Belfast, and this year work in the low countries, followed by Spain. Strange as the forms appear, arguably even stranger is that they do all this with recycled industrial paper,

working out measurements to the millimetre with some of the highest tech hardware around. It's as if craft has met computers and the result turns out to be public space interior design.

*At this stage, I am still unsure what to expect – I have had sketchy details of Artstation's creative processes explained to me, but as yet I cannot even imagine what the final installation will look like. Glenn Davidson arrived this afternoon, and spent a couple of hours wandering around the space, getting a feel for the atmosphere... Neil, a student of Virtual Environments at Salford University also arrived with large amounts of technical equipment, all of which will be explained to us tomorrow. I'm left feeling intrigued, and quite excited by the project, whatever it turns out to be.*

ILLY PLATT, VOLUNTEER IN BRIGHTON

Artstation was originally formed in 1989 out of the ashes of various other process-led projects in which the couple had already been absorbed for much of eighties. Anne and Glenn had met while at Cardiff College of Art in the late seventies, and as with Artstation, these displayed an immersion in how the process of working in an art context could act as an instrument of communication. This meant a leaning to the educational sphere, a dimension that remains central. The art college experience and the zeitgeist of that early period informs a significant element of what Artstation has become, similar in slant to the avant-art topography traceable back to the sixties, which today forms a central plank of the new art establishment ideological rhetoric, from Tate Modern exhibition policy to the tenets of art college pedagogy. With Artstation, however, there is a feeling this geography has been investigated by them more thoroughly than by many of their peers.

Glenn: 'Most of the works we create owe much to performance art, video art, interactive art and that most elusive, philosophical underpinning/form of conceptual art. As art students from the 1970s we were fed a rich diet of conceptual art and the contents of Marxist ideology and also feminism.' They reference Beuys, with whom clear sympathies reside, and specifically his 'social sculpture' thinking and its defining of life as art, as process, a way of becoming that continues to influence subsequent generations. Another related

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part gigantic digestive tracts, part interior design