

Interview: Angela Bulloch

Shining a light on the city

The artist has installed her latest work in the Basel cathedral, as part of the fair's new Art Parcours project

Angela Bulloch, who graduated from Goldsmiths College in London in 1988, has produced drawing machines, light and sound works, and complex interactive installations that are often underpinned by a common thesis: the purpose of public structures and social systems. Her "Rules Series", initiated in 1993, placed banal, everyday regulations (parking restrictions, the standing orders of Britain's House of Commons and Birkenstock shoe-care tips) in a new context, highlighting their absurdity. Since 2000, Bulloch has developed "Pixel Boxes" (in collaboration with computer artist Holger Friese), a key motif in her work. These cubes, made in varying sizes and materials, consist of fluorescent, luminous tubes—red, blue and green—which can be programmed to produce millions of colour combinations. For her Art Parcours, piece, *Night Sky: Mercury and Venus*, Bulloch has transformed the interior of the Basel Münster, built between 1019 and 1500 in Romanesque and Gothic styles.

The Art Newspaper: Is your Art Parcours piece religious?
Angela Bulloch: There are two aspects to the piece. First, it is not religious and neither am I. I don't believe in God. But the work reacts, of course, to the context of the cathedral. I've made the piece very much with the space in mind and it addresses fundamental questions such as "where are you in the world?" The work provides a [virtual] representation of the universe, showing [the planets] Venus and Mercury. I've made something

real from a virtual standpoint. Second, the position of the spectator is key in relation to the installation which [should] be viewed at a distance of approximately 20 metres. You can position yourself in relation to the work in places that you couldn't actually visit physically. The piece incorporates light-emitting diodes which can be controlled. It's quite a demanding context to work in alongside a permanent team of engineers but it's also thrilling.

TAN: *Night Sky: Mercury and Venus* appears to be based on a very clear concept. Have you always worked in this way?

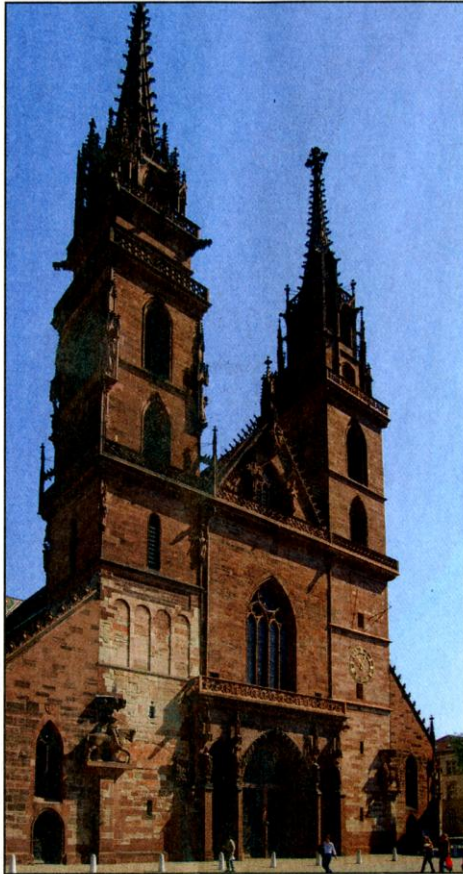
AB: Definitely. I learned to be rigorous technically as well, and [deduced] how to make my own circuit boards with silicon chips. Both the technical and the conceptual have to go hand-in-hand. Besides, you need to know the nature of the material you're dealing with.

TAN: That seems particularly true of your "Pixel Box" innovations.

AB: Yes, I did a lot of technical research and developmental work, following through a process to make something that was technically quite difficult to achieve. I had to devise a new system, focusing on how the boxes would diffuse light, for instance, and develop the dimming mechanisms that allow the pixels to change every second. I straddled both art and design by designing the boxes, then turning them into art. But the principles you apply when designing objects are not the same as those used when making art.

TAN: How have you taken this concept forward?

AB: For my last exhibition at



Esther Schipper gallery in Berlin in March, entitled "Redux", I used the language and grammar of the works in a different way, producing a "Pixel Box" with red, yellow and blue fluorescent tubes, perverting the usual additive colour system. I suppose you could say that I was "riffing" on my own art.

TAN: Such devices invite the viewer to respond and participate. Do you consider your work to be interactive?

AB: It's such a loose word, it gives people expectations and then usually disappoints. All art is interactive after all because a painting needs to be perceived. People come to recognise the "cause and effect" concept at play within an installation but only because they become aware of it over time during the course of the work; I would describe this process as interpassive rather than interactive.

TAN: So who's in control? You or the spectator?

AB: Control is an important issue in our lives. It depends on the context and the situation. Certainly I use the dynamics of control within my work.

TAN: Is art simply about shifting context then? I'm thinking about your "Rules Series" which showed how irrational regulations can be.

AB: Context is an important consideration. Where you find information often has a strong influence on how the information is understood or perceived. One "Rules Series" that I love is the Din-A4 paper standardising system, the subject of a recent "Rules" piece ["A4" identifies the 210mm x 297mm paper size decreed under the International Organisation for Standard-

isation]. It's amazing that all countries, except the US, work with the same paper size; there's something extraordinary about this consensus and international discourse over a sheet of paper. The beauty of this mathematical system really appeals to me.

TAN: What are your future projects?

AB: I'll be heading straight for Johannesburg in South Africa after Basel where I'm participating in a Parcours-style project called "X-Wohnungen", initiated by the HAU theatre in Berlin, that coincides with the football World Cup. ■

Interview by Gareth Harris

Art Parcours

Art Basel's Art Parcours, curated by Jens Hoffmann, director of the Watts Institute for Contemporary Arts in California, aims to transform historic locations and landmarks throughout the city by the creation of site-specific works and performances. Participating artists include Daniel Buren, Ryan Gander and Nathalie Djurberg. Sites include the Old University of Basel, the Natural History Museum and the banks of the River Rhine. The events will be staged over a three-night period, from 17-19 June; tonight's are by invitation only, with the second two nights open to ticket-holding members of the public.
www.artbasel.com/parcours

Basel cathedral