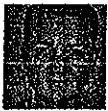


Coomer, Martin, "On The Way There", *Time Out London*, October 9-16, 2002, p.57

On the way there



Martin Coomer
reviews 'En Route'
at the Serpentine
Gallery.

Work from the 1960s to the present by 23 peripatetic artists fills the gallery for 'En Route', the first exhibition at the Serpentine organised by new curator, Rochelle Steiner. In travel, Steiner has picked an unwieldy and, inevitably, an expansive theme: the space becomes a kind of departure lounge, the artists appear like an assortment of high-class and budget carriers vying to take you away with them – through space and time.

King's Cross 1974-2002, the Costa del Sol 1995, Lake Como 1998 are among the destinations on offer. Richard Wentworth's photographs depict the forgotten corners of London – furniture chucked out on the Caledonian Rd, an ad hoc sculpture behind a bus stop in King's Cross. The city is a work in progress, recorded with voyeuristic delight.

In his looped film, Graham Gussin takes us on a never-ending journey around the treacherous roads of Spain's sunshine coast. In this instance, the journey becomes a vehicle for frustration; the destination is always around the next corner. It's a million miles away from the bonhomie found in Hamish Fulton's 'A Time and a Place, Italy'. Beneath a photograph of grinning volunteers, a text reveals that the group – 26 individuals from 15 countries – trekked from Lake Como to the top of a nearby hill and back, once a day for a fortnight. The journey unites. Group hug, everyone.

In a handout, Yoko Ono invites you to 'Draw an imaginary map... put a goal mark on the map where you want to go... go walking on an actual street according to your map...' It's nonsensical. But, curiously, Ono's 1962 flight of fancy is as close as the exhibition gets to examining the journey as a metaphor for spiritual enlightenment or self-knowledge, a mental as much as a physical leap – age-old themes in art, literature and mythology.

Ono's contemporary, Vito Acconci represents the more mundane aspect of travel that simmers throughout the show. For 'Service Area' (1970), the artist had his post redirected to New York's Museum of Art and, each day, walked from his home to collect it. A map highlights his journey from Christopher Street in Greenwich Village to MOMA's midtown address. A hindrance, possibly, but nothing compared to the indignities he has suffered in the name of art. In his films and photographs of the '70s, Acconci tested the limits of endurance. He threw soap into his eyes, had rubber balls fired at him, got tied to a pillar for hours on end.

It could be argued that these, more important works are as much about a journey – a trial overcome or an inner transformation – as the lesser, literal illustration of the theme on display. This is a problem with the exhibition in general; in fleshing-out her thesis, Steiner at times shoehorns the obvious and ordinary into the gallery and, in the process, spoon-feeds her audience.

That's why we get Fischli & Weiss's airport photographs – aeroplanes equal travel, bingo! And why Catherine Opie's US roadtrip stills fill up a wall. Too many vanishing points and so much scenery quickly transforms

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the viewer into a passive and weary cultural tourist.

For this reason, Andrea Fraser's video sticks out. Shot in Frank Gehry's Guggenheim, Bilbao, the film pokes fun at the herd-mentality of today's museum visitors and the patronising 'education – entertainment' strategies employed by establishments desperate to pack them in. Fraser is aided by a ridiculous soundtrack. On screen we watch her pick up an audio guide and respond to its treacle-voiced commands to explore the curvy volumes of the Guggenheim foyer. Mitching her dress above her waist, she fondles a limestone wall with alarming impropriety.

For 'Narcotourismo, Copenhagen' Mexican artist, Francis Alÿs trudged the pavements for a week, each day under the influence of a different drug. His notes record impassively the sensations experienced whilst on speed, heroin, alcohol and hash. As in the best work here, Alÿs's message is that, while we are no longer excited by the travel in the way that generations before us were, our desire to escape – from the norm, from ourselves – is as strong as ever.

'En Route' is at the Serpentine Gallery until October 27

