

of 'Safer with Strangers' was also a conscious response to what Hamblen perceives as the apathy of many Lancashire artists toward the opportunities for experimentation and creativity offered to them by the gallery.

PAD is run by Preston City Council and was set up to provide emerging artists and crafts people in Lancashire with a space to exhibit and sell work. Whilst the shop is run by Council employees, the gallery is programmed by a steering group made up of artists, representing a cross-section of the Lancashire art community, who select proposals sent in by regional practitioners.

As a member of the steering group for six months, Hamblen found himself continually disappointed and frustrated by the proposals he received; "A lot didn't have that 'get up and go'. There was no enthusiasm, no 'Yeah, yeah, fantastic - I've got this great chance to do something new!' There weren't really any proposals where you thought 'Great - this is what we should be doing!' There was very little thought about the way that the space could be used; most people just saw it as somewhere to hang their paintings."

Hamblen views such attitudes as indicative of a small place where, unlike large cities such as London, artists are less exposed to new ideas and diverse types of practice, and as a result can sometimes develop a narrow approach to their own creativity. Nevertheless, he is optimistic about the opportunities available in smaller places and emphasises the role that artists can play in developing their own cultural landscapes; "Artists in smaller places aren't up against the same amount of competition as those in big cities and so it can be easier for them to access opportunities. But it's up to them to make the most of what's there. Whether being an artist in a small town is a good experience or not really comes down to artists' will to do things and make things happen."

Hamblen has certainly made things happen. 'Safer with Strangers' has been accompanied by a public discussion and a professional development talk for Fine Art students and, following an opening which included performances by Hamblen, Baggaley and Welch, the artist carried a placard around the city, initiating debate and encouraging new visitors to the show.

Despite its close proximity to the city centre, one factor in PAD's move has been its failure to attract large and diverse audiences. Whilst 'Safer with Strangers' generated enough interest to ensure a packed opening, many private views have been badly attended, with students from the local Fine Art course and many locally based artists failing to show their support. For Hamblen, the creation of a critical mass of people who are enthusiastic about seeing and making challenging art is critical to the success and sustainability of both the gallery and the local art scene as a whole: "It's the idea of a magnetic mass...There has to be something to retain people. If there isn't somewhere to exhibit or, more importantly, if there isn't an arts community people aren't going to stay."

Whilst venues such as PAD are vital, the development of a dynamic creative community can only be fully achieved through the enthusiasm and dedication of locally based artists such as Hamblen, and the increase of artist-led initiatives and inspiring shows such as 'Safer with Strangers'. So, is Hamblen planning to stay in Preston, or is he secretly drawn to the bright lights of the big city? "No, I'm not moving any time soon. I've thought about it, but I've got an allotment now."

Etaine Speight

## Kate Davis: Lull

Fred London

14 March - 4 May

The culmination of her artist residency at the Wordsworth Trust in Cumbria, Kate Davis's recent work performs, both implicitly and explicitly, Romantic notions of the reconciliation of the human and nature through art. Like Wordsworth, Davis explores a kind of love affair with nature in particular, and with one's experience of the world in general.

According to Wordsworth, significant poetic expression requires an intuitive response, mediated by reason. In Davis's responses to place through the physical act of making - a kind of act of 'love' - she manages to render any Cartesian dualism between mind and body, reason and intuition, unsustainable. All are aspects of engagement. As demonstrated by her portraits of the god and goddess of love, Eros and Aphrodite Kallipygos - a photograph that depicts an archer aiming his arrow not at a person but towards the mouth of a cave, and a pinhole drawing in which the artist has obsessively punctured a large sheet of paper to produce a two-dimensional, pointillist replica of a historic sculpture, respectively - 'love' is both rational and irrational, delicate and violent, ephemeral and absolutely of the body.

Likewise, in *What* - a drawing that resembles human anatomy but remains unidentifiable, produced by scoring steel such that the hot filings flick back onto, and adhere to, a sheet of glass - the violent and unpredictable nature of the process contrasts with the delicacy and apparent control of the resultant etching. Here, 'love' is played out as an overwhelming act of responding, being, making.

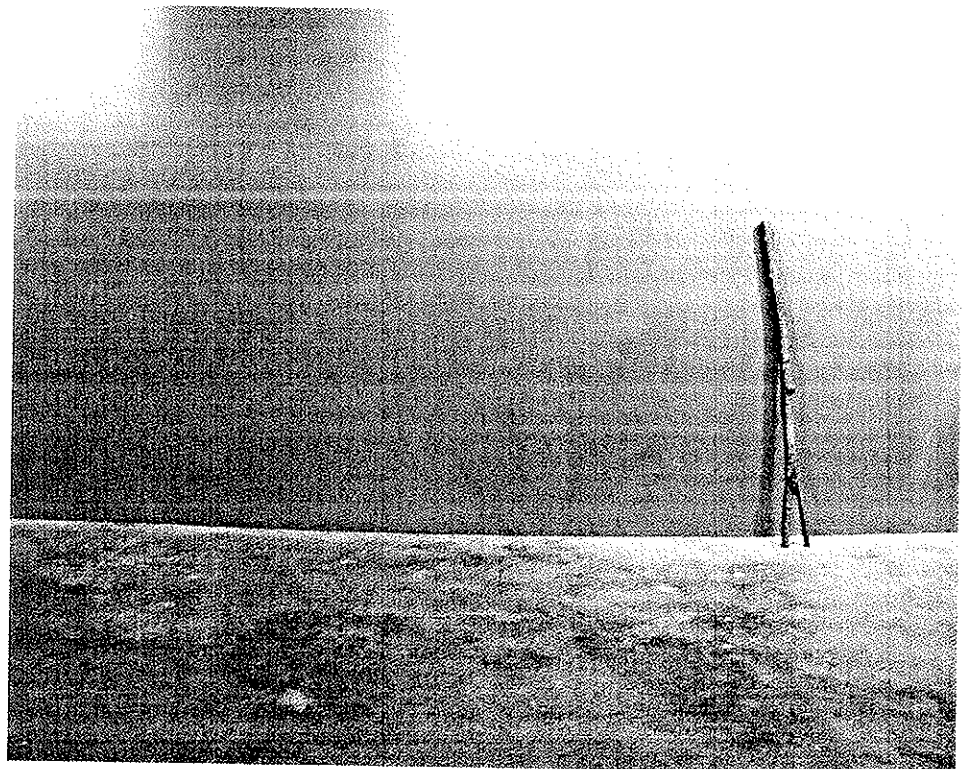
Wordsworth's desire to use language that gives a

voice to lived experience is reflected in Davis's ambiguous lull as both exhibition title and an inscription on a mirror. It is a moment of suspension - a tension between past, present and future. 'Lull' simultaneously suggests an act of pacification, a pause in activity, and a moment of calm before a surprising event (a false sense of security). These are precisely the experiences of the processes of both 'love' and art as they are depicted here - a confrontation with the wilderness: unexpected, transitory, and unpredictable.

Also echoing sublime and romantic notions, *Boat*, a mirrored, stainless steel bathtub-like vessel stranded on the gallery floor, and big enough only for a single, recumbent female, recalls Tennyson's poem *The Lady of Shalott*. Cursed, isolated in a tower, and unable to view the world other than in a mirror, the Lady see Lancelot's passing reflection, falls in love, sails to Camelot to find him, and dies in the process. Like an artist, she is caught between isolated reflection, and living, loving, and dying in the world.

Davis's art successfully holds in balance reflection and sensual engagement. Re-contextualised in a London gallery, these subtle works emphasise the importance and specificity of place and experience, and of responding accordingly. *Prop*, a branch recast in bronze, and installed during the residency as a means to keep the window open in the Boathouse, seems to epitomise the balance between internal and external, and the playful and the reflective that lull elegantly achieves.

Heather Phillipson is an artist and writer based in London.



Kate Davis, *Prop*, 153x14cm, bronze and gold leaf, edition of 3, 2008. Courtesy: the artist and Fred London