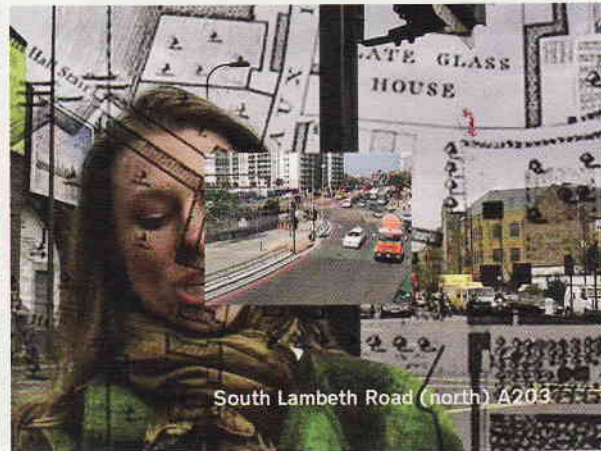
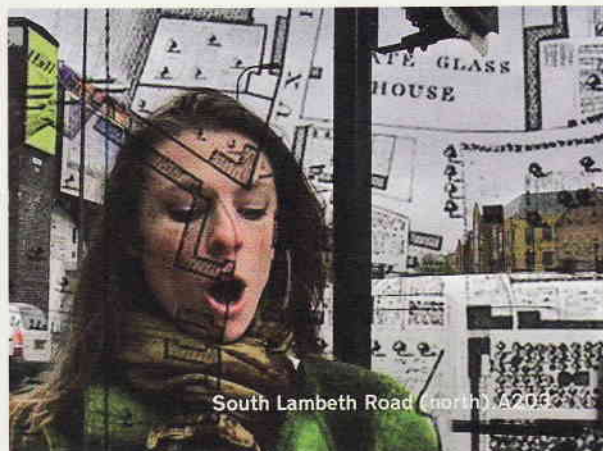
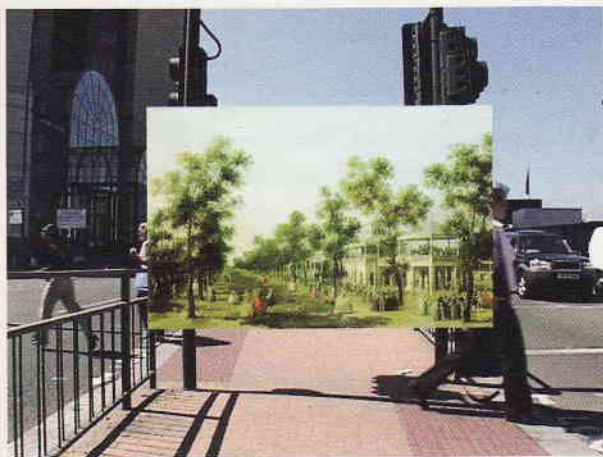

Anna Best

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Vauxhall Pleasure, 2004–2009,
Vauxhall Cross, London



Julieta González
Anna Best
Vauxhall Pleasure /
Occasional Sights

Julieta González —

Unofficial and anecdotal histories, urban dynamics, and collaborative actions converge in your work in the most unexpected ways. Your works read sometimes as complex theatrical or cinematographic productions with lengthy casts of players and collaborators, as well as the active participation of the public. *Vauxhall Pleasure* is one such work, in which seemingly unrelated issues such as activism, leisure, local history, pedestrians, and conservation are addressed. Could you tell us more about the project?

Anna Best —

Vauxhall Pleasure is concerned with a seemingly diverse range of issues, as you say, but of course they are intricately bound together by capitalism's effects on the city, by the story of oil and the motor car. In fact, they sort of spiral out of these core issues in a similar manner to roads converging, overlaying, and racing on from the Vauxhall Cross transport interchange. At the heart of it is the place and the comparison between what we have chosen to do with our urban public space since Vauxhall Gardens pleasure garden's heyday in the eighteenth century and the past few decades. The gardens were an enormous meeting point of consumerism and live entertainment. They were a place where one strolled, socialized, heard music, watched theater, had sex, saw fireworks, etc., and a place that is now replaced by many tens of thousands of vehicle movements per day, which have been mapped by traffic engineers trying to enable the vehicles to move more quickly through the city. The project researches and records these existing lobbyists, a freeze-frame in time of people reacting and protesting. The local historical notes are full of clippings of complaints about the pleasure gardens. Residents are never satisfied, NIMBYism always rampant. But now the locality of Vauxhall Cross is just one example of a vast system that has more insidiously polluted and overridden humanity with its blatant disregard for anything in its way. *Vauxhall Pleasure* took place after the anticapitalist protests in London, in Seattle, at J18 (London), on May Day, etc. As a public art piece or as an action, it is reflective rather than active; I might call it emotional-political. Singing at traffic, the inhalations of polluted air. The space after a great action is often one of stillness—it takes time to know what's next. *Vauxhall Pleasure* tries to articulate this feeling. Is it a collective one? One of futility and undirected passion about the situation we find ourselves in?

Julieta González —

I am interested in your particular approach to art. Most of your works take place outside the exhibition space and engage in quite unusual dynamics that inscribe the absurd in the everyday. How do you relate to traditional modes of exhibition? Is there some sort of compromise in regard to museum and gallery-space conventions of display?

Anna Best —

With most projects, I have felt quite early on in the work that I am joining a history, joining a discourse with momentum, produced perhaps by activists, artists, and maybe citizens, who have been dealing with the issues and material for a long time. I find art history quite limiting—a specific compartment, like a form of autism—and much prefer the tangential nature of an “ordinary” conversation with many individuals. So, in a sense, my work is always collaborative as a research process, but differs greatly from one piece to another in how it is delivered to an audience. With regard to display in museums or gallery spaces, I have found that while conversation and social exchange have been the main tools of my work, it is unsuccessful to show this in a gallery on video. I am sorry to say I have tried it! And I have always been very interested in art that is unannounced, so that an audience is not prepared for it. Of course, the gallery has so many uses as an educational and public resource that I wish I could make use of this space better. There are questions around how one can judge some dialogic—social art as art—and this also interests me, the stripping of something from its context and the aspiration to pass judgment using generalized ideas. I do not believe in this, and like the fact that when something is related to a specific context it has its own frames of reference. I have appreciated gallery modes of display in the cases of being able to literally unpack an archive of historical material, to sell books, to show an artist's film and video, and simply to be used as a project space which is free to enter, warm and dry.

new relationship. It's more like saying to your friend - hold on a minute, I just want to close my eyes and think about something for a bit. The photographs I am making are artefacts from a process of making contact with people, of trying to encounter people. And they start to express how difficult that obviously is.

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If the act of taking a photograph is an invitation to start speaking then, here, if he'd turned round and said - "Why did you take that picture?" - it would have turned into something completely different.

Another time when I met up with Sissu at Shoreditch Fire Station and we were taking photos of a fireman's boots, a fire engine drew up and all the fire fighters of Blue Watch got out of their fire truck and, precisely because we had a camera, stood in a row and posed for us. So you never know, if you just have a camera in your hand anything can happen...

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Where's that photo then?

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I don't know, maybe it's under 's' for Shoreditch.

How did the same stretch of road that spawned the citrus fruits on the railings also give us such an urgent graffiti to prospective homebuyers?

From Oval tube station on the Northern Line take a bus south towards Camberwell Green, a no.36 or a no.188

44_45

will do. The railings are on the right about halfway down and the graffiti was on the left but has long been replaced by a housing development.



Adam, who sent me the Smart car photo, said he had been very encouraged to continue taking pictures like this knowing that I was also doing so. Over the phone he told me about a bus stop on Tower Bridge Road which had been misspelt on the tarmac road surface ~~MISSPELL~~. He said he had cycled over it day after day, on the way to work, always promising himself to bring his camera with him. And then, one day, it had gone.

A similar thing happened to me with the orange on the railings. I saw a whole series of citrus fruits on them, but when eventually I returned with a camera, they'd disappeared.

