



Victor Burgin: A Sense of Place

For the past 40 years, Victor Burgin's art has essentially been about a single subject: the relationship between image and text. During the 1970s and '80s, this basically meant black-and-white photographs accompanied by words, either overlaid or framed separately. Yet if the format sounds simple, the results are deeply complex and provocative – as shown in his seminal 'UK76', the first series seen by the visitor to this extensive survey of the influential English conceptualist, held in the cavernous and atmospheric P3 building. Here, documentary-style shots of British street life are combined with ironic, disassociative descriptions which, redolent of glib advertising language or fashion puff, accentuate the gulf between reality and marketing fantasy.

In later series, Burgin's approach becomes more like a kind of travelogue – exploring aspects of 1970s Berlin, for example – or elliptical storytelling. Certain themes and images recur, in particular a focus on different modes of display – from framed paintings to strippers. His texts, meanwhile, frequently delve into notions of gender theory and political ideology (Burgin is known as a theorist as well as an artist). Sometimes, it has to be said, it all feels rather dense and demanding.

His video pieces from the past decade similarly require close attention. Each one has a virtually identical format: loops of about ten minutes or so, in which sequences of text, often taken from works of literature, are intercut with 360-degree panoramic shots, sometimes digitally created or enhanced. The overwhelming sense is of imagination and description combining, of memories and histories coalescing around a specific time or place. This occurs most powerfully in his most recent work, 'Mirror Lake', where text referring to European immigration, Native American expulsion and modernist architecture alternates with shots of Winnebagos, a Frank Lloyd Wright building and the Wisconsin landscape to leave a lasting sense of melancholy grandeur.

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