

EXHIBITION

Fox's projections of London offer a disorienting portrait of the bustling city, says Angus Montgomery

Gerry Fox, *Living London*. At 176 Gallery, London NW5, until 20 April

Walking into Gerry Fox's *Living London* installation at north London's 176 Gallery is a somewhat daunting experience. In the darkened hall of the former Methodist Chapel are six huge widescreen projections, one on each of the four walls, one on the floor and one on the ceiling, depicting – in full surround and with accompanying soundtrack – a journey through the neon-lit bustle of Friday-night Soho.

I join the crowd skirting around the edge of the room, seeking the best vantage point. Fox, the Bafta award-winning documentary filmmaker, approaches me, wearing a floral pork-pie hat. 'You're meant to stand in the middle, here.' I move to the centre of the room. On each of the four walls the crowds push past me. Above me are branches, lights, the top decks of buses. The pavement rushes by beneath my feet.

The film depicts a journey through London, shot purely from a single viewpoint. It begins in the stillness of Nunhead Cemetery and progresses through night-time Soho and across the Thames to the Southbank Centre, before finally plunging into the river. Then the film loops and the cameraman/protagonist/viewer is reborn amid the headstones of Nunhead.

'I wanted to capture the speed and disorientation of the city,' Fox tells me. 'But I also wanted to achieve a sense of dislocation.' The artist shot each scene six times from different angles to achieve the surround effect, resulting in small discrepancies, such as buses disappearing and reappearing around the screens, adding to the film's unsettling nature.

This is increased towards the narrative's end when the displays begin to flip. As you cross the Millennium Bridge, Tate Modern looming in front of you, Tower Bridge is on your right, instead of your left. The confusion of the Southbank Centre's ramps and tunnels



Gerry Fox's *Living London* installation at 176 Gallery

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is exacerbated as the floor becomes the ceiling and vice versa and the viewer is enclosed in the mass of exposed concrete.

According to Fox, the piece is inspired by the 'visual and emotional power of the city' and, by enhancing the sense of sensory dislocation, he has increased the emotional connect. The effect is similar to a hungover walk through the West End with your iPod turned up full. Amid the whirl of confusions, small moments of detail – a piece of graffiti, a lingering glance from a stranger – achieve greater emotional resonance.

Unfortunately, the two other film installations, housed further down the corridors of the 176, are far more obviously polemical and less emotionally engaging. The second work, a contemplation on childhood and celebration, features (rather gory) footage of the birth by Caesarian of Fox's daughter Frankie. The third piece, a three-screen

projection focusing on different aspects of London life, wears its political undertones rather too heavily. Footage of protesters against the Iraq war is juxtaposed with a military march-past, and shots of market traders are set against film of a windswept rubbish dump. Archive newsreel of the 1911 Sidney Street Siege is played alongside footage of the street today (on the site where Winston Churchill directed operations now stands a Costcutter) – part of the work's obvious expression of the cyclical and regenerative nature of the city.

Fox claims the pieces arose through 'a love of London, and its visual power'. Maybe it is this love that allows him to present the city as it really is: contradictory, confusing, alienating, and very exciting.

Resume: 'Walk with me through London,' says Gerry Fox. 'Just mind your head when we get to the Southbank Centre...'