



Nicky Hirst
Cordon Sanitaire 1996

implication was that this work had incorporated the discursive rationale developed by the former. Again, perspex sheets were suspended on the platform, but here they were regimented into two columns of even width, and while the attempt to deliver a report was again conditional on an indistinct code it was the subject of a considerably more formal organisation.

Having established an overall pattern of direction, Gillick had used the downstairs gallery to engage with *The What If? Scenario* on a smaller and more personal scale. Among these exhibits were *Dining Table (Second Version)*, which referred back to *Erasmus is Late*, 1995 (Gillick's political story based around a dinner party), and the closely related *Ibuka!*, 1995, where a large table had been made ready for guests. Here one felt that history was due to end, *Dining Table (Second Version)* had been folded up and lent against the wall, the glitter-spray had mostly fallen off; that particular party was over. Opposite was a pair of small drawings collectively titled *Scenario (by Gillian Gillick)*. These capably handled line drawings – a Ginneresque depiction of bay-fronted town houses and a sketch of an unremarkable coastline (both by Liam's mother) – reinforced one's perception of the significant impact of context in respect of both scale and identity. In this case the immediate context was two more large sheets of fabric; *Isolation Screen*, which compared to the *Communication Banners*, was far more functional (a tough, synthetic material, one layered over the other, which hung horizontally 4m along the top of a wall), and a group of *Typeface designs*, a reminder that while a designer creates for the future, if he/she is successful the work will ultimately become historically symbolic.

All innovations achieve that distinction not by developing existing solutions but by completely re-addressing

the problem. It is with a similarly resourceful and inventive attitude that Gillick approaches the business of devising and constructing an exhibition. Rather than responding to a specific set of circumstances, he devises a situation with which to inspire and provoke a consequential response which in turn becomes a functioning aspect of the work. With *The What If? Scenario* he had construed a subtly implied critique of once reliable approaches to communication and information, this was, however, repeatedly and enticingly assuaged by the prospect of possibility, both within this show and what might follow. ■

Godfrey Worsdale is a critic and curator.

■ Nicky Hirst

Imperial War Museum London April 25 to June 30

Anthony Wilkinson Fine Art London April 15 to May 25

Cordon Sanitaire, the title of Nicky Hirst's recent installation at the Imperial War Museum, is a military term describing an area which has been quarantined, isolated or separated from its wider setting.

Hirst succeeds in making the themes of dislocation and displacement function at several interrelated levels, allowing the work to acknowledge fully the different contexts in which it operates: historical and political as much as emotional and formal. This integrated approach is achieved through a conscious deployment of the mechanics of empathy, of involvement and disengagement, via minimal interventions into the commonplace and everyday.

Showing in a space as loaded as the Imperial War Museum, certain themes are bound to predominate. His-

tory, and especially that of the two world wars, pervades from the outset. The gallery in which the installation was housed could only be reached by walking through the main atrium; with the museum's domineering collection of tanks, planes and other military paraphernalia viewed at such close range, we are dramatically reminded that museums, by definition, function by taking objects away from their original sites. They attempt to compensate for the absence of actual experience through 'collective memory' or the illusion of authenticity provided by a combination of voyeurism, information and apparent knowledge.

Hirst's installation heightened an awareness of these difficulties of re-presentation in several ways: purposefully overt historical reference going hand-in-hand with the intimacy and pathos of displaced familiarity, as well as a preoccupation with the condition and processes of sculpture.

The installation consisted of several pieces of 1940s utilitarian furniture, its look synonymous with the war period. Painted in the institutional colours of cream and 'endive green', two chairs, a folding table, a wardrobe and chest of drawers hugged the walls of the room, joining ranks with the existing period radiator. These anachronistic objects, ciphers of history as much as individual lives, further emphasised their otherness by being 'attached' to the wall by line upon line of cable, the kind one sees in hospitals and other post-war institutions. Following the contours of the room and furniture, the cable adopted the colour of whatever surface it touched: white for the walls, or the respective colours of the objects, implying an organic relationship which spoke of a gulf between a previous and current existence, clinging as much to the periphery of the mind as the space itself. The lines of cable ran horizontally around the room, with the exception of the chest of drawers, the vertical stack of which was sealed across the centre, keeping their secrets within.

The succinct and rigorous architecture of the installation prevented it from drowning in the sentimentality to which it could easily have been prone. The distance that was enacted here was not just that of subjectivity versus history, or the gap between experience and desire, but also that between objects and sculpture; the latter, far from being a purely formal exercise, emphasises how the commonplace needs to remove itself from the realm of the familiar just enough so that it can activate new readings or, more precisely, those which are latent but not manifest. That is where a space for the viewer is created.

Similar dynamics of engagement and distance were at play in the artist's concurrent show at Anthony Wilkinson Fine Art. Again, it was apt that this venue has other associations, being part of the owner's living space and sited opposite Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

One of the two rooms was cordoned off, allowing the viewer to peer inside from the doorway. Entitled *Trolley for the last offices* (all works 1996), the protagonist here was a two-tiered medical trolley, carrying a bowl for water, swabs and other medical equipment, as well as a brush, towels and name tags. The function of the latter

items was confirmed not just by the title of the piece but also by a mourning card on the mantelpiece. The realisation of what we were witness to produced a jolt of recognition, but we were kept at bay as much by the roped-off entrance as the clinical sheen of the shiny metal. A sense of futility was also found in *Fire Point*, encountered in the corridor just like a normal fire alarm, yet this time the glass shielding the emergency button was replaced by a sheet of impenetrable laminate.

Further exercises in degrees of alienation, inertia and discord were found in the second room. *Untitled (Cups)* and *Untitled (Shelves)* were acetate prints on metal behind glass, each depicting unfeasibly close-together and completely impractical and unrealistic stacks of their respective subjects, from illustrations culled from old-fashioned home catalogues. That they were also intended as a piss-take on Modernist ideals was confirmed by the other piece in the room: *Untitled (Cups)*, a sculptural variation of the acetate print, consisted of eight metal cups stacked precariously rim to rim on a glass shelf. An obvious reference to Brancusi's *Endless Column*, they differed in one major respect: rather than reaching for the sky, they were ready to topple down at any minute ... ■

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■ I beg to differ

Mich London April 17 to May 11

'I beg to differ' was an unspectacular show – 20 video artists and not a video projector in sight. Instead short films or extended loops played on small televisions. After so many recent video installations in the Capital that have aspired to produce a cinematic experience, 'I beg to differ' restored video to a domestic scale. This exhibition raised further issues through its design. The presentation of monitors on white plinths scattered throughout the darkened gallery space was a deliberate attempt to create an active role for the viewer: there were no floor cushions to flop onto, instead the viewer wandered through an installation where different works competed for attention. The use of plinths and video loops may have been an attempt on the part of the curator, Rosemary Heather, to provide some stability for the video works similar to that enjoyed for instance by sculpture, but the noise produced by the installation was unsettling and the distraction of so many images in one space created anything but stability. Each video was invaded by another – soundtracks encroached on silent films and concentration was required to follow a video through to, an ending – except that in most cases there were no endings. Guillaume Paris' video of Pinocchio lying face down in a stream of water, entitled *Fountain*, flows forever; Rebecca Wallis dramatises huge bubbles of gum that are sustained seemingly for ages in *x8 Hubba Bubba* while Peter Land, dressed like some seedy comedian, is

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