

New ways to pick a winner

Sacha Craddock reports on an initiative aimed at encouraging a new generation of exhibition curators

Whether in response to a perceived dearth of independent new curators, or to an awareness of an undiscovered wealth of them, the Institute of Contemporary Arts set up a competition called "Out There". In soliciting proposals "to develop a series of dynamic exhibitions initiated and presented by individuals working outside funded arts organisations", the ICA and the London Arts Board must have expected something exceptional. The first winner of the competition would have to be calm and competent enough to choose, organise and install a show in all three of the ICA's galleries, and yet still sufficiently new, fresh and unworldly to have had little or no institutional experience.

The first recipient of the "Creative Curating" award of £3,000 is Jeremy Millar, a 24-year-old who lives and works in Nottingham. He has curated before, but on a humble scale. His proposal, initially on a sheet of A4-paper, was apparently just what was wanted. His previous experience was to participate in the organisation and policy-making of a self-help, independent gallery in Nottingham.

By the end of the 1980s many people had come to think that too much power lay in the hands of the exhibition curator. Able to pick and choose, subordinating the wider context and the artist's intentions to their own ends, curators were more powerful than critics and just as manipulative. The "theme show" allowed ambitious curators to treat art as fodder.

Millar's proposed exhibition, heavily but cheekily entitled "The Institute of Cultural Anxiety", is right in line with current "post-modern" notions of non-linear and non-narrative shows. Millar has selected work by 50 artists, as well as other objects, films and even old magazines. Sculptures are presented as phenomena; books act as

sculpture; paintings are treated like signs, while placards with stereotypical slogans are reduced, in this context, to art. The helmet worn by Donald Campbell when he was killed is displayed alongside videos of *Godzilla*.

The result is intended to be impossible to understand in conventional terms. The show is meant to be chaotic, a jungle in which nothing takes precedence over anything else. The exhibits are all reduced to the level of so much matter, a mass of ideas and possibilities.

Miller, who only two years ago was still studying photography, is aiming not at anarchy or mess, but at the illustration of a belief that it is no longer possible to reach conclusions, make judgments, or have an overview. With this brief he can hardly fail. The notion of the artist as outsider may have lost currency lately, but the romantic idea of the young independent curatorial outsider gives it a new twist here. But not for long. The ICA has cleverly acquired an up-to-the-minute exhibition without the agony or responsibility of making more than one, initial, decision.

● The Institute of Cultural Anxiety, curated by Jeremy Millar, is on view at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Mall, London SW1 (071 930 3647) until February 12



Jeremy Millar with some of the work from his show at the ICA

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