



Bank

83 CURTAIN ROAD

The impulse to structure our surroundings stretches back to infancy – think of the collections of stamps, shells and pebbles we hoarded as kids. Psychoanalysts have related this need to the helplessness individuals experience when confronted by the magnitude of the world. Knowledge is another classification system which bestows an illusion of control and power. Yet unlike the information compiled by, say, a trainspotter, a scholar's findings carry the authority of assumed objectivity.

Classification – and the covert ideologies it conceals – is the central issue under discussion in this group show. The strongest contribution comes from Simon Bedwell. Throughout the duration of the show the artist will wander the streets of the capital surreptitiously photographing tourists. He labels his shots with what he guesses to be the nationality of his subjects. While the idea is simple, the results are captivating: they speak volumes about racial stereotypes, but also about our yearning to counter the anonymity of urban life.

John Cussans and Colin Lane have

mapped the city according to crime reports, but their findings fail to fire the imagination. Ingrid Pollard has conducted archaeological excavations in Bristol. By making reference to the city's links with the slave trade, Pollard scrutinises why allegedly apolitical sciences delete embarrassing episodes. Orphan Drift address information technology, mixing binary codes with drawings of fossils etc. Beyond the rather glib comment that the past bears a resemblance to the present, their agenda remains intellectually mushy. The Ken Ardley Playboys have produced a video of themselves performing a Beatles song. While this homage to beat culture and goatees is fun, one suspects that they'd have been better off performing the Sex Pistol's 'Pretty Vacant'.

Finally, there's a collective sculpture by the four artists who make up Bank. Suspended upside down from the ceiling is a striking papier mâché recreation of the charge of the Light Brigade. Taking one of England's infamous 'mistakes' as its subject, this piece ridicules the vain-glorious English histories we are taught at school. History surfaces as a chameleon that changes its colours according to the interests it serves. A comprehensive, well-curated show. *Tania Guha*