

**Emma Dexter. 'Space International' (1992).
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90 **Space International** (2–6 Battlebridge Rd, 1992). This was not BANK's first show – that had already taken place in a former bank in Brockley, South East London, from which they had derived their name. But I believe it was as a result of this show, that BANK emerged with a self-defensive sense of the absurd which would later enable them to create a position for themselves in the 1990s London art world.

In a vast semi-derelict space open to the elements behind Kings Cross – a completely disparate group of British and Spanish artists, recent graduates mostly, mounted an exhibition. It was the kind of formless, theme-less group show that appears simply to be a vehicle for showing some recent work (no harm in that? After all, isn't that what an exhibition is really for?). It also had one of those rather more tiresome international exchanges/link-ups based upon someone in London making friends with someone from elsewhere and deciding to collaborate, and assuming that this would be a 'good thing'.

However many of the above assumptions that I have credited to the curators, were clearly already ways of thinking that they themselves were starting to question. The exhibition had, according to the 'catalogue' – a *Snappy Snaps* ring binder effort – no rationale. The exhibition turned out to be a huge exercise in not meeting expectations: even the credits page in the catalogue is photographed surrounded by so much rubbish and so many strategically placed Embassy packets that you can't read some of the names of the participating artists. The anonymous interview in the catalogue goes on to question the need for a

rationale, and questions the notion of 'rationale', also getting in a swipe at the Arts Council for not funding the project.

Clearly the professionalism of exhibitions such as 'Modern Medicine' at Building One (1991), featuring Damien Hirst et al was something that every subsequent artist-organized show had to square up to. 'Space International' was an attempt at a challenge to this – it was a loose and inept exhibition, which made little or no attempt to make the space look anything other than a huge empty shed. So the show acted as an antidote to the glossy presentational strategies that became the norm in the 90s. BANK claimed the right to do something free-form, just to see what happened. Perhaps this laissez faire attitude was a case of making a virtue of necessity – BANK had neither the funds nor the inclination to ape the Saatchi look, and so they chose the low road instead. 'Space International' was therefore allowed to be a non-event, leaving vast areas of concrete completely untouched by art or artist. But perhaps this question of the space, and the getting of it was more important than the show itself? For young artists, wasn't there a huge thrill in grabbing such a large central London site? Thanks to the property slump of the early 90s, space all over London was available – artists played at being tycoons and landlords for a few days, indulged with space that no one else wanted. Emma Dexter