

Mark Wilsher. Review: 'Sum of the parts'.

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South London Gallery September 2 to 6

Rumours had started to spread weeks in advance. There would be women, 20 topless women. Twenty topless women playing the drums. Based on an idea by Wayne Lloyd, an ad was placed in *The Stage* by Fabienne Audéoud & John Russell and the result was the most ridiculous, awesome, oceanic spectacle dreamt up by man. In front of a capacity crowd the women whipped up a 40-minute barrage of noise, cymbals crashing, drumsticks flailing, naked boobs jiggling. The chrome on 20 drum kits glinted under the lights. It was sheer spectacle that defiantly resisted or ridiculed all attempts to theorise it neatly away. If the artists wanted to inscribe a memory or create a new myth within the art world then they undeniably succeeded. They also upstaged effortlessly the preceding week's programme of events, which revisited a range of now traditional, if marginal, practices to explore the idea of collaboration over five nights.

The special qualities and strengths of live art can sometimes also be its weaknesses. Audiences are privileged to have access to the actual processes of creativity, for once, as artists make things happen in front of their eyes. That close engagement with experience and improvisation has provided some of the central themes of postwar activity, and lures visual artists back again and again when the production of objects becomes too ritu-

alised or formalised. But it also causes difficulties for historians who seek to draw up taxonomies and family trees of influence. Operating in the present tense, live art has no memory. Or no reliable memory, at least.

Against this amnesiac tendency are ranged a battery of funding organisations carefully tending their archives, and developments like the Whitechapel Art Gallery's recent restaging of seminal live works (see *AM*257). The regular seasons of new work at the South London Gallery are a vital element within this landscape, using the impressive double height hall as a still point which locates these ephemeral pieces and unites them in memory long after all physical traces have been cleared away. It is the perfect stage for projections, for music and for sprawling de-centered installations where a large audience can sometimes seem to disappear into the shadows.

The week opened with a ten hour durational performance in which work—seth/tallentire laboured in full public view amid a sea of assorted urban detritus. During the course of the day rudimentary structures like shelters and rafts were assembled and taken apart, video footage was shot and shown, and different organisational principles followed. The two artists were a constant presence in the gallery, working individually or wordlessly together, ceaselessly reconfiguring the material structure according to an improvised logic. At

tower rose up

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