I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same.
Responses to Heather and Ivan Morison
_I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same._

**The British Art Show**
15 July – 17 September 2006

Occurring every five years, the British Art Show is the most ambitious survey of new and recent developments in art from the UK. Bristol Visual Arts Consortium (BVAC), a coalition of visual arts organisations based in Bristol including Situations, brought the British Art Show to Bristol in summer 2006.

Situations commissioned a number of new events and projects as part of this national exhibition. _I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same._ was commissioned by artists Heather and Ivan Morison for the opening day of the exhibition on Friday 14 July 2006.

This paper brings together the responses of an artist, an archaeologist and writer with those of the public who witnessed the event. On 2 September, Heather and Ivan Morison presented a ‘tape-slide’ presentation on the work which will continue to act as another manifestation of the event beyond Bristol.

**Heather and Ivan Morison**
I lost her near Fantasy Island.
Life has not been the same.
Friday 14 July 2006
Centre Promenade, Bristol City Centre

This work was the latest in the Morisons’ ongoing investigation into the commercial flower industry, looking specifically this time at the haulage of flowers from auction to wholesalers. For one day, a jack-knifed lorry shed its load of 25,000 flowers across Bristol City Centre. At 6pm, passers-by began to take the flowers and by 7pm the installation was entirely dispersed across Bristol, as people walked home carrying and exchanging armfuls of flowers. A card mailed out a few days prior to the installation gave a possible narrative link with the lorry crash – declaring “African Grey Parrot, grey with red tail feathers. I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same.” The card can be downloaded from the Situations website at www.situations.org.uk.
Urban Ecologies of Hope
Olivia and Dan Hicks

On Friday 14 July 2006 at 5am, Heather and Ivan Morison installed a jack-knifed lorry, spilling its cargo of flowers onto the street, in central Bristol. The artwork was called *I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same*. It was situated in an urban landscape dominated by wooden boards, block paving, lights, fountains and cascading water: the kind of pedestrianised soullessness achieved only by local authority millennium projects. Unseen below the decking lay traces of the landscape of a long, narrow 1970s traffic roundabout.¹

We thought back to the afternoon of April 22, 1973. An architect called Robert Maitland was accelerating down the high-speed exit lane of the Westway interchange in London, where it met with the newly-built spur of the M4, when his front nearside tyre blew out. The Jaguar ran off the flyover, bursting through pinewood trestles, plunging down the embankment and landing on a traffic island in the middle of a large motorway intersection. It was almost impossible to escape. Maitland was marooned in this strange, interstitial habitat like a modern Robinson Crusoe. His mental and physical states degraded. Would he remain in his new home, forsaking his former life? Perhaps part of him had wanted to be lost like this, perhaps he had created his own plight.²

Appearing overnight, the Morisons’ installation had a dreamlike quality. There was not a scratch on the white paintwork. The lorry seemed to have glided to a stop. The split-seconds of a traffic accident were still present in its material consequences: the long refrigerated trunk of the articulated lorry discharging 25,000 bunched flowers across the street. The cut flowers were in transit, ephemeral, crossing continents, but the courses of their short lives were now shifted. Their hopeful journeys – to the oasis of some amateur flower arranger, a polite vase, a jacket lapel, an improvised pint glass, behind an ear or presented to an attractive stranger on impulse – were cut short. Something had gone wrong, and new, unexpected, open-ended chains of events unravelled, temporarily revealing the silent, unceasing choreographies of the containers and cargos that surround us.

We thought of Trostre Park on the outskirts of Llanelli, Carmarthenshire in Wales. The fate of a pedestrian in the landscapes of contemporary planned landscapes (like out-of-town retail centres) is not unlike that of Maitland or Crusoe.³ Here, the pedestrian – like the stranded, crashed motorist – is transgressive: using the space in ways for which it has not been designed. Pedestrians leave ephemeral traces like worn muddy tracks in the landscaped verges, but the DIY superstores and fast food drive-throughs can also feel ephemeral, especially against the small patches of waste ground that survive from one landscape into another, surviving ‘unknown and disregarded’, and maybe ‘long after the motorways have collapsed into dust’. The alienating qualities of these places are fragile: they can be challenged.

*African grey parrot, grey with red tail feathers. I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same*
(Morison postcard sent in advance of installation)

¹ ‘Promenade in the Heart of the City: Imaginative Scheme will persuade visitors to walk to the Harbourside’, *Bristol Evening Post* (4 February 1999).
² Ballard, J.G., *Concrete Island* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974).
⁴ Ballard, J.G., *Concrete Island*, p.69.
The flowers wilted in the sun, and at 6pm their fleeting performance was over. Hundreds of office workers gathered to take the flowers home. They would end their new lives in vases and pint glasses across the city. The blank white lorry spilling beautiful bunches of flowers into the street showed how love can be made with the mundane materials of mass-production and global transport. Reminded of Warhol’s endless soup cans, we tried to imagine their ‘globule-laden insides’ — the complex materialities of modernism which can spill out as well as close down.

The Morisons’ artwork was uplifting and spirited. Its environmentalism was delicate: escapist and yet hopeful. Hooked on the amateur, the naïve, the enchanted. Looking for big ideas in everyday surprises. We know the feeling. The Morisons have tended an Edgbaston allotment, and have moved to west Wales. But in this work they have happened upon radical moments of hope in the urban landscapes of modernity and the hidden interstices of transportation networks. The work reminds us that Ecologies of Hope can be built with many materials. Even those that have fallen off the back of a lorry.

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Heather and Ivan Morison
A commissioned response by Laura Mansfield

I received a postcard, an anonymous message. Three lines of text. Hinting at a narrative, giving a glimpse into the personal history of a real or imagined character. The ambiguity of the text and the anonymity of its author is a central thread to the work of Heather and Ivan Morison. They give the viewer segments of narrative and whispers of encounters inspired by their personal recollections and continual research. For the launch of the British Art Show 6 in Bristol, Heather and Ivan Morison installed the work I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same. in the centre of the city.

Beside the harbour and amid a steady stream of pedestrians, an articulated lorry formed the backdrop to the beginning of the day. Parked up on the pavement, the pedestrian zone, the object became a display piece. Jack-knifed and white, its back doors wide open and its contents spilled: a cascade of cut flowers falling from metal containers. The range of colour, fauna, flora, produced a layered display arresting attention. The flowers seemed more like a giant arrangement than an accidental mess, a product of a violent collision, as the angle of the lorry would seem to suggest and much more an obvious and considered display, a conscious arrangement of form.

The installation was separated from the text, the connection only made by those who knew the Morissons’ work, and realised the source of the anonymous postcard. The disjointed anonymity of authorship of both postcard and lorry, and the invisible connection between each, begs questions as to the intention of the work and its subsequent reception.

In the city centre, with flowers spilling, the lorry is an intervention in the space, an item of display. Received in the post, opened over breakfast, the text hovers over the beginning of the day, to be considered, held on to, or put straight into the recycling without a moment’s thought.

Where then does the connection between the two lie?

The postcard suggested a character, lost, confused and full of longing. Once incorporated into the narrative of the jack-knifed lorry, the seemingly aesthetic display took on suggestions of a broader narrative and personal history: forming a multitude of stories and questions as to the lorry driver, his or her intention, the route of the truck, and its subsequent arrival in the city.

However, without the knowledge of the Morissons’ practice and the connection between the installation and the text, the viewer is left with an easily readable aesthetic, cut flowers, a lorry and subsequently a distance between object and text.

The Morissons’ practice is very much about creating an event, a happening, seemingly spontaneous, without press attention or widespread promotion. For the launch of the work at the opening of the British Art Show in Bristol, there was an abundance of whispers about the work and an anxious waiting for its arrival. Strategic last minute press releases combined with the opening gossip, the excitement of having the British Art Show in the city, created a degree of hype around the central area of Bristol, a waiting for the unveiling of the ‘masterpiece’.

Photo: Matthew Worland
Knowing viewers, either Morison-educated or simply interested with the work, would have easily connected the various elements, creating a narrative understanding to each piece: the early morning arrival, the postcard through the letterbox, the split flowers and the articulated lorry. Once installed in the city centre, the abundance of press attention followed suit, photographing the work throughout the day. The documentary action and continued process of recording was a considered act, treating the work as an aesthetic ‘art object’ and presenting it as a deliberate sculptural intervention, rather than a spectacle or stunt.

The text on the postcard was short and considered, the lorry in the centre and its containment of spilled flowers mirrored the economical use of language, creating a considered structured narrative running through both pieces and an aesthetic unity to the component parts. The contained aesthetic and restrained use of text created a distinct separation between the viewer and the work, forming an idea of a character removed and distant from our everyday selves. With the suggestion of an individual protagonist an abundance of narrative threads flowed from the installation with the viewer free to pick up upon the various elements; the beautiful spectacle of arranged flowers, the awkward positioning of the lorry or the longing and melancholy of the anonymous text. The durational nature of the work created space for the viewer’s engagement to evolve over the course of the day, molding their narrative histories into the piece. In the dense heat of Friday afternoon the cascading flowers began to wilt and fade, heightening the discord between the bright white lorry and the organic mass, referencing the postcard, its withering hope and desire.

The narrative threads extended further as in the evening, passers-by were permitted to take the 25,000 flowers, letting the work filter out across the city and rest in a hundred different homes, connecting the character of the lorry driver to the personal histories of the city’s individuals initiating a diverse and intimate relationship with the work, taking the seemingly distant sculptural form back to the personal, back to the intimacy of reading a postcard over breakfast.
Public Responses
Recorded on the 14th July 2006

“It’s a cross between an accident and a celebration, a combination of the two. It’s gorgeous.”

“I think it’s the artists’ intention for people to wonder what is going on, for it to become an urban myth.”

“It reminds me of a dream…
It was on a damp and misted bridge of the very hinge of break of day
I waited as I always do to watch you pass my way
We cannot share this space at all in the day land in the light
Yet as I waited upon this bridge I am hoping you might
To end today as so often you do
And I will sit upon this bridge and catch my glimpse of you
Then slowly through the mist you walk smiling bring your light
To warm this cold and empty heart
and to whisper silently good night.”

“It’s optimistic and this detracts from the harsh element of reality. Obviously it is some kind of accident, something unfortunate. But it’s not ugly or distressing.”

“I like the attention to detail, the way you can see into the back of the lorry and how the produce has suffered in there. The wilting of the flowers is a suggestion of it being temporary. The way the flowers are spread out makes it seem troubled.”

“It seems to be dealing with the contradiction in industry and nature. Industry, in terms of the lorry being the vessel through an urban environment and nature, in terms of the flowers. The truck is harsh and industrial, and the flowers are the opposite. It sets up a contradiction between the two.”

“I like the fact that it is not going to be here tomorrow. You feel privileged to see it today, because it’s only here for a short time, like a live performance. The flowers wilt over time and disappear. It’s all about the short term, the decay. The more the sun is on the flowers the more they will, so the piece changes over the course of the day. Depending on what time you come, you will see something different.”

“The way the flowers are displayed makes them look like they should be for something tragic. But it’s also really beautiful so you can’t know whether they were meant for a celebration or something quite tragic. It’s quite catastrophic.”

“It’s strange to hear people talking about the waste when that’s what flowers are grown to do - to be picked and displayed. Just because they are not in a church or on a grave or in a vase, people think they are wasted.”

“I do like the idea of all these people wandering around Bristol with all these flowers. It’s like a brief moment of happiness. Love is in the air. I’m going to take mine home for my boyfriend.”
Information

**Heather and Ivan Morison** live in North Wales. The Morisons’ artworks convey the simple pleasures and passions of their endeavours and of those they meet, from amateur floristry to beekeeping. The formal outcomes of their investigations include postcards sent to a growing mailing list, LED displays of text messages, slide shows, LP recordings of conversations, radio broadcasts, special one-off events and science-fiction novels written whilst in transit. Many of these blend factual recall with fictionalisation, merging information into a shifting narrative that builds on the mythology of Heather and Ivan Morison’s lives and the lives of the people they encounter.

**Dan and Olivia Hicks**
Olivia Hicks is a painter living and working in Bristol. Email: oliviahicks@gmail.com

Dan Hicks is Lecturer in Archaeology and Anthropology at Bristol University and Research Fellow in Archaeology at Boston University. Email: Dan.Hicks@bris.ac.uk

**Laura Mansfield**
Laura Mansfield graduated from Bristol University in June 2005. She has worked closely with Spike Island over the last two years developing artists’ projects and texts. Most recently Laura edited the publication *Journal 2: Currency and Exchange.*

Recommended reading

For information on the Morisons’ work and forthcoming projects visit www.morison.info

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