



design centre north, Barnsley, window vinyl

Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design

41 A0 Display boards
8 Films (3 projections)
87 Artefacts

design centre north, Barnsley

6 May 2006 to 17 June 2006

Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture 25 July to 10 September 2006

Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design

Paul Atkinson

Do It Yourself is not just home maintenance.

This exhibition looks at various aspects of Do It Yourself, in order to examine different ways in which people have personally taken part in the design process rather than be reliant on 'professional' design. As such, it covers a range of activities that might not be expected to be seen in an exhibition on DIY: Here, homecrafts such as embroidery and the making of soft furnishings sit alongside cold war fallout shelters, and sailing dinghies are seen next to punk fanzines. Such apparently dissimilar subjects are connected through the theme of democracy because of the role they have played in opening up design and production processes to the public.

One effect of examining DIY from such a perspective is to expand the notion of what might traditionally be considered as 'Do It Yourself'. This exhibition regards any creative activity carried out by people not trained in design as 'Do It Yourself'. In these terms, the creation of a cross-stitch sampler is as valid as building a fallout shelter, assembling a sailing boat from a kit, or creating a magazine by hand. Historically, productive and creative activities of this kind have allowed consumers to actively engage with design and the design process at a number of levels, and to express a more individual aesthetic unbounded by the strictures of mass-production and passive consumption.

And what to show? The advice leaflets, manuals and guide books, exposition and retail catalogues, newspaper reports and magazines and later, radio and television programmes are often the only evidence of what for many has been a significant element of the fabric of everyday life – the results of DIY activity, due to their individual and personal nature, have all too often disappeared without trace with the passing of time.

DIY has allowed people, paradoxically, to react against the principles and edicts of design connoisseurship whilst simultaneously enabling the emulation of those above them in social hierarchies. DIY has acted as a leveller of class – overcoming the social stigma of manual labour out of sheer necessity, and permitting the working classes to engage in leisure activities from which they were previously excluded. It has acted as a social force in reinforcing competitive displays of conspicuous consumption, and as a political force by facilitating the wider dissemination of subcultural views through self-publishing. This exhibition takes this aspect of design democracy as its unifying theme, expanding the notion of DIY from the narrow perspective in which it is often held.

The sections in this exhibition together cover a time period of some three centuries. The focus of the [Edwards'] section covers a period from the early 18th century to the late 19th century, 'Use your hands for Happiness' the 1920s and 30s, 'Do It Yourself security' the 1950s and 60s, [Jackson's] the 1960s and 'Scissors and Glue' the 1970s.

This exhibition does not attempt to construct a developmental history of Do It Yourself, but it does provide some indication of how the concept of DIY has been variously received over time. It is interesting, too, that so many of the same issues are addressed in each section. Throughout, issues of emulation, class and taste are discussed, as are similar economic and social factors. What is more of interest though, is how each section demonstrates different ways in which all forms of DIY have enabled the consumer to rail against the prescribed design edicts, and indeed, prescribed social mores of the time. Moreover, as this exhibition exposes, DIY can be seen as the ultimate expression of individual taste, and therefore as an accurate yardstick by which the popular aesthetics of design can be measured. Whether seen to be conspicuous consumption, emulation, self preservation or self-expression, DIY remains very clearly an intrinsic part of the material culture of everyday life.

Exhibition Photographs

design centre north, Barnsley

6 May 2006 to 17 June 2006



Window Display Boards

Internal space - Sections on Mirror Dinghy and 18C Women's homecrafts





Items on Display - 18C Women's homecrafts

Internal space - 18C Women's homecrafts

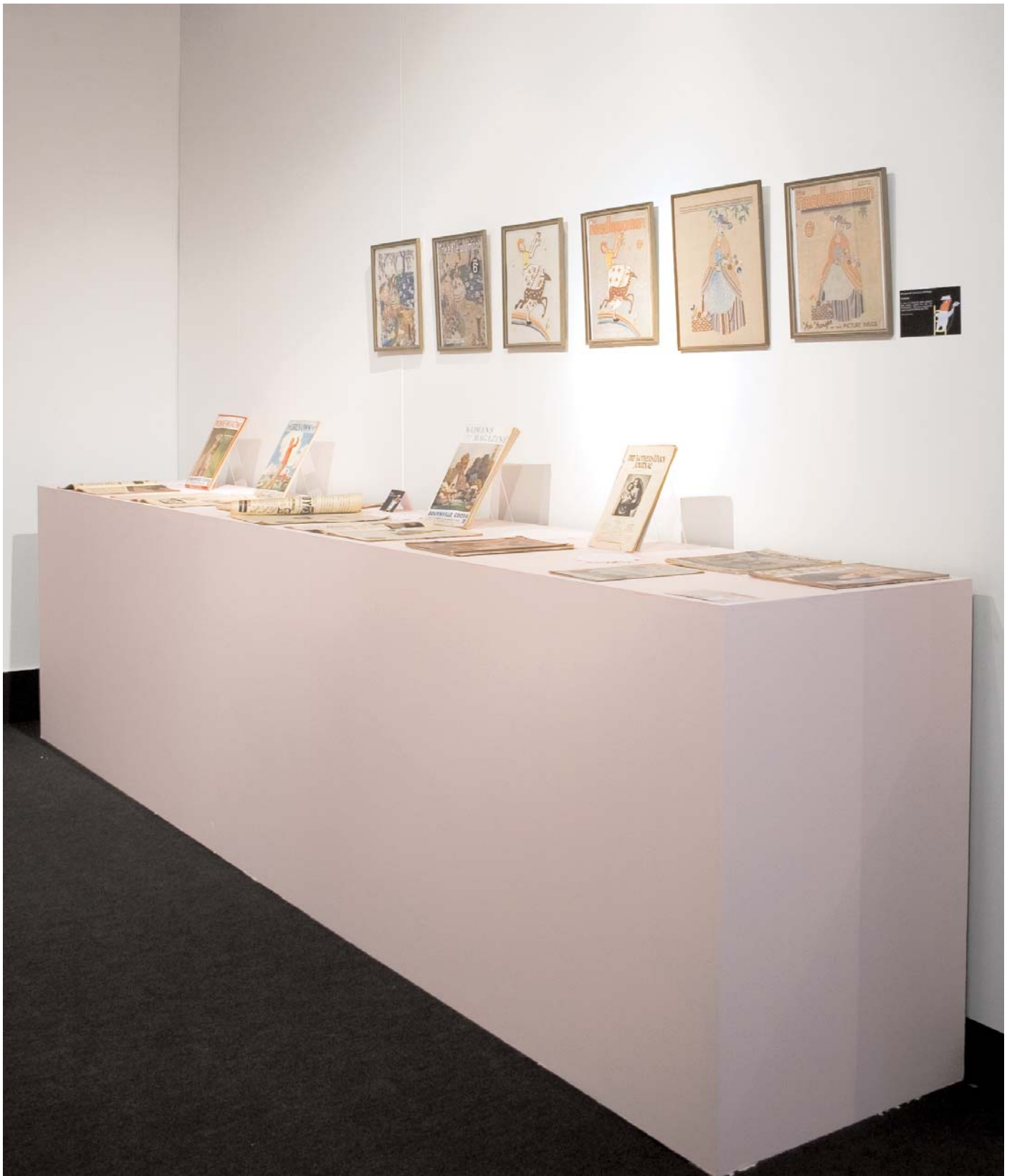




Internal space - Sections on 1920s & 1930s Women's magazines

Items on Display - 1920s & 1930s Women's magazines





Items on Display - 1920s & 1930s Women's magazines and embroidery samples



Internal space - Section on Cold War Fallout Shelters with replica fallout shelter, survival advice leaflets and emergency ration kits, and public advice films being screened.

Internal space - Section on Punk Fanzines with Fanzines in cases



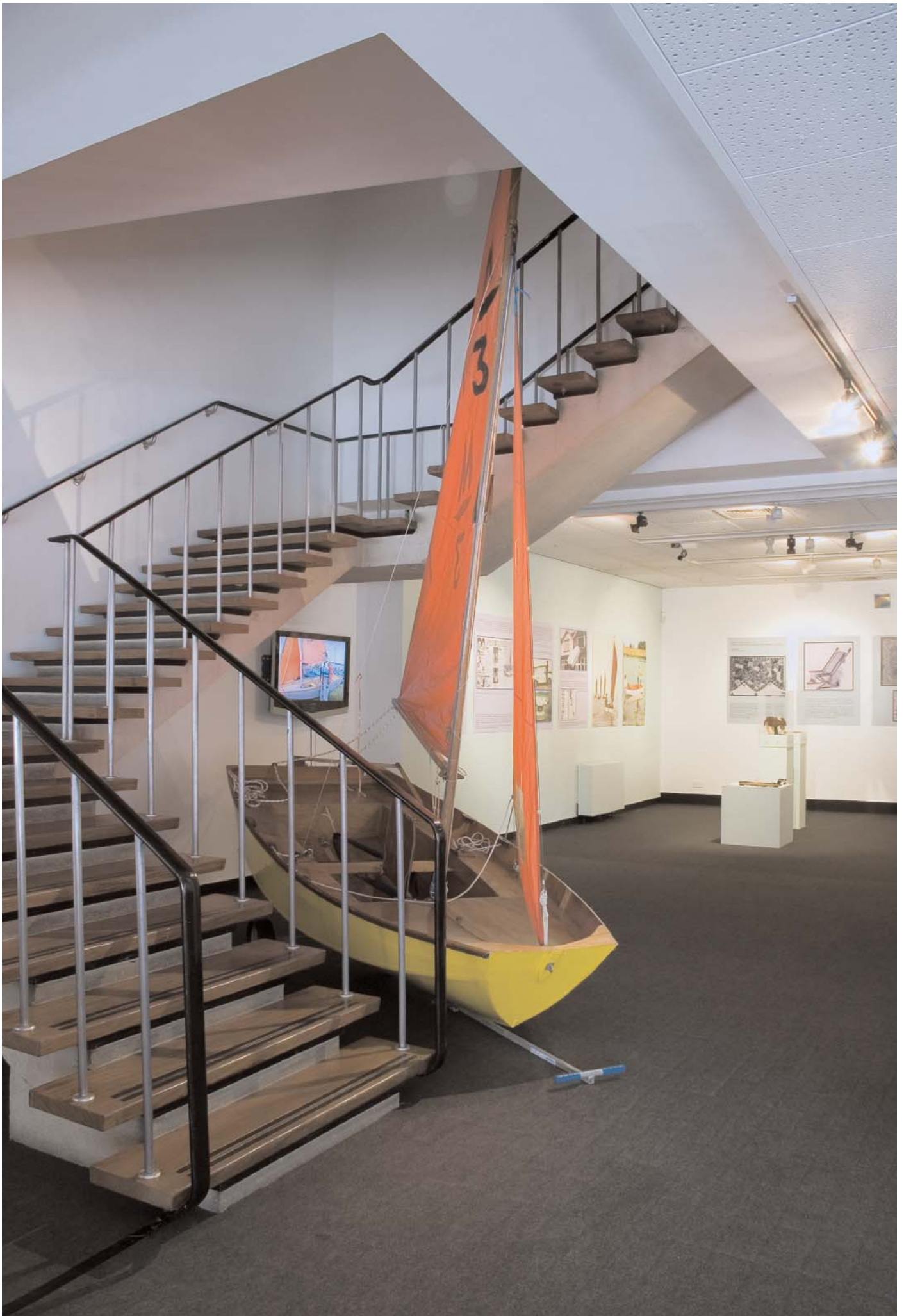


Above: Internal space - From Section on Women's Magazines to entrance showing Punk Fanzines in cases and Mirror Dinghy with video documentary being screened

Below: Internal space - Section on Punk Fanzines on opening night

Next Page: The prototype no3 Mirror Dinghy in situ, made by Barry Bucknall





Exhibitions



Ashton-under-Lyne

Zarah Hussain: Handasah
— **Unity in Pattern**
The artist captures and celebrates Islamic decoration with watercolours on handmade paper.

Central Art Gallery, Old Street (0161-342-2650) Sat 9am-12.30pm & 1pm-4pm, Tue, Wed & Fri 10am-12.30pm & 1pm-5pm, Thu 10am-7.30pm, to Aug 5, free.

Craig Neill: Going Through The Mill

People's memories are framed within industrial objects from the Toray Textiles Mill in Hyde. Central Art Gallery, Old Street (0161-342-2650) Sat 9am-12.30pm & 1pm-4pm, Tue, Wed & Fri 10am-12.30pm & 1pm-5pm, Thu 10am-7.30pm, to Jul 22, free.

When We Were Young

Memories and stories of childhood in Tameside over the past century, featuring toys, objects and photographs. Portland Basin Museum, Portland Place (0161-343-2878) Tue-Sun 10am-5pm, to Jul 14, free.

Impressionist Women

An exhibition exploring the life of Paul Helou and other artists such as Whistler and Degas, that looks at the portrayal of women in 19th century art. The Bowes Museum, Newgate (01833-690606) Sat-Fri 11am-5pm, to Aug 13, £7, concs £6, child, free.

Do It Yourself: Democracy And Design

An exhibition exploring the culture of DIY over three centuries, using studies of retail catalogues, leaflets, manuals and newspaper reports, to determine the freedom that DIY has given to the consumer. Design Centre, Shambles Street (01226-771133) Sat 10am-3pm, to Jun 17, free.

Jun 17-23 2006

PICK OF THE WEEK

1 Make Me Think Me Tate Liverpool. A comprehensive show of always arresting videos, sculptures, installations, drawings and sound pieces by Bruce Nauman, one of the most influential artists working today.

2 Still Lives Baltic, Gateshead. Recent film and photographic work by Sam Taylor-Wood. The celebrity role call of her subjects includes David Beckham, Paul Newman and Willem Dafoe.

3 Tom Hunter Graces Art Gallery, Sheffield. Large-scale photographic tableaux, based on stories reported in Hackney Gazette, that have all the momentous weight of meticulously composed history paintings.

4 Sabine Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool. A touching love story in photographs. Jacob Aue Sobol recalls travelling to the wilds of Greenland and falling for Sabine, a 19-year-old local.

5 Paul Evans Yorkshire Artspace, Sheffield. Semi-abstract paintings that, through their numinous imagery, gestural rhythms and aesthetic charms, appear to hint at elusive depths at the back of beyond.

Beverley

Fleeting Arcadias
An exhibition by the Arts Council of England of British landscape photography. Beverley Art Gallery, Chimney Road (01482-392780) Sat 10am-12.30pm & 1.30pm-5pm, Tue-Fri 10am-5pm, to Jun 24, free.

Bradford

True North
Joel Denby's photographs and illustrations, that explore the architecture and inhabitants of the city. Gallery 11, Great Harbour Road (01274-236303) Mon-Wed & Fri 11am-5pm, Thu 11am-6pm, to Jul 28, free.

Sean Henry

A range of sculptures of mysterious figures peering around corners and half-concealed under blankets. Cartwright Hall And Art Gallery, Lister Park (01274-431212) Tue-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 1pm-5pm, to Jul 2, free. [WA]

Infrasound

Robert Saucier and KIT collaborate in a project that explores contemporary culture and the paranoia caused by the word virus.

Cartwright Hall And Art Gallery, Lister Park

(01274-431212) Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 1pm-5pm, to Jun 18, free. [WA]

Myths And Visions

An exhibition looking at the research and imagination of the special effect creator, Ray Harryhausen's work, who produced creatures for Jason And The Argonauts. National Museum Of Photography, Film And Television - Pictureville Cinema (0870-701 0200) Tue-Sun 10am-6pm, to Sep 24, phone for prices.

Otmar Alt

The German artist's cheerfully grotesque work. Cartwright Hall And Art Gallery, Lister Park (01274-431212) Tue-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 1pm-5pm, to Sep 10, free. [WA]

Prelude: Connect — People, Place, Imagination

An exhibition drawing on historic and contemporary art from Europe and Asia. Cartwright Hall And Art Gallery, Lister Park (01274-431212) Tue-Sat 10am-5pm, Sun 1pm-5pm, to Oct 29, free. [WA]

Streetmap.co.uk
free on
O2
See terms on page 22

North The Guide 37

OUTSIDE LONDON

ASTHALL ASTHALL MANDRILL 11 June-8 July, Wed-Sun 12.6. Biennial exhibition of stone sculpture in the grounds of the former Mildred home.

BARNET MUSEUM OF DOMESTIC DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE Until 29 Oct, Tue-Sat 10.3. Sun 2.3. Food for thought an exhibition of tableware, packaging, advertising and recipes that chart half a century of British eating habits.

BARNSELY THE DESIGN CENTRE Until 17 June, Mon-Fri 10.3. Sat 10.3. Can't assemble that flat-pack wardrobe? Down tool and check out this exhibition on the history of DIY instead.

BIRMINGHAM ICH GALLERY 24 May-16 July, Tue-Sun 11-6. Marcel Duhamel's witty drawings, sculptures and videos are peopled by cartoon bears and strange tree folk.

BOWNESS-ON-WINDERMERE BLACKWELL Until 18 June, Mon-Sun 10.30-5. New pottery in muted colours by William Plimpton.

EAST WINTERSLOW NEW ART CENTRE Until 5 Sept, Mon-Sun 11-4. New paintings by Brit-art veteran Michael Craig-Martin involving closely overlapping everyday objects.

EDINBURGH WILKIE HOUSE Until 9 July, Mon-Sun 10-7. Drawings made in India for the Scottish botanist Robert Wight are paired with contemporary works by Rudolf Stingel.

RENDAI AROUND HALL ART GALLERY Until 1 July, Mon-Sat 10-5. Contrary to popular opinion, artists still know how to draw — as this show proves. Fifty works on paper by the likes of Peter Doig, Paul Noble and Sarah Woodfine.

LEEDS HENRY MORGUE MUSEUM 25 May-27 Aug, Mon-Tues, Thurs-Sun 10.30, Wed 10.3-9. Pretty boys: busts and statues of Hadrian's crowned lover Antinous. Plus views of public sculpture in the prints of the French Revolution.

LEEDS GORRIERIE AUCTION GALLERY 7-14 June, Mon-Fri 10-4. Studies for decorative panels, watercolours, drawings and personal effects feature in the latest exhibition this year to celebrate the work of Frank Brangwyn.

LIVERPOOL: TATE LIVERPOOL Until 13 Aug, Tue-Sun 10.50. Intimate portraits and magical dream-paintings by the underappreciated Austrian artist Marie-Louise von Strydomsky, marking the 100th anniversary of her birth.

MANCHESTER WESTWORTH ART GALLERY 20 May-10 Sept, Mon-Sat 10.5. Sun 2-4. A display of ancient Egyptian clothing, restored to incredible brightness by conservation work.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY GALLERY 19 May-30 June, Mon-Thurs 10.5. Fri-Sat 10-5. Step into Paula Rego's topographical nursery rhyme world via this display of over 200 prints.

NORWICH NORWICH CASTLE 22 May-2 Sept, Mon-Fri 10-5. Sat 10.5-5. Sun 11-5. Rocky picture show art and geology from prehistory to the present day.

SAINSBURY CENTRE FOR VISUAL ARTS

21 May-13 Aug, Tues, Thurs-Sun 10.5, Wed 10.6. Following a facelift from Foster & Partners, the SCA re-opens with a show of Polynesian artefacts.

PENANCE PENHOUSE Until 10 June, Mon-Sat 10.5. The Pre-Raphaelite artist John Brett painted over 200 idyllic Cornish landscapes, 60 of which are on display here.

BY STEY TATE AT IVEY 20 May-24 Sept, Mon-Sun 10.5-30. Abstract works by John Hayward, and Tony O'Malley's 'Good Friday' paintings.

SALEING THE LOWRY Until 25 June, Mon-Fri 11-5, Sat 10.5-5pm, Sun and bank holiday. Charming exhibition on the leisure pursuits of 1930s Britain. See April issue.

SUNSHINE GOLDMAY GALLERY Until 13 June, Mon-Sat 10.5-5.30, Sun 2.30-5.30. Mike Goldmay's collection of rarely seen Graham Sutherland's — including pages from the newly discovered 'Pembroke' sketchbooks — goes on sale.

WINDSOR WINDSOR CASTLE 11 June-2007, Mon-Sun 9.45-5.15. Forget the formal portraits; the artist's best photos from the Queen's photo album are the childhood snaps of her toddling through lilacs or dressed for parties.

AUSTRIA VIENNA LIEBIGSTEN MUSEUM Until 9 July, Mon-Fri 10.5. Bronze masterpieces from Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum.

FRANCE AIR PROVENCE HUBERT SPINER 9 June-17 Sept, Mon-Wed, Fri-Sun 9-7, Thurs 9-11. A century after his death, 117 of Paul Cézanne's Provincial paintings return home.

PAINS CENTRE POPPOPU Until 17 July, Mon-Wed, Sun 11-4. The history of Californian art from 1955 to 1985, taking in Pop, modernist and conceptual art.

MUSEE DU LIEBIGSTEN Until 6 Aug, Mon-Fri 10-5. Tues-Thurs 11-5, Sun 2-5. Georges Mathieu, Pierre Soulages and Jean-Michel Atlan all feature in a survey of Abstraction Lyrique, the French Abstract Expressionism.

NETHERLANDS THE MAJOR DEERENBOUM DEN HAAG Until 7 July, Tue-Sun 11.5. Twiches will flock to the museum's exhibition of birds as a motif in fine and decorative arts.

SWITZERLAND ZÜRICH HUBER MUSEUM Until 18 June, Tues, Wed, Fri 12-6, Thurs 12-6, Sat, Sun 11-5. Strange still-life tableaux by French-born artist Marc Camille Chaimowicz (Wed April 2006).

USA LOS ANGELES HARBISON MUSEUM Until 20 Aug, Tues, Wed, Fri 11-7, Thurs 11-8, Sat 11-5. Major show on the art and actions of the Société Anonyme, founded by Duchamp and others in 1920 to take contemporary art to America.

NEW YORK COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM Until 29 Oct, Tues-Thurs 10.5, Fri 10.9, Sat 10.6, Sun 12-6. Examining utensils through the ages, including 1500's Italian cutlery and George Washington's fork.



3. Watch the birds — Karel Appel, Children Questioning, 1950, in the Hague; 2. Fred and Hubert Thurston, Princess Elizabeth of York, 1927, in Windsor; 3. Bear necessities — costume by Marcel Dzama, in Birmingham.



4. John Brett, Carillon Gifts, 1878, in Penance; 5. 1970s social set — Jean-François Vileon, in New York; 6. Paula Rego print, in Newcastle; 7. A 1920-21 work by Leão Perini, in Los Angeles.

Exhibition Listings:

The Guardian RIBA Journal

World of Interiors, Blueprint

What is unbuilt architecture?

Design for Life
Featuring work by five of the world's best furniture designers, the show is a celebration of the art of design. It's a collection of the best of British design, from the classic to the contemporary. The show is a celebration of the art of design. It's a collection of the best of British design, from the classic to the contemporary.

Paul Kjærholm
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What is unbuilt architecture?
A guide to constructing a 'family without shelter' in the event of a nuclear war is just one of the everyday DIY activities showcased in Do It Yourself: Democracy And Design, an exhibition at the Design Centre in Barmsey. From embroidery to women magazines of the 1920s and punk-rock fanzines from the 1970s, the show looks at how consumers have freed themselves from the shackles of mass manufacturing. If you are wondering where 'democracy' comes to, the idea is that by bringing design to a mass-audience, DIY acts as a social leveller. To 17 June, www.designcentre.org.uk

your one defense against FALLOUT
GET THE BOOKS FROM URAL URALS

Without Louis XV, the Saint Goban glass company wouldn't exist. All this and more is revealed in the Musée d'Orsay's current show 'Saint-Gobain 1665-1937'.
The Sun King's love of his own reflection meant vast sums flowed from state coffers to the mirror makers of Venice. Eventually Louis decided enough was enough and in 1665 set up Saint Gobain as a monopoly and banning imported mirrors for 20 years. In those days glass was spun or blown, but in 1688 Bernard Perrot invented a technique for rolling it. Buying the idea, and

Sheer genius
is history, with France becoming the world leader in large scale glass production. The exhibition looks at the architectural and artistic impact of this technique and the production processes. It turns up some interesting bits — Paton's 1851 Crystal Palace, hailed as the world's first prefabricated building, used off-fashioned cylindrical, long glass panes.

SUMMER GRADUATE SHOWS PART ONE

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YORKSHIRE POST
Magazine

SATURDAY MAY 6 2006

Seven-day TV and radio guide starts on page 34



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Review article

Yorkshire Post Magazine 6 May 2006

(Circulation 57,000)

Home truths on DIY then and now

DIY can be an expression of individualism and creativity according to a new exhibition in Barnsley. Maybe so, but John Woodcock begs to differ

Mr Eccles was our woodwork teacher. I can visualise him, Brylcreemed and wearing a grey smock with a squad of pencils standing to attention in the breast pocket, as he slipped a piece of pine into the vice and in one flowing move planed a beautiful golden curl.

"Right you lot," he'd say, "do the same." Several did, lads who then left our secondary modern to become apprentice joiners and are now probably millionaires thanks to York's building boom and restoration workshops.

Not me. Even when I managed to get the vice bit right, my plane had a mind of its own and gouged lumps out of the wood. The end result wasn't a pretty sight. My efforts at creating dovetail, mitre, and mortice and tenon joints were so pathetic that Mr Eccles wouldn't let me take home my skew-legged versions of a coffee table and stool.

He seemed to think that revealing them in public would make the school a laughing stock and ruin his reputation. He did relent when I produced a bookend, and my mother thought I was the next Thomas Chippendale.

As for metalwork, I never did finish that poker because of a failure to master the heat of the forge and the timing required to shape the blazing rod of mild steel. I could see Mr Anderson's point. Not much use trying to prod a fire with a shrivelled piece of metal reduced to three inches. I had marginally more success making a fish slice, until the rivet securing the wooden handle fell out and mother reverted to her trusted utensils.

I blame father for my lack of practical skills. You should have heard the language when he tried to build a gantry crane from my Meccano No. 5 set. "Where's thatb..... screwdriver?", and worse. I so wanted to resemble the photograph on the box - young boy sprawled on the carpet (we didn't have a carpet), head in cupped hands and watching admiringly as his smiling father put the finishing touches to some fantastic structure.

In our bookcase - paid-for, naturally - was a copy of *The Practical Man's Book of Things to Make and Do*, but only there for show. At No 17 there was no call for advice on wood turning, veneering, and "practical notes on building a house".

On our black and white TV, when it wasn't on the blink and Dad wasn't cursing the vertical hold knob,



Above and right: TV's do-it-yourself guru Barry Bucknell demonstrates the art of bracket fixing to the nation in his series *The ABC of Do It Yourself*. Bucknell was described as "a DIY hero to post-war women".

On our black and white TV, when it wasn't on the blink and Dad wasn't cursing the vertical hold knob, we used to be intrigued by someone called Barry Bucknell. He made do-it-yourself look effortless. You want a conservatory? Anybody can make one. Watch this.





The Mirror dinghy, co-designed by Barry Bucknell, a plywood boat to be assembled at home, which made taking up sailing affordable as a hobby. Picture courtesy Daily Mirror.



we used to be intrigued by someone called Barry Bucknell. He made do-it-yourself look effortless. You want a conservatory? Anybody can make one. Watch this. We did, and mother sighed while Dad fidgeted and hid behind the newspaper.

I don't know how we managed it when money was so tight in those post-war years, but because Dad was so inept at manual tasks he'd call in tradesmen to mend fuses, put up a shelf, and decorate the best room.

Little did we realise how unpatriotic he was being, as well as betraying his masculinity by not making our semi safe and comfortable through his own hands.

At least that would be the judgment of a fascinating exhibition in Barnsley which traces the history of DIY, from 18th-century embroidery kits to today's self-publishing via the internet.

What is now a vast industry worth billions has been contradictory. According to the exhibition's curator, Paul Atkinson, there is a political element. DIY has liberated the individual but has also been exploited by the powers-that-be as a means of controlling society.

Hobbies were useful in reinforcing a moral code and outside the workplace idle hands had to be employed, ideally on the domestic front. The shortage of manpower after the First World War, and the need for craftsmen to concentrate on rebuilding the country after the Second, meant that being good at do-it-yourself was regarded not just as a virtue, but a patriotic duty. Self-help campaigns approved by the government developed wartime austerity slogans like "Mrs Sew and Sew", "Dig for Victory" and "Make Do and Mend".

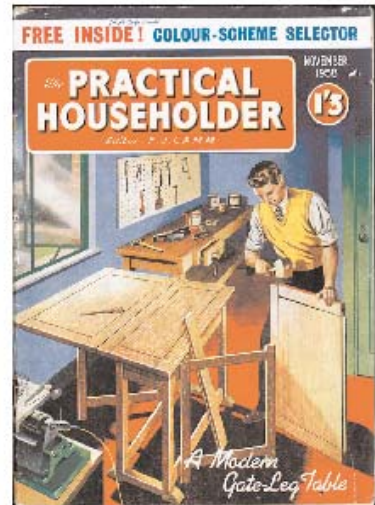
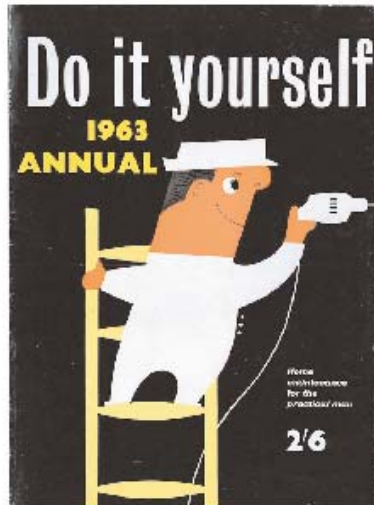
In today's flashy home-improvement TV shows, who among those on *Changing Rooms*, or *DIY SOS*, knows the name WP Matthews? He was as much a pioneer as Black & Decker, the first man to hammer and chisel on behalf of the masses through his *Looks*, BBC radio broadcasts during the 1930s, and in a programme on the opening day of commercial television.

But it was Barry Bucknell, along with the advent of colour magazines, who was the turning point. He is credited with saving numerous hardware shops before

the arrival of B&Q and Homebase, and convincing women that they could decorate and tackle household repairs as well as men. When he died three years ago, one obituary described him as the housewife's friend and "DIY hero to post-war women".

Bucknell inspired social revolution in another way. One of the exhibits in Barnsley is a Mirror dinghy, a self-assembly plywood craft he co-designed in 1963 for the *Daily Mirror* which regarded it as a promotion to sell more copies. In fact, it's the dinghy which is still selling well - 70,000 at the last count - and it has helped to transform sailing. At its original price of £63.11 shillings it enabled many more to take up a sport which had been considered the preserve of the well-to-do.

For the curator Paul Atkinson, a designer and a lecturer at Huddersfield University on the history of design, that red-sailed dinghy is a classic example of how do-it-yourself has helped to change society. "We tend to think of DIY as one thing - home improvement - but it is much more complex than that."



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"Today's consumer often relies on flat-pack furniture, self-assembly - the Ikea mentality. It's usually cheaper to buy than making it yourself, even if you have the necessary skills.

"DIY used to be about saving money when there were economic reasons for household maintenance. Today, it's about choice and spending, a vicious cycle of expenditure that can mean wallpaper at £120 a roll. Programmes like *Clawfoot Rooms* are not about maintenance and necessity but lifestyle, and that can lead to uniformity. People sweat blind they are being individualistic when mainly they are copying what they've seen and read."

Atkinson is 43 and his generation was among the last to be taught woodwork and metalwork as specific subjects at school. Today, they usually form only a part

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These transfers are made from the finest quality paper and are printed in the most beautiful colors. They are suitable for use on any type of paper and are guaranteed to last for ever. They are a most valuable gift for the home and are also a most interesting hobby for the housewife.

Supplement to "Lady's Companion" 14th Nov. 1929.

7 TRANSFER YOURSELVES AND BRING A PERSONALITY TO YOUR ROOM

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WOMAN'S WEEKLY

Knitted Lace

Some of the publications and posters aimed at men and women, from the exhibition in Bamsley on the history of DIY.

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Stouley Womersley

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MORE ORDERS THAN THEY CAN HANDLE. You can handle more orders. You can handle more orders. You can handle more orders.

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FREE

Come to the Exhibition of Members' Work—Admission Free at 94, Folly Street (next St. James' Park Underground Station), LONDON, S.W.1.

of courses in design technology. He wonders if this will lead to the average man having fewer practical skills of the sort which enabled him to convert a 200-year-old barn into his home.

As a counter-balance, modern gadgetry is designed to enable even a cack-handed idiot to fix and install, with the possible exception of me. In the hardware department of Barnitts, a glorious emporium in the centre of York, I am mesmerised by the vast range of equipment available to DIY enthusiasts. Experience, however, cautions me against phrases such as "quick and easy to use", and what am I to make of the ambiguous instruction on a packet "insert and drive home"? I think I prefer a much clearer version: "Read, put back on the shelf and drive home".

The contents of Barnitts' shelves would seem more relevant to NASA technicians at Cape Canaveral than a chap pottering in his suburban shed: here is a dual-beam laser level and ultrasonic tape measure set; there is a pocket-size spirit level with shockproof acrylic vials; over there you'll find a grout rake with tungsten

carbide grit-edged blade—and that's before we get to the power tools.

Even among the basics the non-handyman is up against it. What is a "passivated pro screw", or "annular ring nail", or even Black Japs, which have somehow survived purges by the politically-correct? Technically-advanced products with fancy names can mean good business. Gadgets and the male psyche can be a lethal combination. "My Dad spends a fortune on tools and uses a fraction of them," says Atkinson.

Barnitts never seems to be lacking customers. So why does Atkinson think some of the huge DIY warehouse

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chains which once could do no wrong have seen a nasty dip in profits, with trading down 40 per cent in some cases? Atkinson isn't sure, but it might be that skill levels have declined, that consumers are tired of competing to apply TV-inspired makeovers, or are now paying professionals to do jobs around the house in order to spend more time doing other things.

That is assuming you can find a craftsman. Atkinson faced that familiar problem while setting up the exhibition and deciding to include a nuclear fallout shelter of the type erected by three per cent of Americans in their basements during the Cold War.

"Trying to find a builder to make me a shelter has been a nightmare," Atkinson said. He found one eventually, and admits that the situation could have been worse. He might have needed a plumber.

■ The exhibition, Do it Yourself: Democracy and Design, is at the design centre, 11-15 Shambles Street, Bamsley, until June 17. It is open Monday-Friday 10am-5pm, and Saturday 10am-3pm. Free admission.

Exhibition Photographs

Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture 25 July to 10 September 2006



Above: Internal space - Entrance to exhibition

Below: Internal space - Introductory section boards





The prototype no3 Mirror Dinghy in situ, made by Barry Bucknall



Internal space - Display Boards of various sections

