

NEW LABOUR

When Gilbert & George studied at St Martins in the 1960s, they referred to themselves as "baby artists". Whoever you are and whatever your talent, climbing out of the crib of college into the professional arena is always a daunting prospect, especially when most students can ill afford the transition. Thankfully, Bloomberg's "New Contemporaries" comes around each year to give recent graduates the chance to take their work to a wider audience and, with a bit of luck, attract a dealer.

Only time will tell whether the babes of 2002 will become the parents of future visual movements. But Bloomberg's current crop of 33 artists – showing this month at the Barbican after a stint at the Liverpool Biennial – have certainly made a strong start. Bold statements and brave departures are being made across the disciplines, and Sarah Lucas – who, alongside Graham Gussin and Patrick Keiller, selected this year's show – is a recognisable influence.

The most refreshing aspect of "New Contemporaries 2002" is the rejection of the decorative. Pretty, ephemeral paintings, process-driven techniques and cool abstraction – so often the crutch of graduate work – have been replaced by a far edgier aesthetic, harder on the eye and more demanding of the viewer than your average degree show. The majority of works on display have political content and are executed with intent.

Chief among these are the contributions from Goldsmiths MA Matt O'Dell and Chelsea MA Anna Fasshauer. O'Dell's installation, an assortment of sprayed blue-and-white debris made from cardboard, aluminium and foil, is instantly and eerily recognisable as the aftermath of the Lockerbie disaster. *Pan Am*

103 Lockerbie 1988 (2001) explores the gaps between the viewer's memory of an event and the event itself, as well as satirising the global media, which spews out images of spent life and smashed machinery on a daily basis.

In Anna Fasshauer's installation *A Distant Episode* (2001), news photographs have been laid out on a felt-covered card table and illuminated by a standard lamp. Each image has been doctored using paper fasteners and cut-outs mounted on cardboard, giving comic moving parts to its motley assortment of world leaders, soldiers and children in war-torn countries. By drawing our attention to these quickly forgotten faces from the recent past, Fasshauer illustrates how the news fails to arrest its subjects; as time passes, even tragic events can be given a new spin.

Other artists that catch the eye are Hiraki Sawa (MA Sculpture, Slade) and Eva Stenram (MA Photography, RCA). In Sawa's unnerving video projection, *Dwelling* (2002), her bedroom is transformed into an airport, a microcosm of international travel where model planes masquerade as commercial jets. Stenram, meanwhile, shows *E U Palaces* (2001), a series of digitally manipulated prints of royal residences. With their windows seamlessly bricked up, the edifices become as impenetrably monolithic on the outside as the institutions they represent. Although Stenram certainly owes a lot to Christo in this respect, her images have a particularly intimidating quality – think the Ministry of Love in George Orwell's *1984*.

Michael Selzer

"Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2002", to 12 Jan, *The Curve*, Barbican Centre, London EC2 (020 7638 8891)

Below: Eva Stenram, *Det Kongelige Slot, Oslo*, from the series *E U Palaces*, 2001, LED print on aluminium

