

A spaced out view of Earth

EXHIBITION

Steve McQueen
South London Gallery, SE5
Nick Hackworth

STEVE McQueen, recipient of an OBE in 2002 and the Turner Prize in 1999, recently gained the unfortunate distinction of being the first official British war artist unable to complete his commission. The situation in Iraq was deemed too dangerous.

Quite how McQueen, known for his polished video pieces, would have responded to the most televised war in history remains unknown, and this exhibition sees him treading the rather safer ground of outer space.

On show is a single installation, *Once Upon a Time*, a 70-minute slide show of 116 images, accompanied by a soundtrack of people speaking in tongues, the nonsensical language of ecstatic religious fervour. The pictures were chosen by Nasa to depict life on Earth, for the benefit of all the aliens out there, and placed on the Voyager probe launched in 1977.

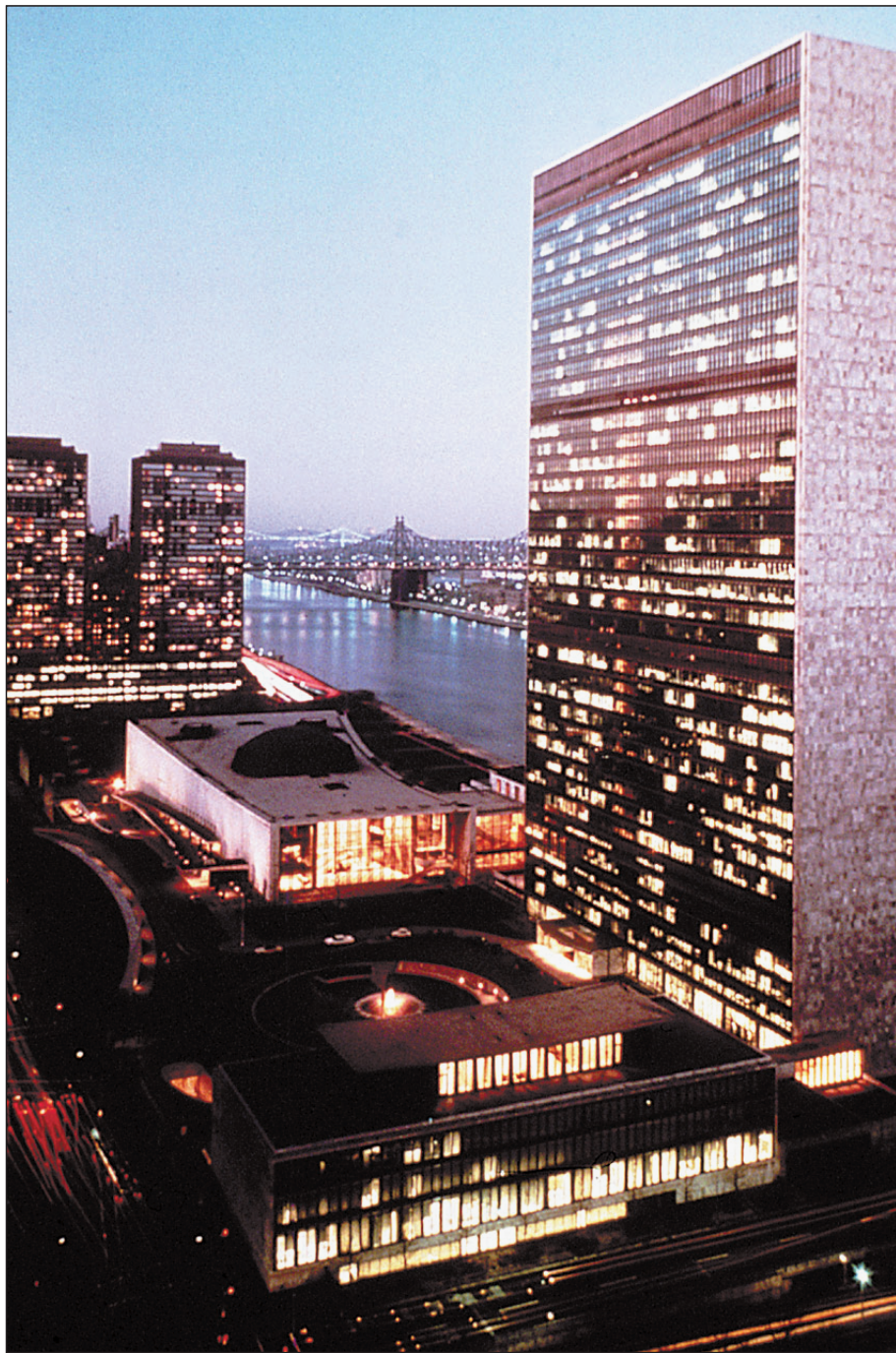
If aliens ever do see them, they'll have a good laugh at some

of the wonderfully dated, over-saturated colour photographs of heroic new skyscrapers, shiny new supermarkets and interesting haircuts. They will also see pictures of a birth, a mother and child, biological diagrams of man and his functions, charts of weights and measures, mathematical equations and more: human life compressed into a handful of images.

It is a poignant cultural document, showing not only one society's self-orientated view of the world, from which war, poverty and disease have been banished, but also the mystery of the need for intelligent life to communicate and be understood. The accompanying gibberish is meant to highlight the subjectivity of our conceptions of knowledge, its outsider status contrasted with the official seal on the images.

The subjectivity, however, is self-evident, which renders the speaking in tongues a pointless distraction, added perhaps to justify the piece's status as original art. The images, though, stand alone, and should be seen, whether in the gallery or not.

● *Until 7 November.*
Information: 020 7703 6120.



Heroic: one society's self-orientated view of the world in Steve McQueen's installation

Scorching clash of loyalties

THEATRE

Gone
New Ambassadors
Fiona Mountford

AT THE moment it appears that everything can be related to events in Iraq. The conflicts of Ancient Greek drama are particularly rich in potential modern parallels, as Glyn Cannon proves in his compelling if under-realised updating of Sophocles's *Antigone*.

In the age of spin and sound bites, shock and awe, a war has finished. Two brothers fought and died on opposing sides and the new leader plans to grant one a hero's burial, while permitting the other nothing. The sisters of the deceased are unhappy with the decree, but only one is prepared to fight for the claim of family over state.

It is easy to see why this slick, short burst of scorching sentiment was acclaimed in the hothouse environment of Edinburgh this year, even if Hannah Eidinow's production is somewhat visually and vocally exposed on a larger stage.

Julia Hickman's powerful *Antigone* thumps around like a truculent teenager in her Gap camisole, interspersing some cumbersome would-be poetry with lines such as, "You are f***ing joking". When she is not shouting, designer Mike Lees has her lie prostrate on top of what appears to be a washing machine. Later, thrillingly, this is revealed to be a David Blaine-style box in which *Antigone* is suspended and incarcerated.

If Cannon has not found a coherent tone for *Antigone*, he triumphs with the depiction of a morally bankrupt ruler. Creon, played to insincere perfection by Nigel Hastings, even addresses his own son (Alastair Kirton's nicely gauche Haemon) as if he were at a press conference. With a little more work, *Gone* could really go places.

● *Until 2 October.*
Information: 0870 060 6627.

He's hip as your grandad – but still effortlessly funny

BOURGEOIS comedians usually dumb down or play up their roots. Michael McIntyre keeps a foot in both camps, swearing poshly in his 1959 newsreader accent. Bob Monkhouse is the nearest comparison.

Despite being in his mid-twenties McIntyre is as hip as your grandad but effortlessly funny, punctuating last night's set with rapid-fire verbal volleys.

An air of autopilot did not dampen

COMEDY

Michael McIntyre/Alun Cochrane
Laugh at Ginglyk, W12

Bruce Dessau

things. A Caledonian heckler enabled him to ease into his splendidly honed frustrations when trying to use Scottish money in English shops,

while restaurant banter cued a beautifully polished mime of the way Italian waiters caress their phallic pepper grinders.

It was apt that McIntyre was cruising. Many years ago, when this subterranean venue was a toilet, Wilfrid Brambell was apprehended for a different kind of cruising. Brambell went stellar as Albert Steptoe and McIntyre is destined for primetime popularity, too. A true class act.

The fortnightly compere here is another rising star.

Alun Cochrane comes from the Daniel Kitson school of literate, northern misanthropes, but boasts a softer edge and a well-assembled IKEA routine that should win him plenty of admirers.

● *Michael McIntyre, Watford Jongleurs on Friday and Saturday.*
Information: 0870 7870707.

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