

Entertainment (OLD)

The spirit of the South

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These days, public galleries make a great virtue of their eagerness to involve the local community by using outreach programmes and touring exhibitions.

For its summer exhibition, the recently refurbished South London Gallery has commissioned, from five international artists, work that was inspired by south London, its people and its culture. After a stint in the SLG the show will then tour various local venues.

In the middle of the room sits the work most literally faithful to the commission, a table created by Polish artist Goshka Macuga. Inscribed upon it is The Source of Life is in the Art of a People.

The legend is a subtle inversion of the one carved on the floor of the original gallery - The Source of Art is in the Life of a People - which was designed by the Victorian social reformer and artist Walter Crane and is hidden underneath the present floor.

By swapping "art" and "life", Macuga has subtly caught the arrogance of contemporary art, which is a world unto itself, often bizarrely divorced from the world around it.

Paula Roush's messy multimedia installation is a case in point. Its intention is to parody the SLG's origins as a socialist institution, but it does so incomprehensibly, by focusing on the gallery's

procedures for the evacuation of its art collection in case of emergency.

More effective is the comic devised by Janette Parris which satires the role of the leisure centre as a panacea for social ills - a role art galleries once played in the strategy of social reformers.

Also amusing is Conford & Cross's rather cheeky work which consists of replicating one of the iron ventilation grilles set into the floor of the space.

The original will join the other works when the exhibition goes on tour, while the convincing replica will stay behind. Quite what epiphanies the good people of south London will experience when contemplating these artistic mediations on their locality remains to be seen.

Until 29 August, 020 7703 6120. ■