

The World's Leading Art Magazine Vol. XXXIV n°222 January-February 2002 US \$7 € 7,23 **International**

Flash Art



Darren Almond
"Fullmoon@Arondine"
Lambda print

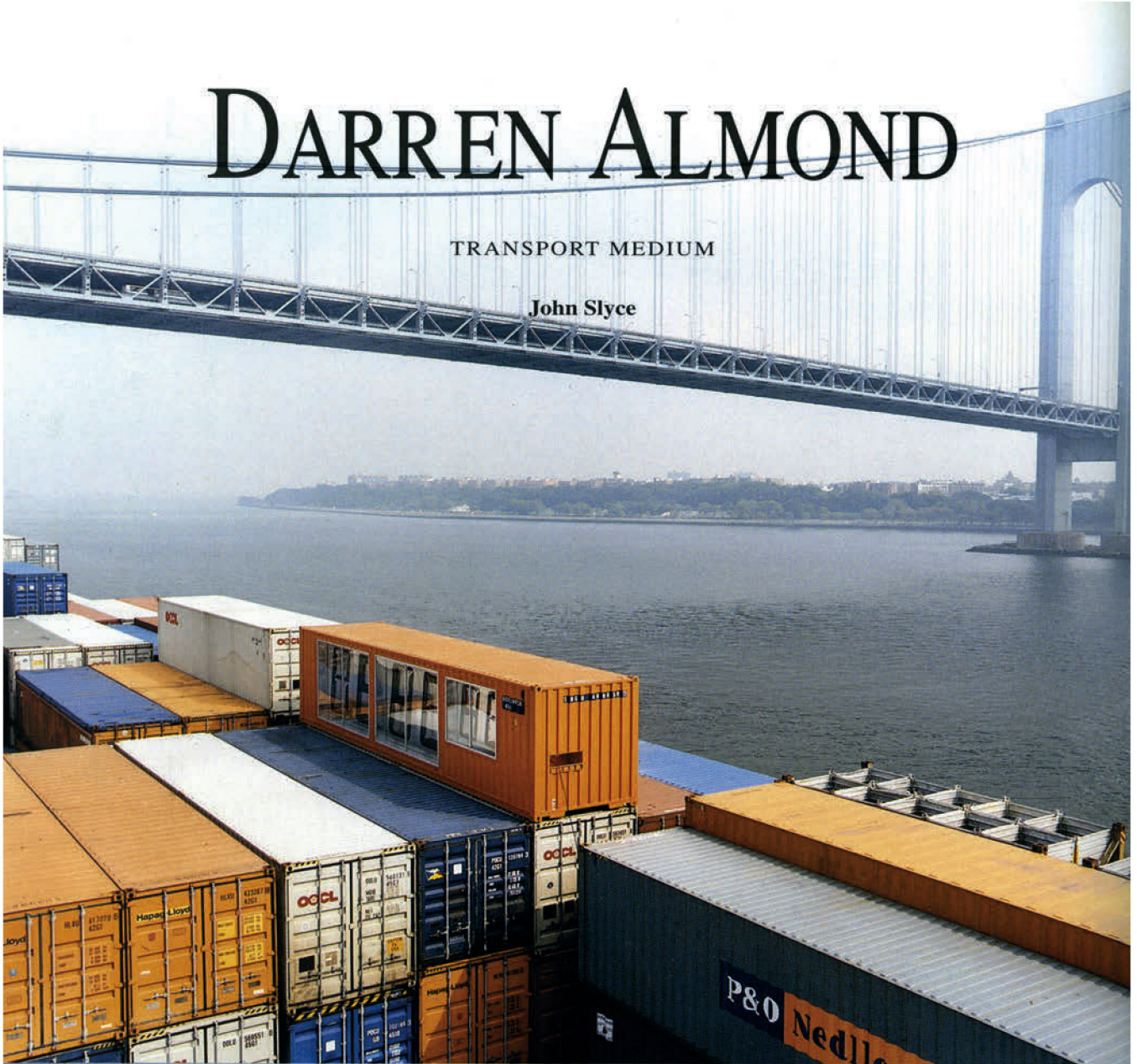


AUSTRALIA \$ 12 • AUSTRIA € 7,23 • BELGIUM € 7,23 • CANADA \$ 10 • FRANCE € 7,23 • GERMANY € 7,23 • GREAT BRITAIN £ 5 • HOLLAND € 7,23 • ITALY € 7,23 • SPAIN € 7,23 • SWITZERLAND SF 12 • U.S.A. & OTHERS \$ 7 • Supplemento n°222 a Flash Art n° 231 dicembre-gennaio 2002

DARREN ALMOND

TRANSPORT MEDIUM

John Slyce



JOHN SLYCE: *You were shooting a new project in the north last week?*

Darren Almond: Yes...and the main character had a mild heart attack the day after I arrived.

JS: *This is family?*

DA: Yes, it is.

JS: *I am sorry.*

DA: No, that's all right. She'll be fine — she's lonely. But yes, this was my first trip up to start filming so I will have to wait a while on that.

JS: *Do you want to talk more about the project or pass on that? This is your grandmother we're talking about?*

DA: This is my grandmother and the work is the next step in the film *Traction* (1999). She lost her husband twenty years ago. She had her first stroke about a year ago and when I visited her in hospital she lit up. Apparently I remind her a lot of him. In a very matter-of-fact way, she told me she wants to die. She wants to be dancing again with him. We connected. It's her body's fault. Her mind is still fine — she just feels trapped inside herself. As a child, I remember it all very vividly. I used to live next door. I had a very special relationship with my grandfather. In the film I'll step into this territory through conversation with her. She realizes she's coming to the end and she wants to get on with it. I want to do the film in conjunction with making a free-standing atmospheric clock that I am working on now. Do you know the clock?

JS: *A self-powered clock?*

DA: It's a clock where if the temperature changes by one degree centigrade it provides the clock with enough energy to run for forty-eight hours. It's almost a perpetual object and very analogue. This was the first time I would move towards an analogue way of visualizing the clock, or that kind of scale.

JS: *Would it be an outdoor piece?*

DA: It feels like it could be. I have a projector that runs off an arc rather than a bulb and gives off a very blue light. The film would shed a sepia toned nostalgia. The projector has no limited shelf-life — if there is electricity you'll get an image.

JS: *So potentially it's perpetual like the atmospheric clock?*

DA: Similar. Say with a solar panel positioned in the desert, the battery would charge through the day and the projection you would see at night and the clock would accompany it throughout. That's where it all is.

JS: *I was struck by the image of your grandfather in front of the coal-burning fire talking to you about going down into the mines — making material from that kind of experience.*

DA: Those stories were fascinating. My father, who worked above ground, would take a flask

of hot tea in winter. Then my grandfather would go to work and take a flask of cold water. I remember asking, "But why granddad? It makes no sense." But then the temperature is constant in the mine and you need cool water for the dust and to clean your breathing passages out. I was back in Wigan last week and the mills are gone and now the landscape is all low-rise buildings and IT parks.

JS: *The introduction of Information Technology to Wigan has an Orwellian ring.*

DA: Definitely. They've turned one of the factories into a museum of the industrial past called the George Orwell Museum and the pub next door is The Orwell.

JS: *There's a relationship in your work to modernism that hasn't been much covered; your moves to address a modernist past in art, politics and economy. How have you attempted to negotiate these issues given the weak experience of modernism in British art and culture?*

DA: You do still encounter the relics of a utopian modernism here. There's a political point here concerning the birth of communism. How that process divided up the globe is central to my feeling very trapped in a position in the world. My perspective was one located in an industrial center — and the working class was a transitional cipher between two struggles for thought. The timeline cutting through England left definite cleavages and I felt as if I was at a central point on a political axis in Wigan. Mine was a very Eurocentric map as a child. There were connections to different cultures through the aspect of industrialization. For me, the cartography of that placement was a modernist issue. I couldn't escape what surrounded me.

JS: *That context still really forms you as an artist who identifies with issues of labor and of class within a wider European context.*

DA: In order to construct an image of yourself you look back to images of your predecessors and relatives. My great-grandfather was a cavalry man in the First World War. There are no other photographs before that in my family, so the image of my family begins with a man sitting on a horse in the early twentieth century. I can only apply that path as a transport medium to where I am at now and what I am surrounded by. It all begins with that man on a horse.

JS: *The sense of history in your work relates to its make up but also to an effort to place yourself as an individual and an artist. Does this stem from your origins in Wigan and a northern industrial family?*

DA: Definitely. I've done a lot of travelling and psychologically I need that attachment to keep focused. But there is also a need to make yourself vulnerable through travel and

All Images: Thames to Hudson, 2000.
Photographs. Courtesy Jay Jopling/
White Cube, London.





Schacta, 2001. Video stills.

exposure to different cultures. That was very much tied up with the notion of being a trainspotter as a kid: I am going to do something that nobody knows that I am doing and I am going to get out of here and see something along the way.

JS: Yet you always come back or attempt to return. I am interested in the point in your work where the autobiographical kicks in. Traction marked a point where storytelling, language and biography entered into the work in a strong way.

DA: The use of the figure was the most remarkable development for me. This gave it a linear quality that wasn't really attached to the work before. Within the reaches of what I had been doing, the work had followed a biographical vein. The prison piece, even though it was a live feed, came from an emotional response to a relative in that situation.

JS: But those biographical factors had always been secondary in the work.

DA: What happened was I turned it all on its head and inverted the equation as mathematics suggests, and it seemed the math was correct.

JS: You don't appear to be feeding the machinery of celebrity with these moves. That said, we're served a litany of plot points in your constructed self: the trainspotting as a youth, Wigan, and the industrial north. Walking to your studio today, I realized that if you had moved to this location only recently it would come off as contrived — surrounded as it is by the Westway, shipping containers, and a web of public transport. Finally, it seems that for you to work from the known is to engage in a theater of the self.

DA: I've always had a studio like this. I am in the landscape of my childhood here. My father worked on building sites and by the age of four I was in the sandpit myself digging in the sand they were using to build. The studio is at an intersection between railway, motorway and canal. You have the Heathrow Express and the underground. You have the mainline railway to Bristol — the line that Brunel is responsible for. It's a hub of the medium of transport. The elevated road outside the window is the road I take to Wigan.

JS: Your work focuses on transitional or suspended spaces not unlike the Westway.

Over your shoulder there is the photo Flatford@Fullmoon (2000) from your series of moonlight exposures. The images have an odd quality — almost as if photography has been suspended from capturing this dead moment or thing. Time is inscribed in these images in an extended and elongated way.

DA: The film is only meant to be alive for 1/100 of a second. I push it to fifteen minutes. I don't want to do the math but that's the push.

JS: Let's look at the idea of working in real time. You relate to these pieces as performances?

DA: In the original real time piece I was curious to see how compelling a still image could be. I was interested in the idea of imposed reflection while focusing on a real time event. To be technically aware of the environment that you are in and be witness to a live event extends time — every second counts for two. The physicality of the sound gives you a sense of scale both of yourself and the presence of the surrounding.

JS: Sound is a crucial aspect of your work that's perhaps underappreciated. Thinking

about scale. I am reminded of Smithsonian's line: Size determines the work but scale determines the art. Sound allows you to push scale beyond given parameters in a work?

DA: I have to deal with it. You can't lose the sound of your own heart and you can't lose the sound of your central nervous system. Put yourself in isolation and you're still left with those two signatures.

JS: Your fan sculptures have always sent me off to that sound scene in Apocalypse Now where the fan blades take on the signature of a helicopter.

DA: And *Bladerunner*. My introduction to postmodernity began by watching that second scene looking down through the overhead fan. I've always liked the way fans have been used in motion pictures as an indicator of time, movement, space. The objects — the fans and clocks — started with the idea that I might be making props that would come together in a film that would be made at some point in time.

JS: *Bladerunner goes both ways for me — the modern is cancelled but preserved in a more virulent form.*

DA: Let me show you something. This is a plan for a clock that I have been working on the past couple of days.

JS: *The three drums rotate?*

DA: That one spins on the minute, that one every ten, and that one turns on the hour. In front of this, if you place the negative of the number, as these drums turn you get a perfect reading of the digits.

JS: *So it is a two-dimensional deconstruction of the flip clock.*

DA: It operates at the conjuncture of analogue and digital — it's a graphic illusion and narration in a controlled given.

JS: *I saw the drums and thought immediately of the chocolate grinder. Your work is inscribed by modernism at every turn — it's somehow about our inability to escape that frame of reference.*

DA: That's coming back to my placement: in going across the Atlantic in one direction with the clock and travelling in the other direction to visit a mine in Kazakhstan. I am a child of the cold war and divided frontiers.

JS: *Such moves are an act of cognitive mapping. Meantime is a project about mapping and the economy of shipping as a pre-existing model of globalization. Your work comes together as a map that shifts from the personal and local to the global and collective — a transport medium that leads from Wigan to the world.*

DA: In art school I spent a lot of time reading about Beuys and the path of the wolf and the coyote. Man followed the dog and wolf at every turn across the ice cap and through Canada to the limits of the West Coast. To go



FullMoon@Spring, 2000. Lambda print.

any further would have completed the cycle. The grid we think we are occupying is an old relational grid. So we are always looking backward as we are walking forward. And that's inscribed in the work.

JS: *Those acts of triangulation are clearly stated in Traction where the viewer is forced to read the three screens in conjunction.*

DA: Very much a self-portrait, that one. Like being out in the mountains with your map and compass — working out where you are is an act of self-portraiture.

JS: *Tell me more about your interest in temperature. How might you factor this into the work? Say, along the lines of what you do with sound?*

DA: With sound, like performance, you have to take up a position as a witness. The real time pieces operate strictly as performance. The pace of work is definitely related to temperature.

JS: *What I am thinking about is your atmospheric clock. There temperature and time are relational.*

DA: They relate because when you're on top of a shipping container in the middle of the Atlantic you're eighteen stories high in the midst of a desert and you can see the earth curve away from you at the horizon. Longitude was an argument between the stellar and the chronos and the time solution was the right answer. The atmospheric clock relies upon the idea that it, as an object, is circumnavigating a 24 hour circle around a magnetic core in a universe with another orbit under climatic control. I like the idea that the clock can be placed in my studio and, in 24 hours, it will have traveled the world and come back to itself. Along that journey it will have picked up enough energy to tell me that it is going to do it again. I like that abstract forward drive to a frontier beyond what is known. That's its function and its existence.

JS: *Time and space are the real agents in your performances.*

DA: They're resilient actors. I set off in a very nonlinear way. In the beginning I didn't think I had a linear track, or a strong enough identity to work in that way. So I shot off in three directions and viewed my

work pattern as a cycle that's constantly repeated within these three points.

JS: *Sculpture, video, and real time.*

DA: Yes, and moving one constantly into the other. That way I could keep the fan turning somehow. How many times have I said, "I am not making another fucking clock."

JS: *But you will.*

DA: And I am — the atmospheric clock and this two-dimensional clock — all without really being interested in time.

JS: *Your two-dimensional clock will also exist as a three-dimensional model.*

DA: Yeah, being a good modern postmodernist, I work from the grid. A grid moves from blank space to a delineation of a point in that space. I keep it to simple points of conversation, simple points of meeting, simple gestures. I deconstruct everything in a two-dimensional plane then recompose it.

JS: *Your work strikes me as concerned with the gap that exists between experience and its description. The Moonlight images, even though we know they're frozen, don't appear to be static — there is movement in them.*

DA: I just photographed a tree in Pollock's garden between his studio and the house. The negative spaces of the tree are totally the calligraphy implied by his paintings. And the position of the moon in autumn catches the tree just at that point where there's a perfect silhouette.

JS: *An autumn rhythm... Does that series have an end point or is it an ongoing project?*

DA: That was the last one of those images that I made. But the end points are Antarctica and the Arctic. That's it.

JS: *So that will complete the map — at the poles?*

DA: The films go easterly and sculpture goes west and the photo pieces have tended to go north and south. *Meantime* will complete its journey by rail travelling across the American deserts to the West Coast and then by boat across the Pacific and I am going along and documenting it all the bloody way.

JS: *You talk about your strategy of filmmaking as "instinctual."*

DA: The strategy is to make myself vulnerable again which allows me to look at things anew. I film at a glance while in a state of movement with no choreography. There's a point where it begins and it ends when the film runs out, but within that everything is instinctually lead by observation.

JS: *But research is involved. You have a guide to the Arctic and one to the Antarctic before you go there.*

DA: I have to obviously since I am going to be taking photos in crazy temperatures. I am using these guides as a logistical tool. I have no idea what I will get as far as images go. I imagine that looking into the horizon of a pole at night will produce a total white out. But it's a nice point to stop them on.

JS: *These moonlight images are about making visible an invisible quantity of time in the image and in the cultural past.*

You've looked at the spaces of Pollock, and Turner, and Constable.

DA: The locations are not specifically artist-led. I didn't run off to Mont Sainte-Victoire because Cézanne was there. I just happened to witness the landscape and the light. These photo pieces were the first time I really enjoyed making something. I think it's about what you allow yourself to experience while you are producing. You go off into nature and sit down and look into one spot for an hour and you never know what you're getting. It's just a bloody nice thing to do. ■

John Slyce is a critic and writer based in London.

Darren Almond was born in Wigan in 1971. He lives and works in London. Selected solo shows: 2001: Tate Britain, London; Mathew Marks, New York; Max Hetzler, Berlin; Kunsthalle, Zürich; De Appel, Amsterdam; 2000: The Approach, London; Chisenhale, London; 1999: The Renaissance Society, Chicago; 1997: ICA, London; White Cube, London. Selected group shows: 2002: "Casino 2001," SMAK and Bijlokenmuseum, Ghent; Berlin Biennale, Berlin; "Deliberate Living," Greene Naftali, New York; 2000: "Apocalypse," Royal Academy of Arts, London; 1999: "Chronos & Kairos," Museum Fridericianum, Kassel; "Seeing Time," SFMoMA, San Francisco; 1998: "UK Maximum Diversity," Galerie Krinzinger, Bregenz; 1997: "Sensation," Royal Academy, London; 1996: "A Small Shifting Sphere of Serious Culture," ICA, London.

Strangers on a Train

Top: *Alfred*, 1999. Cast aluminium and paint, 114 x 22 x 1.2 cm. **Bottom:** *Image Transfer I (detail)*, 2000. Heat transfer on handmade silk screened paper. Photo: Stephen White.

