**Intervention/Decoration**

Various locations, Frome, Somerset, 10 May – 21 June

Seven international artists have contributed new work to this scattered-site exhibition, the inaugural project from new Frome-based commissioning organisation Foreground, installed throughout the town centre in its established cultural venues and public spaces: the exhibition seeks to transform, disrupt and reactivate.

Frome’s history of textile production provided the stimulus for Jim Lasdun. Drawing on 19th-century designs produced in the town, Lasdun developed a repeating geometric pattern which was turned into fly posters. With a simple palette of black, blue and yellow, Lasdun’s bold rectilinear designs wallpaper the town. Pasted onto bearded-up windows and lamp posts, they punctuate the centre with an abundance of pattern, ensuring that encounters with the exhibition are unavoidable.

Skillfully, Eva Beskow’s work points to Frome’s former textile industry and the provincial it once enjoyed. Her enormous cotton curtain makes reference to the recently vacated Weaver’s Shed, domesticating the space. The impact of both these artists’ work is visually striking, the evocative potential of Lasdun’s is released where his design has been applied to slider-drawn buildings. The historical reference engenders a reinvigoration of the town’s architecture while simultaneously invoking a timeless era. A few text posters suggested that Lasdun’s pattern was not to everyone’s taste, although one young skater had embraced it, pinionering the design all over his board.

Like many other towns, Frome has revived the tradition of town crier. For her piece, Ruth Evans instructed Fromers’ choir to proclaim lines from the poem of Curly Spiller, a leading figure in the literary movement of the early twentieth century. Following each performance, proclamations such as “Shining alway pure and bright, overcome a source of light” or “Trump and joyful, so we do we be the primer star” are printed onto brightly coloured banners and presented at the Black Swan Gallery. Although Spiller’s original writings may make fascinating reading, these poetic verses are ripped from their original context, reduced by Evans to a state of rent coherence that sadly closes down rather than opens up any pertinent discourse.

Well known for his cryptic, enigmatic text works, Lawrence Weiner’s contribution is pinned directly onto an exterior wall of the old Silk Mill. Large orange letters with bold black outline read, *AT A DISTANCE TO THE FOREGROUND*. Weiner’s work invites multiple interpretations, and while the exhibition guide states that the piece “comments on the building’s position within the towncape and simultaneously suggests the attitude towards public space”, it comes across more like a witty quip on its own inception. Weiner, who is based in New York (as a distance), has used this work, no doubt along with installation instructions, to the exhibition curators (Foreground).

Cornelia Parker commissioned a Damien Hirst to create a hedge sculpture engrossed with Philip Larkin’s notorious 1967 poem, *This Be The Verse*. Installed onto the side of the Old Church, directly opposite the graveyard, her sculptural piece was easy to missed as it melted into its surround. Although the use of Larkin’s poem may be considered controversial, Parker’s work spoke poignantly about familial relationships, while offering a humorous yet melancholic subversion of the usual sentiments found on the neighbouring memorials.

Despite the potential incongruity between Richard Woods’ multi-coloured cartoon floorboards and a grade one-listed Nonconformist chapel, the combination works surprisingly well at the Book Lane Chapel. In fact, far from jarring, Woods’ piece complements the interior of the stunning eighteenth-century building with a number of colours echoing those found in its stained glass windows.

Michael Dean’s rather puppy-looking sculptures were positioned behind the chimpanzee-friendly architecture of Potter’s former library. Dean’s highly idiosyncratic and impertinent works with their modest materials and apparently haphazard construction make for a somewhat unassuming focal point. Although out without hints of potential brilliance, Dean’s execution feels scrappy and unresolved. However, the poem’s aspect of this exhibition by far is the looming map in the exhibition guide, which, in pieces, simply makes no sense. However, the struggle to find certain locations actually presented an unexpected opportunity to discover some of the more interesting parts of this Somerset town.

Unimaginative title aside, ‘Intervention/Decoration’ is one of those exhibitions that does exactly what it says on the tin and achieves it here brilliantly. The overall quality of the exhibition is of a standard rarely seen in a city that alone a town like Frome. A genuine engagement with and sensitivity towards context is evident, and to attract series of the calibre is an impressive achievement. Inevitably, a question arises, the answer to which will probably only be established after the event: who really benefits from this kind of exhibition? While local artists may feel overlooked doing a project like this, there is little doubt that bringing internationally acclaimed practitioners to their doorsteps and introducing such work to a wider audience away from the ossified contemporary art circus, can only serve to refresh and invigorate the local arts scene.