

## Exhibition Guide

**Yuri Leiderman *Birmingham Pattern***

**28 July – 16 September 2007**

**Second Floor Galleries**

Born in Odessa in 1963, a time when the city was part of the Soviet Union and 'nationality' was interpreted as 'ethnic origin', Yuri Leiderman has a complex sense of identity. Currently based between Berlin and Moscow and born of Jewish parents, he describes himself as a 'nobody', a marginal observer whose nationality is artificial in its construction, ideological and even 'hallucinogenic'. Such self-perception is highly evident in *Birmingham Pattern*, a series of performative installations collectively entitled *Geopoetics*, in which the artist deals with nationality alongside issues of cultural stereotyping and historical legacy.

Comprising existing, reconfigured and new pieces made in response to Birmingham, these interrelated installations involve a series of black-and-white photographic assemblages. Resembling pages from scrapbooks, they are loaded with historical resonance – images from World War II, the liberation of Odessa, pictures of Anne Frank – referencing shared history, focussing attention on what is common to all rather than what is different. In *Geopoetics 1*, Leiderman collates pictures of World War II Memorials, all commemorating the same thing and reflecting an identical sentiment yet existing in different political and geographical contexts.

In stark contrast to the photographic material, Leiderman has invited Birmingham-based musicians to perform in traditional national dress intermittently throughout the duration of the exhibition. Music is suggested as a means of transcending borders, a communication or common ground open to influence, welcoming difference. In this way, Leiderman starts to reveal his understanding of the term 'geopoetics' as a distortion of geopolitics whereby social, historical and ethnic meanings do as much to create a 'nation' as do geographic boundaries or borders.

The composition of individual *Geopoetics* also negate any reading of the work whereby music illustrates the image or vice versa. In describing the process of creating such juxtapositions, Leiderman comments,

I try to construct 'abstract compositions' that do not have strict rational meaning and where 'nations' are, so to speak, on the same surface as colours, lines, readymade objects, etc. The compositions relate to my poetry – I see myself rather as a writer than an artist. It would be difficult to explain rationally why, for instance, an Afro-Caribbean group settles down in front of an Odessa liberation film and a Chinese group in front of Anne Frank photos, in the same way as an abstract painter wouldn't explain why he put a red or blue spot of colour here or there.

The improvised performances that emerge during the exhibition are partly inspired by the musicians own cultural traditions whilst equally, influenced by the sounds of others playing in the gallery.

Having journeyed through this semi-chaotic landscape of *Birmingham Pattern*, visitors finally encounter Leiderman himself in *Geopoetics 5*, in a half-hidden smaller gallery. Dressed as a Swiss Naval Captain – a non-existent officer in a non-existent military force – he sits with his head bowed, lonely and tired in front of a decorative cake tin. Does it contain letters from home? Is his cylindrical hat simply an abstract shape intended to match that of the tin? We don't know, but in this isolated figure we see the artist at once as nobody and somebody, fiction and non-fiction, real and imagined.