





MIKE NELSON

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## ACCA

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As ever, we thank our longstanding collaborators: John Brash and Brian Scales. Thanks particularly to Ned Needham and Adrian Watkin, who worked with Mike throughout the pre-build and installation period. Thanks finally to our indefatigable installation crew and ACCA staff.

## PROJECT TEAM

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Rebecca Coates

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All images courtesy  
Mike Nelson

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John Brash

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BPA

Designer  
Matt Hinkley

## BIOGRAPHY

Mike Nelson was born in Loughborough, England, in 1967, and currently lives and works in London and Edinburgh where he is the Research Fellow in Sculpture at the Edinburgh College of Art. In 1990 Nelson graduated with First Class Honours from the University of Reading, and he completed a Masters at Chelsea College of Art & Design majoring in Sculpture in 1993. Mike Nelson is represented by Matt's Gallery, London and Galleria Franco Noero, Turin.

Solo exhibitions and projects include: *AMNESIAC SHRINE or Double coop displacement*, Matt's Gallery, London, 2006; *After Karouac*, Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona, 2006; *Spanning Fort Road and Mansion Street - Between a formula and a code*, Turner Contemporary, Margate, 2005; *Studio apparatus for MAMCO...*, MAMCO Geneva, 2005; *Triple Bluff Canyon*, Modern Art Oxford, 2004; *Nothing is True. Everything is Permitted*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 2001; *The Deliverance and The Patience*, Peer Commission for the 2001 Venice Biennale, The Old Brewery, Giudecca, 2001; *The Coral Reef*, Matt's Gallery, London, 2000; *On-site Project*, Camden Art Centre, London 1998.

Significant group exhibitions include: *A Secret Service: Art, Compulsion, Concealment*, Hayward Gallery, London and touring 2006/7; XXI Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, 2004; *Strange Weather*, Modern Art, London, 2004; *Poetic Justice*, 8<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial, Turkey, 2003; *Micro/Macro*, British Council exhibition, Kunsthalle Mücsarnok, Budapest, 2003; Biennale of Sydney, 2002; *The Cosmic Legend of the Uroboros Serpent*, Turner Prize, Tate Britain, London, 2001; *British Art Show 5*, National Touring Exhibitions for Hayward Gallery, London, 2000.

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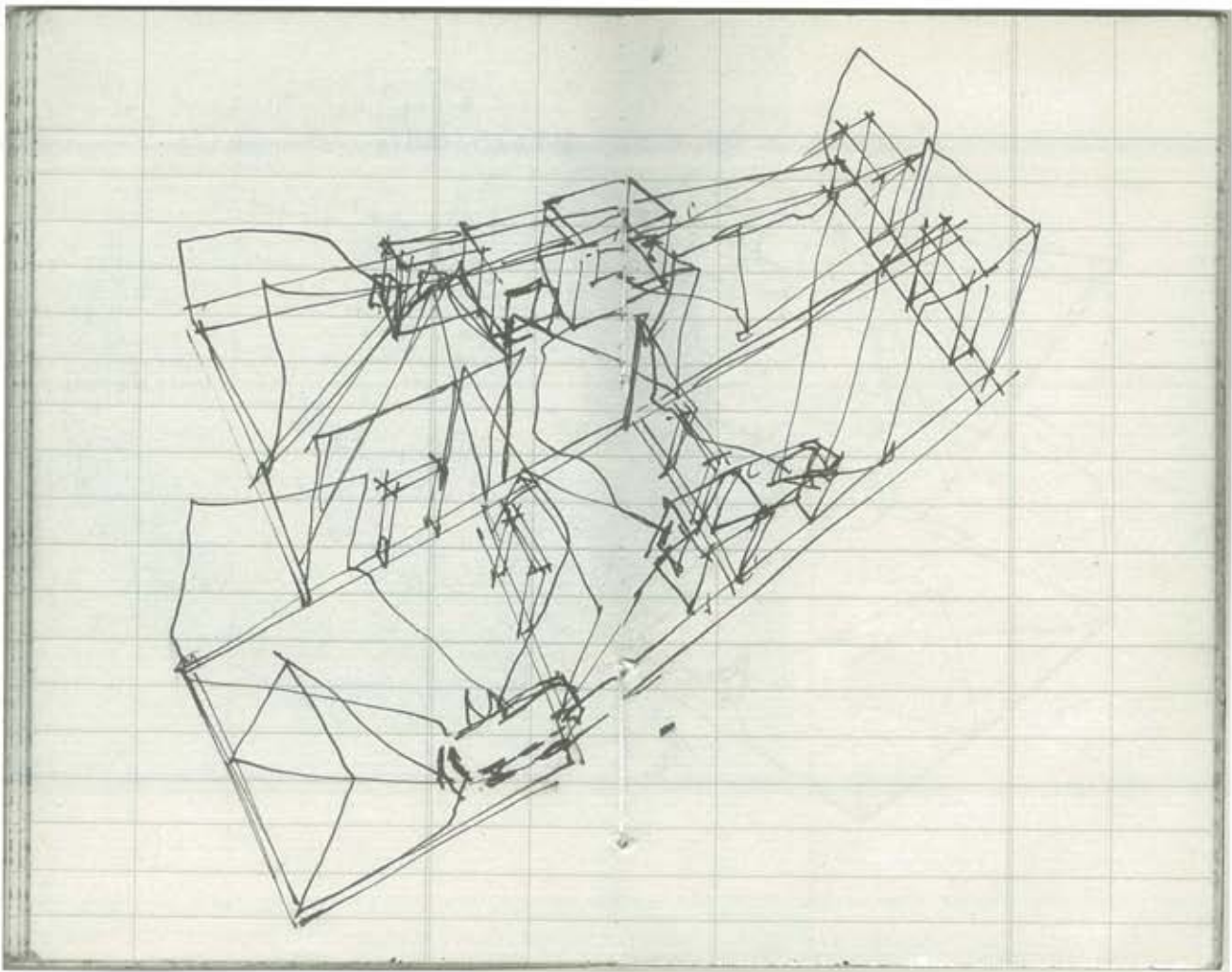
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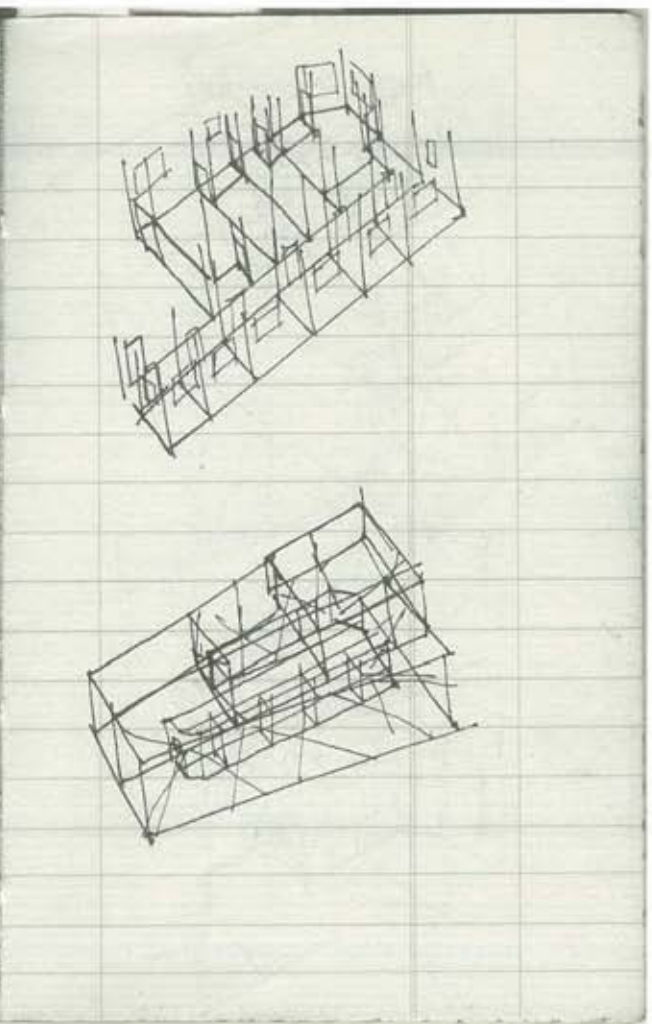
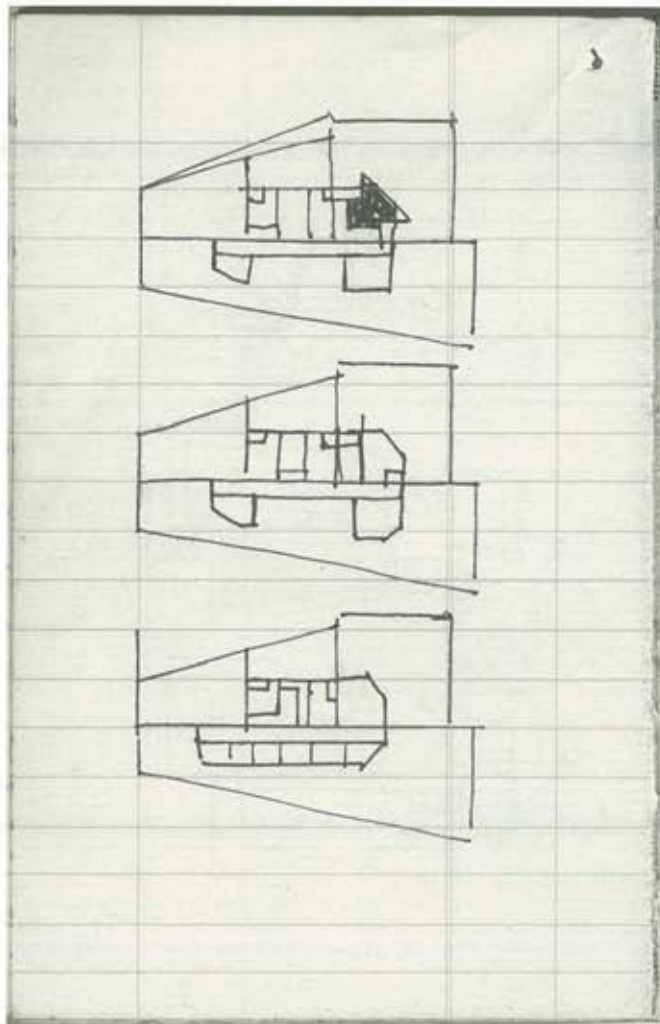
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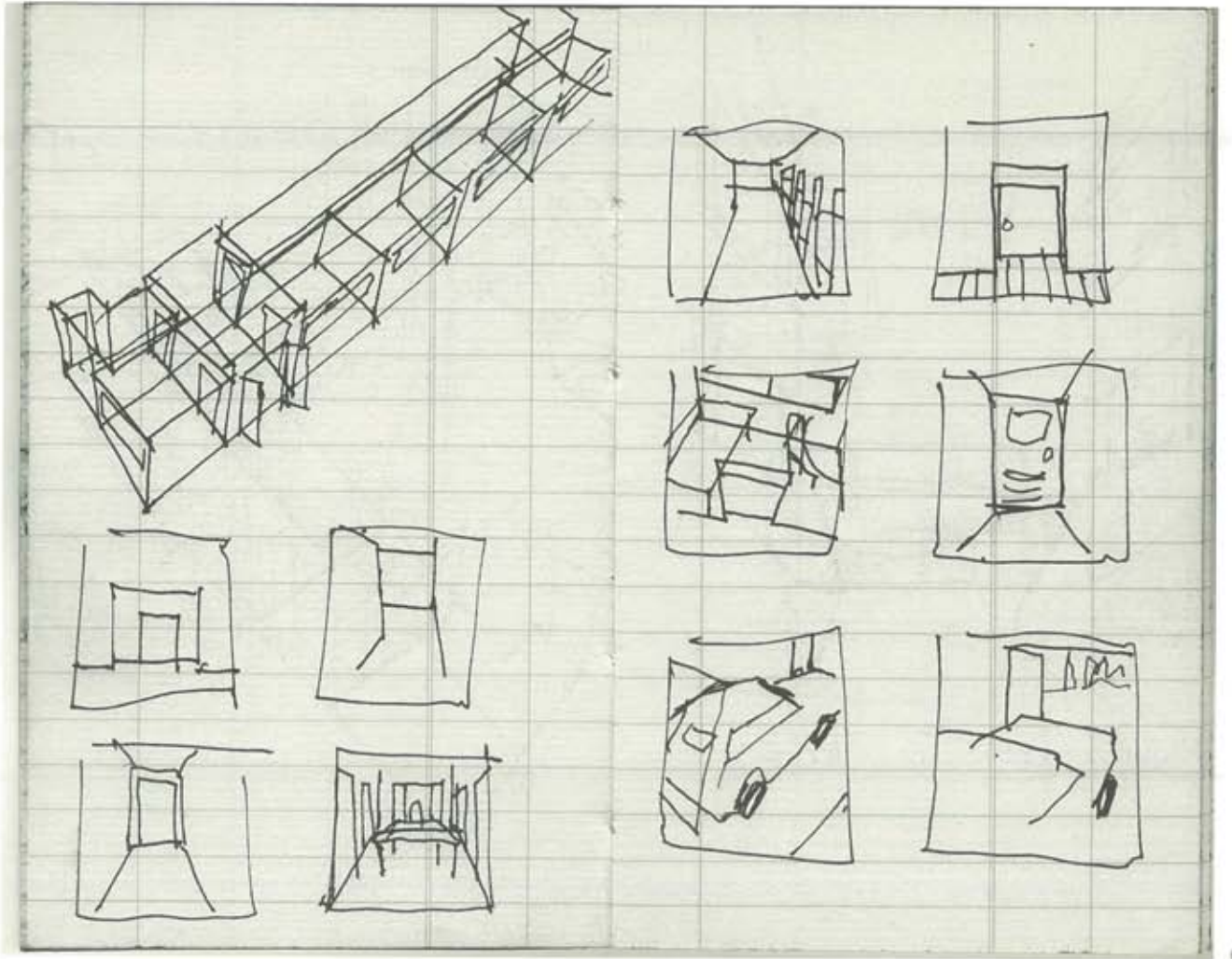




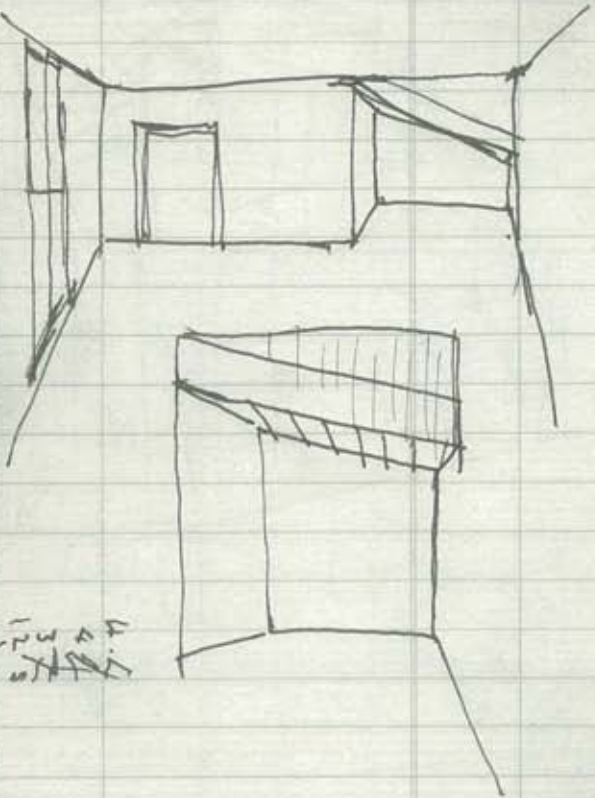
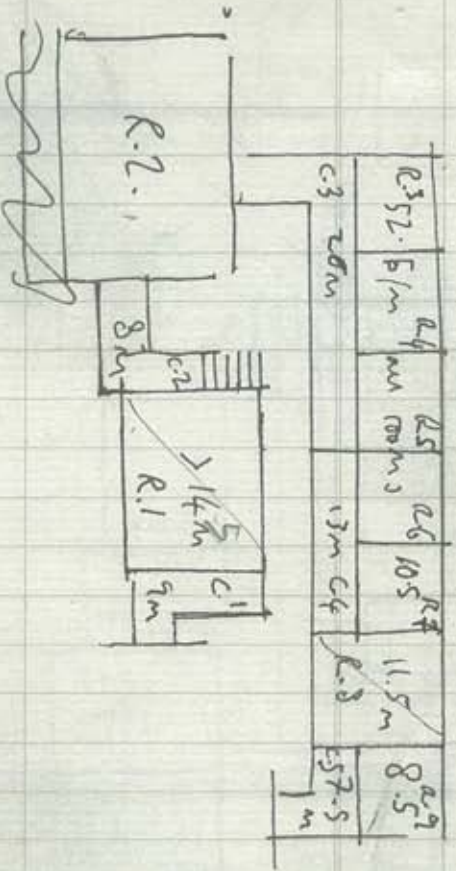




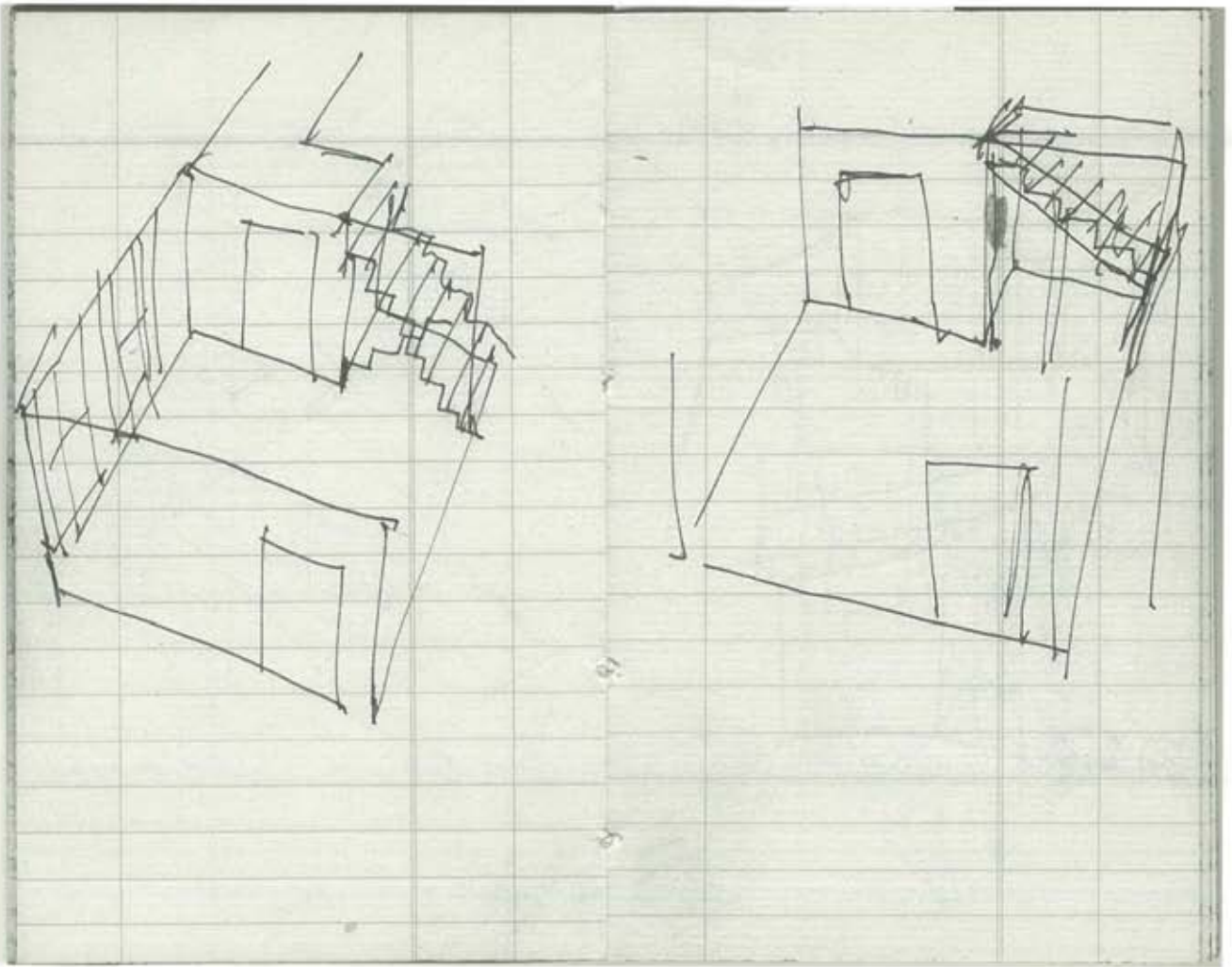




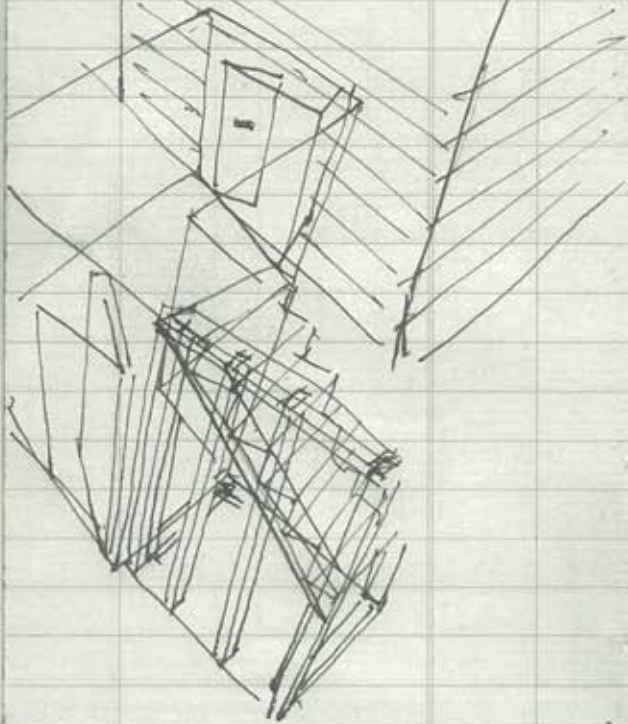
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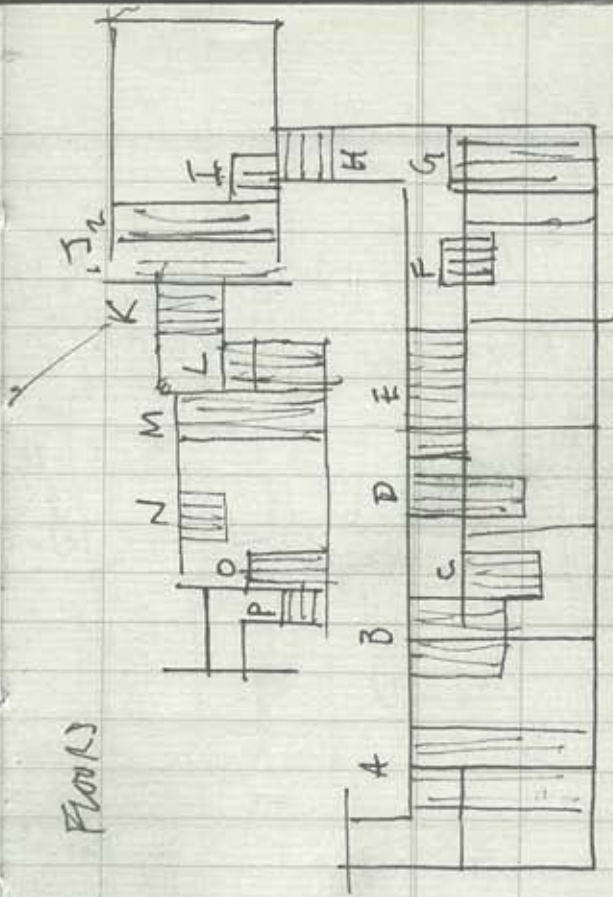
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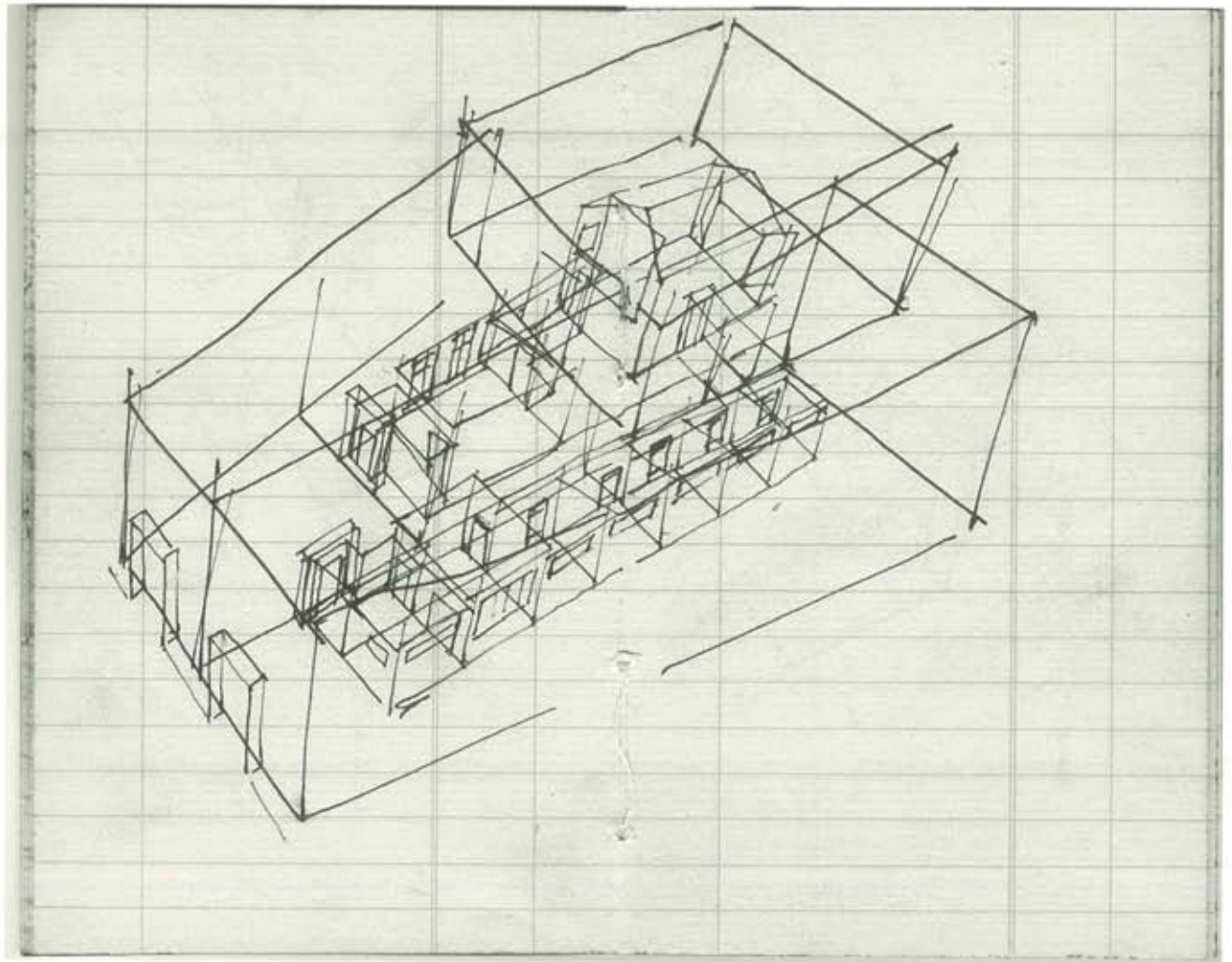
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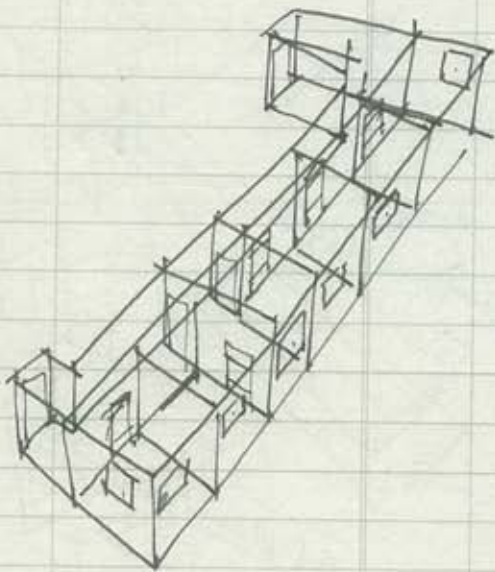


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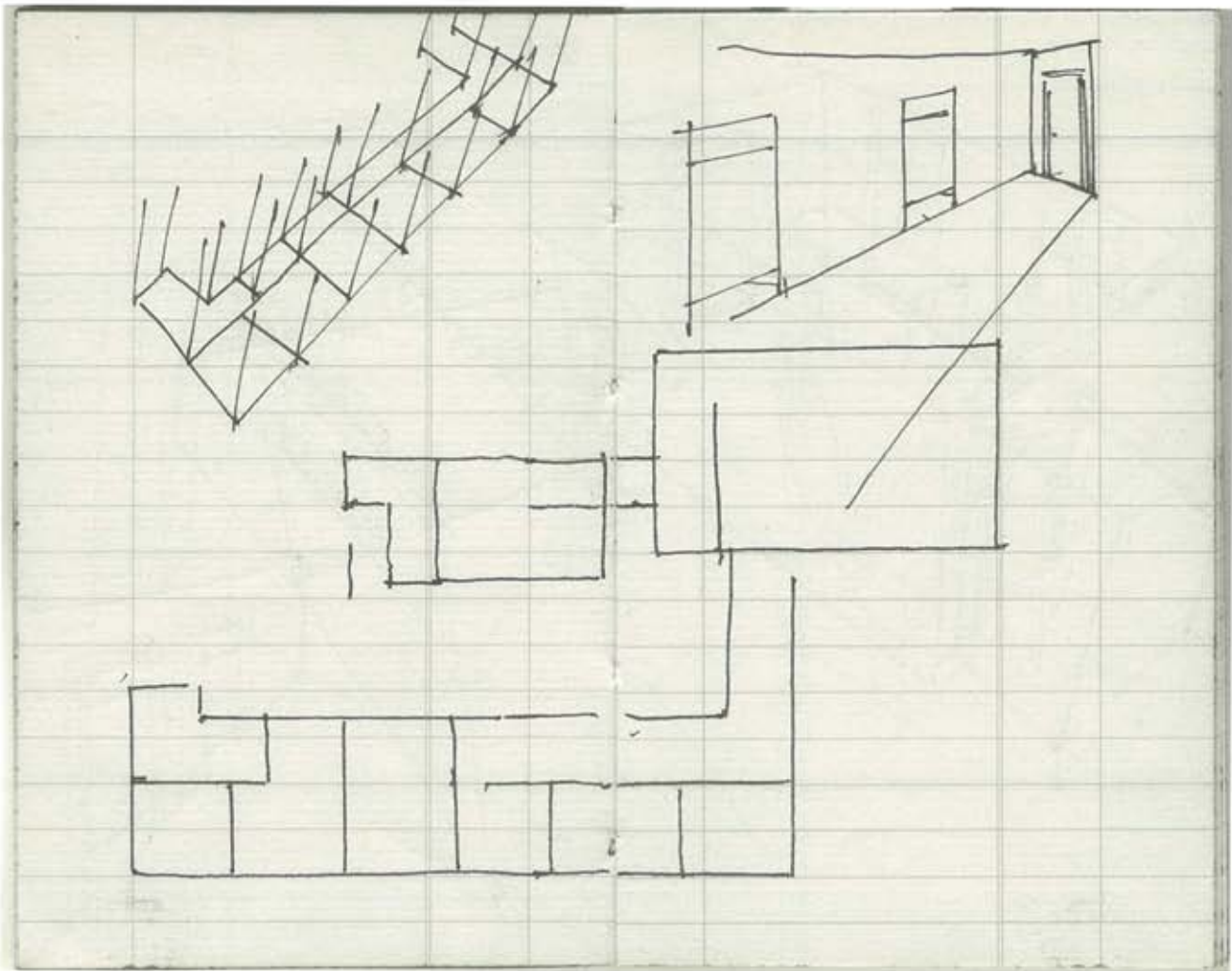






$$3.20 \times \\ 64 \text{ m}^2 \text{ (640 sq. ')}$$

5 windows min  
4 full doors  
5 half doors



Cultural Truths:  
Australia on \$10 a day

Rebecca Coates

*Twenty years ago, when I first arrived on the plains, I kept my eyes open. I looked for anything in the landscape that seemed to hint at some elaborate meaning behind appearances. Gerald Murnane, The Plains*

In the late 1960s and early 70s, the world was a very different place. Post-Vietnam war and Watergate, a new generation of travellers was in search of new truths; a new exotic, undiscovered and pristine. Cultural travel of this sort was not new. Tourists on the Grand Tours of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, often young romantics inspired by Byron and Shelley, had travelled across Europe to Greece and Rome in search of Classical truths and unsullied beauty. It was an adventure in the discovery of Self as much as it was an experience to broaden one's outlook and bring back cultural artefacts to fill the Empire's Neo-Classical façaded museums.

This new generation was different. Motivated by beat writers like Kerouac and Ginsberg, these later travellers replaced the cultural history of old Europe with the exotic of the Orient and road trips across a 'newer' continent. These early journeys along the hippy trails of Asia spawned another kind of travel guide. In constant quest of the untrodden path, these guides were less literary reflections of journeys travelled, and more cultural commentaries requiring an itinerant army of regular updaters.

There is a bitter-sweet irony to these guides. What once assisted in unlocking treasures and experiences previously unknown rapidly assisted in making the world a much smaller place. The more people travelled, and the further afield they went, the fewer the places that remained untouched by the heavy hand of Western civilization. From being transported by the Wonders of the World, we now demanded what to do, where to stay, and hours of opening.

While we once travelled out of curiosity, and to broaden our minds, the motivations for travel now are far more ambiguous: people travel as much for a change of scene as they do a life-changing experience. As our lives become increasingly controlled, protected, and regulated, these travel guides allow us to live wildly and travel freely within the safe constraints of the well-worn path. How far wrong can you go when you have not only the location, but a full description, and rating out of ten? And if all else fails, there is always the quick SMS for a second opinion.

Mike Nelson's project for ACCA takes its name as much from this particular form of literature, which had its genesis in the Melbourne-born travel guides *Lonely Planet* as it does the connotation of the words: lonely planet. As Nelson suggested, 'it would be impossible to look at those words anywhere in the world let alone Melbourne without seeing the product as opposed to the meanings of the two words at the same time – a kind of switching between the two.' Nelson started toying with this idea of the cultural travel guide in his ICA installation *Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted* (2001) where he created a Tardis-like time travel experience which included numerous editions of the ubiquitous travel guides in many of the rooms he constructed. He describes them as 'the bible to two generations ... nothing depicts globalism more clearly than they do'. Luring people to cultures which will be destroyed by their visits, eventually the only experiences of the truly exotic will be the previous editions of the guides themselves.

*Lonely Planet*, Nelson's title for this exhibition in Melbourne is prescient. These two words cannot be read without their immediate association with the travel guides that share the epithet. At the same time, coupling the words 'lonely' and 'planet' asks us to question our position within our own small world, the world of our nation, and the Earth's uneasy state as we juggernaut towards global warming, increased nuclear power, unresolved war and conflict, and collapsing value systems. Individuals, becoming increasingly isolated within the community they live in, search for meaning and a meeting of common minds in locations that are removed from their daily reality. On an increasingly unstable planet it's no wonder we employ these travel guides as a well-thumbed security blanket.

Interweaving book and building, the link between fact, fiction and architecture is inescapable in Nelson's work. Particular writers, filmmakers, iconic books, and literary genres intertwine (like literary motifs or musical refrains) throughout Nelson's oeuvre. Borges, Soviet science fiction, spaghetti Westerns: each with an interest in the structure that enfolds the concurrent narrative threads. As viewers, we grasp and attempt to make sense of the fragments presented, their significance an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of possible interpretations.

In Melbourne, as around the world, buildings have always been a form of storytelling. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Neo-Classical façades tried to impart a sense of history, solidity, and grandeur to a society reliant on a speculative gold rush. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings of the nation continued to look towards established European styles and traditions that were, at least stylistically, twenty years out of date.

The era Nelson evokes for this installation is an amalgam of Melbourne's 1930s glory days. Solid wooden doors – no veneer here – complete with brass hinges and door returns, salvaged from the old Melbourne Cricket Ground Members' stand. Their patina and veneer resonate with the crack of leather on willow, and a young nation's confidence, security, comfort and largesse when Australia lived off the wealth of the sheep's back and the highlight of the year was the sea voyage 'home' to England. Dusty and worn, each lovingly-used salvaged element comments on the times from which it came, as well as evoking memories for us in its new-found dis/location.

Rather than looking forward, Nelson's built environments always seem to refer to a time past: *Triple Bluff Canyon* (2004), a wood shed, partially obliterated by 20 tons of soil in the 1970s by US artist Robert Smithson, was reinterpreted for MAO and covered in tons of sand and partially submerged oil drums, one of which is labelled 'Texaco' - as much a link to the current political situation as Smithson's was thought by some to be 30 years previously. *Spanning Fort Road and Mansion Street – between a formula and a code* (2005), Nelson's installation in a disused building in Margate, England; *Magazin: Büyük Valide Han* (2003), his equally difficult to find off-site project for the Istanbul Biennial, Turkey, and *Mirror Infill* (2006), his most recent project as part of the Frieze Art Fair London, each features the increasingly redundant photographic dark-rooms that recur throughout Nelson's works. All are about creating a space that destabilises certainties, instead creating one that is both actual and mystical. *Lonely Planet* evokes the 1930s institutional feel with its heavy wooden doors and windows, skirtings and trims, moody browns, two-tone hospital blue and beige, and mossy green interiors. There is a nostalgia in the use of old materials, a reverence for things done properly - the time-consuming and labour-intensive way.

Equally, there is a desire to challenge our understanding of the present through our reading of the past. As with the superseded editions of *Lonely Planet* travel guides, Nelson's salvaged materials are a cultural reference for a time past and experience long gone. As with the travel guides, our understanding of (superseded) reality is not always exact. Nelson plays with this ambiguity and uncertainty in his careful juxtaposition of second-hand elements, salvaged materials, and someone-else's discarded tat.

In some ways, Nelson reassures us with his choice of architecture and interior spaces. These are things we know from experience, or from seeing in a picture or reading in a book. Possibly, however, they are not quite as you imagined or where you would expect them to be. These environments are often presented by Nelson as having fallen down on their luck. Low-rent, dilapidated, or abandoned spaces - a taxi office, an old cinema foyer, seedy biker bars, arcade parlours and grimy hallways. In the past, they have been filled with a profusion of bric-a-brac and someone else's junk: weathered stacks of pulp books and magazines, trophy animal heads and comic masks, broken toys and rusting oil cans. Their range and choice depends on what the magpie Nelson gathers and distributes during the course of his pre-construction phase. There is a nod towards occultism, orientalism, science fiction, and crazy conspiracy theories. All suggest journeys, escape, and the existence of other realms.

Like other artists preceding him, Nelson articulates the layering of memory and meaning that is encrusted like the patina of grime on second-hand furniture. Everything is significant: doors and windows salvaged from hospitals, civil servants' corridors, decommissioned transport, and flea-pit hotels. These interiors reveal a series of tableaux (different locations, different sentiments), where a single object such as a desk, a sleeping bag, a jacket or magazine invokes the shifting reality.

For *Lonely Planet*, there will be less of this cultural detritus. The interiors are sparser, less laden with reference, as Nelson shifts from a specific narrative structure that the visitor had to discover and follow, to one that is more open-ended, suggestive, and multi-stranded, relying more on the visitor's own points of reference. Doors still thud, floorboards creak, and dust motes flicker in the twilight gloom. Nelson gives clues, but doesn't impose a narrative. The memory of these objects and interiors, and the resonance of their subsequent significance, enters your subconscious, your psyche, your being, returning to either haunt or transport you. A Mike Nelson installation, once experienced, will never be forgotten.

For this exhibition, these clues are revealed through a series of unfolding slide narratives. Projected from the building's windows and apertures are a series of 35mm slide projectors, each set at a different revolution, that, with the rapid gunfire of the turning slide carousel, inexorably cut their way through the silence of the room. Edited and sequentially structured, this is not simply some travel diary of an accidental tourist escaping the cold and miserable darkness of a Northern winter. Rather, it is a visual attempt to make sense of our uneasy relationship with this continent; our frequent sense of claustrophobia in this vast and open land; and our desire to hug the coast, in a tightly contained and controllable perimeter, as evoked in Patrick White's *Voss* and Gerald Murnane's *The Plains*. It is not an accident that our government sends illegal immigrants into Australia's central expanse.

Projected onto convex mirrors, these images taken by Nelson over the course of his time and travels, are morphed and manipulated to form a series of further narratives that capture both the ambiguity of the more recent colonists' uneasy alliance with the Australian continent (the isolation, the sense of claustrophobia, the sense of Other) and the weight of silent voices of those who first occupied this (to European eyes) harsh and inhospitable land. A bluestone aqueduct, a discarded bottle, an abandoned house. Clues, each and every one, which, without actually giving any answers, perhaps reflect the desire of some to erase the history of those who occupied the land before us. Each image, flashing in front of our eyes with strobe light velocity, creates a film-like effect. Unsure of what has actually been seen and what our minds have filled in, these images act like our memories of iconic films – Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the lowly schlock horror of the B-grade movie, or such classics as Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. There is a shared dreamlike quality, an otherworldliness of heightened perception that we don't want to puncture by watching a second time.

As Nelson's constructed worlds can be read as an attempt to make sense of our cultural history, by presenting alternate and concurrent readings, so too can his recurrent preoccupation with the sub-cultures that often inhabit them. Groups existing on societies' margins have their own strict codes of reference and symbolic icons that are at once familiar but foreign to the 'mainstream' audience who reads them. In the late 1990s, Nelson invented the Amnesiacs, a fictional biker gang, who appeared throughout a series of works. Stemming from Nelson's interest in Soviet writers who used the genre of lo-fi science fiction to bypass the censors, Nelson's exploration of sub-cultures is similarly subversive. Whether fictional biker gangs, hot-rod car meets, surfer-culture, or homeless people's temporary living quarters, these fragmentary portraits are perversely fascinating beyond our simple voyeurism about how others live. They also arouse our own desire to reject the status quo, to live dangerously, yet within the confines of an alternatively structured state. In many ways, they echo our desire to cut free and travel to unknown destinations, whilst reassured and assisted by that ever-reliable cultural compass, a *Lonely Planet* guide.

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#### Coda

On the day that Mike Nelson arrived in Melbourne it was unseasonably hot: nearly 40 degrees in mid October. Subsequently, we plunged back into quasi-winter and Antarctic chills, even managing to put on a show of freakish snow in the hills surrounding the city for the beginning of summer. A climate in flux, the familiar gone wrong, prompted the constant refrain that, No, this is not normal, even for this upside-down world of the Southern Hemisphere.

But what, now, is normal? What is the context in which we live and exist? How do we read, or make sense of, the place and times which we inhabit? It is this sense of the normal gone wrong, or the everyday displaced, that continues to haunt the immersive, labyrinthine series of unfolding rooms that Mike Nelson creates. In all, he subverts, mutates, and transcends our understanding of the architecture and the cultural frame of reference: a cultural nomad himself, he transports the visitor to a different time and a different place. Unlike the travel guides that he references, and, ironically, refers to religiously himself when travelling, he refuses to add commentary, allowing the past, the present, and our own cultural roadmap to intermingle in a new reality where we too don't belong, and are just slightly off key.

*My journey to the plains was much less arduous than I afterwards described it. And I cannot even say that at a certain hour I knew I had left Australia. But I recall clearly a succession of days when the flat land around me seemed more and more a place that only I could interpret. Gerald Murnane, The Plains*







Last resting-place of Capt. Allen F. Gardiner.

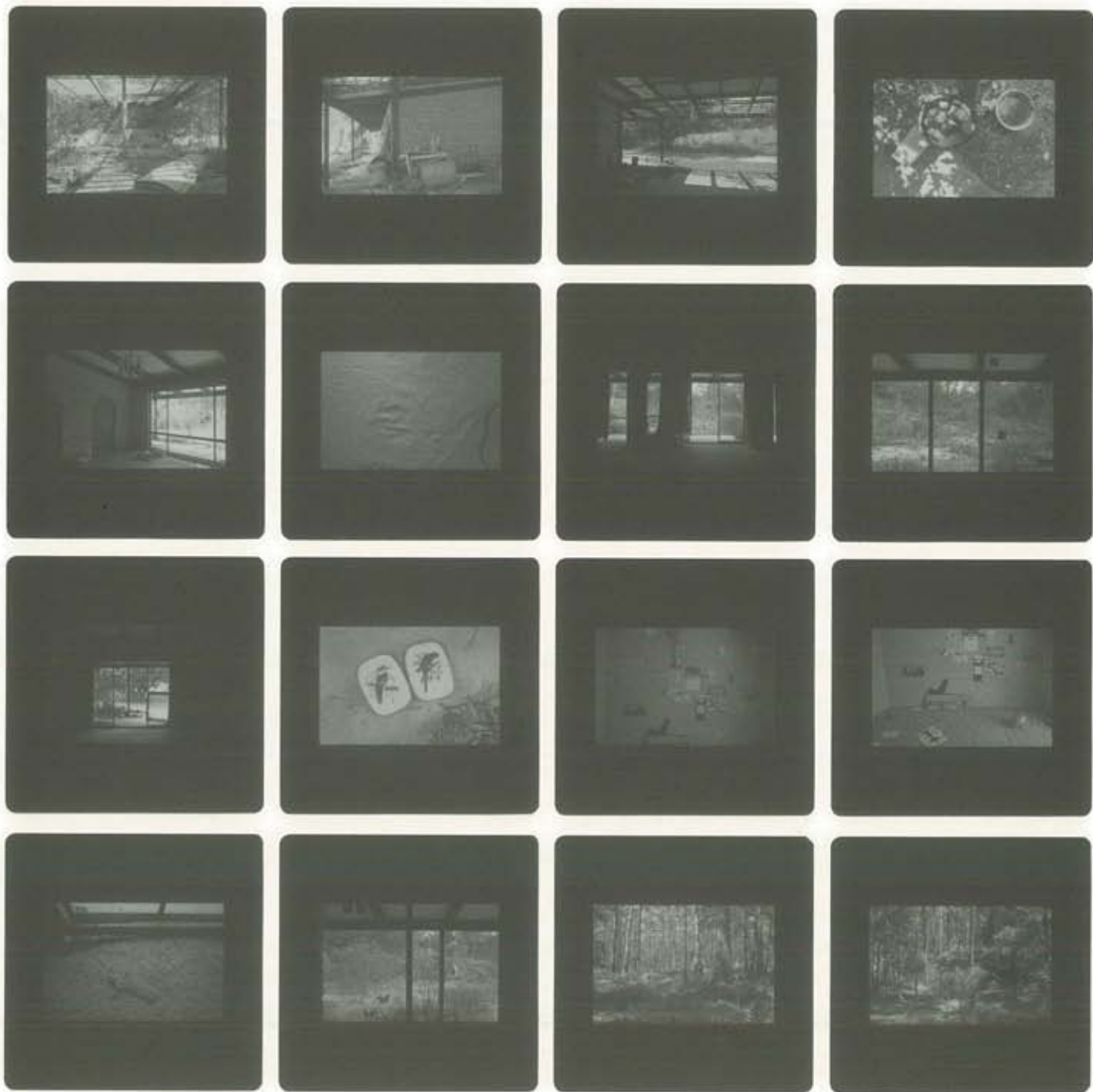




















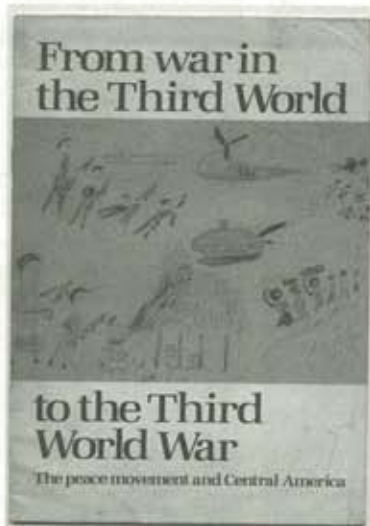




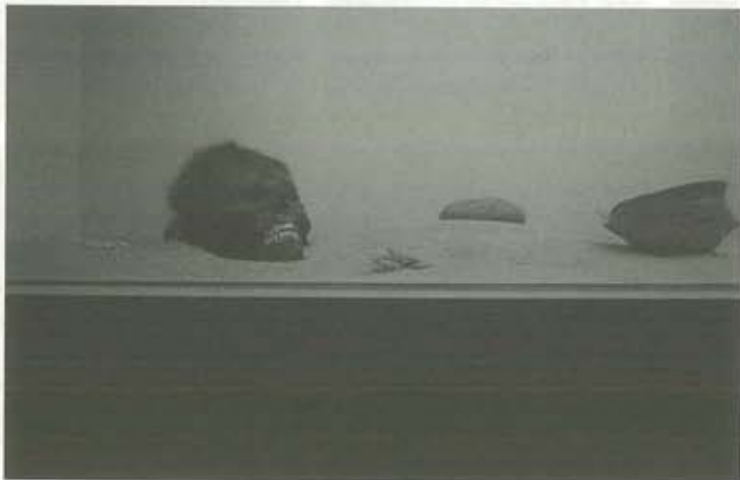








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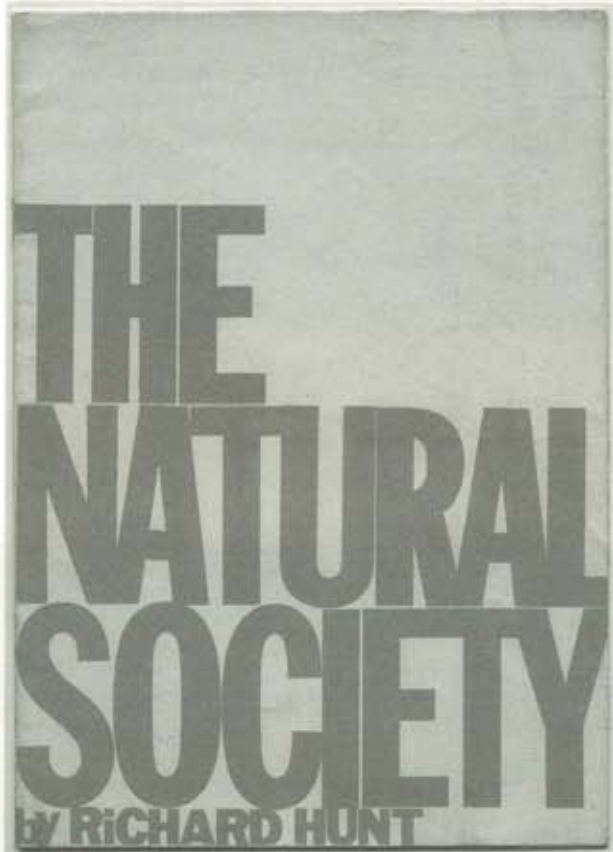
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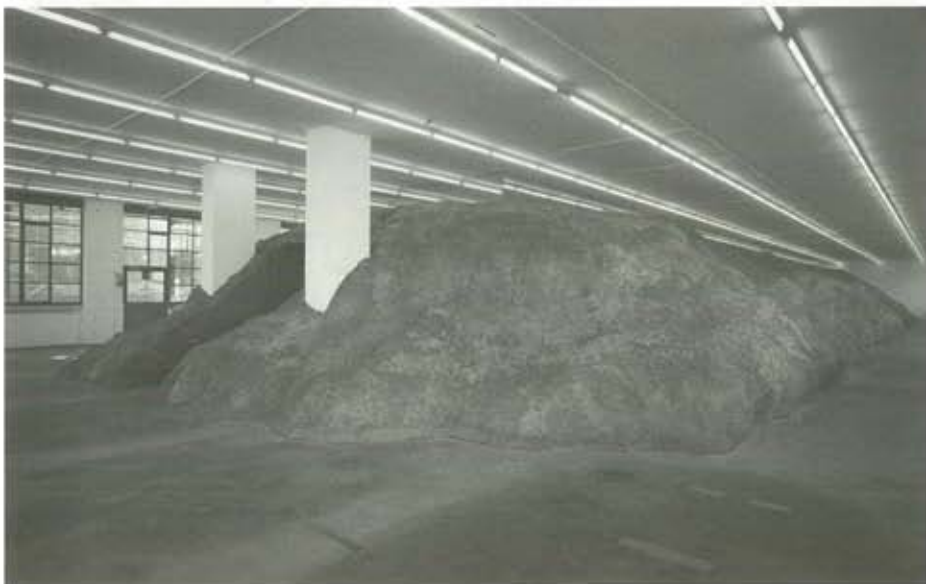
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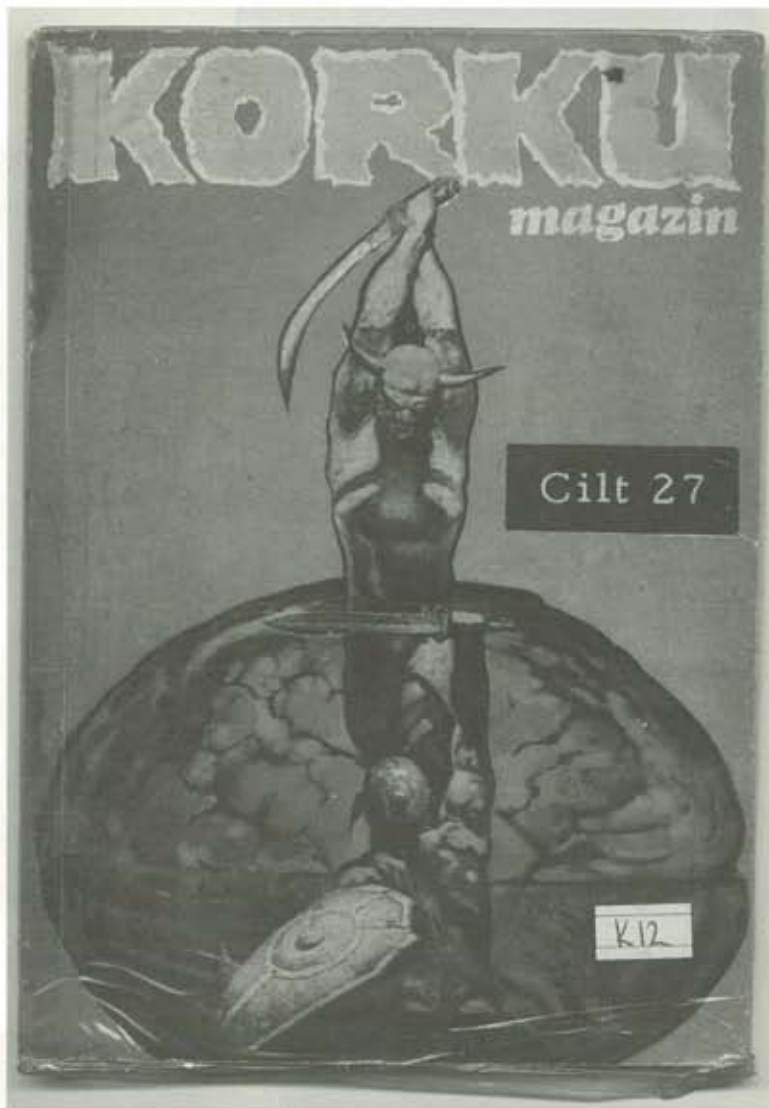
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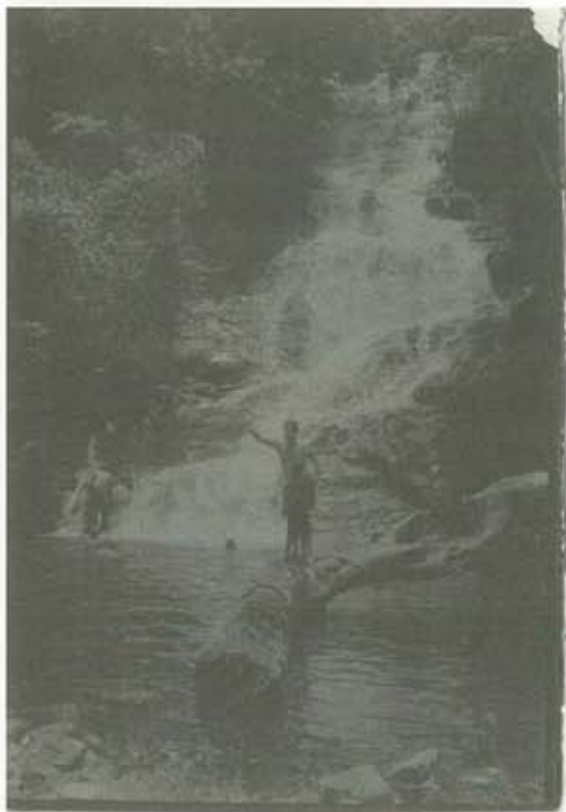
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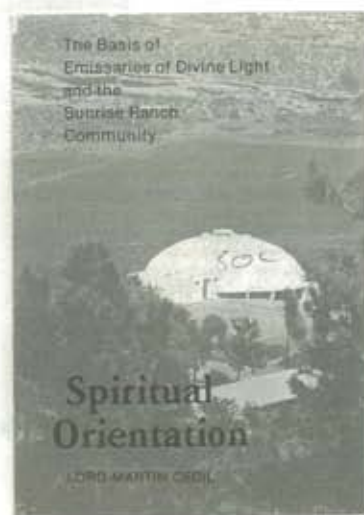
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DEBILE MENTHOL

Switz

Emile Au Jardin Patrologique

Cheery Swiss LP by our pals. Inventive, nimble and dense. Light & eclectic. From our comrades RR Switzerland.

Batterie Campagne. A

Another fine record from the Debiles. Dense, varied, plenty fast & furious with good tunes, complex & sinuous arrangements. Surprises, noise. In the grand tradition of composed & complex Rock "Rock", bordering on C20 chamber/Improvised/Irresponsible humour traditions. Fine stuff from the now sadly defunct CE mavericks. Snap it up.

OSKORRI

Basque

Adio Kattalina B

Basque nationalist group, very involved with their own folk traditions, but electric instruments. Fine arrangements, tough lyrics & great great tunes. Bears repeated listening, each more pleasurable than the last.

LINDSAY COOPER, JOELLE LEANDRE, MAGGIE NICHOLS. (UK, FRANCE)

Live at the Bastille A

Improvised at the event. And eventful. Some wonderful playing, fluid & fine details, entrancing sonorities. Some of the verbal drama may wear with repeated listening, for me it did. This may be personal.

IN DRAME MUSICAL INSTANTANE (Fr)

Rideau B  
Grandes Orchestres B

2 of a substantial body of work by this team of 3 & their fluid orchestras. Electric & acoustic, VERY wide canvas, lots of experiment & rich writing & arranging. "Grandes..." shows a variety. "Rideau" rich & VERY Well crafted. A real Pleasure.



GIOVANNI VIGNOSTA (Italy)

Olympic Signals B

Carefully made & very charming. Satis, 2ND spring to mind - some more synthesised tracks on first side, but all with very engaging & simple tunes, intelligently developed. Side 2 is excellent.

ROBERTO MURCI (Italy)

The Loa of Mexico B

Intelligent, well-made - a lot of instruments from other cultures & some ethnic recordings included in a dense, deep & beautifully constructed collage of musics & atmospheres. A fine work in an often abused musical form. Recommended. PS bag insert is I-500th of one whole painting by Gigi Camporelli. So this is a VERY limited edition.

HELLENORE (France) B

Fine work with insert folder illustrations by Mnemonists - very varied music content - in the same broad musical area as the Debiles perhaps. Continually interesting & skillful work. A lot of ideas.

MONSIEUR BRASS Quebec (Canada)

Rivir C

Densely arranged & nimble music, melodic, odd, slight echoes of the Debiles (though I doubt Monsieur Brass have heard of them). Open sounding but costantly engagingly arranged & played & full of surprises. A first record from this six-woman Quebecoise group, playing trombone, sax, bass, guitar, synthesiser, drums, violin. Recommended.

NARCA (Mexico)

C 6

Interesting & uncompromising music - most like Univers Zero, if anyone. Violins & bassoon help this association, as well as C20 chamber-music influences. Deserves support. LIMITED NUMBER (not such great recording quality - but, this is a small independent Mexican initiative & needs support to survive & develop).

MURPHY STREET (UK)

A

More essential than the last Murphy Street, but more telling arrangements, charming songs with sharp bits sticking out & soft bits meekling under. Shapely & thoughtful & not too polished-up (TINY echo of Eric Bentley meets Robert Wyatt). Not for instant thrills.

KALAMATI SURFERS (South Africa)

A Letter from South Africa A

Paints a grin & courageously frank picture of life in SA today. Musically detailed & skillful & excellently put together. A lot of 'documentary' recordings as part of the work, tellingly used. Dense & clear. Recommended. 5" KALAMATI

A THINKING PLAGUE (USA) C

An interesting record & very well recorded. Strong compositions, mostly extended songs. A lot of ideas & fine detail. Echoes of late (Western Culture) Heavy Cow, Magna, Kew Rhinos, Progressive European Rock & experimental music & American 'edge'. Some of the lyrics a little gratuitous, but the whole is engagingly complex & satisfyingly direct. Stimulating. Extraordinary hand-made covers.

PHILIPPE CAUVIN (France)

Memento A

No sensation but imagination & quality. Guitarist & singer with strong melodic sense & fine ear for timbre, working with keyboards & percussions & synthesiser. Singing reminds a little of C. Vander, music belongs in its' own category.





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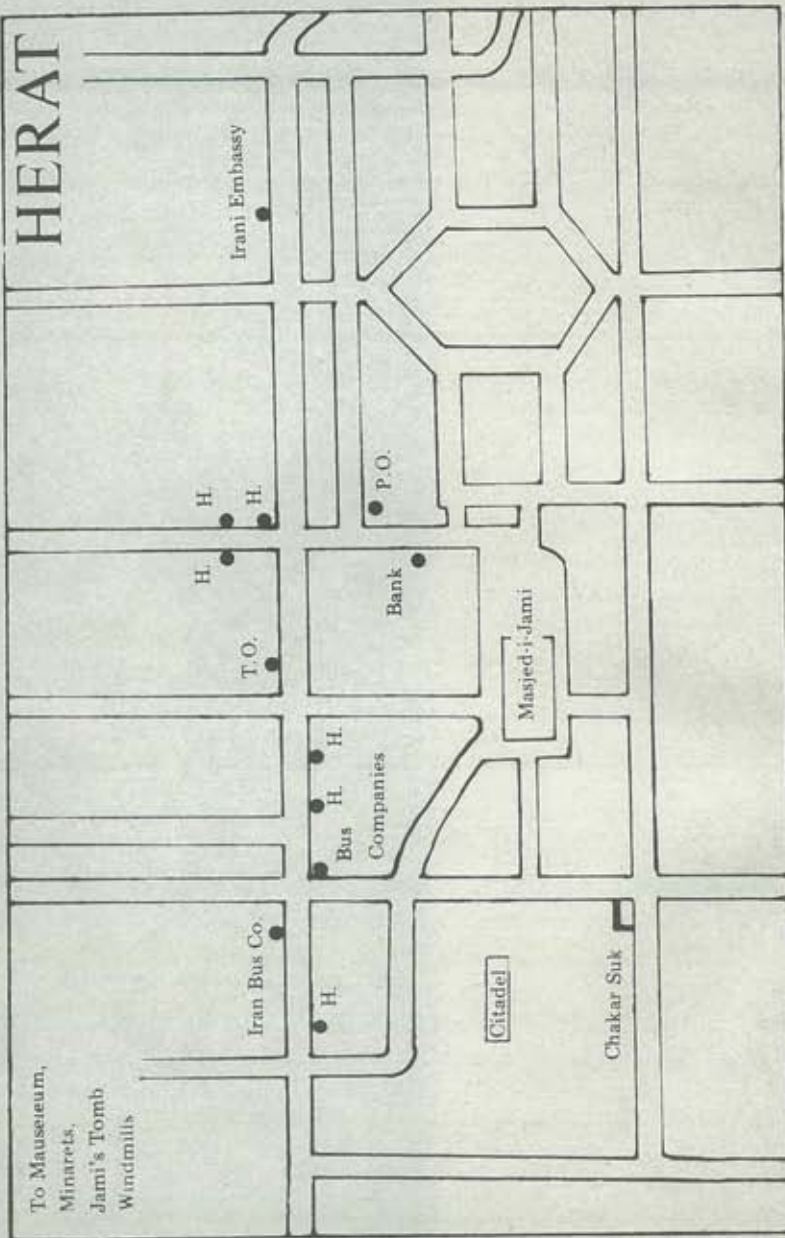
We pledge: ALL our policies are *MT* policies, & all our promises *MT* promises !



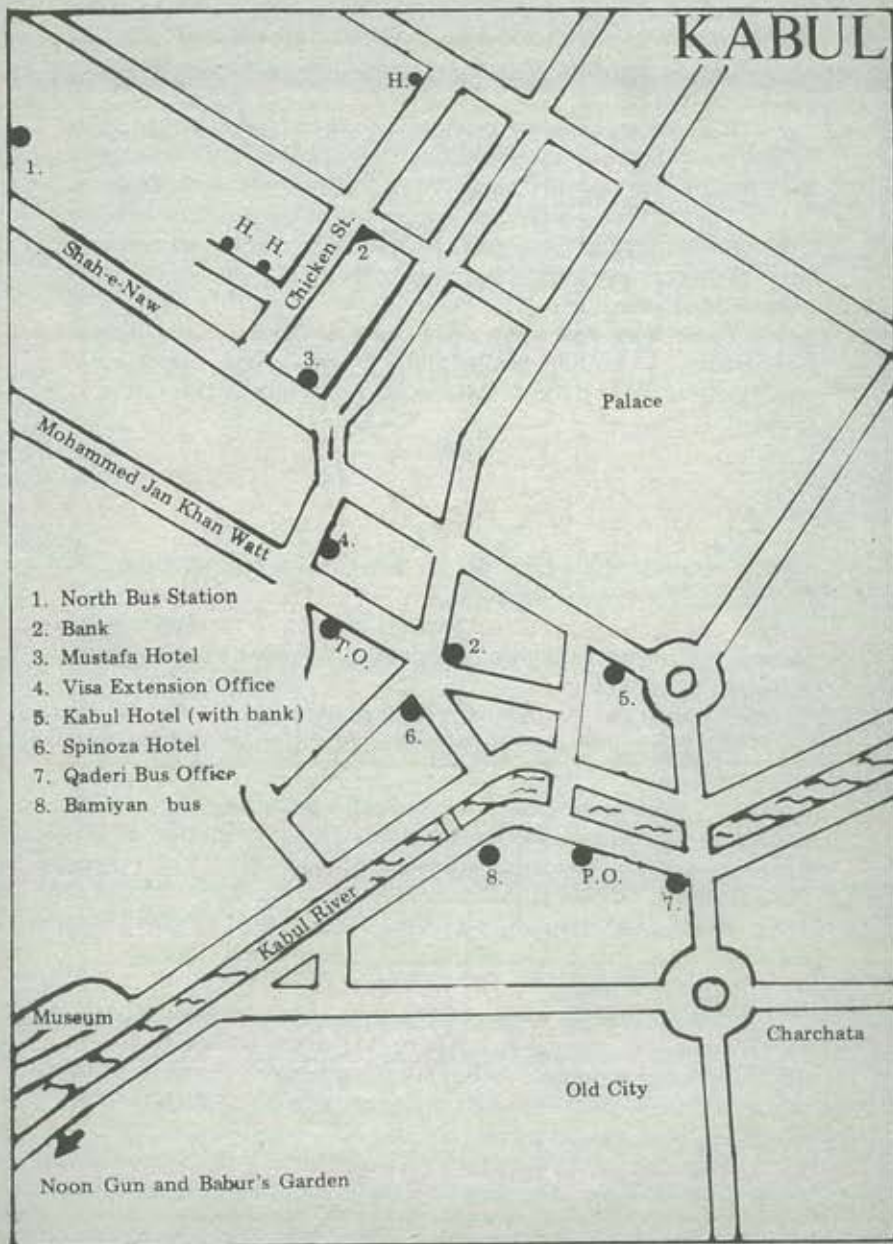
# GUIDE TO ASIA

700

NEPAL SRI LANKA  
INDIA  
PAKISTAN  
AFGHANISTAN  
IRAN  
TURKEY



## KABUL



day transit visa. Not checked on the border where they only ask for an oral declaration. Currency — about 40 Afs equal \$1 and 80 Afs to the £.

It's cold and snowy in Winter, and roads may be blocked by snow and ice, but it's pleasantly free of other travellers, and the local people may feel slightly less hassled and be more open.

One difficulty is that many people in the country have until recently had little contact with money in the quantities that foreigners use, and when some of us start flashing it around they can get greedy.

There is a staple choice of kebabs or vegetable rice in most restaurants, but in the travelled parts there is a wide variety of western food. You have to start worrying about hygiene here, though.

## HERAT

**Sights:** Pleasant city to wander in. The town is famous for sandals but it's hard to get a good pair.

**Hotels:** Along the main street which buses finish on. Pardees is recommended but I only had a meal there, which was pleasant. From 40 Afs a bed.

**Tourist Office:** On the main street, variously described as Darwaza Maler and Hasing Street. They had run out of maps but let me copy my own.

**Transport:** Qaderi buses are fast and are new buses which break down less. Recommended by the locals. Other buses may be good but some are used by pickpockets and thieves and may not survive the hot desert. Book early if possible.

Kabul bus leaves at 4 or 5 am., costs 300 Afs, takes 15 hours for 1100 Kms. Bring food. Kandahar buses leave during the morning, take 8 hours, cost 175 Afs.

It is possible to go direct to Mazar-i-Sharif by truck. Ask at the TO who will also get you a permit. It takes three dry, dusty days; food and accommodation are relatively expensive and basic. Some say it is a great experience, others wouldn't touch it. It is beautiful, wild and primitive.

Mini-bus to the border, 60 Afs, six buses a day but it is best to take the 6.30 am. one, as you waste a lot of time at the border and may miss the bus to Meshed. Book the day before.

### MAZAR-I-SHARIF

**Comment:** Site of the beautiful Mosque, burial place of Mohammed's brother-in-law, Ali. Balkh, nearby, is the birthplace of Zarathustra and Jelaluddin Rami. This city and the trip are one of Afghanistan's few remaining unspoilt yet accessible areas.

**Transport:** Many buses to Kabul, and trucks to Herat (see Herat).

### KANDAHAR

**Comment:** Good embroidered shirts and shirt fronts at market, 300 — 500 Afs. There are symmetrical designs if you ask around but they are not always on show. Shirt fronts are as good as the shirts, which are often badly made with not enough room under the arms.

**Hotels:** Near bus terminus and on the Herat Road, Good bakery on opposite side of clock tower. From 40 Afs a bed.

**Transport:** Qaderi runs to Kabul and Herat — 6 per day to Kabul; one at 5.15 am. to Herat. Others run up until 1 pm. 110 — 150 Afs to Herat; 110 Afs to Kabul.

### KABUL

**Comments:** Currency exchange in the Old City, at Sarai Shazada, near the river. It may only be worth it for large amounts, and you should look at a Newsweek first for the latest rates. Don't hand over your money till you have received your exchange.

**Sights:** Modern Kabul looks unbelievably drab — half built East European style — but the atmosphere in the city as a whole is pleasant. Getting around is confusing as few people speak English. It has an excellent museum, silver market and sheepskin coats.

The old city is best for shopping — bargain hard.

**Hotels:** Depending on the season and how full the hotels are, all prices are open to bargaining. Chicken Street, and the old city overlooking the bazaar have hotels at 30 Afs a bed with mythical hot showers. They never seem to work when you want them.

Chicken Street is in Shah-e-Naw and has developed into a tourist/handicraft street, selling carpets, jewellery, coats, beads, etc. at inflated prices using high-pressure sales techniques. However, there are restaurants and shops selling tasty food, such as the New Steak House, the Mercedes, the Place With No Name and Cable Hogue.

The last two are vegetarian and they are recommended for sleeping in too in summer. On Shah-e-Naw is the Mustapha, a modern,









































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MIKE NELSON  
LONELY PLANET

21 December 2006 - 25 February 2007

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MIKE NELSON



