

VARIANT MAGAZINE AUTUMN '91

The Last Weekend

Alston. June 21th-23rd.

Alston, 'the highest market town in England', provided the setting for *The Last Weekend*, a three day event of live art presented by the *Edge Biennale Trust* and coinciding with the summer solstice. Eleven artists from Britain and Europe were invited to make work for this rural location, situated on the Pennine Way and occupying a position of particular isolation. It was chosen for a number of reasons; set in beautiful scenery, Alston is small yet offers enough facilities to accomodate an international gathering of this sort. It was also felt by the organisers that although the community is very mixed, in some senses it is quite highly developed in terms of understanding arts and crafts. The intention however, was not so much to do an event for the rural community as to use Alston as one might a conference centre, utilising rural sites and materials and in some cases address rural issues.

Issues around the Gulf War were also touched on in *Tree Line Poison Well* by **Nick Stewart**, sited in a derelict mill by the side of the river. In two parts, the first involved the artist, clad in black, kneeling on top of a wall of the building and staring out across a meadow to the war memorial, meditatively raising and lowering a strip of bandage in the wind. Inside, the same material connected a small willow tree to a well, filled with oil and surrounded with lead, to suggest overflow. The focus of elevation/inversion of tree and well was shifted in the later performance when the nettles, which had previously clogged the interior, were cut down, bundled with lead ribbons and affixed to an interior wall. Stewart, blindfolded, was connected by the same taut fabric to the well and tension was created as he struggled to retrieve what was weighed down. A lead box was salvaged, cut open with a stanley knife and the revealed contents of newspapers arranged. Whilst it was apparent that these Guardian headlines concerned the Gulf War, the action of indexing and folding them left no time to locate specifics. These papers were then shoved into niches in the wall, below the nettles, and incinerated.

Associated relationships between Alston's lead mining history and wider issues of industry and waste, coupled with the controlled intensity of the latter performance made this a particularly interesting work.

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