



Draw me a Castle
Pat Flynn

Foreword

The worlds created by Pat Flynn explore modern landscapes, architecture and fiction. They are hauntingly familiar, filled with hope and aspiration. From a British retail shopping mall with its uniform Americanisation, to a reflection of a shoe shop in a shiny marble floor, Flynn takes the viewer into a recognisable space that feels at first glance comfortable and safe.

However, Flynn's romantic cityscapes are globally generic spaces that seem bereft of human intervention. This lack of presence joined with the expectation of action places the viewer in some form of paralysing introspection in which they are forced to think about their daily activity, the public spaces around them and their interaction with other people.

Flynn's photographic images are not photographs at all, but are painstakingly created, pixel by pixel. Close up you can stare into the detail of the recreated spaces and imagine that you are there, as part of the image but as you stand back the view creates

a more out of body sensation as if you are viewing this world from outer space, looking down into a lost civilisation.

Flynn's work shifts from computer-generated photographs to animations. Again, the viewer is seduced into several different worlds: from a snake that continuously moves through a peep-hole shoe, to a child's mobile, recreating Ptolemy's model of our solar system where the celestial bodies are reduced to small circular discs perpetually spinning around Earth. 'Untitled (Coins)' shows golden coins continually cascading downwards into an undefined blackness. The movement seduces the viewer into an almost hypnotic state, waiting for something to happen, but nothing ever does so you are left with a feeling of anticipation and the inevitable, that nothing will change.

When a 'real' physical object does appear in Flynn's practice, it is often taken from the world he creates or from a computer game environment that influences his work. He plays with scale

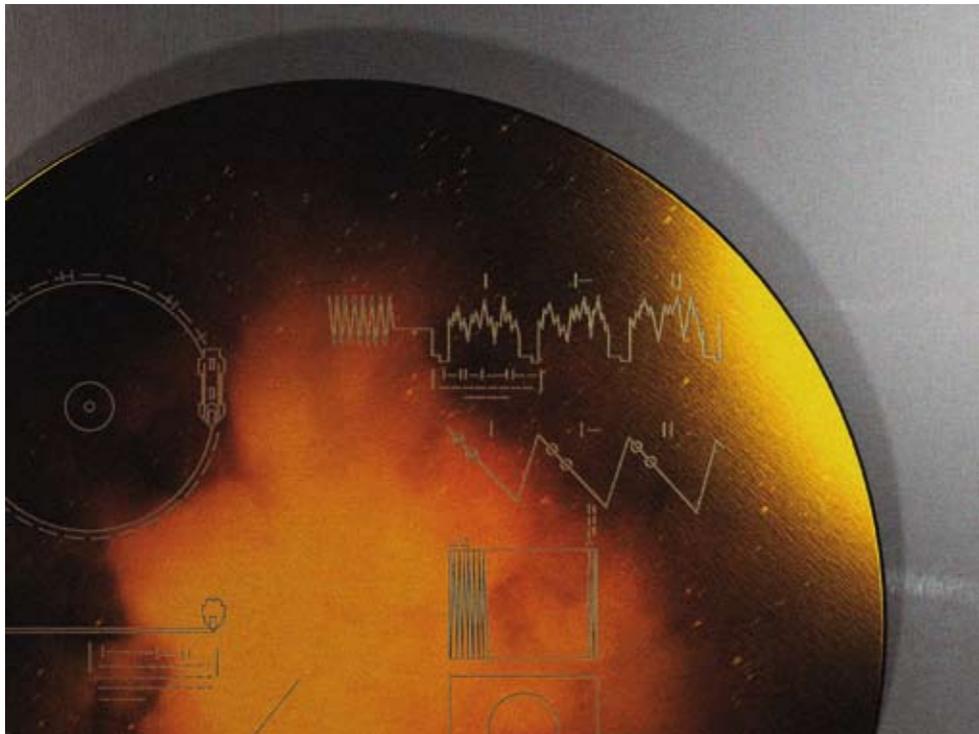
and the audience's proximity to the object whether in film, photography or sculpture. You are taken on a journey, tempted in by the luxurious surface of the artwork, but quickly you begin to experience a darker state within these worlds that Flynn creates. Are these 'real' places or fake imposters? Why am I stuck in these perpetual cycles of movement that have no beginning or end?

These feelings of anticipation and expectation of a changing state haunt Flynn's practice. These brilliantly executed creations are closely linked with unidentifiable feelings of guilt for being alive and echo the circular nature of our lives. The reality is Flynn has created a series of mirrors in which we see the reflection of our true existence; these worlds are right outside our own front door, as well as inside of ourselves.

Holly Davey
Acting Visual Arts Programmer



Above and opposite:
Untitled (Mobile), 2006.
Still from digital animation.



Above: Untitled (Voyager), detail,
2007. Diasec print.

Opposite: Untitled (Voyager),
2007. Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



Pixels and Dust

Graham Parker

When Pat Flynn was a kid in the early 1980s, in the North West of England, he watched his brother type a short sequence of 'Draw' commands into a ZX Spectrum computer, to produce a series of circles onscreen. His brother was using a language called BASIC (Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code), which was devised in 1963 as an inefficient programming language in terms of speaking to the computer processor, but metaphorically explicit enough for non-specialists to describe and run simple operations on a microcomputer, in a syntax close to English. Having watched his brother, and entranced by the possibilities, Flynn used his own begrudgingly granted time at the keyboard to type his first command:

Draw me a castle

He describes the subsequent disappointment as one that has haunted his work since.

Today Flynn could build a virtual castle if he wanted. The onscreen possibilities of 3D programming grow exponentially with each new software iteration and Flynn is an adept visualiser and renderer of such imagery. But in his work, the adeptness is often married to visual depictions of limitation or failure in the face of

the infinite, which of course carry an art-historical knowledge of the romantic sublime, but perhaps more personally echo a two-decade old error message received by a small boy in Manchester, trying to explain his imagination to a machine.

Flynn and I grew up at the same time in different provincial cities — Manchester and Belfast. Punk and Thatcherism, to name two phenomena, passed through the landscape at different local speeds and frequencies, leaving transformed sensibilities and urban geographies we were both slightly too young to register as unnatural. Of the innovations we were self-consciously aware of, home computers began to be more affordable and a generation of kids began swapping cassette tapes of games alongside their compilation tapes of records and songs taped off the radio during Sunday night's chart rundown. At weekends the same kids might make their way to their local high street, possibly stopping in to the local Dixons or Curry's to sneak onto the computers on display and enter quick looped commands to make them repeat the kid's name, favourite band, or obscenity ad infinitum. Later, if we read Debord we might be told that it was impossible to think outside of the terms of the spectacle, but in those

brief moments of minor delinquency on a particular screen in a particularly accented city, there was a hint of emancipatory local possibility. There was an illusory sense of freedom in the moment we saw ourselves reflected in what we took for public media space, within the second in which we hit the final return key.

Subsequently, the high streets these shops were located on were transformed by the market logic of the retail park and its flexible shells for high turnover commerce. In a recent project Flynn made a 3D computer model of just such a park, and captured a series of stills from it showing the park at peace under a brooding Martian-red sky. With its Pizza Hut architecture and Macdonald's arches it is instantly legible, but there is no trace of human presence in the images — no rubbish, graffiti, teenage drinkers or 50-something security guards made redundant from manufacturing jobs. Just an eerie, pristine site, sitting under the indifferent heavens that hover over Lancashire and Kentucky alike.

Somewhere in those heavens is a small space probe carrying a Golden LP record featuring the sounds of earth and rudimentary information on humanity. The Voyager probe set off

through the gas and dust of space in 1977, just as punk was transforming Mancunian popular culture and defining the cultural terrain Flynn's generation of artists would ultimately inherit. It's ironic to think of speed-fuelled Punk railing against the 'dinosaurs' of prog-rock, whilst the ultimate concept album sped amongst the dinosaur-slaying meteors. Punk left a legacy of cultural self-sufficiency in Manchester that was taken to an extreme in a city where the lingua franca was already chippy self-aggrandisement. Sometimes the city talked volubly to itself, in between buttonholing others to listen. And whilst somewhere along the line to globalisation and the 'free' exchange of information, many western cities had by necessity also turned back in on themselves to assert specific, marketable identities within an increasingly homogenous global market, Manchester's mean mode of discourse seemed all too suited to giving up on dreams of outer space as both goal and metaphor. The Voyager probe exited the solar system in June 2006, after several Buzzcocks reunions, to the indifference of a generation of grown up kids who no longer drew rockets.

However, one of the kids had kept his eye on the imagined vanishing point of the receding probe — just as he'd stayed willfully out of step with the immediate cultural politics and follies of the city he lived in. A recent Diasec photographic diptych made by Flynn shows the Voyager probe in a mass of darkest space, alongside a night-time shot of a shark's eye emerging from water — the night sky reflected in it. It's brooding and ambitious and deeply melancholic. Flynn has a self-deprecating way of describing his preferred aesthetic as a kind of camp, but that may in part be a defence mechanism for justifying his work in a city where there are so many cultural forces mitigating against the use of the metaphysical poetics he relies on. It's his awareness of and navigation amongst these forces that I find intriguing. Flynn makes pixel perfect scenes that don't shy from addressing the awe of the sublime, whilst the artist himself is constantly negotiating and more or less successfully negating the real time quotidian experience of living in the sarcastic puritanism of Manchester, England.

In this dialectic spirit it's important to note that Flynn's electronic practice emerged out of a very physical sculptural practice, albeit one that was already mapping back populist

electronic figuration into the physical world. An early experience I have of his work is of helping lift a life-size sculpture of a car, coated in a laminated rendering of the pixels used to depict it in the background of a video game, out of a garage — trying not to scuff the edges or break our fingers as we tilted it onto the back of a van parked in Withington, Manchester. Games designers use sparse arrangements of pixels (and redundancies where possible) to create visually credible background objects with the least amount of memory — aiming for a virtual weightlessness of sorts that keep the game flowing faster. Flynn would magnify and transfer these surfaces onto MDF frames to create life-sized sculptures of boulders, cars, etc. that had an equally decorative place in a world, but were subject to this world's physical laws and a contingent weight of melancholy.

The artist often refers with approval to an Edward Allington text in which Allington spoke of the 'futility' of surface in relation to sculpture and of coming in to his studio each morning to find his new work covered in a fine layer of dust. And when I think of the reasons for Flynn's increasing use of digital imagery as a primary medium in his work, following these earlier physical

sculptures, I'm reminded of Bas Jan Ader's response to being asked why he made so much work about falling: "Because gravity defeats me."¹

And yet defeat, failure and chance still haunt the smooth animations of Flynn's recent work — most explicitly in the lottery balls churning endlessly, suggesting a miniscule and endlessly postponed chance of victory. It's there, too, in the beautifully rendered and beautifully mistaken animation of the Ptolemaic universe as a child's mobile, with earth stood still at the centre as the planets rotate around it — an animated conceit waiting to be undone by some digital Galileo's "And yet it moves."²

Perhaps most explicitly Flynn recently borrowed the Sinn Fein slogan, "Ourselves alone"³ for an exhibition title where, stripped of its defiant political context, it was transformed into a description of an existential aching that few of his peers dare admit to approaching.

In 1972 William Crowther, a computer programmer and amateur rock climber, found himself negotiating a divorce. Faced with limited access to his daughters and as a break from the pressures of writing assembly

code for the routers of ARPAnet (think proto internet), Crowther wrote a text-based adventure game called 'Colossal Cave Adventure' (later just 'Adventure') for his daughters, loosely based on his climbing experience in the Kentucky Mammoth cave system — much of it carried out with his now-estranged wife, coincidentally called Pat, who had written the plotting program that enabled them to visually map their explorations. The game spread through the nascent internet, often discreetly installed and left on machines overnight to greet the next user with an unexplained magical world opening up from their terminal, albeit one described and navigable only in clipped, functional phrases that the user discovered by trial and error (as with BASIC its principal achievement was perhaps a linguistic interface that was intuitive to non-computer specialists: 'Look, Use, Listen, Take, Eat, Enter', etc).

'Adventure' defined a genre of gaming that has mutated into the multi-user online games and arguably many of the social-networking sites (MySpace etc) of today. In a celebrated and now iconic description from the start of the game, the scene is described thus:

You are in a 20-foot depression floored with bare dirt. Set into the dirt is a strong steel grate mounted in concrete. A dry streambed leads into the depression.

The scene matches the description of an actual entrance to the Bedquilt cave in the Mammoth system and some gamers claim to have been able to carry out rudimentary navigation of the caves from the description of the fictional caves described in 'Adventure'. Aside from that though, there's something of the necessarily brief descriptions permitted by the processing capabilities of computers at the time, that strikes a chord with me in thinking about Flynn's work both now and as a child asking the computer to draw him a castle. Just as Crowther's "20-foot depression floored with bare dirt" might be said to have its origins in both a patch of Kentucky hillside and personal, psychological terrain, so Flynn's animations, prints and sculptures wrestle with a very personal and local set of implications and histories.

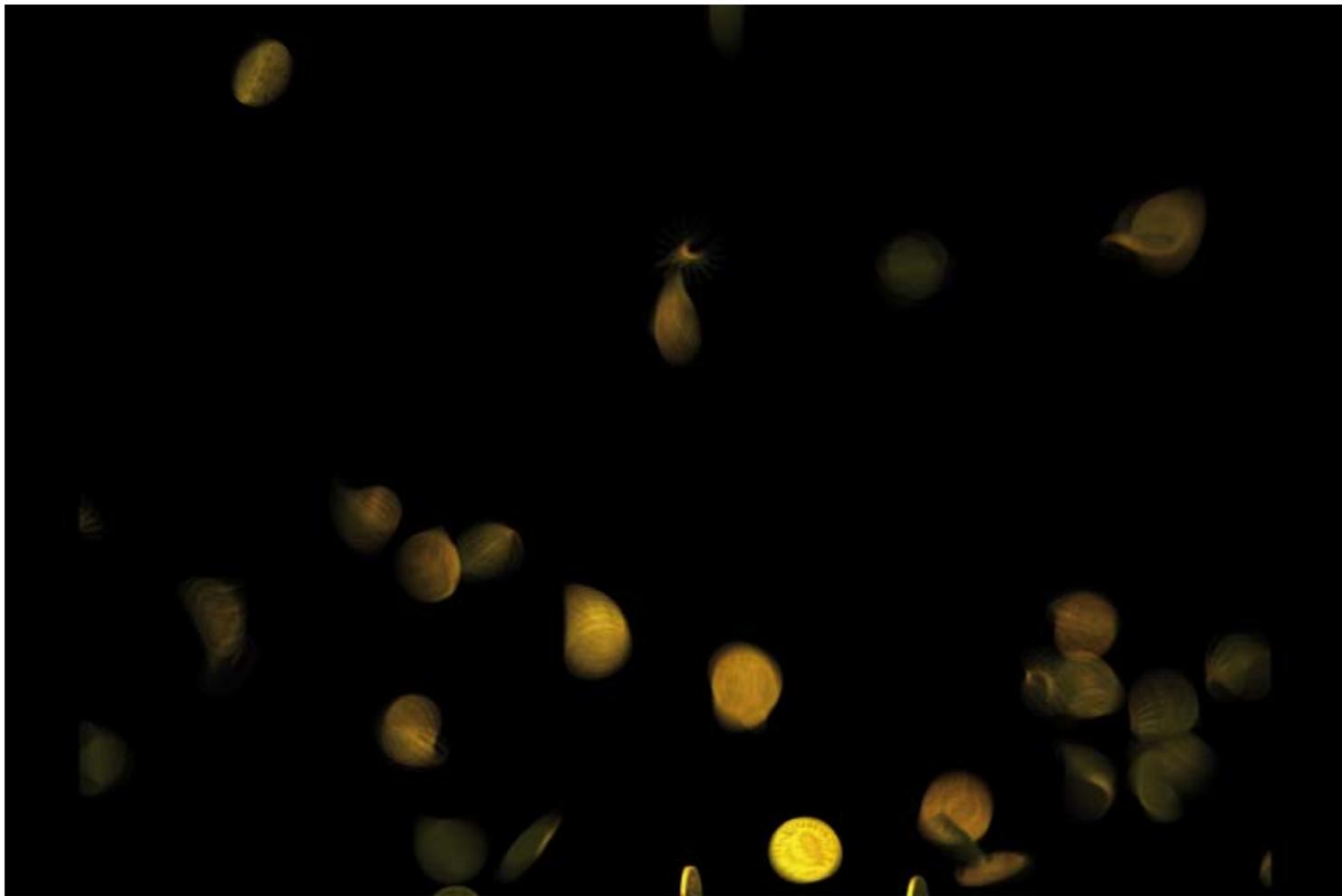
It's this tangible struggle, as much as any compositional element, that acts as a necessary punctum by which we can approach and experience these works as emotionally charged pixels set amongst our shared dust.

Graham Parker is an artist. He lives in New York.

¹ When Ader showed his films 'Falling I' and 'Falling II' in Düsseldorf in 1971, they were accompanied by an artist-drafted descriptive text reading only: "The artist's body as gravity makes itself its master." See Godfrey, Tony. Conceptual Art. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1998

² "E pur si muove". Iconic, though probably apocryphal, words spoken by Galileo after recanting his defence of heliocentrism (a theory undermining the Ptolemaic conception of the universe) before a Papal inquisition. Stillman Drake, Galileo at Work: His Scientific Biography, (Dover Publications, Mineola, NY, 2003)

³ 'Sinn Fein', Irish political party, whose name literally translates from the Gaelic as 'We Ourselves', more commonly, 'Ourselves alone'. Source, Sinn Fein.



Above and right:
Untitled (Coins), 2001.
Still from digital animation.



Above and right:
Untitled (Snake), 2007.
Still from digital animation.

If you hit the ground you die

Martin Vincent

Sitting on the underground train thinking of the time it takes to make a journey, and how you are not doing anything, but you are getting somewhere. You are still, but you are moving, you are only waiting to arrive. You stare at the floor of the train, at the aluminium grid that provides grip for the feet of boarding and detraining passengers, and it becomes fascinating. Your eyes follow the positive lines of the raised areas, then the negative lines of the spaces between, the intersections of grids and networks.

On such brief journeys you could learn to remove yourself from aimless reverie by reading a book, but sometimes the very book you are reading can encourage your drifting thoughts. Italo Calvino's famous novel, 'If on a Winter's Night a Traveller', might be simplistically described as a sequence of beginnings of stories that in the end add up to a story in themselves. There is a lot more to it than that of course, it is a limitlessly self-referential book. One of the chapters has the tautological title 'In a network of lines that intersect' (if the lines did not intersect it would not be a network). How intentionally the tautology is implanted in this most tautological of fictions is open to question, because this is the English

translation from the author's original Italian. Perhaps the tense is slightly different, and we should be thinking that the lines are in the process of intersecting, of becoming a network, and that this process is continual. In Calvino's fiction, if you follow one path then it is inevitable that you will, sooner or later, intersect with another.

In the opening title sequence of Alfred Hitchcock's 'North By Northwest', animated lines descend and cross the screen, intersecting to become a network, a mesh onto which the words of the credits slot, sliding down and across, stopping like trains at a station, then moving off to allow the next credit to slot into place. An extraneous decorative bar regularly slips down one side of the screen, just to add extra movement. An image emerges behind the lines, and we discover that they delineate the grid of a glass-fronted high-rise building, seen at an angle. The title sequence was created by graphic designer Saul Bass, whose name is synonymous with this specialised area of cinema.

Bass' titles for Martin Scorsese's 'Casino' presage the entire film. Beginning with an explosion, we see the silhouette of Robert De Niro flung into the inferno, falling through flames, a descent into

hell depicted in the most literal way imaginable. The flames fade into the lights of Las Vegas casinos, seen close-up in geometric sequences of gorgeous artificiality. Set to Bach's St Matthew Passion, the sequence is fearlessly camp and indulgent. De Niro continues to fall as close-up flames rise up from the bottom of the screen. It is a dream-like space from which we awaken into the movie. The kind of space permitted only in title sequences, experimental animation, or artists' video.

Pat Flynn speaks admiringly of Saul Bass' willingness to adopt the visual styles of contemporary art without concerning himself with the conceptual baggage attached to them. Bass is not afraid to luxuriate in the purely visual. A title sequence has no obligation to forward the narrative, it is a few minutes where time stands still, like the underground train ride, while we wait for the story to begin. A Bass opening sequence can contain the whole story within its graphic lines, and stand up as work in its own right. His early sequences, from the 1950s and 60s, used animations that looked like paper cut outs (to most powerful effect in 'The Man with the Golden Arm', where angular lines replicate the harsh intensity of Frank Sinatra's portrayal of a reforming heroin addict). Later, working

with his wife Elaine, he used more lush, computer-generated images.

Usually, in galleries, art on video is shown on a continuous loop, projected on a screen in a darkened room — a black box. Often the work shown this way has a beginning, a middle and an end, but the demands of art require constant access — that's the nature of the way art is exhibited, and demonstrates that the tradition of object-making cannot easily be bucked. Some artists fight this context by demanding timed showings, many simply capitulate and allow films which have a clear narrative to be dropped in on and sampled at random, placing reliance on the diligent viewer staying until the video reaches the point they came in at.

Flynn doesn't fight the context, his recent computer-made films have no beginning or end — he makes loops. The work is, in this sense, gallery friendly. The lottery balls spin and fall constantly, the mobile of the Ptolemaic universe keeps on rotating, the snake weaves endlessly through the toe of the shoe. An earlier work does have a beginning, and is an appropriate starting point. It shows coins falling to the ground and bouncing, spinning and finally settling. It uses a computerised

simulation of gravity — one which is imperfect, because gravity is the hardest thing to simulate, and within the world of computers, the easiest thing to avoid.

There was a cheaply made programme shown on satellite television a couple of years ago titled ‘The Race Against Gravity’. It was about space exploration, but that title prompts the thought that racing against gravity is what we are all doing on Earth anyway. Or perhaps fighting gravity. We always lose in the end though — or gravity wins, dragging us inevitably back down to Earth. Except perhaps for those people who get their ashes sent into space. Gravity and mortality can be synonymous, and the purpose of space travel is to represent the possibility of escaping both.

While Italo Calvino seems to offer an infinity of intersections, the possibility of no intersection also needs to be faced. The Voyager spacecraft is right now moving along its pathway further and further from Earth. It carries with it a gold-plated disc containing information which, it is hoped, could be read by other intelligent life forms in the universe, should it ever cross their path. It is a twelve-inch analogue disc designed to be played with a stylus (also included) at sixteen and two thirds

rpm. It contains images and music from the cultures of the earth selected by a team led by TV scientist Carl Sagan. It represents a time-capsule of Earth in 1977. (And is the ultimate unattainable holy grail of any record collector.)

Flynn has depicted the Voyager isolated against the dark nothingness of space, and framed by a distant halo, a star nebula. He has also made use of the image of the disc designed to convey the hopes of all humanity. Voyager is a physical encapsulation of our hapless desire to communicate — even if we have nothing to say: it includes people saying ‘hello’ in 55 languages. Voyager has escaped gravity, and is drifting on a quest which might never end.

After his death, Scotty from ‘Star Trek’ (aka Irish Canadian actor James Doohan) had his remains launched into space. Well, not quite. Scotty never escaped gravity, a small part of his ashes were sent up in a rocket over the New Mexican desert, where they reached a height of 72 miles, before being parachuted back to earth, to be retrieved and placed in a garden of remembrance. Except the ashes were lost, and Scotty joined the ranks of those ill-fated, anonymous crew members who stood at the back of

every Star Ship Enterprise landing party, beamed down to an alien desert, never to go home again.

In a diptych of images, Flynn pairs the Voyager with the eye of a shark reflecting the night sky. Look at Saul Bass’ titles for Hitchcock’s ‘Vertigo’ for more clues to Flynn’s visual inspiration — Kim Novak’s eye in extreme close up, containing a spinning vortex. And it is not just title sequences, Flynn’s snake animation is an unashamed steal from ‘Indiana Jones’. It picks up on the movie’s fetishism and amplifies it through isolation and repetition. It is disconcerting and ambiguous.

Flynn’s snake, as we’ve observed, is endless. It is like the snake that eats its tail, the ouroboros. One of the most ancient human symbols, the ouroboros is said to represent the cycle of the universe, creation coming out of destruction, life constantly consuming and renewing itself. Carl Jung identified it as a central archetype in the human psyche. In Flynn’s work this powerful symbolic presence is alloyed with the cheap violation of popular cinema. An extenuated ouroboros creeping through a shiny white stiletto-healed shoe.

The glossy artificiality of the image should have a dehumanising effect, but what is happening here is all too human. Snakes are inextricably connected with humanity’s lowest urges. Their association with the Fall is more than metaphorical, it is a physical, visceral thing. Crawling on their bellies they constantly remind us that gravity is in operation, and we are all only a slip of the foot away from crashing to the ground.

Flynn chooses to show his work on monitors rather than projections. Again, it is part of the recognition that presenting something in a gallery means that it is inevitably encountered as an object, to be approached by the viewer and given as much or little time as the viewer feels it warrants. Films in galleries, time-based works, are in constant conflict with this. Flynn’s looping animations give us a sense of suspended time. We wonder if they continue when the gallery is closed. Within the closed world of computer animation the snake never stops moving. The gallery visitor can rest assured that he or she has not missed the beginning, and can leave without missing the ending. Gravity is always present, but falling can be infinitely extended. It is very much like a dream of falling, where, they say, if you hit the ground you will never wake up.

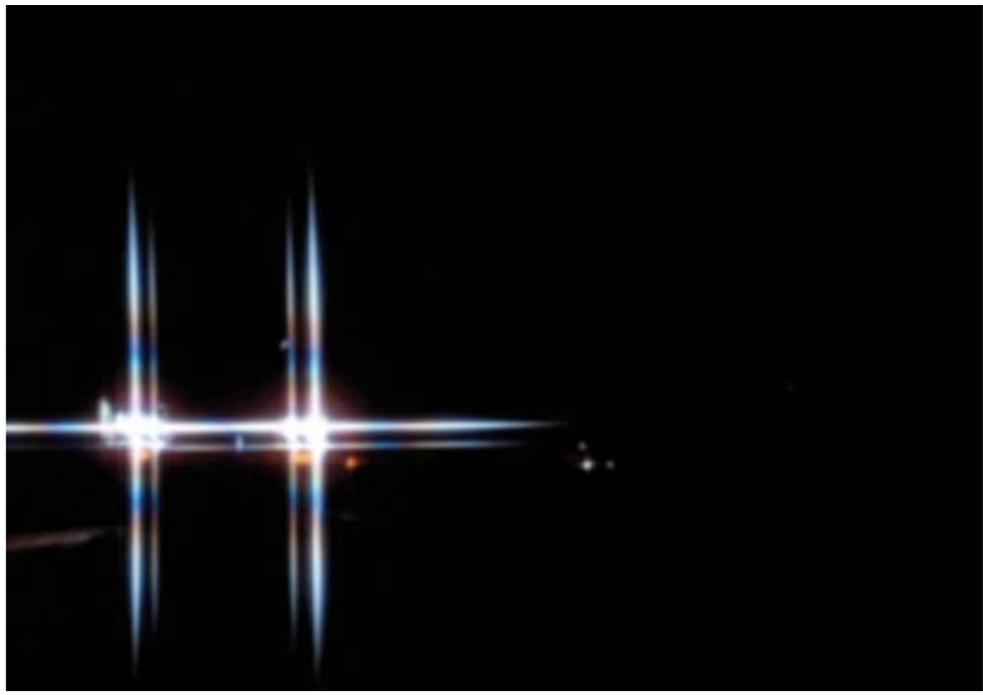
The shininess of computer-made works lends sufficient distance to allow the themes to emerge, and there is no escaping the quiddity of real objects. The computer’s clumsy gravity underlines both its artificiality and the human failings that go into its making. Real gravity, as Scotty now knows, cannot be so easily set aside.

There are no intersections on the Glasgow Underground. It is not a network, it is a simple loop, with two lines — clockwise and anticlockwise. If you get on the wrong train you will get to your stop the long way round. If you miss your stop you can stay on the train and in twenty minutes or so you will arrive again. Or you can defer your responsibilities and ride all day, knowing that as soon as you stop your life will continue, and then there will be no escape.

Martin Vincent is Captain of Aye-Aye Books, Glasgow and Salford.



Untitled (Shark's Eye),
2007. Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



Untitled (Eyes), 2006.
Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



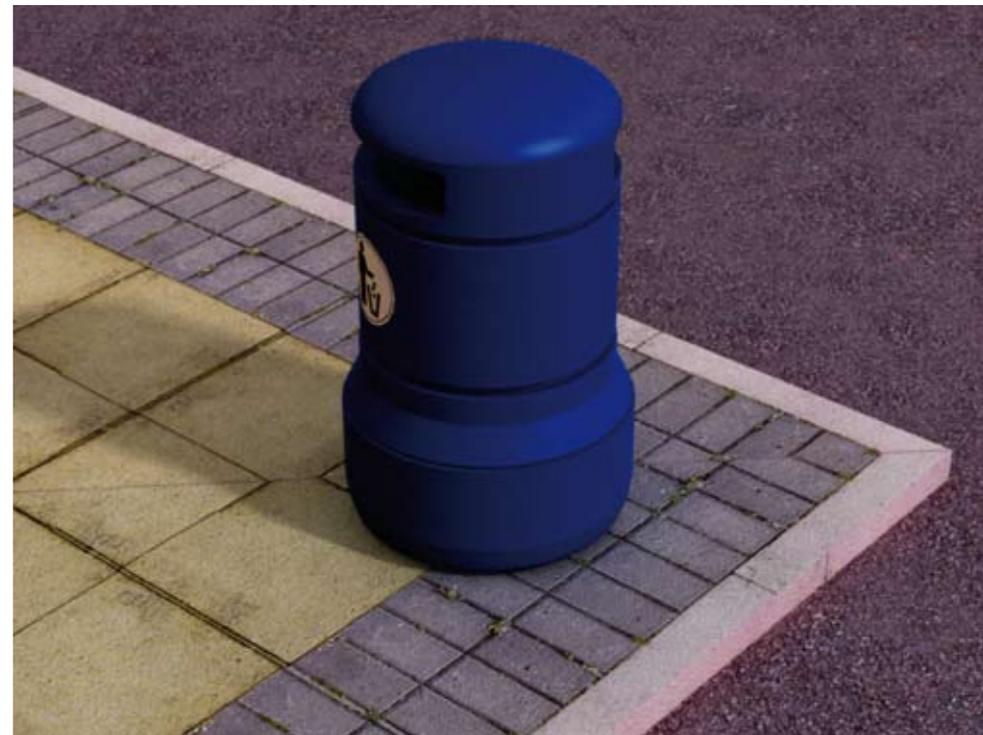
Untitled (Retail Park_A),
2005-06. Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



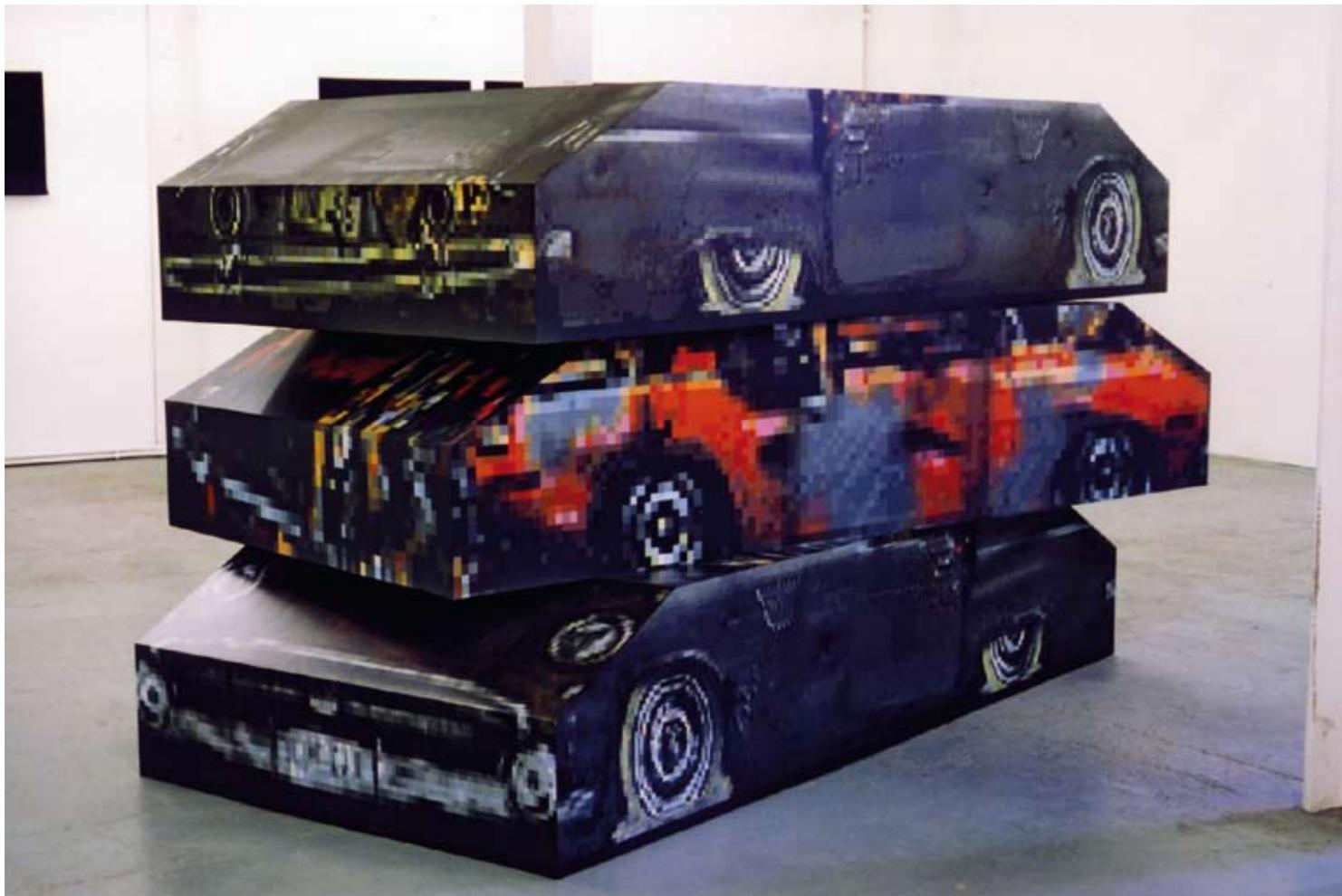
Untitled (Retail Park_B),
2005-06. Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



Untitled (Floor), 2007.
Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



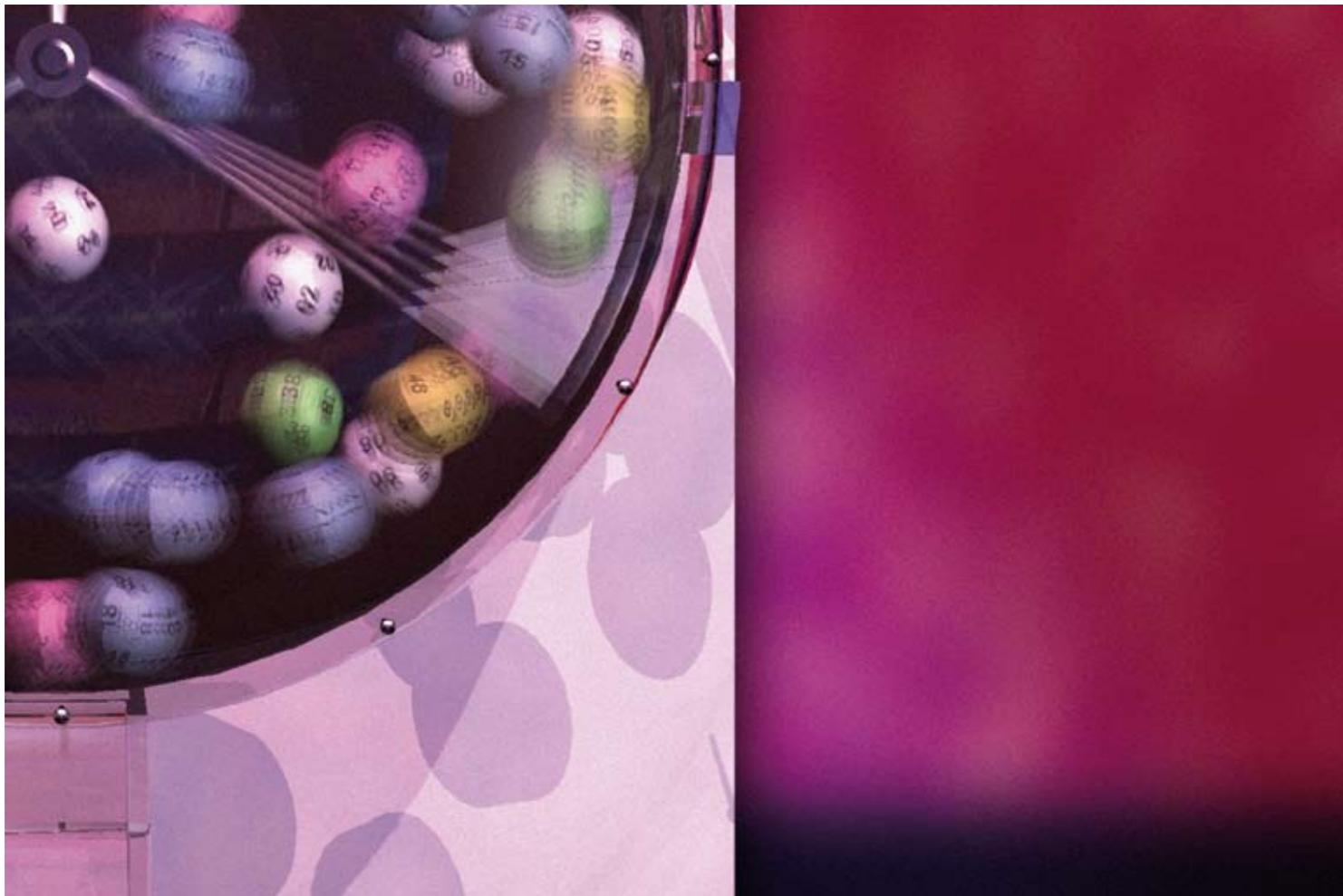
Untitled (Bin), 2007.
Diasec print.
180cm x 240cm



Untitled (Junk Yard Cars),
2000. MDF and Lambda print.



Untitled (Coliseum), 2007.
MDF and Lambda print.



Untitled (Moonstone), 2004.
Still from a digital animation.

Born 1972, Leigh, UK
 Lives in Manchester, UK
 1997-98
 MA Fine Art, Manchester
 Metropolitan University, Manchester,
 UK
 1993-96
 BA (Hons) Fine Art,
 Staffordshire University

Solo exhibitions

2007
 'Solo exhibition', Vane, Newcastle
 upon Tyne, UK (forthcoming)
 'Draw Me A Castle' Chapter, Cardiff, UK
 'Gas and Dust' The International 3,
 Manchester, UK
2006
 'Ourselves alone', Kunstraum Marion
 Scharmann, Cologne, Germany

Selected group exhibitions

2007
 'Videoclub', Brighton, UK
 www.videoclub.org.uk
 year07 art projects London, UK
 Kunstraum Marion Scharmann,
 'México Arte Contemporáneo',
 Mexico City, Mexico.
 Scope Basel, Basel, Switzerland
2006
 'Zoo Art Fair', The International 3
 stand, London, UK
 'Preview Berlin' Kunstraum Marion

Scharmann stand, Berlin, Germany
 'His Name is Full of Miracles...',
 Site Gallery, Sheffield, UK
 'BMCA Showreel', Rogue studios,
 Manchester, UK
 'Settling In', 338 Great Western Street,
 Manchester, UK
 Vane, Nova art fair, Chicago, USA
2005

'Zoo Art Fair', The International 3
 stand, London, UK
2004
 'We go round and round in the night
 and are consumed by fire', Liverpool
 Biennial, The Novas Building,
 Independent District, Liverpool, UK
 'Ain't no love in the heart of the city',
 CBAT, Cardiff, UK
2003

'We go round and round in the night
 and are consumed by fire', Comme
 Ça space, New York, USA
 'Thermo03', The Lowry, Salford, UK
2002
 'Out Of Town', Collective Gallery,
 Edinburgh, UK
 'Out Of Town', University of Central
 England, Birmingham, UK
2001
 'Gangster, Macho', Debenhams
 Windows, Tib Street, Manchester, UK
 'Builders Arms', The International 3,
 Manchester, UK
 'Ich Bin', Galerie 2YK, Berlin, Germany

'Pixel', Chapman Gallery, Salford
 University, Salford, UK
 'Deliverance', Leeds Metropolitan
 University Gallery, Leeds, UK
 'A History of the Future', Waygood
 Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
 'Apocalypse Now and Next Week',
 Outline Gallery, Amsterdam,
 The Netherlands
2000

'Utopia', Flux Space, Flux Magazine,
 Manchester, UK
 'The Grotto Show', Castlefield Art
 Gallery, Manchester, UK
 'Goethe's Oak has Woodworm', LMN,
 Static Gallery, Liverpool, UK
 'Apocalypse Now and Next Week',
 Castlefield Art Gallery, Manchester, UK
 'Untitled, upside-down (Planks)',
 Castlefield Art Gallery, Manchester, UK
 'Complete', Leeds Metropolitan
 University Gallery, Leeds, UK
 'Untitled, (Planks)', Bluecoat Art
 Gallery, Liverpool, UK

Residencies

2001-02
 Artist in Residence, Wheatly
 Fellowship, University of Central
 England, Birmingham, UK

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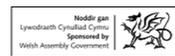
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Cover image: Untitled (Sea), 2007.
Diasec print. 180cm x 240cm

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the international 3

Nelmes Design

