

SITUATIONS PAPERS

A commissioned response to
Heather and Ivan Morison's *I lost
her near Fantasy Island. Life will not
be the same, 2006*

Laura Mansfield

First published on www.situations.org.uk, 2006



SITUATIONS

Heather and Ivan Morison
I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life will not be the same, 2006
14 July 2006
Bristol City Centre, UK

On Friday 14 July 2006, a jack-knifed lorry shed its load of 25,000 flowers across Bristol City Centre. At 6pm, passers-by began to take the flowers and by 7pm the installation was entirely dispersed across Bristol, as people walked home carrying armfuls of flowers. This was Heather and Ivan Morison's *I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life will not be the same...* a work, which was unannounced and unexplained and operated as part-monument, part-performance intervention into public space which captured the public's imagination. The work was commissioned for the British Art Show 6 in Bristol.

I received a postcard, an anonymous message. Three lines of text. Hinting at a narrative, giving a glimpse into the personal history of a real or imagined character. The ambiguity of the text and the anonymity of its author is a central thread to the work of Heather and Ivan Morison. They give the viewer segments of narrative and whispers of encounters inspired by their personal recollections and continual research. For the launch of the British Art Show 6 in Bristol, Heather and Ivan Morison installed the work *I lost her near Fantasy Island. Life has not been the same, in the centre of the city*.

Beside the harbour and amid a steady stream of pedestrians, an articulated lorry formed the backdrop to the beginning of the day. Parked up on the pavement, the pedestrian zone, the object became a display piece. Jackknifed and white, its back doors wide open and its contents spilled: a cascade of cut flowers falling from metal containers. The range of colour, fauna, flora, produced a layered display arresting attention. The flowers seemed more like a giant arrangement than an accidental mess, a product of a violent collision, as the angle of the lorry would seem to suggest and much more an obvious and considered display, a conscious arrangement of form.

The installation was separated from the text, the connection only made by those who knew the Morisons' work, and realised the source of the anonymous postcard. The disjointed anonymity of authorship of both postcard and lorry, and the invisible connection between each, begs questions as to the intention of the work and its subsequent reception.

In the city centre, with flowers spilling, the lorry is an intervention in the space, an item of display. Received in the post, opened over breakfast, the text hovers over the beginning of the day, to be considered, held on to, or put straight into the recycling without a moment's thought.

Where then does the connection between the two lie?

The postcard suggested a character, lost, confused and full of longing. Once incorporated

SITUATIONS

into the narrative of the jack knifed lorry, the seemingly aesthetic display took on suggestions of a broader narrative and personal history: forming a multitude of stories and questions as to the lorry driver, his or her intention, the route of the truck, and its subsequent arrival in the city. However, without the knowledge of the Morisons' practice and the connection between the installation and the text, the viewer is left with an easily readable aesthetic, cut flowers, a lorry and subsequently a distance between object and text.

The Morisons' practice is very much about creating an event, a happening, seemingly spontaneous, without press attention or widespread promotion. For the launch of the work at the opening of the British Art Show in Bristol, there was an abundance of whispers about the work and an anxious waiting for its arrival. Strategic last minute press releases combined with the opening gossip, the excitement of having the British Art Show in the city, created a degree of hype around the central area of Bristol, a waiting for the unveiling of the 'master piece'.

Knowing viewers, either Morisoneducated or simply interested with the work, would have easily connected the various elements, creating a narrative understanding to each piece: the early morning arrival, the postcard through the letterbox, the spilt flowers and the articulated lorry. Once installed in the city centre, the abundance of press attention followed suit, photographing the work throughout the day. The documentary action and continued process of recording was a considered act, treating the work as an aesthetic 'art object' and presenting it as a deliberate sculptural intervention, rather than a spectacle or stunt.

The text on the postcard was short and considered, the lorry in the centre and its containment of spilled flowers mirrored the economical use of language, creating a considered structured narrative running through both pieces and an aesthetic unity to the component parts. The contained aesthetic and restrained use of text created a distinct separation between the viewer and the work, forming an idea of a character removed and distant from our everyday selves. With the suggestion of an individual protagonist an abundance of narrative threads flowed from the installation with the viewer free to pick up upon the various

elements; the beautiful spectacle of arranged flowers, the awkward positioning of the lorry or the longing and melancholy of the anonymous text. The durational nature of the work created space for the viewer's engagement to evolve over the course of the day, molding their narrative histories into the piece. In the dense heat of Friday afternoon the cascading flowers began to wilt and fade, heightening the discord between the bright white lorry and the organic mass, referencing the postcard, its withering hope and desire.

The narrative threads extended further as in the evening, passersby were permitted to take the 25,000 flowers, letting the work filter out across the city and rest in a hundred different homes, connecting the character of the lorry driver to the personal histories of the city's individuals initiating a diverse and intimate relationship with the work, taking the seemingly distant sculptural form back to the personal, back to the intimacy of reading a postcard over breakfast.

SITUATIONS

Biography

Laura Mansfield is a writer and researcher based in the North West.

She studied Art History at Bristol University before completing an MA in Cultural and Critical Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London.

© Laura Mansfield and Situations. Published by Situations at the University of the West of England, Bristol, 2006.

The person using Situations Papers online may view, reproduce or store copies of this paper providing the information is only for their individual use, and is not used for commercial purposes. Any copies of this paper, in whole or in part, must include the copyright notice above and the customary bibliographic citation, including author, attribution, date, article title, Situations Papers Online, and the URL <http://www.situations.org.uk>. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Publisher.