

AD  
ART & DESIGN

# ART & THE CITY

A D R E A M O F U R B A N I T Y





# JANE MULFINGER

## NACHTIGALL

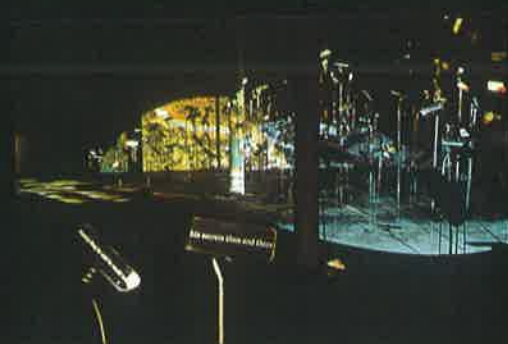
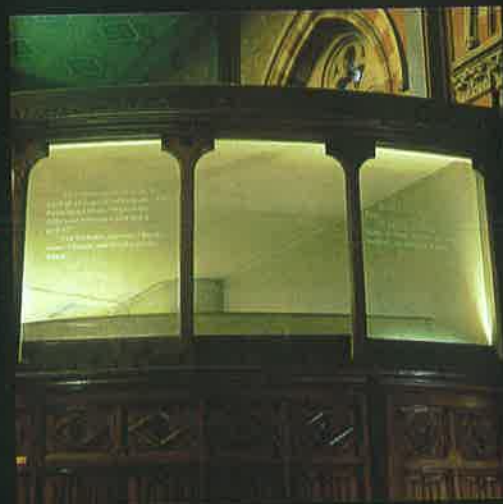
Many of Jane Mulfinger's multimedia installations have been responses to the complex, fragmentary character of the contemporary city and the way this affects its inhabitants. *Caught in Passing* (1994) was an installation consisting of 22 pairs of used shoes cast in Schott crystal. The shoes, Manhattan Salvation Army rejects, are arranged two by two, complete with cracks, scuff marks and trailing laces, as though awaiting the return of owners who will slip them on and walk out into the streets once more.

*Common Knowledge* (1992) was a site-specific work made for London's St Pancras Station, in which ethnic and nationalistic jokes from around Europe were sandblasted, in their original language, onto glass panels above the railway booking office. Addressing issues of insularity, xenophobia and cross-cultural tensions and accommodations, the 13 panels together suggested a contemporary Tower of Babel. *Regrets, London* (1995) incorporated a series of English regrets, solicited anonymously and sandblasted onto the surface of car rear-view mirrors on stands; transparencies, including a satellite photograph and an aerial view of the City of London, were projected onto and reflected off the mirrors.

*Nachtigall, 3:00 uhr, Berlin Stadtmitte* (1996) is a new piece made for the Urbanity project. An antique oak chair with a deep blue feather pillow sits isolated from the commotion of the city on a darkened space. An audio tape of a lone nightingale recorded on a summer night in Berlin's city centre plays continuously, allowing the experience to be relived at other times and in other places. The bird sang an entire night until dawn broke and the sounds of the city overwhelmed it; this excerpt catches 30 minutes of uninterrupted singing, during which the bird never repeats itself. The recording documents a lone voice in what seems a surprising oasis in the middle of the urban environment.

The nightingale, known for the intricacy of its call, is also a symbol of solitude – here, the ironic solitude of the city, where despite the press of people, the pleasure and pain of being alone with oneself are never far away. The pages which follow bring visual imagery to an essentially auditory work.

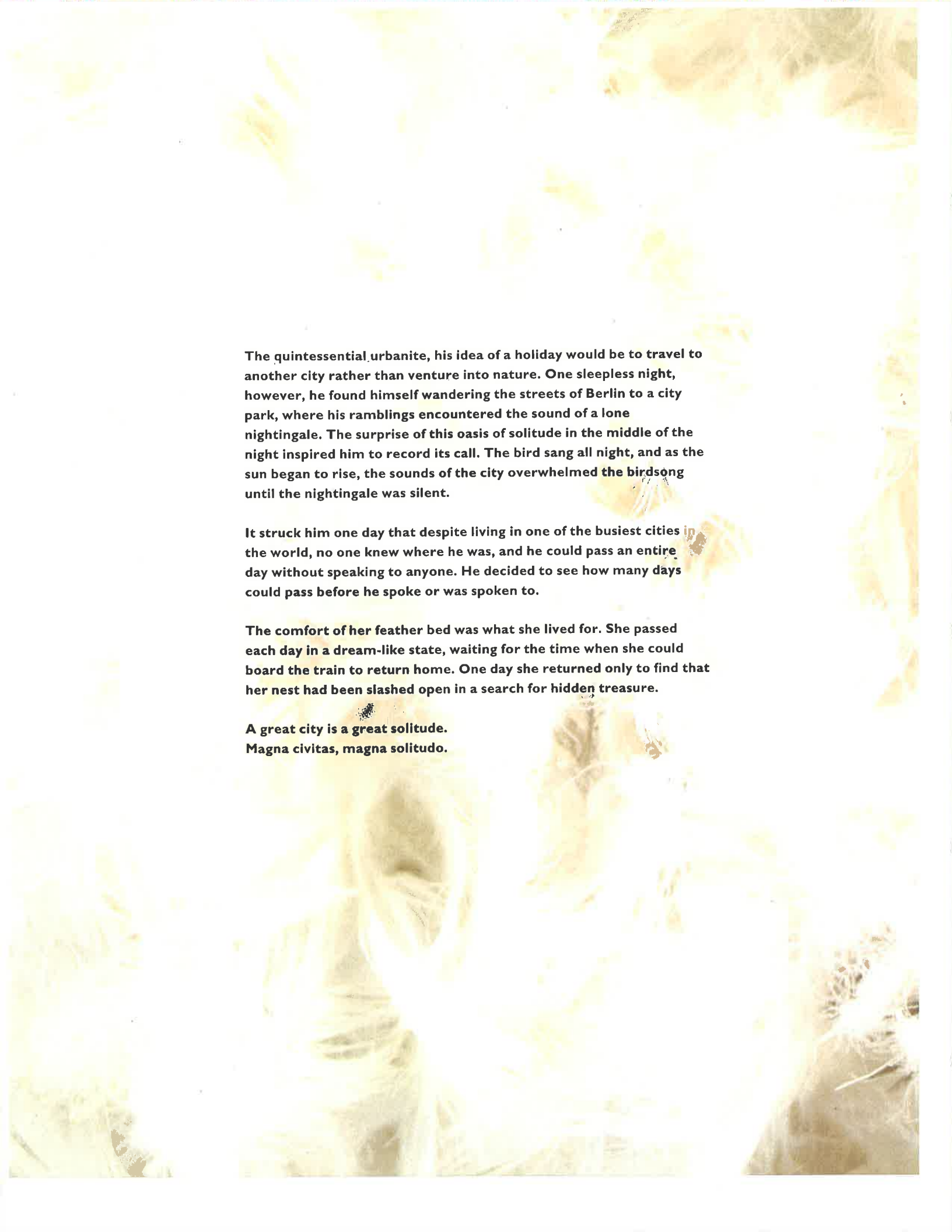
John Stathatos



FROM ABOVE: *Caught in Passing*, 1993-94, cast Schott crystal; *Common Knowledge*, 1992, text sandblasted onto glass; *Regrets, London*, 1995, rear-view mirrors, steel tubing, projections



NACHTIGALL



The quintessential urbanite, his idea of a holiday would be to travel to another city rather than venture into nature. One sleepless night, however, he found himself wandering the streets of Berlin to a city park, where his ramblings encountered the sound of a lone nightingale. The surprise of this oasis of solitude in the middle of the night inspired him to record its call. The bird sang all night, and as the sun began to rise, the sounds of the city overwhelmed the birdsong until the nightingale was silent.

It struck him one day that despite living in one of the busiest cities in the world, no one knew where he was, and he could pass an entire day without speaking to anyone. He decided to see how many days could pass before he spoke or was spoken to.

The comfort of her feather bed was what she lived for. She passed each day in a dream-like state, waiting for the time when she could board the train to return home. One day she returned only to find that her nest had been slashed open in a search for hidden treasure.

A great city is a great solitude.  
Magna civitas, magna solitudo.



