

chora

FRANCES AVIVA BLANE

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TIM DAVIES

PETER GRIFFIN

SUSAN HILLER

SIMON MORLEY

PAUL MORRISON

JANE MULFINGER

MARTIN RICHMAN

HELEN SEAR

30 Underwood Street Gallery, London

18th September — 31st October, 1999

Hotbath Gallery, Bath

23rd February — 22nd March, 2000

South Hill Park, Bracknell

1st April — 30th April, 2000

Abbot Hall, Kendal

9th May — 18th June, 2000

Jane Mulfinger

No Vacancy, 1991. Glass, paint, light, etched spectacles. Dimensions variable

*Presentiment – is that long Shadow – on the Lawn –
Indicative that Suns go down –*

*That notice to the startled Grass
That Darkness – is about to pass –*

- Emily Dickenson

Of all the senses our eyes are most directly linked to our brains, being extensions of the cerebellum. To be blinded in Oedipus' case was not only to lose a physical faculty, but also to be punished for lack of 'insight'. Conversely, for Tiresias with his "wrinkled dugs", who as T.S. Eliot puts it, "sat by Thebes below the wall", losing the physical sense of sight was compensated for by the gaining of a visionary sixth sense.

In much of her work Jane Mulfinger has used a multiplicity of signs – Morse code, musical notation, Braille – to explore our relationship not only to the visible and tactile world but also to language. Her metaphysical works encode a multiplicity of metaphoric resonances that reach beyond the formal problems of parole and langue, of image and text, sign and meaning.

In *No Vacancy* she has etched the text from Philip Larkin's poem *Old Fools* backwards and inside out onto the lenses of second-hand spectacles. Through these discarded objects a physical sense of absence is evoked of the one time wearer, so that we are encouraged to ask questions about how memory is created and internalised, how we 'know' things and negotiate our relationship between our internal desires and the external world. The spectacles focus attention not only on the physical act of looking but also on the distinction between 'seeing', 'vision', and 'illumination'. Mulfinger quotes Edmund Burke: "Extreme light, by overcoming the organs of sight, obliterates all objects, so as in its effect exactly to resemble darkness". The image thus paradoxically becomes one not of 'impaired', but of 'heightened' or 'internalised' vision, where notions of clarification and obfuscation, revelation and concealment, become elided. Boundaries between the viewer and the viewed, between subject and object are also blurred. The fact that the text is difficult and obscure to read erases its status as linguistic sign, lifting it into the realm of the symbolic.

In the western tradition of art the presence of light has often denoted a sense of mystery and awe, and the halogen light directed onto the red ground behind the spectacles evokes a sense of philosophical meditation on the visionary. While the discarded objects signify as both *memento mori*, and (within this culture where there is so little opportunity to mourn) like seventeenth century *vanitas* paintings, a stark reminder of death. Through this disruption of our conventional reading of linguistic sign and syntax, Mulfinger opens an anterior space where meanings and resonances may be heard.

