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December 16th 1977, the infamous Sex Pistols gig at Brunel University. Infamous for its lack of cohesive sound, Sid Vicious' inability to stand up sober and Johnny Rotten's claim that it was the worst gig the band ever

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EVERY DAY IS LIKE SUNDAY: WHITSTABLE BIENNALE

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By Sylvester Spintor
4 Sep 2012

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Every two years since 2000, a sleepy seaside town in the Garden of England is vivified — hosting an art festival unlike any you may visit. Without the swarming and frenetic rubbernecking that turn such festivals into carnivals, Whitstable — celebrated locally for its oysters — has a wealth of charm. Its off-beat character lies a world-apart from Tate Modern’s *Damian Hirst* show (seen in its closing weekend just an hour’s drive to London along Kent’s northern coast).

A day charter bus runs from London art-borough Bethnal Green. But its passengers are not the only visitors, as its reputation for outstanding offerings becomes internationally established. In its sixth appearance, the Biennale’s abundance is not of visual art — the ever ready paintings and sculptures — instead a surfeit of screenings, live events and immersive and performative installations. All are presented in a ramshackle range of makeshift indoor and outdoor spaces across this small fishing town. From a Sea Scout’s cabin to spare rooms in local houses, such constraints mean the scale is small, the atmosphere is intimate, and each step discloses unexpected moments. Previous years highlights have included a musical ensemble of six ice cream vans.

The emphasis here is on younger and emerging artists. None so exemplary as Kieren Reed, whose central exhibit to the proceedings takes the form of an information center on the town’s pebbly beach. A functional and social sculpture built by Reed himself, this geometrically particular wooden hut is a celebration of vernacular architecture. “I researched the structures in some detail,” says Reed, “people now think its been there for years.” An anonymous and Tardis-like intervention, inside is room enough for a reading area, seating to host talks and classes, and transformation into a resident artists studio.



Social Sculpture/Whitstable Biennale Headquarters. Kieren Reed, 2012.

Also of note is *Speak Nearby*; a thoughtfully curated group exhibition comprising four artists’ film and video, which includes *Jordan’s Dance* (1977) by Derek Jarman. Elsewhere, Emma Harf’s film *Monument to the Unsaved* disturbingly evokes a car crash on the nearby M20 motorway viewed in reflection via an innovative installation of car wing mirrors. To appease those with family in tow, Gareth Moore’s *Children’s Films* takes the form of an itinerant screening project, inviting a group of international artists to produce short 16mm films for children. Yet the period charm infused in their production is more likely to enthrall the nostalgic forty-somethings, than little Ludovick and Elliot.

The *Whitstable Biennale* runs from 1–16 September 2012 across various venues in *Whitstable, England*.

Text by Sylvester Spintor

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