

## National Review of Live Art – Fred Brookes

What was then Performance Art Platform was already established as a national showcase for live art by the time I arrived at the Midland Group in Nottingham in 1980. The building, which aspired to be the Arnolfini of the Midlands, though it was never completed, was a complex of shops and a factory in the Lace Market, amended and adapted to house a wide range of contemporary art, craft, film, media, performance and music. The Platform took over the whole place for a weekend, with dozens of performances and exhibitions in every hole and corner, inside and out, as well as debates and set pieces. Some vivid images remain on my retinas.

Station House Opera's 'Sex and Death' all blue against the red walls of the performance space: a chap called Duncan with boxes on hands and feet, straining inside a big elastic stockinette tube: Jim Whiting's 'Purgatory' high-kicking and wheezing on the sculpture court: a naked Robert Ayres descending the wall: Roberta Graham's intense visceral slide projections.

Under the hand first of Steve Rogers, then Jeremy Peyton-Jones and later Nikki Milican, the Platform attracted everybody who was anybody in the rapidly-evolving live art scene. Old lags like Ian Hinchcliffe, Shirley Cameron and Jeff Nuttall rubbed shoulders, and more, with up-and-coming stars, future professors of art, one-hit wonders and much local talent. For a long weekend each October, the building throbbed with every kind of manifestation; physical, philosophical, frantic, furious, funny. Half of what went on would not make it past today's health-and-safety regulations. Much of the work was from new artists, often never seen before, and one could not predict what might be going to happen. We took the risks, and as far as I recall no-one got anything worse than bumps and sprains, except for the mental trauma, of course, of which many bear the scars today.

Nottingham scarcely knew what it had, and there were occasional objections from neighbours, fall-outs with the local press. The city council, which had panicked at an earlier stage and backed out of the project to create a contemporary art centre in the city, kept well away. Nottingham's on-off love affair with art and artists has continued. Anish Kapoor's Sky Mirror is an acknowledged local landmark, Ron Haselden's Nottingham Neon was neglected and then scrapped by the council. The archive which was created by Barry Smith and Nikki Milican to hold the history of live art in the UK at Trent University was let go to Bristol, the proposed Future Factory, brainchild of Robert Ayres, which was to be a national focus for live and radical art, has been diluted into the conventional safety of the Centre for Contemporary Art Nottingham, currently building in the Lace Market, which, welcome as it is, represents an opportunity missed. The Midland Group itself was liquidated in 1987 when the then East Midlands Arts did a dirty deal with the County Council to switch funding to the Angel Row Gallery in the library, itself now gone. The city council inherited the building and sold it off at auction. Little trace remains of the sites where some of the most extraordinary events I ever witnessed took place.