



Christian Jankowski, *In the Wood (Im Wald)*, 1998, documentation of an action previously featured in his *Portikus* book project. Here, Jankowski sits in a forest reading the "Easter March" of Goethe's *Faust*. He reads out loud, then carves words into tree trunks around him, in a performance that explores German fascination with nature, romanticism and the forest. Courtesy of Klosterfelde, Berlin

Like Beads on an Abacus Designed to Calculate Infinity

An Exhibition Curated by Andrew Hunt,
Rockwell Gallery, London

William Hollister

A smattering of art by Czech and Bohemia-based artists appeared at a very visible London exhibition recently. But for all that Slavic presence, the curated show curiously was not devoted to any well-worn problematics of Eastern (ahem) Central European visual culture. The show, entitled "Like Beads on an Abacus Designed to Calculate Infinity," directed viewers instead toward the closer quarters of England's East Anglian landscape just outside of London – East of London.

Visitors to this Spring exhibition were welcomed by what presented itself at first as a disassociated clutter of parlor pictures, where any meaning linking the images remained elliptically evasive. The catalogue juxtaposes John Sell Cotman's 1810 pastoral etching of the moldering Castle Acre priory with the confrontational image of a man facing backwards while riding an escalator leading up to Wenceslas Square, in Prague. This only reinforces this sense of carefree clutter. But with the introduction of a few clues necessary to decipher, a carefully crafted

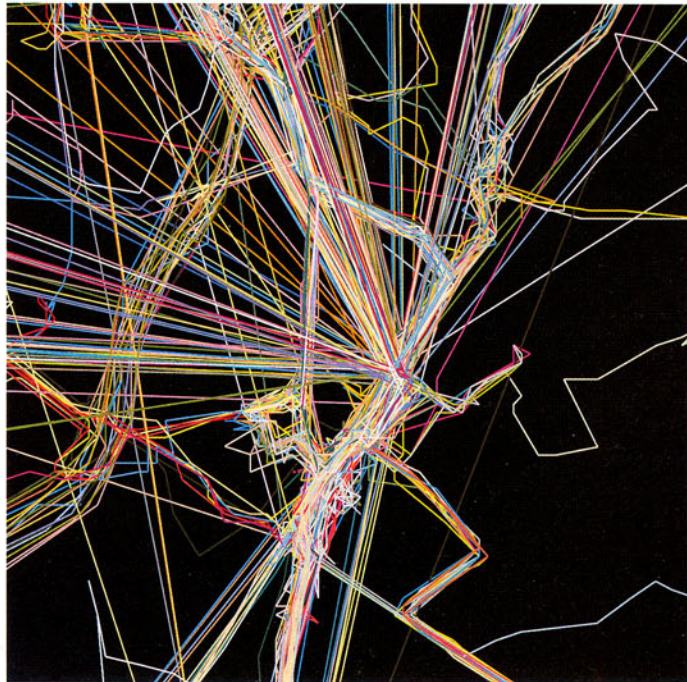
creation of Andrew Hunt's curatorial imagination emerged.

Hunt is very clear about the show's goals. "I wanted to get to grips with work which deals with a contemporary idea of the sublime in terms of artists that

I thought dealt with this in some way through ideas of expressionism, conceptualism and archival practices," Hunt said.

The show is mainly inspired from a passage of a 1995 book by W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of*

Thorsten Knaub, *GPS Diary*, 2004, movement is tracked one year by satellite and rendered on an aerial map, a new color each day, Inkjekt print



Saturn, an account of the German author's wanderings through East Anglia, the eclectic world he encountered and the people he met in a meandering reflective journey arranged with as much happenstance as obsession.

Hunt knew of Sebald when he ran the creative writing department at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. He asked each of 43 artists to prepare a piece in response to Sebald's prose portraying a Norwich-area motorway seen from the air at night, from where automobiles are "like beads on an abacus designed to calculate infinity."

How did so many Czechs get into an East Anglian Exhibition? "The artists I invited seemed to exceed any neat categorization," Hunt said. "Sebald's writing has the ability to take us in a number of directions revealing histories and unlikely coincidences."

One such coincidence was in Ján Mančuska's "43," with marker and pencil applied directly to the gallery wall, in an exercise that took the artist 43 breaths to make. Other Czech art represented coincidence included Jiří Kovanda's documentation for a performance dated September 3rd, 1977 – an untitled action in Prague. "Kovanda represents both a historical and a contemporary conceptual practice. Jiří is relatively unknown in the UK, so it was a really important to present his work alongside the group of younger artists who form his peer group in Prague," Hunt said.

Tomas Vaněk's *Particip no. 39*, 2004, dealt with "everyday coincidence in a way – a list of small observations on everyday life on acetate – things that seem to affect everyone at some point in their lives." Jan Serych had displayed a "Drawing Designed to Disappear Immediately," along with Czech – based Norwegian artist, Jesper Alvaer's *Gin & Yang*, a video still.

The sum of the artist's works in theory is a reaction to Sebald's landscape of "endless terraces, sprawling satellite towns, business parks and shining glass houses which looked like large quadrangular ice floes drifting across this corner of the continent where no patch is left to its own devices." In actuality, curator Hunt has succeeded in smudging the hard edge of definition separating regional art and international currents.