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“Chemistry of London”
By Guy Brett

I think it could be argued that an expanded space – physical and conceptual – for art has developed alongside, parallel to, an expansion of cultural complexity and diversity in the life of the average citizen of London. This process probably began in the 1950s when the term ‘globalisation’ was unknown and migrations of the world’s peoples had not reached the scale they have today. The London avant-garde art scene, beginning in the 50s, has represented almost laboratory conditions for the clashing and fusing of cultures, even if the established institutions for a long time were not aware of it. There was an extraordinary type of reciprocity about these clashings and meetings, and a kind of equality, because each individual, according to their origins, had different mental sets in which there were elements of freedom and elements of restriction. Certain demands for liberation within British society – from traditional authority, patriarchy, snobberies and class – drew young people to London from relatively more hidebound social structures. They often brought with them other forms of liberated thinking or acting in comparison with which Britain was still ‘uptight’. These opposites mingled in the process of working out a humane set of values.

Similarly, the notion of a space for art expanded beyond the narrow terms of an object displayed in an art gallery to the discovery of new contexts, new materials, new collaborative, participatory and performative structures. Mónica de Miranda

herself epitomises both the complexity of cultural traces which make up identity and a diverse and flexible art practice. Certain of her works are tuned to the pristine art gallery, where contemplative time is needed, and others take the form of videos, graffiti painting in the street, performances, collaborative projects with other artists and with children and so on. Many of her works have a visual structure of overlays and fusions, such as her *Road Lines* (digital photographs, 2005) where map fragments of different cities merge together in the palms of people's hands and the map lines of roads evoke the creases and veins in the human skin.

However, with all this talk of movement, crossings and hybrids there is something that is changeless and constant in identity: the individual's memories of childhood. George Eliot asks in one of her novels: "Would we love this world so much if we had not spent our childhood in it?" Her question assumes the intensity of childhood impressions. It seems there is some sensory bond to place, atmosphere, colour, touch, taste, sound and smell that survives even an unhappy childhood. Perhaps the persistence of childhood memory corresponds to the stillness, focus and brilliancy one can find in a work of visual art.

Guy Brett