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## Art reviews: giving 'em both barrels

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**ERNST LOGAR: INVISIBLE OIL**

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**PEACOCK VISUAL ARTS, ABERDEEN**

**NEVILLE RAE: NATIONAL MONUMENT**

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**SIERRA METRO, 22 WEST HARBOUR ROAD, EDINBURGH**

ARTISTS these days aren't known for causing trouble in the public sphere. If you make art that is principally about other art and show it in art galleries, you're unlikely to rattle many chains outside the art world. But there is a minority who go in

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search of trouble – and they know exactly where to look.

Austrian artist Ernst Logar is one such. His work includes a large series of photographs, Non Public Spaces, in which he deliberately seeks out places to which access is usually denied, and an investigation into issues of Nazi partisanship in his native province of Carinthia, which was then put on show in the Austrian Parliament.

On a residency with Peacock Visual Arts in Aberdeen, he planned to look into the oil industry, a powerful presence in the city, though its workings remain closed to many. He hoped to continue Non Public Spaces here, but found his idea drowning in a sea of polite e-mails from people who "regret we are unable to assist on this occasion".

We all know about oil. We worry about the cost of it and how it may be polluting the world. We listen to politicians droning on about it, and activists declaiming. But very few of us ever see it. Logar makes this point by placing 59 litres of inky, viscous crude in a Perspex barrel in the middle of the gallery. It dominates the show both visually and with its potent smell. (Ironically, it has come from Venezuela. Requests from Aberdeen-based oil companies were met with more polite refusals. The oil capital of Europe, it seems, is not a place to go looking for oil.)

Staring into the inky depths of the barrel, you see yourself reflected, a quality which Logar makes more deliberate use of in Reflecting Oil, where he employs a pump and a Perspex frame to create a kind of moving mirror. He is also making an analogy between drilling for oil and in the inner journey of psychoanalysis, even if the metaphor is a little, well, crude.

Elsewhere there are large photographs of oil rig-like structures made from rubbish found on local beaches: plastic bottles, a discarded trainer, an old tyre. They speak both to the pollution of the oceans by ubiquitous plastics, and the uneven distribution of wealth in the oil capital – the sculptures are named after the city's most

deprived areas.

More interesting is his further exploration of crude oil as an artistic material. He uses it to coat picture frames (giving a burnished charcoal-grey effect) and to coat paper that is then used in print-making, creating a semi-reflective surface that he then embosses with the legends of sea-borne rubbish: a take-away box, a rubber glove, a shuttlecock.

These Derivatives start to look like fossils, relics of a long dead civilisation from which future generations will try to learn. These are some of the best works in the show, and given the persistence of these materials in the environment, it may well be that they are all that's left to help some future society fathom the 21st century.

Aside from twitching the tail of the world's most powerful industry, the most colourful battles about art happen over public artworks. Bitter experience tells us that, while almost anything goes in an art gallery, put a sculpture in the street and suddenly the most sanguine citizen has Strong Views.

Public art has a chequered history. In the past, it has been used to glorify heroes, bolster authority figures and reinforce ideologies. Now, property developers include it in their plans to raise the tenor of a neighbourhood. So what is public art today, asks Neville Rae, and does it still have a purpose?

He explores this in his show which opens new gallery Sierra Metro, a large, attractive space in a former warehouse in Granton, once a test facility for the Northern Lighthouse Board. He exhibits a series of maquettes inspired by the location, the latest part of Edinburgh earmarked for "waterfront regeneration".

They are rarely less than provocative. His Cavorting Sailor is less a dignified statuesque figure than a swaying, raucous drunk. Swanfield may recall an old place name, but there has been some destructive encounter in which the porcelain bird has lost its head. The Black Swan, while keeping its head, looks as though it has passed through an oil slick.

United Wire is very different from the others: a flat disk marked with an abstract pattern of lines. This recalls Rae's last show in Edinburgh, at Inverleith House, where he exhibited the modernist abstract works of Brian Miller, who was appointed town artist in Cumbernauld in the 1960s and whose projects went largely unrealised.

It is meant to tower over its environment, as Rae's postcard illustration demonstrates, reminding us that all these works are technically maquettes for bigger structures.

This means 35 Crewe Place would be life-size, a Rachel Whiteread-esque model of a modernist maisonette, the ordinary made into art.

Rae has stripped these works of their potential contexts, aiming to ask questions of them in the neutrality of a gallery space. However, this has also had the effect of stripping away the urgency of many of the key issues. Context, it seems, is essential if there is to be informed debate – or even just a colourful argument – about the whys and wherefores of public art.

&149 Ernst Logar until 15 November; Neville Rae until 1 November.

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