

Between the SPACE

We never think of commuting as being strange. But where else do you sit with the same people each and every day, in such close proximity, yet do everything in your power not to communicate or interact with them?

Between the Space, a joint venture between First Great Western and Reading based curator Erica Burton, provides a platform for engaged and politically challenging contemporary visual art to be considered by a wider audience within the context of the everyday. This innovative project takes place between January and April and sees a series of new commissions by three UK-based artists.

One of those artists taking part is Olivia Plender. Having only graduated a few short years ago from the prestigious Central St Martins College of Art and Design, Plender's resumé already makes for impressive reading.

As well as the publication of her comic work, *The Masterpiece*, being met with critical acclaim, Plender's work has been viewed at exhibitions across the globe.

And only this year she was invited to exhibit at the Tate Triennale at Tate Britain.

As part of the Between the Space project,

Susan Griffin talks to Tate artist Olivia Plender who is bringing rail staff and commuters together

Plender has chosen to comment on the social structures experienced whilst travelling on trains.

Plender says: "If you're a commuter, you travel on the train but potentially don't have much of a relationship with the people who work there. Instead, you zone out, read a book and try and ignore the people around you."

"I wanted to try and humanise the space and build some sort of bridge between the worker and consumer"

As part of her research and to pick up anecdotal information, Plender spent time talking to train employees at Reading station and on the train between Reading and Paddington. "I wanted to look at it from the employee's perspective, to try and humanise the space and build some sort of bridge between the worker and consumer."

Plender was also interested in utilising the space afforded by **reach** magazine as a site for showing work.

"What got me really excited was the idea of

creating an alternative distribution network for artwork. I wanted to make something that could be accessible and distributed to a lot of people. Everyone likes a comic and it makes sense in relation to this public art project," she explains.

Between the Space also includes work by Arnaud Desjardin who has taken up a transitory residency on the train and has produced a blog of his activities, entitled *Stranger on the Train*. To arrange a meeting with Arnaud on the train as part of his residency, call or text 07804 174962. Artist Jo Roberts, has undertaken a period of research on the journey between Reading and Paddington documenting her observations and encounters of the geographical and social journey in *Back and Forth* – a free booklet available from Reading and Paddington stations.

● A free talk by the artists will take place at Reading Station on February 24, 2007.

Visit www.betweenthespace.org.uk

● Between the Space is supported by Arts Council England; South East, Artists in the City; Reading, First Great Western, HeathWallace and Adriana Marques.



Artist Olivia Plender's new cartoon, *Work*. The drawing depicts a long-standing station employee who started work for First Great Western through the Conservative government's Youth Training Scheme. The image with the snippet of personal history humanizes Barry, the station employee, prompting a feeling of mutual respect between customer and service. The cartoon also reinforces and questions our understating of political and social responsibility.