

Flash Art

MICHAEL ASHKIN

EMILY TSINGOU

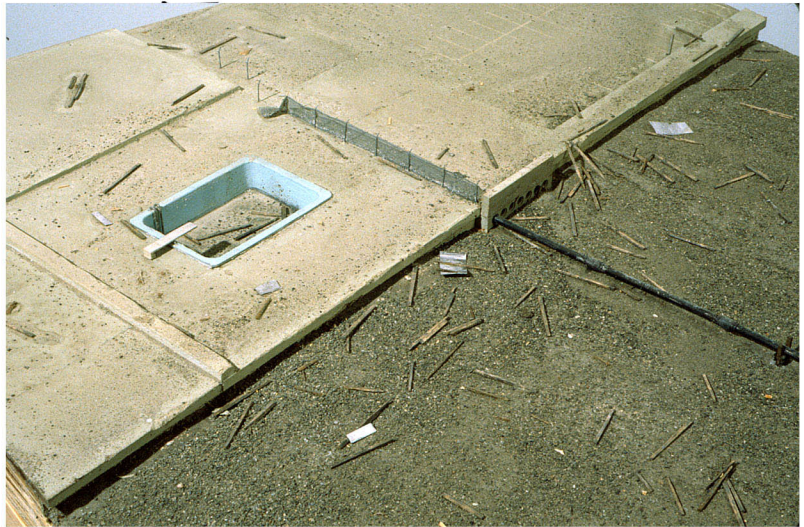
In this, his first solo show in Britain, Michael Ashkin's scaled down, table-top, *mise en scène* landscapes are assiduously crafted metaphors for our fall from grace. These stark, barren, and liminal scenes (all imaginary with the occasional borrowed details) are all at the fringes of man's active influence on the landscape, and beyond his daily purview. Ashkin has migrated here from his favoured arid semi-desert zones to stagnant marshes, brackish inter-tidal flats, and derelict waterfronts, where water is not so much a blessing as the progenitor of wasted tracts whose no-man's land resists the everyday world.

In his largest work here, *No.87*, 1997, there are all the signs and symptoms of tragedy, whether in the recent or distant past we can't quite tell. A light aircraft has plummeted nose-first into the viscously yielding mud at the heart of some god-forsaken mudflats — the sort of place to which H.P. Lovecraft might have led us only to abandon us to the loathsome depredations of some vile subterranean miasma. Surely any survivors must have subsequently perished. So authentic is Ashkin's model that, by association, one's nostrils become assailed by that putrid, stomach-churning smell of maturing stagnant mud, even though this particular mud is "Envirotex" resin and dust.

Ashkin's landscapes are untamed, ravaged, disheveled, baldly proclaiming their resistance to man's order. They draw us out of our microcosmic, parochial view of the world, into the realms of the macrocosmic, nearer to that sublime feeling of being "close to the edge." If the details of daily living are excluded here, connotations of the metaphysical are rife. These works resist narrative, its fragments ultimately overwhelmed by that transcendental presence of the metaphysical, where time becomes an abstract flux whose ambiguities cast us adrift. High-risk ventures, Ashkin's landscapes are transgressive in their craftsmanship at a time when skills, either painterly, graphic, or sculptural are generally ignored as criteria of worth.

Roy Exley

R E V I E W S



MICHAEL ASHKIN, No. 100, 1999. Detail. Wood, metal, dirt, glue, plastic, paint, 97 x 61 x 119 cm.