

The families, the children, the working class- let's do it. I'm ready!
(Notes to accompany Justin Eagle's *a solitary cosmopolitan*)

The title of these notes is taken from *Modernism: A New Decade's* opening track; or, alternatively, from The Style Council album that Polydor refused to release. Soul-influenced songs about Thatcherite Britain were one thing; a new Deep House direction was another. Yet time passes and meanings shift - twelve years later the record was deemed ahead of its time (and a digitally remastered version was finally put out on CD).

Justin Eagle's *a solitary cosmopolitan* explores similar subject matter (meaning very British notions of culture and class, combined with a sideways take on eighties politics). The exhibition consists of two works, namely *The Whisper* (a photographic print of a public sculpture intended for a Homebase carpark), and *Reconstruction of the Atmosphere* (a Modernist-style mobile 'decorated' with a motif appropriated from hotel stationary).

Andre Wallace, the man behind the original *Whisper*, has been undertaking commissions for statues since the 1970s and his work can be seen across Britain – from Salford and Newcastle to London's Docklands. His public sculptures are, in every sense, made for this – large, recognizable as art objects, and yet completely congruous with their no-style-style surroundings; and likewise the kissing couple were initially designed to *merge*, only in their case with a contemporary (i.e. capitalist) hotel interior.

When displaced from their corporate surroundings however, their illicit implications become apparent. The whisperers (now smaller and indoors) appear to whisper *about* the kissing couple; while the kissing couple (now bigger and floating) *consciously ignore* the whisperers. The altered scale (too small to be Modernist Sculpture, too big to be occasional) creates a feeling that is simultaneously light and disconsolate – what Yeats might term a 'lonely impulse of delight.'

Paul Weller (meaning a politically orientated suburbanite in immaculate casuals) looks out at us from 1989 every inch the solitary cosmopolitan - but what of his modern day counterpart? When stood in the (currently flat and pastel-coloured) Arena Gallery one is overwhelmed with strange nostalgia - both for a time when The Guardian reader might also have been the Socialist Worker reader; and for when an Italian coffee machine could signify the urbane. *A Solitary Cosmopolitan/Modernism: A New Decade*. I'd be ready to do it, if only I knew what 'it' was.

Susan Finlay, 2010