

Mark McGowan 'TV News'
International Project Space, Birmingham
16 November to 16 December 2006

Two days after Remembrance Sunday, Mark McGowan started six days of lying on the ground in Birmingham City Centre in a foetal position, dressed in combat gear and a red beret. As I watched, his eyes were closed and he spoke softly to a news crew as they interviewed him in front of the big screen in Chamberlain Square.

McGowan's performance *Dead Soldier* (2006) – which took place during the opening week of 'TV News' – received exactly the same media attention that the exhibition focused on, and the audacity of McGowan and curator Andrew Hunt throughout the performance was impressive; their ability to issue the right press release to get the desired response and then incorporate this material into the installation in time for the opening speaks volumes about the predictability and indolence of the media. 'Controversial artist Mark McGowan,' 'whose art doesn't really exist unless people take notice of it,' exploits this laziness: if you believed everything you read in the papers, McGowan has been thirty-seven years of age since some time in 2002. In the same press coverage, there is also a notable lack of investigation into whether the artist's more arduous 'pilgrimage' performances were ever really completed.

As his first show in a public gallery, 'TV News' provided an overview of the media attention McGowan's work has drawn since 2001, as well as various pieces of documentation from his performances and related letters of communication; as such it offered a good summary of his practice in all its aspects: the 'work' in artwork; McGowan's exploration of suffering; and, of course, his manipulation of the media.

Perhaps the most telling criticism of the British media implied by the whole exhibition was that chat show hosts Richard and Judy are currently the only television presenters able to provide a considered response to McGowan's work.

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