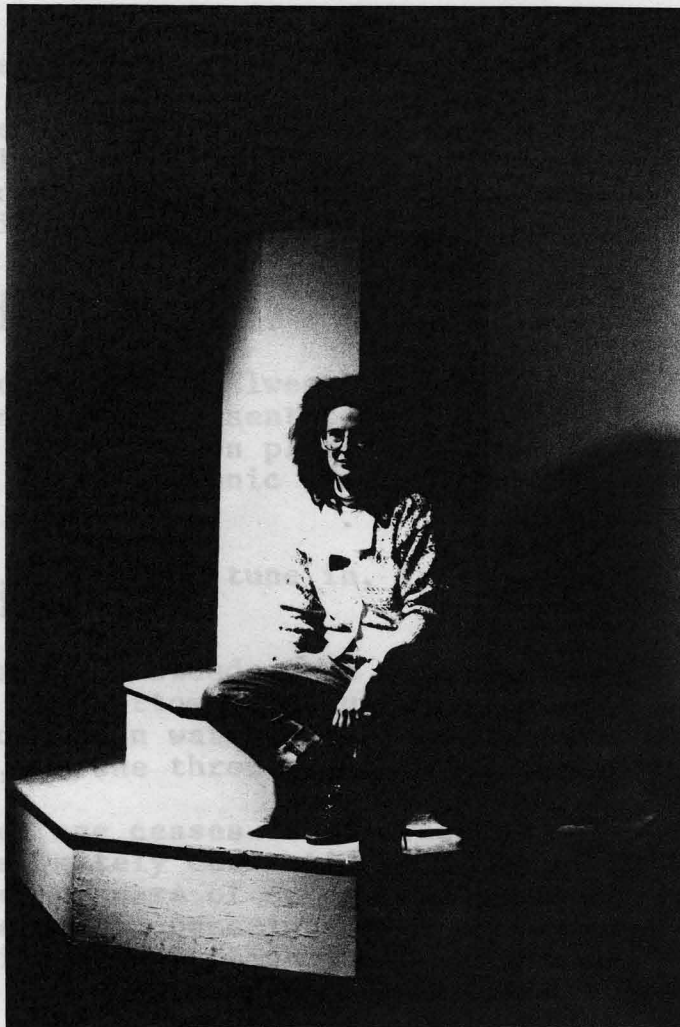




Adrian Henri talking to Judy Mervaisen on KALEIDOSCOPE April  
1991

- J.M: What, you may ask is a respectable Kaleidoscope reporter doing gazing down a wishing well with the pop painter and poet Adrian Henri. Well, not dropping pennies for a start.
- A.H: We are looking down into what looks like water but we aren't actually seeing our own face. We are seeing the face of a child ... looking into water.
- J.M: We climbed up a couple of steps to a plinth in a small darkened room in Liverpool's Bluecoat Gallery, one of a number of sites that's devoting itself to Video Positive.
- A.H: And every so often it drops a stone into the water and the image of its face breaks up with the ripples.. and then reforms again. Its very simple, a rather magical kind of effect.
- J.M: You almost forget about the technology when you are looking, don't you?
- A.H: Well, that's the good thing, I think. So far, a lot of video artists have said 'look at me how clever I am'. Presumably this was made with a lot of difficulty, but it doesn't look like that, it looks simple...which is what art should be about, I think. And its very moving and evocative.
- J.M: Catherine Elwes' 'Wishing Well' is a subtle fusion of sculpture and technology and for my tastes too, video art seems to work best when artists don't seem desperate to impress visitors with super-high technology.

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Alison Darnborough  
Gallery director of the Posterngate Gallery, Hull.

'The installation has been very well received in Hull. It has affected a complete transformation of the gallery. Someone described the church-like quality of the space and we heard little gasps of surprise as people looked down. It was good that you didn't see the image immediately but had to make an effort to 'get' it. Normally you're not supposed to touch objects in museums and galleries, let alone climb on them. A lot of people didn't dare step up and had to be prompted. These conventions run very deep. But it was worth it if you were intrigued and curious enough to make the climb. One girl claimed she was having a mystical experience and stayed in for about two hours! I personally felt an affinity with the idea expressed in the press release about coming to terms with your own childhood. You put a lot of things onto your child..without really intending to.'

Mike Stubbs

Artistic director, Hull Time-Based Arts,

'The most resonant thing for me is the idea of the little boy down the well. I can link him with the part of oneself that has been dumped down the well and forgotten...a forgotten voice..not listened to enough.'

Anna Douglas, 'A cautionary note on positivity', Women's Art Magazine, July/August 1991.

'Artists like Catherine Elwes have resisted novelty in favour of questioning the representational role of technology. Her Wishing Well installation plays defiantly on the illusive qualities of the electronic image to explore issues of 'the real.'

Nicky Hamlyn, 'Turn on, tune in, freak out', The Guardian, April 30th, 1991.

"The life-size well stands on a podium in the centre of a dimly lit room. At the bottom is an upturned TV playing a short tape of the reflection in water of an androgynous child. Periodically, he/she throws in a stone which breaks up in the reflection.

After a while, one ceases to be aware of the surface of the screen and intimately connected with the image of the child while also being aware of one's physical distance from it. This uncanny sensation is occasionally disrupted by the echoey sound of the dripping water, which lends a solidity to an intriguingly illusory experience".

Translated from the German - Petra Unnetzer, May 1991

Catherine Elwes' Wishing Well is a garden well built of natural stone in a darkened space, which the observer can look down into. From the depths of the well a video picture floats up accompanied by the voice of a child. The atmosphere is imploring, intimate and bewildering. It draws the observer into a maelstrom of thoughts and questions about interpersonal relationships, about unfamiliar forms of communication, even about one's own childhood, when, instead of a mirror image, the picture of a child is reflected up by the water.

Chris Meigh-Andrews, Art Monthly, June 1991.

"(WISHING) WELL" by Catherine Elwes was, in terms of the technology employed, the least complex work in the festival. But this elegant simplicity was also its strength. Entering a darkened space, the viewer encountered a cool, font-like construction, from which emanated occasional sounds of splashing water and the muffled, echoing voice of a child.

The viewer was invited to climb up and look down into the "well" only to be confronted by the apparently reflected image of a child, periodically broken up by it's dropping of coins into the water. The physical demands of this work created another form of "interactivity", a play on reflections. This in turn opened up an imaginative space within which to contemplate the nature of the illusion and our relationship to the child within us. The quietness of the space combined with the unusual proximity of other viewers as one peered down the well, produced an uncannily intimate experience of video.

J.M.C. Yorkshire Post, Jan 21st, 1991.

"Wishing well by Cate Elwes, commissioned by Hull Time Based Arts, is a new video installation being premiered in Hull and touring to Liverpool.

This installation combines a strong architectural expressiveness with the self-absorbed playfulness of a child dropping pebbles into the water. While constituting a whole experience which requires an active spectator participation, namely climbing up to peer into its depth, the Well is meaningful in a variety of ways.

First seen in illuminated isolation amongst enveloping darkness, the Well rises from a two-tier octagonal base to an overall height of about six feet, its planes precisely marked by the light. The hollow sound of dripping water combines with a child's voice and intermittently the splash of a sinking pebble.

Hushed tones, darkness and restricted spread of light are effective preparations for meditation and reflection. Vagueness of audible impression, the hardness of solids, the slow dynamics of voice and water are powerful evocators of mood and also of curiosity. A curiosity initially fully satisfied by a child's command of French, or the ability to lip-read English numerals up to eight. The video sequence recycles automatically and lasts for about three minutes- the length of time it took for a child's own interest to wane."

Steve Partridge, 'Variant' No: 9 Autumn 1991

"The reflection which was the TV screen at the bottom of a constructed well was a child's face and for me it was child as self rather than other. The piece stayed on the right side of the video/sculpture debate as the construction was a necessary part of the illusion rather than for its own sake".

Kate Elwes  
was interviewed by  
Claire Stanley