

Vivid improvement for art as former garage offers a new service

Terry Grimley

welcomes a new art venue in Eastside

An unprepossessing 1950s garage in workaday Digbeth has become Birmingham's newest contemporary gallery.

Vivid, alias the Birmingham Centre for Media Arts, has swapped its former home in the Jewellery Quarter for this new headquarters at the corner of Heath Mill Lane and Fazeley Street. An agency which commissions and collaborates with artists working with new technology, it now has a space to exhibit work to the public for the first time.

"We are emphatically not a gallery, we're a production company," says director Jasmin Baig-Clifford. "But this space gives us the opportunity to have work produced and exhibited in the same area.

"We talked about relocating

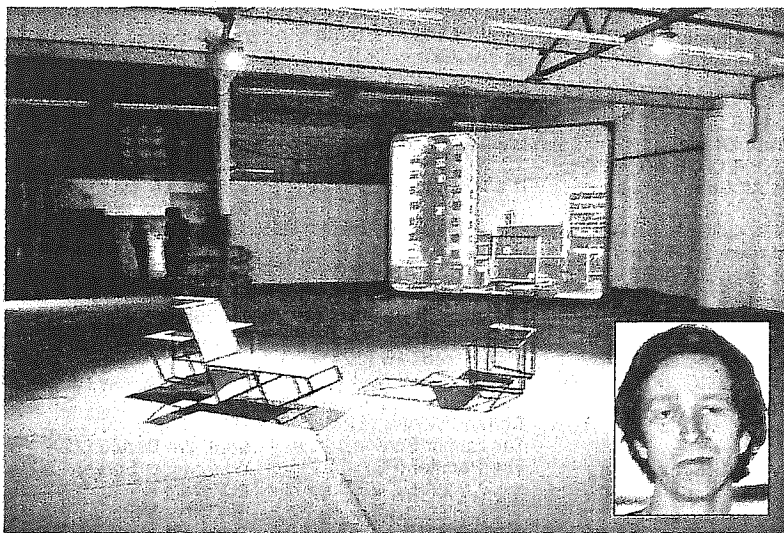
endlessly, but we started bringing artists down to this building in January, and their response was what swung the decision for us.

"They really felt the lack of a contemporary space. There have been exhibitions in temporary spaces in places like the Mailbox, but there wasn't anything you could pitch a proposal to and know it would still be there in a year's time.

"The typical immediate response was so excited that it convinced us we should go ahead with it. We moved in the first week of April, and we've had people drifting down and banging on the door wanting to see the space."

The building is owned by the Bond Company, which has put a new roof on it. The interior has been treated to the obligatory coats of white paint but retains the atmosphere of its previous use, with the MOT bay still clearly marked.

The opening exhibition, *Mobilette*, features a diverse



Vivid's new gallery is launched with an exhibition incorporating an architectural installation by Calum Stirling (Inset)

collection of recent work by Glasgow artist Calum Stirling, who was resident at Vivid last year. It reflects his interest in the links between art, music and architecture.

The most striking exhibit is a

live video projection of a model city built from German model railway accessories of the 1950s and 1960s, collected via Ebay. The brightly- coloured model itself looks quite jolly, but blown up in black and white on

a large screen this blandly modernistic place looks at once familiar and alien, like the empty location for a 1950s science-fiction film.

In another exhibit a piano plays a score derived from the random pattern of dark bricks in the end-wall of the building.

Stirling, who has recently shown in Berlin, Vienna, Barcelona and the National Gallery of Australia, works across a range of disciplines including sound design for television and architectural product design. There are some examples in the show of his furniture design.

Stirling will also feature in the official launch exhibition opening on June 16, alongside work by Steina Vasulka, Nina Katchadourian, Ivan and Heather Morison, Adele Prince, layla Curtis, Kate Pemberton and John Hammersley.

"For us the space is enabling us to become a company that works with artists from start to finish," says Jasmin Baig-Clifford.

"Proposals are already coming in, and we have one we're developing with two artists which is going to open here and at the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Arts, in London] - which is a fantastic leap forward for us."

Vivid's move marks another step in the gradual transformation of the lower Digbeth area from an industrial zone to one focused on arts and media. Maverick Television and Screen West Midlands are already in residence in Heath Mill Lane between the Custard Factory and The Bond, and Ikon Gallery is hoping to open a second space on Fazeley Street, only a few yards away.

"There's enough familiarity now with the Custard Factory and that being part of a creative area," says Jasmin Baig-Clifford. "We say we're just round the corner from the Custard Factory and a fair number of people from outside the West Midlands have a good notion of where that is."