



SARAH SPARKES

Driven to abstraction

Rebecca Feiner visits an art exhibition devoted to the motor car

As we feel our way towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, blinded by the light of new technological dawns, from stem-cell research to the e-clicking revolution, there seems barely time for the average Joe and Joanna to take stock and get ahead of the curve. So I was delighted at the prospect of *Driven*, an exhibition curated by Sarah Sparkes and sponsored by Citroën City and the Classic Car Club at East London's Fieldgate Gallery, which provides a space to explore our relationship with that very familiar piece of life-transforming technology, the internal combustion engine.

More than 100 years since its conception, the horseless carriage is still causing heated debate. From the red flags that once preceded all motor vehicles to the frenzied flag-waving that greeted Lewis Hamilton at Silverstone, the car moves us from love to hate and back again.

So *Driven* is not a minority-interest exhibition for petrolheads but a wider exploration of a technology that is universally relevant to the peoples of the world, be they supercar-driving princes or paupers dispossessed by a multinational land grab for biofuel crops. Thirty-two artists have responded to the challenge with everything from the psychological, the fetishised and the dangerous to the fashionable and the celebratory.

Some, disappointingly, have lived up to the show's press-release quote from Alex Cox's cult road movie, *Repo Man*: "The more you drive, the less intelligent you are." Among them is Benedict Radcliffe, whose very obvious contribution is *Straight Out of Dalston*, a black-window conversion

Four-wheeled beasts: an image from Nigel Grimmer's Roadkill Family Album, which is featured in the Driven exhibition (below)

of a Mk4 VW Golf with dance music on the car stereo: slick, yes, but hollow and unoriginal.

Don't be put off, though, because the other exhibits are far more imaginative. The ironic *Roadkill Family Album* by Nigel Grimmer shows humans (such as the artist's mother, above) lying corpse-like on the open road wearing animal masks, while Alexis Harding's sculpture *The Escapee* uses the familiar galvanised steel railings that dress ring roads and pedestrian walkways to dramatic and eerie effect; the car is not present, but we may imagine the screech of brakes as we survey its impact – a road accident disturbingly transformed into minimalist art.

But it's not all bleak; there is beauty here too, and rightly so. Occupying a darkened side-room, *One day, 14 hours, 37 minutes and 48 seconds* is a magical, otherworldly installation by Robert Currie. He has created a delicate and alluring experience from vertical strips of glistening

black videotape, representing the physicality of travelling through time and space that we usually become aware of only on long road trips.

A single light source shimmers through the tape, creating the illusion of night driving in the rain, while straight ahead, as if viewed through a wet windscreen, an elusive, jewel-like silhouette of a car materialises.

In a world of perpetual motion, I heartily recommend taking a rare moment of stillness in this sprawling gallery to contemplate the amazing, epoch-defining phenomenon of the motor car. Love it or hate it, the exhibition will certainly mean something to you.

♣ *Driven* runs until July 29 at Fieldgate Gallery, 14 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES and is open Friday-Sunday 1pm-6pm, late opening July 27 6pm-9pm. Admission is free.

