



LONDON BURNING: Portraits from a Creative City

edited by Hossein
Amirsadeghi;
Thames & Hudson;
£58 (hardback)

If there's a single thread running through this compendium of artists' experiences of London life, it's encapsulated by Moroccan-born gallery owner Hassan Hajjaj: 'I feel I'm not British but I'm a Londoner'.

London, we're repeatedly assured, offers opportunities not found elsewhere; not necessarily for fame and fortune, but often simply for acceptance; the freedom not to be stereotyped by sexual preference, identity or ethnic origin. The resulting cultural mix is why, 'if your idea works here, it explodes,' according to Fabien Riggall, Secret Cinema's founder.

But this inclusiveness is under threat from gentrification, which brings narrow-mindedness in its wake - fashion designer Lyall Hakaraia draws hostile curiosity anywhere outside Dalston. Alternative views are available: Anthony Gormley says his art happened 'almost in spite of London'; it wasn't until he lived in North Yorkshire, alongside 'weather and moors, heather and forests and deep winters', that he 'began to live properly'. He has much to say about how London became a creative powerhouse, citing Serota and Saatchi; the art schools; and especially Tate Modern, whose opening was a key moment in cultural transformation. But like many others, he too worries about gentrification: 'when it's all cleaned up, where is there room for the mess that artists make and feed off?'

Film director Guy Ritchie is a lone dissenting voice in this: Soho is apparently better than ever now, because 'you get bored of the filth'.

From Daunt's bookshop to William Blake's grave in Bunhill Fields, Islington, there's not an image in the book that doesn't illustrate the ways the city inspires artistic endeavour, if only because - to quote 'multicultural genius' M.I.A. - 'you produce better work as you're at home all day on account of the weather.'

MICK HERRON



Artists Gilbert & George base most of their work on London's East End



ROCKALL SOLO

by Nick Hancock;
CreateSpace;
£6.50 (softback)

For 45 days, Nick Hancock lived on a rough tooth of granite so

remote that it sits in a different time zone to the rest of the UK. *Rockall Solo* details the summer he spent on the tiny islet and the five years it took to get him there.

While a siren's existence in the open ocean sounds poetic, Hancock veers from romanticism and focuses instead on the realities of surviving. Punctuated with descriptions of his guano-covered surroundings, he shares how he kept his mental state, like any other piece of expedition equipment, in good nick and

it's hard not to be struck by how important it is to keep a steady head.

This is also true of the run up to the event. During an attempted first landing, the author describes how media involvement and corporate sponsorship quickly became a psychological tightrope for someone due to spend six weeks alone. The contrast of the book's busy first half to its isolated second shows the classic paradox of the expeditioner, who in wanting to go it alone still needs the sponsorship, exposure and media attention to pay for it.

Once out of the outer Hebrides, interactions with minke whales, skuas and one lone starling are a relief from the monster storms that rock his shelter. With a down-to-Earth tone, *Rockall Solo* is a remarkably honest depiction of living in a place that fewer people have landed on than the moon.

LAURA COLE

ROBIN FRIEND