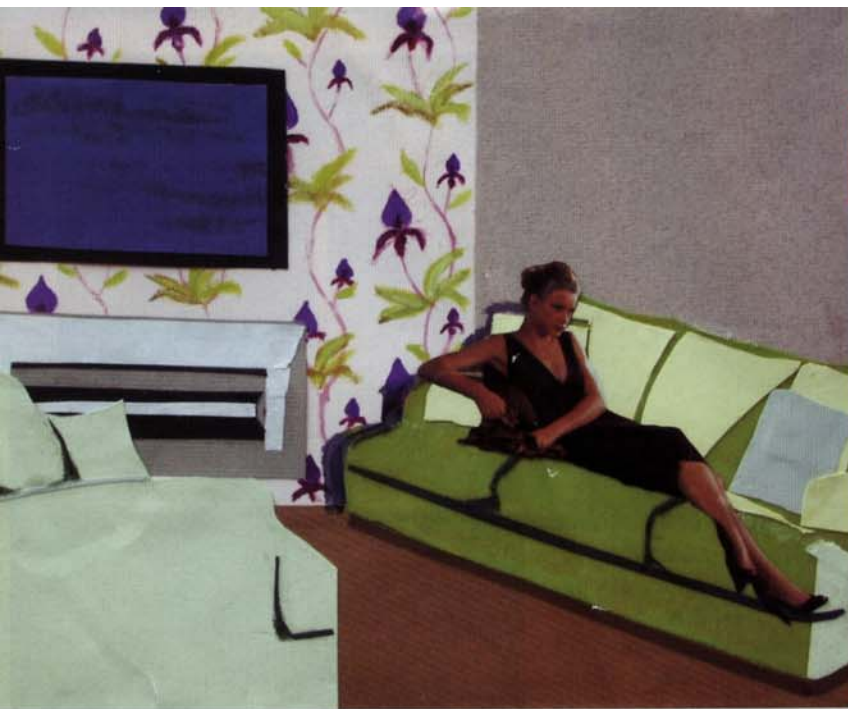


Left, *Girl on Sofa*, 2007, by Sarah Jeffries



Above, *I shall arrive soon*, 2003, by Fergal Stapleton
Left, *No 114*, 2006; below, *No 87*, 2005, both by Rana Begum

The alchemists

BritArt's young pretenders are taking everyday material and turning it into potential gold-dust. Louisa Buck highlights the names to watch

Celebrity artists and telephone-number price tags may continue to hog the headlines, but a new generation is proving that the most mundane of materials and low-key subject matter can also pack a hefty visual and conceptual punch. These emerging artists, who work in a wide variety of media and come from many backgrounds, are already attracting serious collector attention and confirm that less is often much more.

ALEXANDER HEIM, who finished his MA at Goldsmiths last year, finds beauty in base matter, as in a series of jewel-like pieces made from crushed wing mirrors. "I start from a place or thing that grabs my attention and then try to find the right material for it," says the Hamburg-born artist, who insists that, despite forays into different media including ceramics, poured ink, molten lead and the smoke from a paraffin lamp, he is primarily a video artist. "I spend 50 per cent or more of my time walking around London with a camera – it doesn't matter where."

One outcome of these perambulations is *Grand Walk*, a strangely uplifting film that focuses on a particularly insalubrious stretch of London's Regent's Canal, and which has been bought by collector Anita Zabłudowicz. "A swan family was breeding right next to this horrible estate, and all these people were watching them constantly," he recalls. The

overall effect is less David Attenborough than *Big Brother* as the swans raise their cygnets, surrounded by floating rubbish and accompanied by a trippy, high-energy soundtrack.

The urban environment also plays a key part in **NATHANIEL RACKOWE**'s large industrial-style sculptures, which use light, motion and workaday building materials in ways that can be highly disconcerting. "I'm inspired by my experience of inhabiting cities and the built environment" he says. "I feel that I constantly have to adapt to my surroundings and I want the sculpture to have the same effect – people have to react to it."

One of his earlier pieces involved a tense walk between two lines of fluorescent strips that were timed to roll together every five minutes, crushing anything in between, but now the work relies on physical presence rather than potential threat. Rackowe's solo show this autumn fills east London gallery Bischoff/Weiss with an enormous structure made from scaffolding covered in white plastic cladding and using sequential lighting to reveal the shadows. He is now working on a permanent commission for the Norman Foster-designed McLaren Technology Centre and, in September, his heavy-duty kinetic sculpture *RP3* has a month-long residency in the Economist Plaza in St James's.

KATE ATKIN looks to the natural world for her inspiration, but there is nothing pretty or soft-centred about her enormous,

Below, *Grand Walk*, 2005, by Alexander Heim



obsessively detailed pencil drawings or the sombre black reliefs. She uses moss, rocks, ferns, gnarled tree trunks and ridged bark, but says, "I find it painful when people make botanical references – the idea of expeditions and explicit research points is irrelevant to me."

Atkin was a year into her photography MA at the Royal College of Art in 2004 when she started to draw a tree that she had idly photographed in Hyde Park and "suddenly realised what I was supposed to be doing". A month after graduating, she was taken up by the gallery Museum 52, and her drawings are eagerly sought after, but she >