

24 - 31 APR 1989



# VISUAL ARTS

## reviews

### ■ INTIMATE DISTANCE: PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY

A woman stands naked behind a shower screen. Seeking to clear the blurring translucent screen, to break through, her gestures further smear it with wide arcs of blood. The screen darkens and blots out the slipping body. Dislocation goes on and on, to the static-blurred sound of Beirut short wave radio. 'Changing Places' is one of Mona Hatoum's two video contributions to this exhibition of work by five black women artists living in the UK. It was filmed during a 1984 visit to Palestinian parents in Beirut, and its themes of dislocation, power and powerlessness, and the rejection of cultural identity as something fixed - a safe place - ripple through Intimate Distance. Photography as flat print is largely rejected: where Hatoum chooses the blurring matrix of video images, Sutapa Biswas and Zarina Bhimji hang large transparencies from the ceiling, so the images, throwing out shadows, imply more than a print. And less; pinned against the wall they'd disappear. Which is what, judging by some politely crossed-out expressions around her work, some viewers would like to see happen to Bhimji's sequence. Showing the indistinct outline of a sleeping (or dead?) man scattered with tufts cut from thick hair, the implication is of a domestic, and hidden sex trauma, as a metaphor for wider alienation. 'To exit' writes Bhimji 'or to think of a person who is traditionally rooted - this gives me a feeling of freedom, and a feeling of panic.' Guyana-born Ingrid Pollard attacks the black/urban, white/rural divide by collaging pictures from her family album against cold Brit seascapes and tripper clichés in careful Victorian copperplate: 'wish you were here'. Maxine Walker's image of a bride behind a veil, within her documentary-style sequence of a wedding, is disturbingly ambivalent. No answers, and certainly no naff configurations of 'black experience' - an excellent show. ROSE JENNINGS



POSITIVE IMAGE? DETAIL FROM 'INFESTATIONS OF THE AORTA, SHRINE TO A DISTANT RELATIVE' BY SUTAPA BISWAS, IN THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY SHOW 'INTIMATE DISTANCE', WHICH IS REVIEWED THIS WEEK