

'Tempered Ground'

Museum of Garden History

South

In terms of both its ambience and audience, the Museum of Garden History isn't a natural home for contemporary art. Anna Best and Jules Mylis have obviously sussed this out. Open a hatch in their wooden box and '90s techno fills the air – to the disgust of those taking tea in the café. On a monitor inside the box are images of roadworks from trade magazines; the notion of the museum as genteel sanctuary is turned on its head. Set to a soundtrack of chamber music, Anna Boggon's video of topiary and immaculate lawns seems more sympathetic to its surroundings – at first glance; but things turn a bit Benny Hill as a scruffy, motorised tree bombs around the well-kept grounds of Packwood House, Solihull.

Organised by Danielle Arnaud, 'Tempered Ground' is the result of

collaborations between artists and horticulturists from around the country. Working with head gardener Wolfgang Bopp, Andrea Liggins attempts to give us 'backstage' access to The National Botanic Garden of Wales in Carmarthenshire by beaming images to a plasma screen via her mobile phone. It's a nice idea, but all you get are fuzzy pictures of plants. In a wall text, Alexa de Ferranti eloquently explains her attraction to the grounds of Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire; but, set into a plinth and the floor, her little diascoes reveal only a couple of succulents and a picture of a gardener (presumably her collaborator, Paul Farnell). Teaming up with John

Tordoff, David Cotterrell explores issues about display, privacy and property. Look through some binoculars pointing towards the ceiling and you get a composite view of his Hackney garden as seen from the upstairs windows of neighbouring houses – a surveillance device that questions why we garden, and for whom.

Martin Coomer

