

## The m<sup>2</sup> Gallery upholds an unlikely but longstanding artistic heritage in Peckham, writes *Rory Olcayto*

IBP ARCHITECTURE WRITER OF THE YEAR



The return of *Only Fools and Horses* for a one-off sketch on a BBC charity fundraising show in March

raises the tantalising prospect of Del Boy and Rodney (but sadly, not Trigger, RIP) wandering around the Bold Tendencies exhibition in Peckham car park inspecting the avant garde sculptures and hipster haircuts the south London neighbourhood has come to be known for.

Had they reunited a little earlier, the wheeling, dealing brothers might even have confronted Jess Flood-Paddock's *New York – Paris – Peckham* (pictured), a ready-made sculpture of Del Boy's yellow Reliant Regal three-wheeled van, the star of Bold Tendencies 5 in 2011. Flood's copy of the old banger 'considers the complex relationship a community may develop with its reputation and representation', and how 'the icons from the show become shorthand for expressing struggle and farce familiar in contemporary life'. I'd love to hear Del Boy's take on that, and what French word or phrase he'd mangle to make his point. And Rodney's too, with his GCE in art and brief stint at Basingstoke art college.

But how their old stomping ground has changed since the last show, a Christmas special in 2003, is unlikely to feature in Del Boy's return, which centres on the old gang celebrating his 65th birthday and revives an unused script by show creator John Sullivan, who died in 2011. It's probably for the better, because the truth is a little different from the story now being spun about Peckham's transformation from downtrodden inner-city hole into a vibrant centre for the arts. The presence of two nearby art schools – Camberwell and Goldsmiths – the South London Gallery, the Flat Time House (the home and studio of artist John Latham), William Blake's angelic vision way back when: this is the evidence of Peckham's long artistic heritage. These are the headline acts, of course, but they are many other



venues that back up Peckham's credentials: Ken Taylor's m<sup>2</sup> Gallery, for instance, part of Quay2c, a practice of architects, designers and artists on King's Grove just a few minutes walk from Queens Road Peckham railways station (and easily reached from Shoreditch, etc, on the Overground). It has been active since 2000 (when *Only Fools and Horses* was still part of the schedules) and regularly puts on very good shows. Ken will probably think my timing useless (sorry, Ken) because the most recent exhibition, Cathedral Series, by regular AJ lensman Anthony Coleman, has just finished (sorry, Anthony). Coleman's show was a photographic study of the west fronts of England's medieval cathedrals, minsters and abbeys (not all of them – the focus was on the southern ones). Individually they are magnificent portraits, the stonework details enhanced by the mild

white skies they are set against. Viewed together, the effect is even greater, a holistic vision of the phenomenon of Norman cathedral building.

Coleman allows the viewer to compare and contrast. Wells is my favourite; but the Jacob's Ladder carving on Bath's west front is the most eye-catching detail. Inspired by m<sup>2</sup> Gallery, the AJ will soon publish Coleman's study in full.

Earlier last year m<sup>2</sup> hosted another brilliant show, Conniston House 1:3, by AHMM's Will Lee, eerie photographic collages of the interiors of a 25-storey Camberwell tower block built by the LCC in 1963. The stunted images, of doors with giant handles and living rooms with absurdly shortened wall-hung radiators, are dizzying and uncanny. As Lee explains: 'Mundane and domestic components take on a new significance as they form closer relationships with their surroundings, while attention is drawn to the scale of the dirt and crude construction holding the building together – evidence of builders, residents and the passage of 50 years.'

You can assume there'll be more thought-provoking art on show this year. Taylor's standards are high; or, 'He who dares Rodney, he who dares...', as Del Boy might say.