

Ham & High

HAMPSTEAD & HIGHGATE EXPRESS

Turfed out

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WHILE last month's Frieze Art Fair in Regent's Park grabbed headlines, a more modest but very uplifting alternative fair took place around the corner.

More than 50 international exhibitors staged thematic shows at the Melia White House Hotel in Albany Street for scopeLondon. But not all went smoothly. An installation called Green Intervention, in which 40 square metres of turf were to be laid on the pavement outside, was sanctioned by the fair's producer but vetoed by the hotel at the last minute on grounds of safety. Dirt was a factor.

Spanish artist Elena Bajo and her collaborators, two New York curators who call themselves W/O Walls, reacted to the ban by arranging the turf in a pyramid behind the church opposite: a sorry sight on the rainy opening day.

Enter Mike Egan, manager of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge based at the church, who persuaded his colleagues to have it planted in the grounds. So, on October 23, the rejected turf began a new life. If you want to check on its welfare, it's to the right of the entrance, opposite Great Portland Street Tube.

This project follows in a tradition of turf-art - including the "greening" of Smithfield this summer and Sod Swop made in Kensington Gardens in 1983 by David Nash, who wanted to create a piece that would say in the most basic way where it came from - by using the land itself.

Green Intervention want turf to raise awareness of "the culture's battle with nature". As Renee Vara of W/O Walls said: "Nature will continue to break the boundaries constructed by culture - whether they be psychological, administrative or social structures built to deny nature its true expression." I admire their lofty ambitions for commercial turf dumped by a landscaping firm.

There seemed no such discord in the use of interior spaces. New York galleries made keen use of bathrooms, with displays of erotic pictures and titles like the Swinger Series. More interesting was the "bathmat" of a child's party frock (very Grayson Perry) with its top half compressed into a transparent disk.

I enjoyed the imaginative use of the king-size beds. One was propped up as a screen for a blurry video of a baby crawling and a couple having a rather active lie-in.

Silvia Levenson, an Argentinian artist working in Italy, used a formidable bedspread of squares of glass and wire with upturned spikes to make A Room of One's Own.