

INTERNATIONAL LAWNS

“Driven by a fascination and respect for the history of brand management and corporate identity, the design group INTERNATIONAL LAWNS undertake projects by both commission and personal motivation.”

Of particular relevance to Frome, INTERNATIONAL LAWNS are excited to premiere their unsolicited re-branding of the Co-op. The project was inspired by an engraving of Robert Owen, founder of utopian socialism and the cooperative movement, made by Henry Thomas Ryall of Frome, Royal Engraver to Queen Victoria, after a painting by William Henry Brooke. In the manner of Ryall, INTERNATIONAL LAWNS’ ‘Co-op’ is a re-working, an interpretation of Raymond Loewy’s decommissioned cloverleaf logo. We plan to present this to the Co-op, perhaps next year, with the suggestion that it is superior to their replacement by Harry Pearce and John McConnell of Pentagram and should be considered for immediate re-implementation. * In contrast to the façade of resolute self-belief characterised by most large design groups, INTERNATIONAL LAWNS practice a philosophy of doubt, questions and distraction. For the duration of this exhibition visitors will be able to contact the agency with requests and ideas that the team will process and return. We will also be showing examples from our LAWN archive. *In this case especially, we are prepared to gracefully accept the probable rejection of our recommendation. We are aware that Pentagram was founded on principles of lateral equality compatible with the cooperative movement.

INTERNATIONAL LAWNS, is a design agency run by artists Andrew Curtis and Niall Monro.

This exhibition has been supported by Frome Town Council.



(Foreground INTERNATIONAL LAWNS commissioned public sculpture by Rupert Ackroyd)

An interview between INTERNATIONAL LAWNS and Peter Conway.

PC: Who are and what is INTERNATIONAL LAWNS?

IL: INTERNATIONAL LAWNS is a small design group founded in 2013 by artists Andrew Curtis and Niall Monro. We have been working together creatively since 2008 and decided the time was right to formalise our partnership. Most of the projects we work on are self-initiated but recently we have been approached to work for others.

PC: Were you both working in similar practices and disciplines when you started to collaborate? Do you both have a similar approach to the work that you make? Or do you lock horns and battle it out?

IL: We both come from backgrounds involved in the production of printed matter, both for commercial and fine art purposes. Niall's experience began in the pre and early digital period of the 1980's whereas Andrew's is of the last 15 years or so. Although we share views on approaching work, pushing an idea beyond our preconceptions is only possible through the resolution of a healthy battle.

PC: For this exhibition I understand you have focused on the early cooperative movement. Is the cooperative movement something that inspires you in your everyday lives? Are there any other ideas and artists that inspire the work you create?

IL: We are both interested in any attempt to disrupt, reconfigure and improve societal expectance and habit. Both the cooperative movement, co-founded by Robert Owen and the Co-operative Group, an extension of Owen's ideals, now struggling to maintain an identity distinct from its non co-operative competitors, inspire us to act. We are open to and inspired by the ideas of all, artists included. Edwin Beard Budding had a great impact on a large part of our work.



PC: Was Edwin Beard Budding, being the inventor of the lawnmower, an inspiration behind the name INTERNATIONAL LAWNS?

IL: INTERNATIONAL LAWNS is also the name of a tennis centre in Eastbourne, something we were unaware of when we decided on our name, but they've yet to complain so we'll stick with it if we can. The name came from our research into the function of the garage door beyond its primary purpose. We see the seasonal repainting of its surface as the nearest most people will come to taking on the history of high modernist mid-century abstraction, in a contemporary suburban context. Only a short leap took us to the well-kept lawn, another means of displaying one's aesthetic values, indebted to Budding's inventiveness.

Although as a design group we specialise in the reworking and hopefully reintegration of decommissioned logotypes, our research leads us into areas of display and façade that inform the work we produce. We hope to show pieces from our LAWN archive at The Toolshed

PC: What sparked your interest in the suburban landscape? Did you grow up in a suburban environment? Also, could you tell us a little about the re-branding project for the Co-op?

IL: We both live in the suburbs, Niall in West London and Andrew in South East London. We see them as the neutral space between nature in the countryside and the man-made city centre, a place where the subtle aesthetics of lawn care or garage door painting can flourish.



Our re-branding of the Co-op is a work in progress. We were hoping that the display in Frome will feature a definitive resolution to the project. This is looking unlikely, though we have designed a logotype which we are currently running implementation tests on.

The idea to do it came from an outstanding photograph we found online, of a Raymond Loewy designed co-op logotype on the side of a building. At the time we were thinking about the failed idealism of the early cooperative movement and were repeatedly drawn to the work of its founder, Robert Owen. The most familiar image of Owen is a painting by William Henry Brooke, though a reworking of this image as an engraving by Henry Thomas Ryall seemed much more satisfactory to us.

The current branding used by Co-op, despite its competent functionality, to us lacked the qualities we found in the Loewy design that it replaced. In the interpretive manner of Ryall's reproduction of Brooke's painting, we decided to rework Loewy's design in the hope that it may, when complete, be reintroduced.

PC: So, what does the future hold for INTERNATIONAL LAWNS? Have you got any other re-branding work in the pipeline? Is there anywhere online that people can see more of your work?

IL: For the duration of the show at The Toolshed we are inviting visitors to contact us at with requests and ideas for future INTERNATIONAL LAWNS work. We are keen that the exhibition functions as an advertisement for our services, not a retrospective survey. We will update INTERNATIONAL-LAWNS.TUMBLR.COM with our responses to proposals.

We have recently been asked to curate a series of exhibitions and accompanying publications addressing the 'mines' which is scheduled for early 2014. Unsolicited re-branding projects include a Dutch furniture, appliances and home accessories multinational and a popular British telecommunications provider.



PC: Can you recommend a starting point or further reading for anyone who may be interested in the life of Robert Owen and the early Cooperative movement?

IL: For anyone interested in Owen, we would definitely recommend 'A New View of Society and Other Writings' which contains a strong selection of his ideas. 'Josiah Warren, The First American Anarchist' by William Bailie is another useful text detailing the life of Warren who lived in New Harmony, a progressive community founded by Owen, but rejected his cooperative ideals and developed a contrasting philosophy of individualism.



(International Lawns, 2013, The Toolshed)
toolshedgallery.com