

She 2004

We proposed to position an eternal flame in physical and symbolic relation to the Lion statue in Forbury Gardens, Reading, England. The Lion commemorates a battle in 1880 in Maiwand, Afghanistan – Britain’s last military involvement in Afghanistan before 11 September 2001. Through its monumental scale, heightened musculature and formidable pose, the Lion exudes a powerful physical presence, while retaining all the mythical and heraldic connotations interwoven with British military and feudal history.

In popular culture flames recur as symbols of destruction, passion and desire. In the public realm, symbolic flames include the torch held by the Statue of Liberty in New York, the Torch of Remembrance to the Unknown Soldier in Paris, and the Olympic flame. These invoke ideas of freedom and democracy, eternity, and internationalism.

The world’s increasing dependency on fossil fuels is the key issue underlying human societies’ unsustainable relationship with the environment. The proposed eternal flame would have burned mineral gas: fossil fuel piped from and across a range of territories including Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kazakhstan, Morocco and Nigeria.

The flame would have served as a beacon, and illuminated the Lion as a reference point for the people of Reading in the new world order. We think the work had strong potential for film, photography and television, and that it should have attracted national and hopefully international attention. We believe this attention would have contributed to Reading’s public image as a progressive community.

The social process of gaining support and consent for the proposed installation would have involved us fully in giving public talks and presentations. We would also have consulted and collaborated with many people, including local councillors, arts officers, business people and academic researchers in the geopolitics of energy.

The flame would have burned continuously until the people of Reading exercised their democratic rights by voting to extinguish it.

*She* (1887) is the title of the classic adventure novel by Henry Rider Haggard, set in a distant land at the limit of the British Empire. The central character is ‘She Who Must be Obeyed’, a beautiful enchantress who is immortalised by immersion in the eternal flame.



*The Maiwand Lion* (1886)  
War memorial by George Blackall Simmonds  
Forbury Gardens, Reading, England  
Courtesy of Reading Museum





Neil Tudman  
*Refugees near Herat, Afghanistan* (2003)  
 Courtesy of Médecins Sans Frontières



'Eternal Flame' study for *She*  
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