

Because it is there 1992-98 mixed media



Because it is there is a single work comprising the works of four artists:

Glen Baxter
Thibaud Beghin
Jonathan Davis.
Kate Blacker

The Last Mystery
The Roof of the world
Electronic Press Kit

portfolio of drawings
card game
video
photographic enlargements



The works are based on the 1933 Houston-Mount Everest expedition to fly over and photograph the summit and approaches of Mount Everest. The expedition returned with the first images of the Earth taken from high in the atmosphere, photographs looking down onto the summit of Mount Everest.

BIT: KB/6B 33/92

APRIL 1933. KING KONG HAS JUST CLIMBED THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING AND IS FENDING OFF AN ATTACK BY A SQUADRON OF AMERICAN BIPLANES. HALFWAY ACROSS THE WORLD, TWO BRITISH AIRCRAFT ARE SOARING HIGH ABOVE THE CLOUDS. SQUADRON LEADER THE MARQUESS OF DOUGLAS AND CLYDESDALE A.F.C., M.P IS IN THE FIRST AEROPLANE, WITH COLONEL L.V.S BLACKER AS OBSERVER PHOTOGRAPHER. FLYING ALONGSIDE IS FLIGHT LIEUTENANT D.F. MCINTYRE AND MR. S.R. BONNET OF THE GAUMONT BRITISH FILM CORPORATION. COLONEL BLACKER IS PEERING THROUGH HIS VIEWFINDER. HE OPENS THE CAMERA SHUTTER. THE SUMMIT OF EVEREST IS CAPTURED ON FILM.

During April in 1933 two specially developed biplanes piloted by men wearing elaborate heated altitude suits flew over and photographed Mount Everest. The principal aim of the expedition was to discover if aviation photography was possible over the highest and most severe landscapes of the Earth to enable the future cartography of the world's most inaccessible places.

At the time of the expedition only ten per cent of the Earth's surface had been accurately mapped.

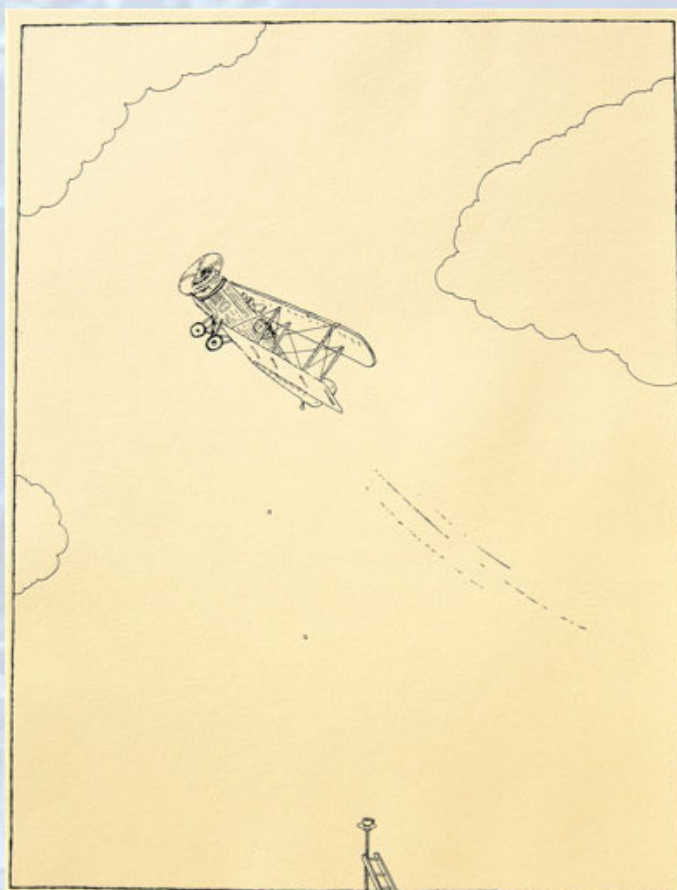


THERE WERE NUMEROUS TESTS OF ELECTRICALLY HEATED CLOTHING DESIGNED TO COMBAT THE EXCEPTIONALLY LOW TEMPERATURES OVER EVEREST

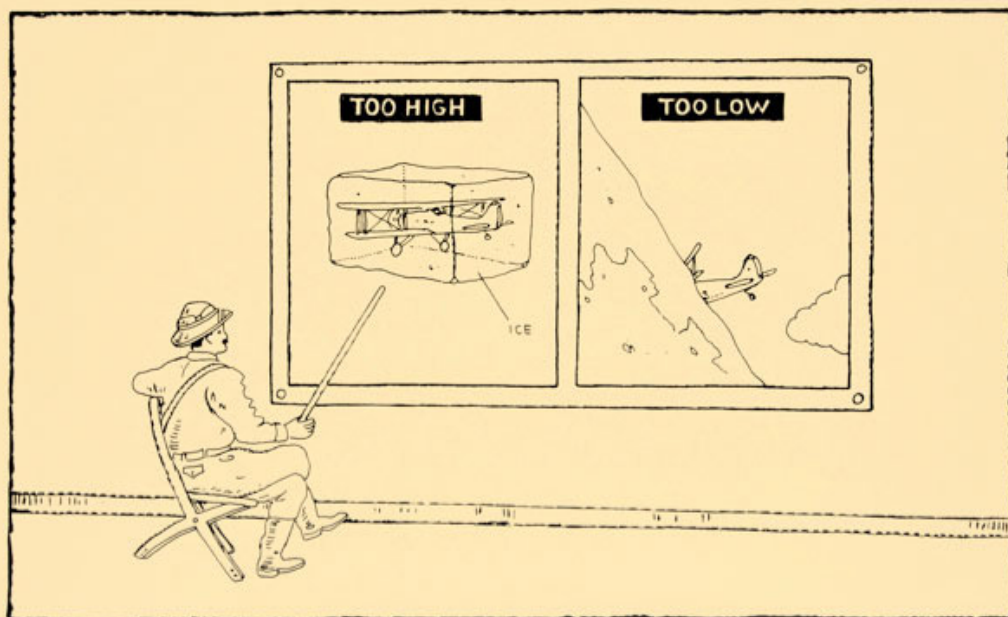


...NOT ALL OF WHICH TURNED OUT TO BE ENTIRELY SATISFACTORY

As preparations for the expedition progressed technological breakthroughs were made in many areas of aeronautics, camera technology, cartographic techniques and cold climate exploration.



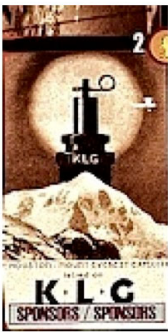
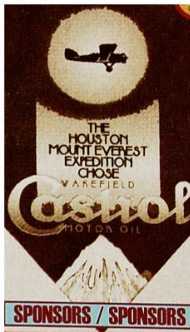
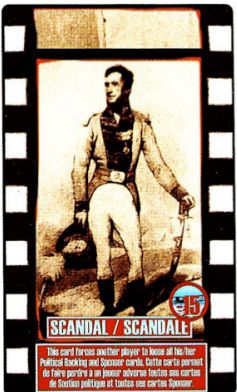
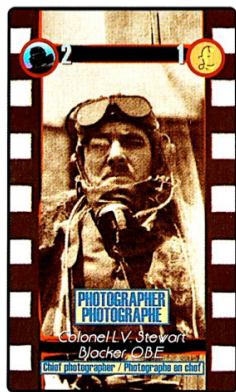
IN ORDER TO PERFECT THE PINPOINT ACCURACY
REQUIRED ON THEIR MISSION, BLACKER AND
M^CINTYRE RAN A SERIES OF TEST FLIGHTS
USING THE LATEST "SUGAR LUMP" TECHNIQUE



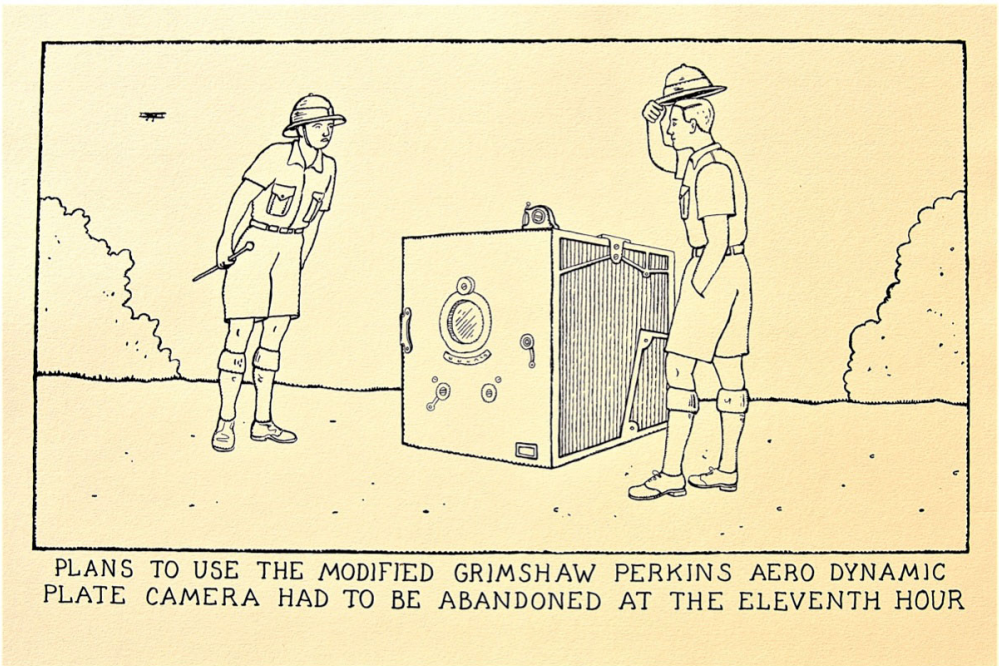
COLONEL BLACKER PONDERED THE DIRE
CONSEQUENCES OF MISCALCULATION

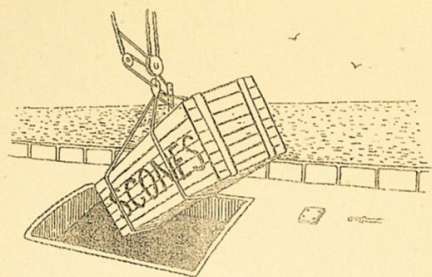
Colonel LVS Blacker, observer photographer of the expedition, told an anecdote concerning his ancestor Valentine Blacker.

Once Surveyor General of India and responsible for the trigonometrical mapping survey of the country he had been killed in a duel by a cuckolded husband. Colonel LVS Blacker speculated that had Valentine Blacker lived, Mount Everest might have been named Mount Blacker instead of after his assistant George Everest. It is unusual for photographs taken on a supposed scientific expedition to have been signed with the photographer's signature. There may be reason for an hypothesis that the Colonel was hoping to re-associate the family name with the world's highest and now 'conquered' mountain.

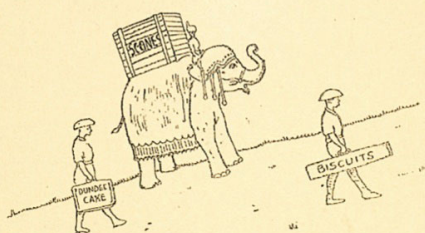


Commercial sponsors were keen to associate products with the successful outcome of the expedition.

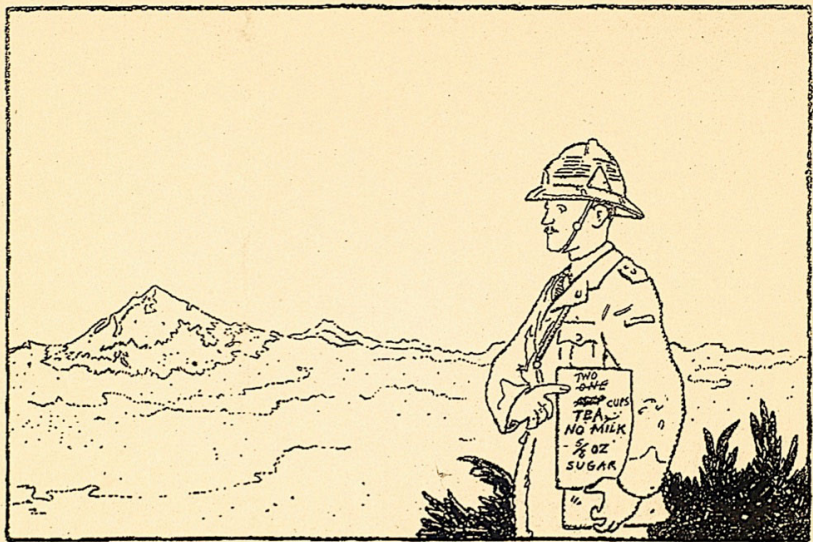




ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES WERE
SHIPPED IN FROM ENGLAND



AND TRANSPORTED ACROSS
DIFFICULT TERRAIN TO THE
BUNGALOW AT PURNEA



"THE SUCCESS OF OUR MISSION RESTS ENTIRELY UPON
CLARITY AND PRECISION" ANNOUNCED COLONEL BLACKER

The aerial conquest of Everest would also demonstrate the inevitability of British colonial superiority in India and it was hoped, subdue Gandhi's popular influence.

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The expedition was remarkable in being backed by both private and commercial sponsorship, although in essence Scientific there were nevertheless many political and propaganda purposes behind it.



The patriotic millionairess and aviation enthusiast Lady Lucy Houston sponsored the flight for the most part, she had previously funded the development of the Supermarine spitfire, the prototype of the famous fighter aircraft, the 'Spitfire'. The expedition was to show the power of aircraft and camera in modern warfare and give Winston Churchill weight to his argument as he put pressure on the British government to re-arm against the possible threat of an expansionist Germany.

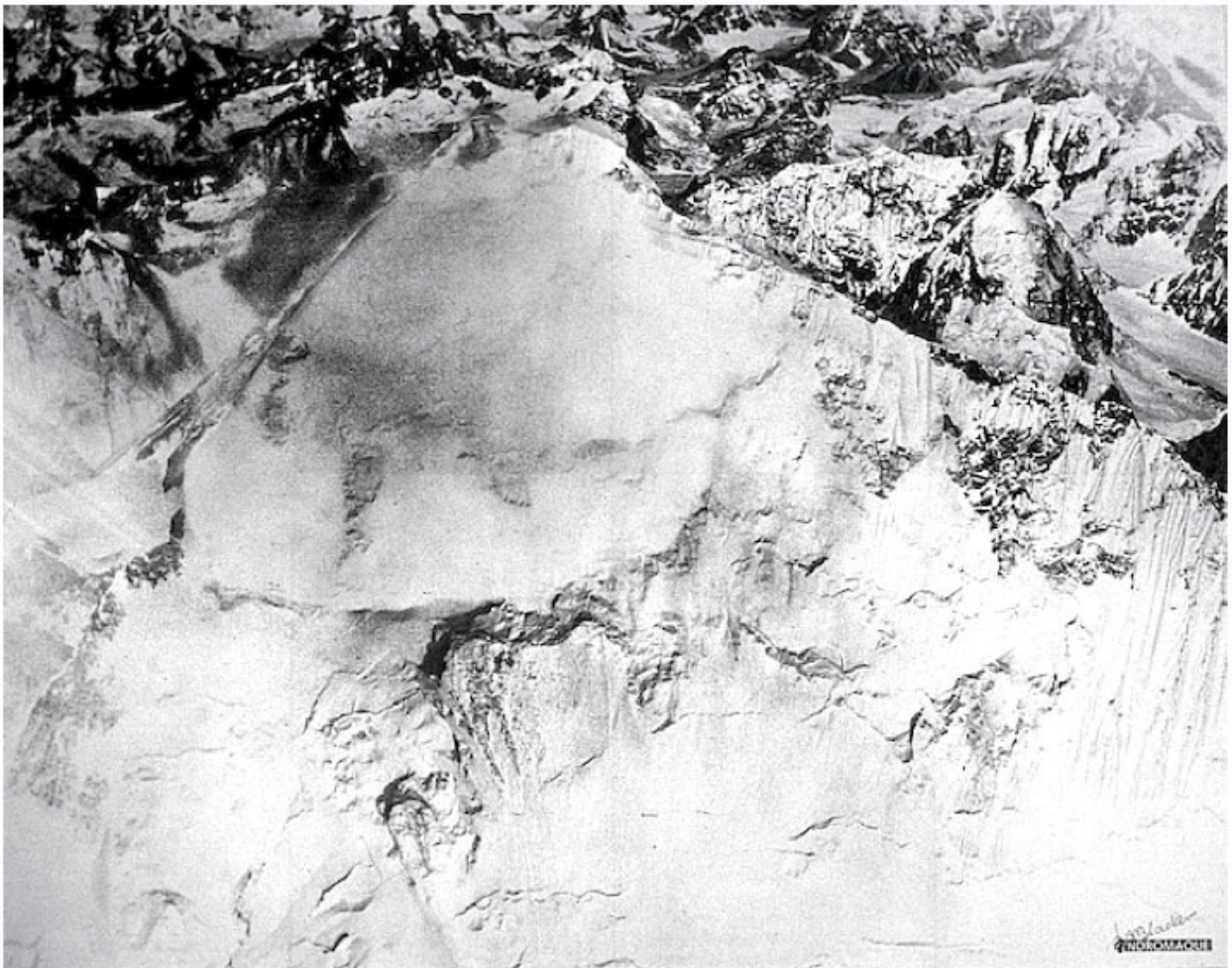




"Wings over Everest" was a 40 minute documentary film produced by Gaumont British to be shown in their cinemas. It was made on location in India and during the preparation of the expedition.

The Times newspaper assured full pictorial coverage of the Himalayan landscape with the story of the expedition in a nine page pull-out supplement and front page headlines.

The most inaccessible place on earth was suddenly available to the public via the media.

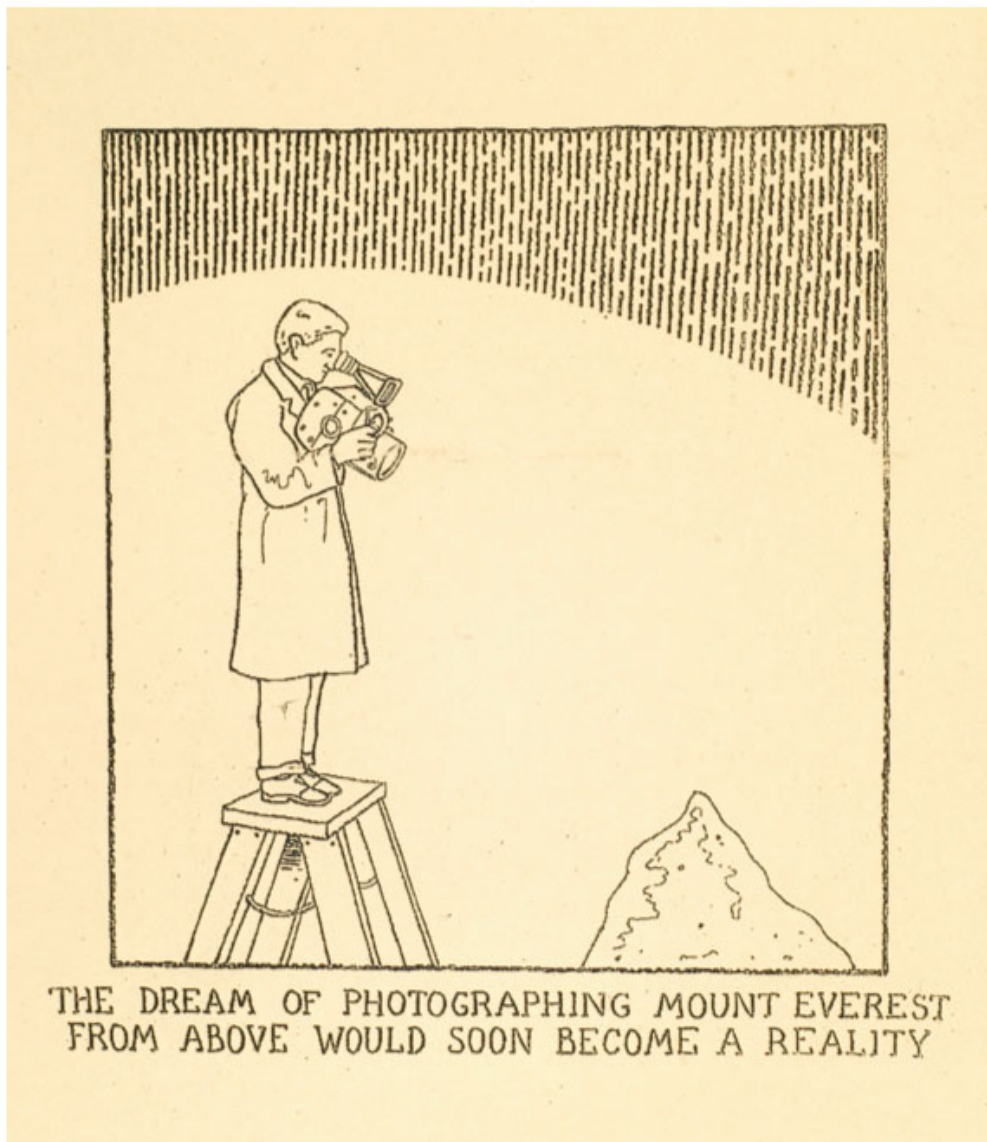


'Because it is there' is available for a wider public outside the art exhibition framework, it is possible to reconstitute the whole work by buying an individual version of each of the elements.

The Last Mystery and Roof of the World have each been printed in bilingual (French and English) versions in 3000 unsigned copies and distributed through independent outlets. Electronic Press Kit is available for standard television outlets, on DVD and on the internet.

It is possible to be aware of only one quarter of the whole, a fragment of the story - a story which has disappeared in the wake of rapid development and a flurry of record breaking expeditions. 'Because it is there' also exists in three 'original' examples with signed versions of each of the works.

At the centre of the work lies one of the most significant changes in our point of view, the ability to look down on our planet and ourselves from space. No longer looking upwards and out in awe but down onto the earth from above at anything, anywhere, anytime. The photographs of the 1933 expedition over Everest embody this pivotal change, their impact at the time no less awe inspiring than the first images of earth taken 40 years later by Apollo from the moon.



The Last Mystery by Glen Baxter.

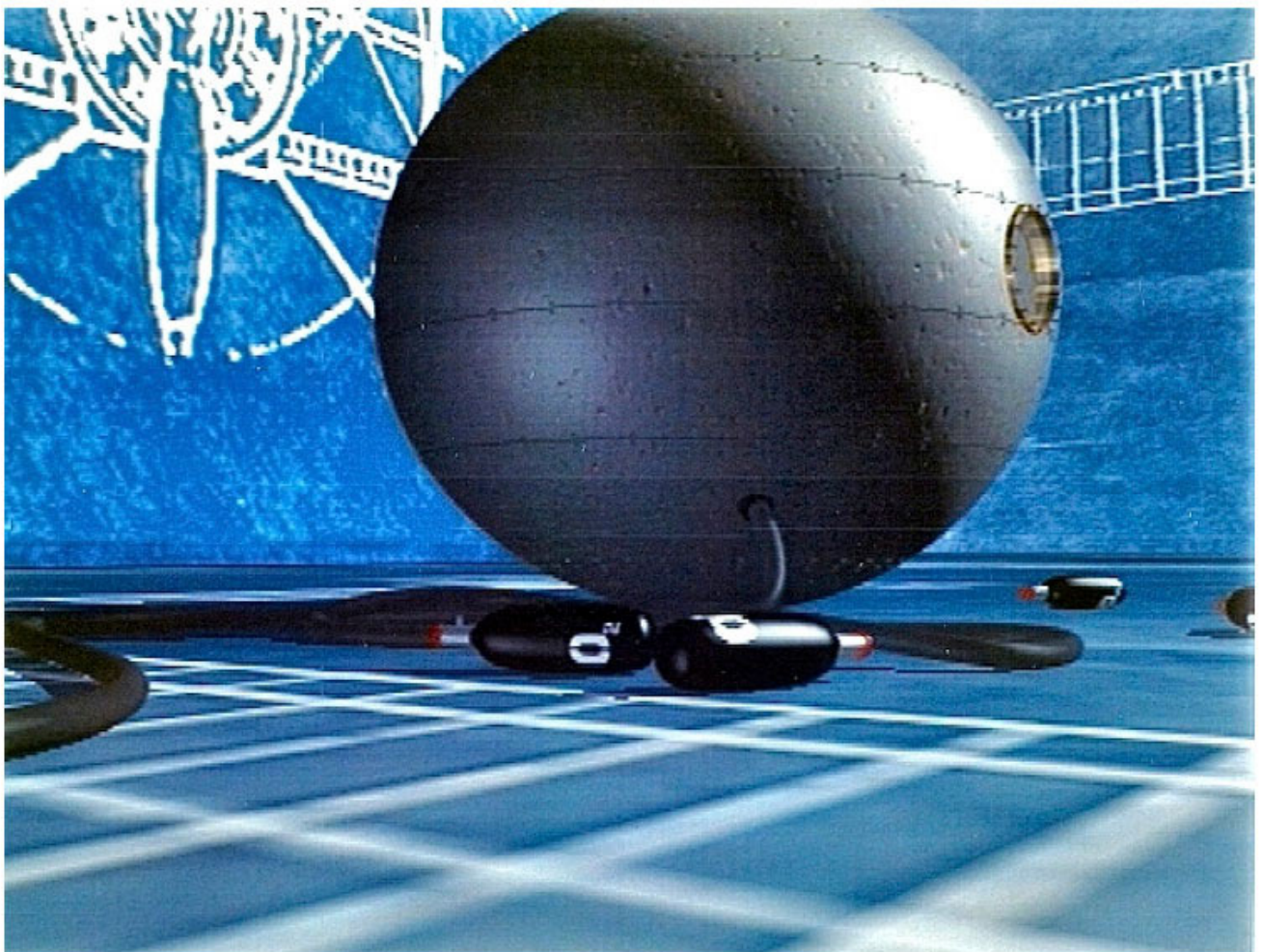
A portfolio of ten drawings with text. An oblique look at the elaborate and innovative experiments made by the 'back room boys' in the preparation of the photographic and technical equipment for the flight contrasting with an absurdist take on the last gasps of British colonial rule in India.

Roof of the World by Thibaud Beghin.

A card game for players who are engaged in the complexity of mounting the expedition, confronting the technical, economic, strategic and political challenges experienced at the time. Facts and anecdotes about the expedition are revealed as players collect the necessary combinations of planes, pilots, sponsors and political support to launch their assault on Everest.

E.P.K. (electronic press kit) by Jonathan Davis.

A twenty minute video that takes the form of a video press release for 'The importance of being Everest' a feature film about the expedition including interviews with the other artists. As both art work and information package EPK occupies a space between publicity, art and documentary.



Five Photographs enlarged by Kate Blacker

Selected from the panoramic photographs taken on the flight by Colonel LVS Blacker. The very large "as if you were there" scale combines two points of view; literally we look up at the mountain in the photograph in front of us, but the camera's point of view looks down onto the summit. Our gaze pivots between the physical act of looking and the understanding of what we are seeing. Our perception is also shifted through the superimposition of the signatures. We are unsure if the signature (half hidden by the logo of the company @ndromaque, sponsors of the enlargements) is that of Colonel Blacker expedition photographer or Kate Blacker, artist.

"These works are not simply the re-presentation of interesting archival finds in a contemporary context. It's not story telling. It's more the discovery of historical moments where all the different elements in play seem to suggest a way of reassessing a certain accepted view of art or culture and from this develops the beginning of an idea. What I do is unravel the historical event, focusing on the essential aspects that I think might lead to a correlation with art. This in turn leads me to my choice of collaborators and the core structure of the work."

Kate Blacker 2003.

Some of the main themes in this historical event that related to contemporary art and culture:

Authorship, ownership and copyright of photographic images.

The breakdown of the colonial system and its gradual replacement by multinational companies.

The end of a romantic era in exploration and the beginning of commercially sponsored expeditions acted out in front of the media.

The newly achieved ability of man to survey his planet from above and the impact this had on how we perceive ourselves.

