

Ian White: *Any frame is a thrown voice* 19 April – 24 June 2018

With Jimmy Robert, and Julie Cunningham,
Sharon Hayes, Emma Hedditch, Evan Ifekoya
and Adrian Rifkin

Curated by Kirsty Bell and Mike Spelinger

Ian White (1971–2013) was an influential artist, curator, writer and teacher who lived in London and Berlin. His solo and collaborative performances, made from 2002–12, derive from an expanded approach to the live event, whether film screening, lecture, dance or theatrical presentation. They draw on a wide variety of materials including slides, video, spoken word, gesture and collage. All of White's works have radically different starting points – the paintings of Thomas Gainsborough, a film archive in Berlin, Elizabethan gardens, listings from a gay cruising website – layering and colliding their adopted materials to produce what White called an “excess of content”. They do not offer explicit commentary or explanations for these juxtapositions, instead the works enlist the spectator to construct their own interpretation in real time.

This exhibition is also an act of interpretation. Almost all the works presented here were originally performances and have been reconfigured and interpreted specially for this show and these spaces. For White, it was important to remove the idea of a single definitive representation of any particular performance and to emphasise “repetition and failure”, the work's own inevitable inconsistencies and contradictions across its different iterations. Taking its cue from this approach, *Any frame is a thrown voice* re-presents White's works in various formats, including installations and stagings of comparative documentary materials, as well as live events with re-performances by other artists.

In the **Central Space**, a key late work, *Democracy*, is presented through video documentation of four different iterations of the work that took place between 2009–10. These have been synchronized with the PowerPoint slideshow and a live broadcast of the BBC World Service, which accompanied the original performances. Some of the themes connecting the work's images and gestures are drawn together in a text written by White to accompany the performance, shown here on the wall.

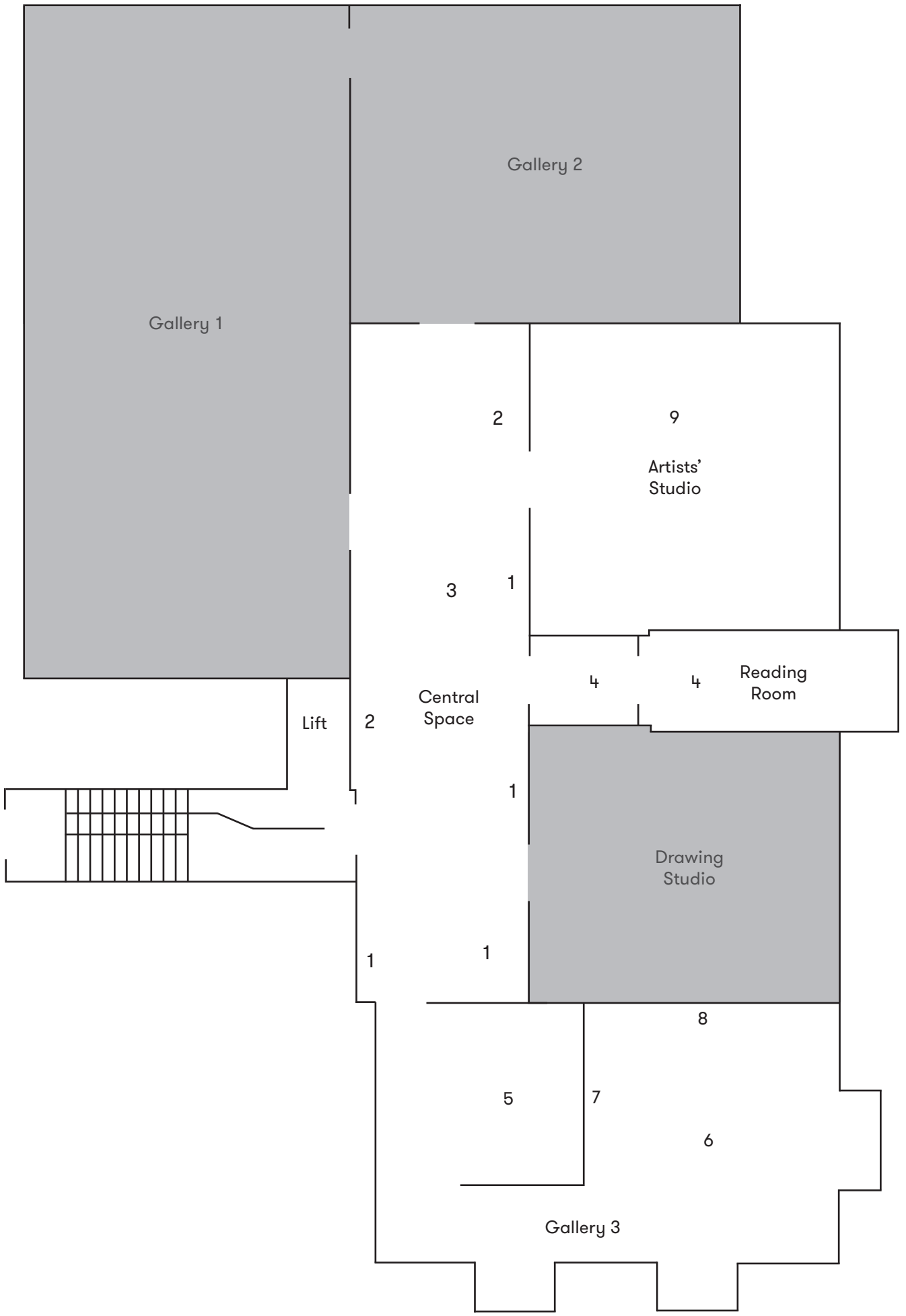
In **Gallery 3**, two of White's earlier works, *The Neon Gainsborough* (first performed 2002) and *6 things we couldn't do, but can do now* (2004), are represented in contrasting ways. Here the emphasis is less on documentation of White

himself performing, and more on rethinking these works speculatively as installations. *The Neon Gainsborough* – which White once succinctly described as “Gainsborough's paintings (slide show) read as psychotic by a gay hysteric” – was never documented, but was a work White himself had considered turning into an installation, since it was largely based around elements which could be automated: a slide projection synchronised to a video on a monitor. The ‘performed’ element of the original piece – the unfurling of two posters at key moments – has here been replaced with theatrical spot lights, echoing the scenography of some of White's other works.

6 things we couldn't do, but can do now was the first of White's collaborations with the artist Jimmy Robert. The work was originally twofold: both a performance and an installation in Tate Britain's Art Now space. In both forms, the work was concerned with the question of how performance and gesture are recorded and transmitted. For example, what is a faithful record of a movement? Can we really understand a gesture without trying to trace it ourselves? In the process of making the work, Robert and White went through painstaking training to learn choreographer Yvonne Rainer's famous 1966 dance *Trio A*. For *Any frame is a thrown voice*, Robert has revisited the original installation, combining parts of the first iteration (drawings, texts and a video showing Rainer performing *Trio A* in 1978) with new elements, including video documentation of one of their Tate performances. Robert has also disassembled and reconfigured a collage of Polaroids, which appear here as a series of enlarged prints.

The large collage of black and white photocopies was first exhibited as an element of the *6 Things* installation, but White also showed it subsequently in other contexts under the title *7 Years*, and described it as a “published, edited diary.” The photocopies come from the pages of a notebook White worked in from 1997–2004, filling it over time with black squares. These blacked-out pages are a trope that recurs throughout White's work, appearing again in his performance *Black Flags* (which is presented as part of the events programme of the exhibition).

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List of works with descriptions by Ian White

Central Space

1. Democracy, 2009-10/2018

PowerPoint projection, four digital videos on monitors, text on wall, live feed of BBC World Service, 30 mins

“Democracy is about not having a choice, obviously. It presents one or more arguments in the form of images, while we listen to the radio and the artist mainly stands on one leg.”

Monitor far left:

- Julia Stoschek Collection, Düsseldorf (video by Andreas Korte, stills by Yun Lee), 9 April 2010

Monitors left to right:

- DAAD galerie, Berlin, 10 July 2010

- X Initiative, New York, 17 December 2009

- DAAD galerie, Berlin, 17 July 2010

2. (I am) For the Birds, 2013

With Jimmy Robert
Archival prints on paper

3. Drawings and notebooks, 1997 – 2013

Reading Room

4. Trauerspiel 1, 2012/2018

Technical script, photographs, text, archival material

“Trauerspiel 1 is a live performance for proscenium stage. Five ‘dances’ incorporating simple objects and ‘interrupted’ by the machinery of the auditorium (lights, curtain) alternate with five 16mm artists’ films, selected from Arsenal’s collection. A naked man sits on stage knitting. None of these illustrate each other, but produce increasing layers of allegory.”

Performed 13 March 2012, Hebbel-am-Ufer Theatre, Berlin

Photography of performance: Nina Hoffman. Film-collage courtesy the estate of Peter Weiss

Gallery 3

5. The Neon Gainsborough, 2002-03/2018

35mm slide projection, digital video (transferred from VHS), posters, 40 mins

“Gainsborough’s paintings (slide show) read as psychotic by a gay hysteric, sitters facing their own death, our own apocalypse. A visionary painter aligned with Blake, not the Public lie.”

First performed 1 June 2002 at Cubitt Gallery, London

6. 6 things we couldn’t do, but can do now, 2004/2018

With Jimmy Robert
Collage on paper, typewriter ink on paper, pencil on paper, digital prints, digital videos

“6 things... proposes a Minimalist-style grid of objects, with/against which actions are carried out in a live performance that is equally an ongoing process, one that explores the possibility of exchange and of making human relations manifest.”

Monitors from front to back:

- Yvonne Rainer, *Trio A*, 1978
11 mins (courtesy of Yvonne Rainer)

- Jimmy Robert and Ian White, *6 things we couldn’t do, but can do now*, Tate Britain, Saturday 20 November 2004, 50 mins

The printed programme notes are from the original performances at Tate Britain, 2004 – please take a copy

7. From Marriage à la Mode et cor Anglais, 2007-09/2018

With Jimmy Robert
Theatrical curtain

“‘It is not by Painting that Photography touches art, but by Theatre’ (Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes) / ‘To be alert is to be decorative’ (What Century?, Frank O’Hara). Marriage à la Mode et Cor Anglais explores a boundary between the still image and movement via repetition, artificiality, posing and mortality.”

First performed 6 November 2007, STUK, Leuven

8. 7 Years, 2004

Photocopies and ink on paper

Artists’ Studio

9. Lemon Rose, 2012/2018

With Jimmy Robert
Audio extract from video documentation, c.13mins

“Lemon, rose, a lemon, a rose, a room, a body, bodies, speech, pictures, objects, colour. Demonstrated over two evenings that mirror each other, Lemon Rose is an argument constructed through film, performance and the mechanics of the auditorium itself, an argument made of and about the relationship between language and materiality.”

Performed April 2012, Jeu de Paume, Paris

Sound edit: Ion Dumitrescu

Wednesday 2 May, 7.00pm

IBIZA: a reading for ‘The Flicker’, 2008-10/2018

Performance by Sharon Hayes

Black Flags, 2009-10/2018

Performance by Evan Ifekoya

Wednesday 6 June, 7.00pm

Black Flags, 2009-10/2018

Performance by Adrian Rifkin

Democracy, 2009-10/2018

Performance by Julie Cunningham

(continued)

The red theatrical curtain dividing **Gallery 3** was originally used as an element in another of White's collaborations with Robert, *Marriage à la Mode et cor Anglais* (first performed 2007). In the performance, the curtain was used as a prop: folded, heaped and dragged across the stage by Robert and White, both dressed in red silk gowns. Here it is redeployed as both practical exhibition architecture and a theatrical gesture.

In the **Reading Room**, one of White's final and most complex works, *Trauerspiel 1* (2012) is presented. Originally performed on a proscenium theatre stage in Berlin, the work was commissioned by the Arsenal film archive as part of their Living Archive project and incorporated five 16mm films from their collection, interspersed with what White called 'dances.' The work is displayed here in a frieze-like timeline, comprising the original technical scripts, photographic documentation of the action on stage, and texts White wrote describing each of the films. An image by one of the filmmakers, Peter Weiss, acts as a placeholder for the individual films, in the same way that White used it to show documentation of *Trauerspiel 1*. This display offers an exploded view of the work as both score and document, and provides an insight into the complex interplay of different materials and media common to all of White's work.

The frequent inclusion of films within White's performances presents a challenge for documentation, which inevitably struggles to do justice to both the live action and the films as they appeared in situ. In fact, White was interested in precisely this dilemma, questioning how films can be 'documented' or experienced in a second-order fashion, such as through verbal or written description. In the **Artists' Studio**, another collaborative work with Robert, *Lemon Rose*, is presented as an audio extract. The original performance incorporated 16mm screenings of Hollis Frampton's *Lemon* (1969) and Lis Rhodes's *Dresden Dynamo* (1971). In the extract here, Robert and White read from various existing descriptions of the two films, in both English and French.

The **Artists' Studio** will also host Julie Cunningham, Sharon Hayes, Evan Ifekoya and Adrian Rifkin who have been invited to revisit White's scripts through their own working practice. Each will present one work from his 2008-10 trilogy of solo performances: *IBIZA: a reading for 'The Flicker', Black Flags and Democracy*. Over two evenings, which adopt the event structure White used himself, two different interpretations of his key work *Black Flags* will be presented, paired with a second work from the trilogy. In addition, White's frequent collaborator, artist Emma Hedditch, will present a programme of artists' video which responds to White's curatorial practice and his approach to moving image as a live event.

White himself was fiercely opposed to "the paralysis of contributing to history books", preoccupied instead with what any artwork means in the present tense of our own experience. This made him acutely aware of the impossibility of a neutral staging or presentation. As he once wrote: "any frame is a thrown voice." This exhibition presents several such thrown voices, whether those of White's previous collaborators, those invited to perform his works, or the curators of the exhibition, who here place emphasis on lived experience of the work, over objects or documents. The result is necessarily speculative: a thinking aloud about the future life of White's works, exploring how they might act as a catalyst in the present rather than as relics of the past.

A newly commissioned essay by Kirsty Bell is published in the File Note, available in the Bookshop for £1.

With thanks to Stephen Connolly, Ståle Eriksen, Josephine Pryde, Insight Lighting and Golab Berlin

Ian White (1971–2013) was an artist, curator and writer. His performances – both solo and collaborative – were staged at venues including Tate Britain and Tate Modern, London; the Chisenhale Gallery, London; Jeu de Paume, Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. White organised many influential screenings, events and exhibitions for venues including The Horse Hospital, LUX and the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Kino Arsenal, Berlin; and the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen. He taught extensively, holding positions at Goldsmiths' Department of Art and the Dutch Art Institute amongst others, and was leader of the LUX Associate Artists Programme (2007-13), an experimental post-graduate programme for artists working with the moving image.