

A series of free talks and discussions with the curator and invited guests will accompany the exhibition. These events will take place from 6-8pm on 23rd & 30th November, full details on at jerwoodvisualarts.org

Tacita Dean
Jeremy Deller
Sarah Jones
Alex Katz
Sharon Lockhart
Cornelia Parker
Richard Wentworth
Rachel Whiteread

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Frith Street Gallery, London
Lisson Gallery
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris
Maureen Paley Gallery, London
The Modern Institute
Neugerriemschneider, Berlin
Timothy Taylor Gallery, London

Supported by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation
020 7654 0171 | www.jerwoodvisualarts.org

JERWOOD **VISUAL ARTS** JERWOOD **SPACE**

Shonagh Manson
Director, Jerwood Charitable Foundation

Passing Thoughts and Making Plans reflects a continuing commitment to promote and celebrate the role of photographic practice within the Jerwood Visual Arts programme.

What Catherine presents to us in this exhibition is a never-before-seen glimpse of the diverse practice of some of the most respected visual artists working today. We are grateful for the opportunity she has created for us to consider their thought processes, and to progress through the usually private individual journeys of making an art work. We thank each exhibiting artist for their openness and participation.

Passing Thoughts and Making Plans in the third in a series of *Encounters* exhibitions, which form part of the Jerwood Visual Arts programme, supported by the Jerwood Charitable Foundation. The *Encounters* series aims to explore the issues and territories in the borderlands between disciplinary fields. These areas of investigation are identified in conjunction with invited artists and curators, and we are privileged that Catherine Yass agreed to curate this show with such an ambitious vision. Catherine first exhibited at the Jerwood Space in a solo show in 2001, becoming a selector on the inaugural Jerwood Photography Award in 2003.

AN INTRODUCTION

passing thoughts and making plans

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Artists who use photographs as source images, storyboards, explorations of shapes or spaces, thoughts about spaces for installation.

Curated by Catherine Yass, *Passing Thoughts and Making Plans* shows photography as part of a thought process or train of associations and wonderings, following and shaping an idea as it is formed.

4th November - 13th December 2009
Mon - Fri 10am - 5pm | Sat & Sun 10am - 3pm

Jerwood Space
171 Union Street
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JERWOOD **VISUAL ARTS** JERWOOD **SPACE**

THOUGHTS, PLANS, NOTES, SKETCHES, IDEAS, FORAYS, HYPOTHESES, GUESSES AND PHOTOGRAPHY.

Of all the media available to art, photography seems to be the subversive leveler. It is the one which above all showed us that the casually observed could be every bit as profound as the thoroughly wrought; the half thought as revealing and satisfying as the fully thought; the first notation as vital as the end result; the photo picked up by chance in the street as rich and strange as anything pre-conceived.

While it is true that certain forms of photography can have the status of an initial sketch or doodle (think of the studio test-shot, for example) there is something so absolute about even the most off-hand photo that it seems final, complete almost as soon as it is begun. Ordinarily, photographs are not 'worked up' into an end form the way a sketch may become a painting, an armature may become a sculpture or a series of shots may become an edited film. One wonders if it even makes sense to talk of such a thing as an *unfinished* photograph.

Only the photograph's *meaning* seems to remain unfinished. And it is this tension between apparent finality and inscrutable open-endedness that gives photography what Walker Evans called, back in 1946, *its disreputable charm*. He suggested we have little choice but to accept this and "let the ambiguous procession of events reveal their own ambiguousness". Sixty-odd years later another Evans (Jason) averred that photography was a "Victorian parlour game that promised objectivity and delivered something else" and that "perhaps if there were any art to be had it would be in the difference between the two." Artwork and document. That stand-off between the photograph's competing allegiances was there from the start and it is not going away any time soon. So it was that photography only became 'art' in the era in which a condition of art was to ask what art was and how it might be understood. For some this has been a bore but really it is the key to the intrigue and the endless renewal that keeps the medium vital. Photography could not help but smuggle the artless document into art and in doing so it opened a Pandora's box of anonymity, amateurism, accidents, automatism and archivalism. And that's just the 'A's.

It will always give you more than you bargained for. Take a photograph and straight away it seems to ask: Is this what you wanted? Did you *know* what you wanted? Were you guessing? Hoping? Was it *really* you who took this? Can you claim it? How much of it is actually your doing? Could you live with this? Are you responsible for it? The photographer Lee Friedlander knows all about the unpredictable photographic bounty when he shrugs "I only wanted Uncle Vern standing by his new car (a Hudson) on a clear day. I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on a fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and seventy-eight trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It's a generous medium, photography." Well, it is generous in that it can turn all that stuff of the world into 'your vision'. That can make you look really good (and the world even better). But secretly photography hasn't given it to you so much as lent it, lent it as an image. And it is always winking at you, letting you know that with one false move it can claim it all back for itself. Generous, but a little sadistic too. Perhaps this is the source of its appeal. One *takes* a photograph, but one only *borrow*s the world from which it derives and to which it ultimately belongs. Appropriating an existing photograph for your own ends only extends this essential logic.

Photography has always been a loose association of technologies and applications and today it seems looser than ever. Perhaps this is why discussions about the specificity of the medium, about its definition, seem to produce more heat (and less light) than ever. But such matters are rarely resolved in advance, if at all. It is just as productive to look at what people do with it, to look at the working assumptions of those who are drawn to its possibilities. On this score the present exhibition offers us any number of openings. Let us consider just one of them: materiality and its relation to thought and process. This is a thoughtful exhibition and a material one too. But those looking for a clear relation between these ideas might have their work cut out. How do we move from the world seen as an impromptu sculpture by Richard Wentworth's mobile phone camera to Cornelia Parker's contact sheets of silverware, all arranged for our inspection? From Jeremy Dellar's silent stills of the motion of collective music making to Sharon Lockhart's clutch of anomalous pictures gathered together like mute children at an orphanage? From the flat notation of Rachel Whiteread's photo-notes for sculptures and installations to Sarah Jones's rose bushes in shot/reverse shot and to Tacita Dean's photos of bottles in Morandi's studio? If the worlds in which these artists are interested are in limbo between something tangible and something intangible perhaps it is inevitable that photography is the conduit here, if not the means of expression. An apt way of making plans and passing thoughts. Of showing them for what they are and what they could be.

David Company

PASSING THOUGHTS AND MAKING PLANS.

In 1843 Octavius Hill photographed all 450 members of the Disruption Assembly (founders of the Free Church of Scotland) in preparation for a large scale oil painting portrait. These individual studies are full of life and expressive quirks which remain in an unresolved fluid state.

Before a photographic image has been fixed or shown it has the provisional quality of a thought which comes and goes before it has settled into a concept. It remains like a sketch or notes for something else, leading to somewhere outside itself. **The artists in this exhibition use photography as a tool for working out ideas that will eventually be resolved in another medium, or as a photograph other than the one used for research.**

Gustave Moreau's studio in Paris is full of plan chests and sliding frames containing oil sketches. These small paintings are made on different surfaces, on anything to hand; they are loose and free, part of his flow of thought. Oil painting is more often associated with a final work just as photographs can be seen as a final frame or full stop, but these sketches wander out of such conventions into the territory of the potential, the contingent, the unformed.

Photography in its most basic state is a latent medium, a negative, an image-in-waiting. These references are built into the way we understand photography, so even when the image has been printed and fixed there is an underlying sense of contingency. This understanding inflects the way non-negative photographs are read; digital photographs offer themselves to continual alteration and transformation, mobile phone images are transitional fleeting exchanges, polaroids emerge from nothing and their viscous quality can give way to fading and melting back into the chemical base from which they appeared.

Because a photograph is a direct trace of what it records, whether on to unexposed film or as digital data, it is the record of an action as well as being an image. It has an immediacy which lends itself to making connections and following thoughts across places and times. This does not only apply to the speed at which we can take photographs with contemporary technology; even a laboriously taken Fox Talbot large format print made 165 years ago retains its freshness, with the ladder leaning against the window feeling as wobbly and precarious as it would now.

As a tool for developing and planning a work photography is very versatile; the image can be played around with, turned upside down, laid next to other images, repeated; colours brightness and contrast can be tested and changed. The image can start off as one thing and become another, mutating into different moods and formats and finally even disappearing, but present through the information it gave or the thoughts it allowed.

Photography as a thinking process can be open-ended, offering no conclusions, a way of passing on thoughts of passing thoughts and of making plans along the way.

Catherine Yass