

There Not There

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The Courtauld Gallery
14 June – 15 July 2018

Organised by the students of MA *Curating the Art Museum*:

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'I take pictures in order to see the world'

— Wolfgang Tillmans, 2010



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Gedser*, 2004
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © Wolfgang Tillmans.
Courtesy Maureen Paley, London.

INTRODUCTION

There Not There has been created by a group of twelve student curators as the culmination of this year's MA *Curating the Art Museum* programme. For this project we were invited to draw upon the full range of two distinctive collections: that of The Courtauld Gallery and the Arts Council Collection.

While previous years were invited to respond to a current exhibition at The Courtauld Gallery, we were given a different brief. It consisted of two words — 'Making Space' — and was to mark the impending two-year closure and transformation of the Gallery as part of the Institute's major refurbishment project, Courtauld Connects.

Over the course of six months we explored many different ideas. Some were literal responses to the brief, such as taking an artwork down every week for the duration of the exhibition until the space was empty. Others were more conceptual, such as investigating the specific nature and viewing conditions of a gallery space. The possibilities of the brief and the range of works available seemed endless.

We eventually decided to focus on works that, for us, suggested an ambiguity between the opposite notions of absence and presence. The twelve contemporary artists brought into conversation in *There Not There* (a title borrowed from Christine Hatt's work) each address disappearance in their own way.

The range of media in the exhibition allows the theme to be explored from many angles: film exposes disappearance as a process, photography records what is no longer there and sculpture gives form to spatial voids. In many of the works, shadows, texts, reflections and interventions in nature mark the presence of an absent creator — a presence that, while unseen, remains an integral part of the work.

The ideas that inform *There Not There* have shaped our curatorial process from the beginning. We debated how firmly to assert our own curatorial presence in the show — a question every curator must face. We hope that, in keeping with the title of the exhibition, our presence is known but not visible.

— Students of MA *Curating the Art Museum* 2017–18



Armando Andrade Tudela, *Billboard 12* (from the 'Billboard' series), 2003
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © Armando Andrade Tudela.
Courtesy Arts Council Collection.

MAKING A MARK

All artworks begin with a mark. This gesture is a fundamental component of the visual language we use to create paintings and sculptures. It is both a product and process. A dab of paint is applied to the canvas; charcoal is smudged onto paper; marble is chipped away from the block, leaving behind a form that wasn't there before. The permutations and interpretations of a mark are infinite.

The material process of mark-making is clearly evident in Christine Hatt's drawing, *There Not There* (1991). The dark rectangle exerts a powerful presence, emerging from the surrounding and comparatively vacant space of the white paper. The off-centre position of the rectangle causes the eye to expect a matching shape to appear within the white space, suggesting a symmetry that never quite materialises. On closer inspection, this deceptively simple abstraction reveals a greater complexity. Hatt describes the process of making in this work as 'the accumulations of multiple layers of repetitive marks — thin, unbroken, multi-directional, overlapping lines'. The rectangle is neither uniform nor opaque, but composed of a spectrum of colours that fuse together through subtle marking and shading. In Hatt's absence, the mark acts as a permanent register of her extensive physical efforts.

Beyond announcing its own materiality, a mark can be made to obscure something else from our vision. A man's face is scratched out with blue pen in each image of Karl Ohiri's series of photographs, *How To Mend A Broken Heart* (2013).



Karl Ohiri, *How to Mend a Broken Heart*, 2013
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © Karl Ohiri. Courtesy Karl Ohiri.

The marks record an unsophisticated and candid act of vandalism, taking the form of specific words ('fool', 'idiot', etc.) in some photos and furious scribbles in others. The content of the photographs is deeply personal, chronicling the shared lives of Ohiri's mother and father before their eventual separation and divorce. The private nature of the work is intensified by the fact that the "vandal" in question is Ohiri's mother. The resulting display evokes feelings of tension, suffering and retribution. In one photo, the word 'false' appears scrawled over the torso of the artist's father. In this image, history has been rewritten and painful memories now contest formerly blissful ones.

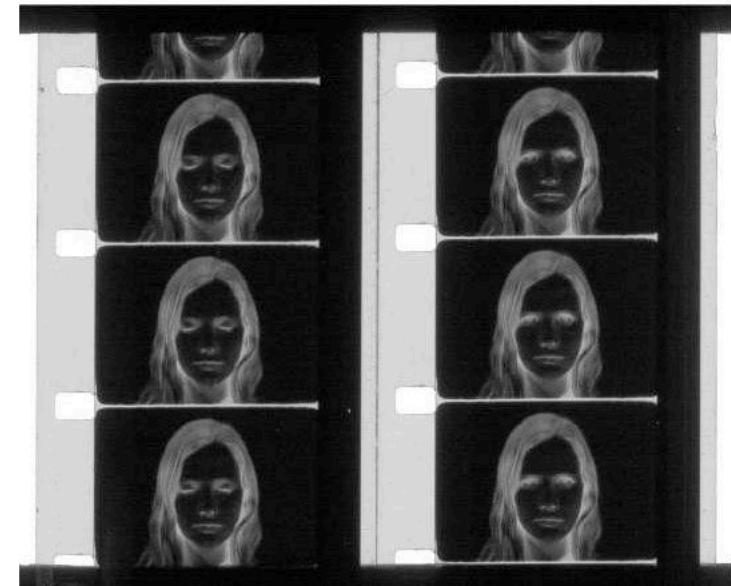
The voice of Ohiri's mother becomes palpable through her efforts to erase his father's presence. The marks in each snapshot create a chaotic composition that mirrors his mother's conflicted emotions. This general disorder contrasts with the work's title, which would appear to promise a solution for overcoming emotional trauma. Instead, the photos convey just how unclear this procedure becomes when it is put into practice. Perhaps we cannot eliminate certain moments from our past; however, the process of mark-making that Ohiri highlights in this work provides its own form of catharsis.

So far, the definition of a mark has been tied to a material quality, but some marks can be immaterial. Runa Islam makes such a mark in *Stare Out (Blink)* (1998), in which she plays with the medium of film and the process of seeing in order to imprint a new image on the viewer's retina. A young woman's face, presented as a photo-negative projection, gazes straight at the camera. This image is regularly interrupted by clear passages of 16mm film.

In the few seconds after the woman's face has disappeared, we are left momentarily haunted by its positive after-image. The positive version, a "true" image of the woman's face, appears less stable than the filmic negative. The experience of Islam's work is founded on persistence of vision, much like Hatt's *There Not There*. Both artists investigate the relationship between positive and negative forms. More specifically, Hatt and Islam look for ways of making the space between these forms salient, while also blurring the distinction between them.

In the company of Ohiri, Hatt and Islam's works demonstrate how the process of mark-making ultimately reveals more than it obscures. What remains after the act, and what endures in our memory, is perhaps the positive imprint.

— Laura House



Runa Islam, *Stare Out (Blink)*, 1998
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © Runa Islam.
Courtesy Runa Islam.

'Filmic presence is always determined by an earlier presence which the viewer has experienced and then lost. That is why film provokes so many deep feelings. You retrieve what you have lost.'

— Runa Islam, 2002

FROM MEMORY WITH LOVE

'Space defines landscape, where space combined with memory defines place.'

— Lucy Lippard, 'The Lure of the Local'

If the places depicted in the works of George Shaw and Paul Seawright seem ordinary at first, they reveal themselves as poignant reflections on the effects of time and events on our lives. Treading the line between art and documentary, these landscapes encapsulate reality, memory and lived experience. These records of the artists' respective hometowns, Coventry and Belfast, lack distinctive locational markers, allowing for deeply personal endeavours to resonate with viewers on a universal level. Everyone can think of places that have particular meaning for them, and a home — be it a house, a neighbourhood or a whole country — is naturally highly evocative. Its familiarity provides comfort and protection; we appropriate it as our own. Yet it can also become the source of much distress if it begins to escape us, to look unrecognisable.

Shaw has spent the best part of his 30-year career meticulously painting various areas of Tile Hill, the post-war council estate in Coventry where he was raised. Each painting offers a glimpse into the architecture and urban landscape of a specific moment in British history, as well as into Shaw's life growing up there. To most outside Tile Hill, the disappearance of the Woodsman pub depicted in *The End of Time* (2008–9), would have gone unnoticed. Yet to Shaw, this pub was a major part of his life. The pub — previously called *The New Star* — was his mother's workplace and his father's occasional haunt.

That Shaw has chosen to depict this site three times over the course of ten years is telling of the affection he has always had for it. In its earliest iteration, *Scenes from the Passion: The New Star* (1998), the pub is still intact; it is burnt in *Scenes from the Passion: The New Star* (2002); and finally demolished in *The End of Time*. Interestingly, the increase in scale of each painting runs counter to the gradual disappearance of the pub: the less visible the building, the larger its depiction.

The bleak shades of greens, greys and browns in the most recent version, combined with the glossy sheen of the enamel paint, afford the work a hazy, dream-like quality. The empty patchwork of concrete and grass is eerily quiet and takes on an air of the sublime. All that remains of the pub are Shaw's memories, now embodied in this painting rather than in the physical place of their origin. In this sense, this painting both pays homage to a significant place and time in his life, and serves as a symbolic substitute for its subject matter. To take in Shaw's work completely requires standing away from it and experiencing it as an atmosphere. Its large format belies its profoundly intimate and nostalgic meaning.

Conversely, Seawright's photoworks must be seen up close for their specific message to be fully grasped. For Seawright, making work in his hometown of Belfast represents not so much a way of crystallising his own experiences as a means of coming to terms with the nation's difficult past. The Northern Irish landscapes in his photographs show no obvious scars; they are only identified as the specific sites of sectarian violence in the chilling newspaper clippings that accompany them, stripped of the original mentions of religious affiliations.



Tuesday 3rd April 1973
"late last night a 28 year old man disappeared from a pub. It wasn't until this morning that his body was found abandoned in a quiet park on the coast."

Paul Seawright, *Tuesday 3rd April 1973* (from the 'Sectarian Murder' series), 1988–91
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © Paul Seawright.
Courtesy Arts Council Collection.

The difference in tone between the carefully composed images and the news reports is an acute reminder that things are not always what they seem.

The anonymous locations, photographed in colour more than a decade after the events — where flowers grow, people roam and children play — emphasise how unspectacular they would be in another context. In an instant, however, they became the scenes of irrevocable tragedies that would, as the artist puts it, 'puncture' the country's history forever. On the one hand, Seawright alludes to the inevitable reality that life goes on, and that everywhere is home to someone, no matter how horrific the circumstances. On the other, he ensures that these traumatic events are never overlooked or forgotten.

The devastating silence in Seawright's photographs is matched by the emptiness in Shaw's painting. Though the works could never claim to bring back what is gone, they can draw attention to the unseen and raise questions about how best to deal with change. Both Shaw's and Seawright's emotionally charged works act as catharsis, for the individual and for the collective. By grappling with feelings of nostalgia and loss, they become vehicles through which to immortalise the past, make sense of it and look to the future.

— Margot Mottaz



George Shaw, *The End of Time*, 2008–9
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © George Shaw.
Courtesy Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London.

THOUGHTS ON NOTHING

'I bought a bottle of Jack Daniels and hoped he wouldn't be home.' That is how the young artist Robert Rauschenberg recalls heading, in great trepidation, to the studio of the eminent painter Willem de Kooning, back in 1953. He was going there to make an unusual proposition: he wanted one of De Kooning's drawings. Or rather, he wanted to erase one of the artist's drawings, in order to make a new work of his own. De Kooning reluctantly agreed; 'it'll have to be something that I'll miss', he declared. One month and countless erasers later, the piece was finished. Rauschenberg's close friend, the artist Jasper Johns, later framed and labelled the now almost blank page: 'ERASED DE KOONING DRAWING. ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG. 1953'.

This story epitomises the spirit of change in the artistic scene of post-war America. All over, artists were questioning the very assumptions that underpinned Western art. The act of erasure could no longer be thought of as one of destruction, Rauschenberg and Johns proclaimed, but one of artistic creation and collaboration. Their friend, the composer John Cage, had articulated similar concerns in his provocative *Lecture on Nothing* in 1948. 'I have nothing to say and I'm saying it', he pronounced; 'what silence requires is that I go on talking'. Silence, according to Cage, is not the absence of sound, but the endless possibility of noise. By the 1960s, Cage's theories were being received with enthusiasm by artists in Britain. Richard Long, a student at St. Martin's School of Art, and Michael Craig-Martin, who had trained in Yale before arriving in London, were among those who had witnessed Cage's lectures.

In 1967 Long made his seminal work, *A Line Made By Walking* (1967). Hitch-hiking across the country from Bristol to London, the artist stopped in a quiet field. There, he trod back and forth across a patch of grass, using his feet to score a line, which he then photographed as it caught the sunlight. He called this momentary intervention in the landscape an 'immaterial sculpture'. Documenting the transient, Long captured the rhythm of passing time. What is remarkable about this work is that while the artist himself does not appear in the work, his corporeal presence lingers. It is precisely this unseen performance that propels us into the composition: we imagine ourselves, too, walking the line. Since that time, Long has continued to create and record immaterial sculptures across the world, involving us as active participants in his journey.

Craig-Martin, too, was exploring the coming together of body, space and time. His work *Kid's Stuff 1-7* (1973) consists of seven mirrors attached to a board, above short handwritten, first-person statements. As we pass before the work our reflections appear and disappear: *Kid's Stuff 1-7* demands our presence, and our absence, to be completed. Craig-Martin enigmatically referred to these early works as 'mirrors: forwards and reverse'. Indeed, *Kid's Stuff 1-7* obliterates linear time. The mirrors function as obstacles that prevent us from experiencing a seamless sense of progression. Movement is fragmented as our reflections appear and disappear in the narrow mirrors. The artist's observations on the realities of aging are antithetical and anachronistic. They profess that in this moment in time we, like the artist, feel the age we are — 'I feel I know myself' — and, simultaneously, that we feel younger: 'How strange it is to be my present age'.

We are detached from the present and, at the same time, irrevocably tied to it. In this way, youth and aging, past and present, converge. The work's blend of simple statement, humour and the poetic prompt in us an almost child-like response, somewhere between amusement and curiosity.



Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967
The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London © Richard Long.
Samuel Courtauld Trust, Gift of the artist, 2009. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018.

Made more than a decade later, Jasper Johns' *The Seasons* (1985) articulates a similar concern with the bodily and the temporal. In each print of the series we find, quite literally, the shadow of the artist's presence: the silhouettes that populate the compositions were traced from the outline of the artist's body. The shadows vary in shade, appear and disappear in a staccato rhythm, now obscured by the rain and snow, now pushed to the edges by an eclectic swarm of objects, memories and motifs that recur in the artist's work over time. Here, excess is a form of erasure. Or, to borrow Johns' term for the erased de Kooning drawing, *The Seasons* operate as 'additive subtraction.'

Johns not only inscribes his shadow onto the prints, he also imbues them with gestural marks that reveal the physical process of printmaking: going back and forth, adding and subtracting, layering. This cyclical gesture is echoed by *The Seasons* themselves: the series starts with *Summer* and ends in *Spring*, symbolizing regeneration. Drifting through space and time, drenched in rain, sunlight and snow, appearing and disappearing, the artist's shadow invites us to join him along the way. Johns produced the first version of *Winter* after reading Wallace Stevens' poem 'The Snowman' (1954). His shadow is the listener:

*For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.*

— Beatriz García-Velasco Bernal

LIST OF WORKS

Works from The Courtauld Gallery

Jasper Johns (b. 1930) <i>The Seasons</i> , 1984–91 Etchings and aquatint on paper 4 parts, each 49 x 32.5 cm	Richard Long (b. 1945) <i>A Line Made by Walking</i> , 1967 Silver gelatin print on paper and graphite on board 37.5 x 32.4 cm
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Works from the Arts Council Collection

Michael Craig-Martin (b. 1941) <i>Kid's Stuff 1–7</i> , 1973 Mirror, tape and text on plastic 7 parts, each 40.6 x 30.5 cm	Christine Hatt (b. 1954) <i>There Not There</i> , 1991 Wax crayon and graphite on paper 122 x 122 cm
Andy Goldsworthy (b. 1956) <i>Black (Soil Covered) Snowball</i> , 1979 Cibachrome print on card 42.4 x 52.4 cm	Runa Islam (b. 1970) <i>Stare Out (Blink)</i> , 1998 16mm film Running time: 3 min
Andy Goldsworthy (b. 1956) <i>Hole in Snow</i> , 1979 Cibachrome print on card 50.2 x 40 cm	Karl Ohiri (b. 1983) <i>How to Mend a Broken Heart</i> , 2013 21 defaced photographs, 1 wedding photograph Various dimensions

Paul Seawright (b. 1965) <i>Sunday 9th July 1972</i> <i>Thursday 14th December 1972</i> <i>Tuesday 3rd April 1973</i> <i>Monday 30th December 1974</i> (From the 'Sectarian Murder' series) 1988–91 C-type prints with text (selected prints) 101.6 x 76.2 cm each	Wolfgang Tillmans (b. 1968) <i>Gedser</i> , 2004 C-type print 61 x 50.8 cm Armando Andrade Tudela (b. 1975) <i>Billboard 9</i> <i>Billboard 12</i> <i>Billboard 14</i> (From the 'Billboard' series) 2002–04 C-type prints (selected prints) 42.4 x 58 cm each
George Shaw (b. 1966) <i>The End of Time</i> , 2008–09 Enamel on board 147.5 x 198 cm	

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.

Additional Loan

Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963)
Untitled (Blue), 2008
Plaster, pigment, resin and
patinated bronze (four units)
56.8 x 34.6 x 13 cm

Collection of Christian and Florence Levett.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, we thank Christian Levett and *Minerva* magazine for their generous sponsorship of the exhibition, which would not have been possible without them.

We would like to thank our tutor Martin Caiger-Smith, who has set and overseen this project, for his help and guidance.

We would like to thank the staff of the The Courtauld Institute of Art and The Courtauld Gallery: Dr Barnaby Wright (in particular, for his support throughout), Professor Deborah Swallow, Dr Ernst Vegelin van Claerbergen, Dr Karen Serres, Dr Rachel Sloan, Dr Alexandra Gerstein, Dr Ketty Gottardo, Dr Rosamund Garrett, Dr Alixe Bovey, Professor Joanna Woodall, George Mogg, Emily Dodgson, Michael Sherry, Henrietta Hine, Mercedes Malcomson, Margot Black, Sophia James, Giulia Sartori Conte, Helen Higgins, Stephanie Christodoulou, Mark Willetts, Rebecca Morris, Maeve O'Donnell-Morales, Caireen McGinn, Jessica Akerman, Matthew Thompson, Alex Mitchell; and Minnie Scott (Curator of Interpretation at Tate Modern).

We would also like to express our gratitude to our colleagues at the Arts Council Collection: Jill Constantine, Jodie Edwards, Joshua Dowson, Bethany Hughes, Grace Beaumont and Heather Welsh.

Finally, we would like to thank the artists and their galleries: Michael Craig-Martin, Andy Goldsworthy, Christine Hatt, Runa Islam, Jasper Johns, Richard Long, Karl Ohiri, Paul Seawright, George Shaw, Wolfgang Tillmans, Armando Andrade Tudela, Rachel Whiteread; and Carl Freedman Gallery, Gagosian, Galerie Lelong, Kerlin Gallery, Maureen Paley and White Cube.

Transport and Installation: Crown Fine Art

Lighting: Lightwaves Limited

Wall Paint: Terre de Bohême by Argile

Insurance: Blackwall Green

Video Installation: The Kino Club

Construction Design: M.C. Designers Limited

Graphic Design: Charlotte Emily Murray

Audio Guide Sound Editing: Luke Kulukundis

Audio Guide Voice Acting: William Stevens



EXHIBITION EVENTS

Curator's Tours

Every Sunday, 4.00–4.45pm

Thursday 28 June, 5.00–5.45pm

Thursday 12 July, 5.00–5.45pm

Lunchtime Talks

Every Monday, Wednesday,

Friday, 1.15–1.30pm

These talks will take place in the exhibition space at The Courtauld Gallery. All talks are free with a gallery ticket.

Artists-in-Conversation

Monday 25 June, The

Courtauld Institute of Art,

6.30–8.00pm

Tickets: free

Unseen London Walking Tour and Exhibition Viewing

Saturday 7 July, 2.00–4.00pm

Tickets: £6.00 full price,

£4.00 concessions

Booking is essential for these events.

The Courtauld Institute of Art and The Courtauld Gallery are located in Somerset House, Strand, WC2R 0RN.

For more information and to book tickets, please visit therenotthere.co.uk.



If you would like to listen to the audio guide which accompanies *There Not There*, please scan the QR code to the left with your phone camera. Alternatively you can find the audio guide at therenotthere.co.uk.