

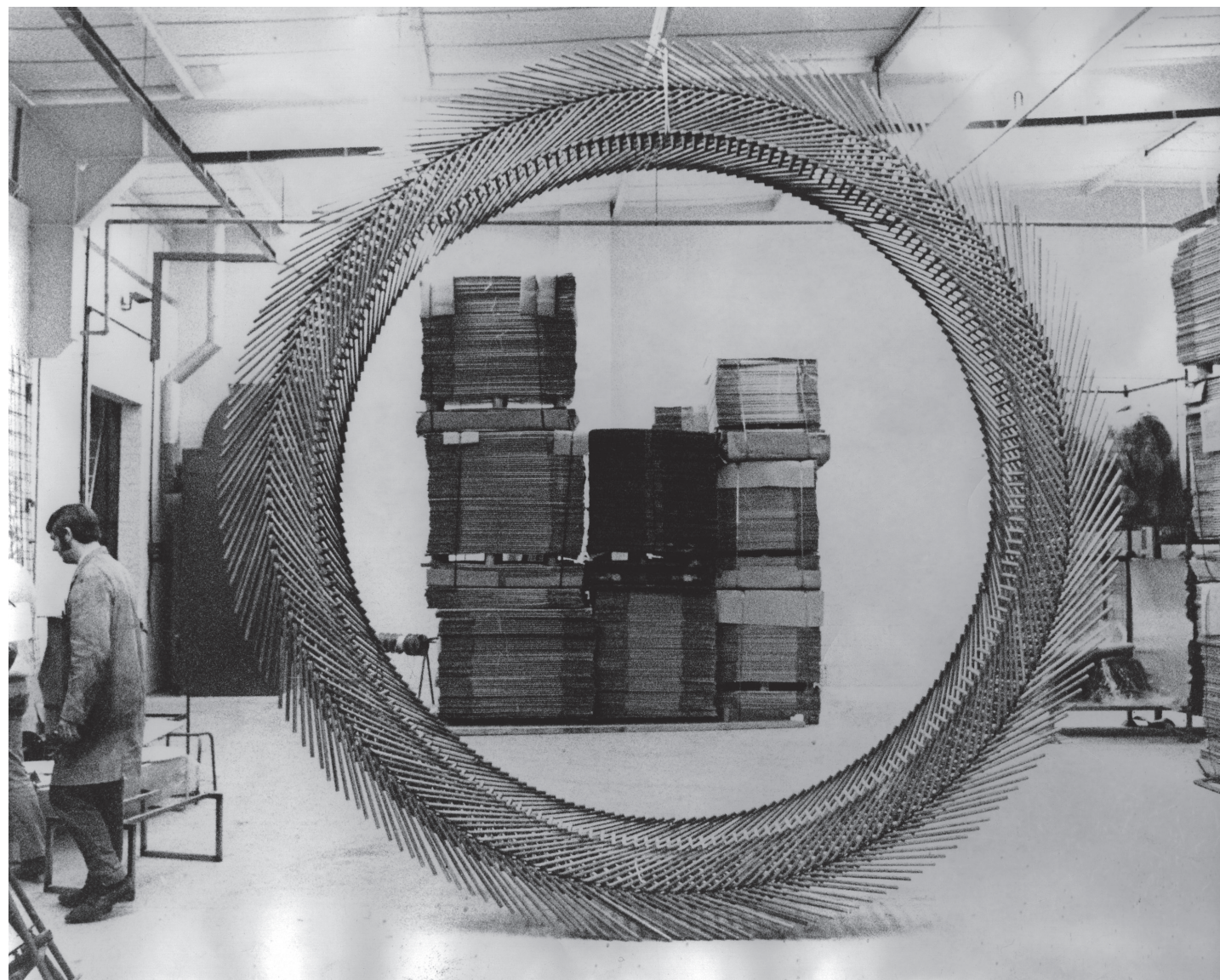
MODERN ART
OXFORD

EXHIBITION GUIDE



STRAIGHT TO CAMERA

STUART BRISLEY
STATE OF DENMARK



EXHIBITION GUIDE

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OXFORD

STRAIGHT TO CAMERA:
PERFORMANCE FOR FILM

Project Space
17 October – 14 December 2015

This programme asks questions about the nature of performance and how it is recorded, shown and experienced, in an attempt to deconstruct what can happen when the audience is watching but is no longer in the room.

The practice of making and filming performance in the studio away from the gaze of an expectant audience has proved consistently seductive to artists since the mid 20th Century. *Straight to Camera* is a changing exhibition of artists’ films examining the practice of making performance for the camera. The programme maps the relationship between film, theatre and the nature of live performance. It aims to more clearly identify this form and give a sense of the possibilities it suggests in a digital future. *Straight to Camera* is not a comprehensive history but rather an attempt to describe an important link in the history of performance and film.

Prior to the late 1960s performance art was documented primarily through stills photography as a static record of an ephemeral moment. The invention of small handheld cameras presented artists with a new set of parameters within which to explore the possibilities for performance art. Whole works, happenings and performances could now be repeated, restaged and recorded - live audiences are no longer a necessity. Artists from a range of disciplines including visual art, dance, theatre, music and filmmaking began to exploit the freedoms suggested by this marriage of film and performance.

The genesis of this genre in NewYork, which quickly migrated to Europe and beyond during the late 1960s, is vividly brought to life by the film critic J Hoberman in his essay, *Like Canyons and Rivers: Performance for it’s Own Sake* and gives a strong sense of the atmosphere of the time. Hoberman describes how the ephemeral dynamism of the live event merged with the controlled reproducibility of film to produce an exciting process led paradigm in which there were no fixed points of reference.

Watching these films exposes both the manipulation of the film but also the process of performance-making. Something often denied to the audience within a live work. In the intimacy of Warhol’s Screen Tests, the theatricality of Beckmann’s productions or more latterly the self possession of Atay’s vision, the audience is not only witnessing the performance itself but also the artists’ process, the practicalities and choices of production.

The early process led activities; staging events in the studio at midnight regardless of who might come, performing solely to the lens of a camera or in the anonymity of the street are now often lost or destroyed and can no longer be seen. But from those beginnings performance art has evolved and grown to be an established part of art’s mainstream, with numerous exhibitions and biennales devoted to its production. However the early intertwining of film and performance continues to resonate in the practice of artists working today, applying the same techniques to examine the nature of comedy, realityTV or performed personal rituals.

where Brisley worked gathering information on the history and customs of the area in an attempt to create an active social tool which would develop the town’s sense of community, rather than simply produce a mere archive. This presentation is complemented by a study room where key texts and resources which relate to the history and culture of mining in the UK is available for you to explore.

Stuart Brisley’s engagement with the act of painting is explored in a passage of works in the Piper Gallery. Titled *Royal Ordure* (1996), the painting evokes an ongoing and increasingly central concern in Brisley’s practice; the tussle with a social and cultural detritus; real, metaphorical and imagined. Similarly, *The Missing Text, Interregnum 1-3* (2012-13) depicts a jumble of debris, remnants of failed businesses which Brisley discovered in an abandoned shop during his 2010 residency at PEEB, London and which reminded the artist of the Conservative Party’s slogan for the 2010 general election, ‘Broken Britain’.

The enduring relationship with the body as subject will be traced through an accompanying film programme, in which some of Brisley’s most prescient performances can be seen in the Basement.

State of Denmark is curated by David Thorp in association with the Museum of Ordure. The exhibition asserts Brisley’s influence as one of the most important and enduring voices in international contemporary art. The exhibitio is accompanied by a new pamphlet featuring a text by David Thorp.

Stuart Brisley’s destabilisation of received narratives resonates with the challenging tone of the work in *PLATFORM* in the Project Space. While Brisley and this group of emerging artists hail from different generations, both exhibitions present alternative positions on the society in which we live today.

Stuart Brisley’s films are shown daily from 11am - 5pm downstairs in the Basement.

Please feel free to use photography and social media in all of the galleries

@mao_gallery | Instagram: modernartoxford
#republic | #monarchy

This exhibition presents a selected survey of historical and recent work by seminal British artist Stuart Brisley (b. Surrey, 1933). Celebrated as a performance artist, the great breadth and diversity of Brisley’s practice will be explored in *State of Denmark* through a range of sculpture, photography, film and painting.

Throughout his career, now spanning six decades, Brisley has consistently interrogated the political conventions of the time. From his early projects in ‘60s post-war Germany and his recurring engagement with the politics of Northern Ireland to his more recent critique of the British monarchy and systems of power, Brisley’s profound and singular voice resonates with a younger generation of artists working today.

In a time marked by widespread dissatisfaction with our political institutions, from the protests against inequality mounted by the ‘Occupy’ movement to the proposed dismantling of the Unions, this exhibition highlights the urgency of the critique which Brisley has relentlessly pursued throughout his work.

State of Denmark will include early and rarely seen works which reappraise historical moments that chime with the contemporary political climate.

In the Upper Gallery *Before the Mast* (2013), is a series of photographs from a ten-day performance exploring the decimal calendar introduced after the French Revolution. This attempt to eradicate all religious and royalist influences from day-to-day life reveals Brisley’s fascination with the Revolutionary moment which has played itself out consistently throughout his career. This interest is also revealed in *State of Denmark* (2014), a new installation created especially for Modern Art Oxford. Here, an iron crown is hung over a collection of clothing. Beside this stands a wooden structure; one side comprised of removable panels and demarcated as republican, the other given over to monarchy. A royal portrait of a child prince is placed inside, apparently trapped by the system in which it exists. This work highlights a vulnerability of seemingly permanent institutions by opposing the political systems of republic and monarchy. Visitors are invited to contribute to this debate by writing on the structure’s panels.

Featured in the Middle Galleries is documentation of Brisley’s pioneering *Peterlee Project* 1976-1977, also published as a book on the occasion of this exhibition. Peterlee is a mining town in Durham

STUART BRISLEY
STATE OF DENMARK
CURATED BY DAVID THORP WITH THE MUSEUM OF ORDURE

Upper Galleries
20 September - 16 November

PROGRAMME

In *STUDIO No.1* we see the performance of a number of Foley sounds (sound effects for radio and film), enacted within a purpose built sound stage in his native Czech Republic. This studio however was never used as intended, due to the invention of recording tape, and the space and it's props remained empty – a forgotten site for performance reactivated only for Stětina's camera. However here the process is inverted and we see only the actions, there is no sound except that which we are asked to imagine as doors are slammed and feet walk up stones stairs.

Fikret Atay

Tinica, 2004, digital film
10 – 16 November

Fikret Atay's films capture moments of private, sometimes intimate, performance. In *Tinica*, a young man stands on a hill overlooking Batman, Turkey. He prepares with utmost care a makeshift drum set from used cans, plastic bottles, and container covers. He gives a bravura performance to an indifferent and distant city-scape - there is no audience and no response. Only the camera is there to record his activity.

Finally he kicks the drum set down the hill, the cans and bottles roll down the slope towards the town and finally come to rest among the rubbish at the bottom as the performance, and even the instruments that made it, dissolve back into the city.

Marcus Coates
Out of Season, 2000, Digital film
17 – 23 November

Marcus Coates is best know for his shamanistic performances and films in which he adopts the costumes and tropes of First Nation peoples to consider the tribes, rituals and superstitions of contemporary society. In *Out of Season* we see a man wondering the woods alone chanting football songs to the sky. Removed from the stadium and the context of the opposition fans, Coates' film strips away the accepted social perceptions of his behavior and in doing so reveals the power and absurdity of performing alone.

Mel Brimfield

Quantum Foam performed by David Cann, 2014, Digital film
24-30 November

Mel Brimfield's complex practice is concerned with the historiography of both performance art and popular culture – TV sitcoms, comedy and cabaret. Skillfully weaving a playful narrative between the history of performance art and the most significant

Geta Bratescu was an important figure in history of Romanian conceptualism. Although largely marginalized by the regime in her homeland in the mid 20th Century, following the political thaw in the 1970s Bratescu worked as an illustrator and graphic designer alongside her artistic practice. At the end of the '70s, she rented a studio that served both as a place of work, but also increasingly functioned as the subject of her artistic practice, becoming a stage for temporary installations as well as a production venue for her films.

Geta Bratescu

The Studio, 1978, 16mm transferred to digital film
17 – 24 October

The Studio is an action documented on film in which the artist used her own body to investigate her studio's spatial proportions. By contrast to her Conceptual contemporaries, such as Bruce Nauman and Paul McCarthy, Bratescu does not view the relationship between the studio and the body as independent from life's daily problems: she aims constantly to dissipate the boundaries between the spaces of art and of everyday life.

Erika Beckman

We Imitate; We Break Up, 1978, Super 8 transferred to digital film
25 October – 1 November

Based in New York, Erika Beckman has been making films since the 1970s, combining choreographed tableaux, set designs and manipulated camera work, her films anticipate the work of a generation of younger artists. Beckman's creative methodology initially saw her transforming her studio into a sound stage on which to produce her performances, with the aide of some trusted assistants, she describes her practice as producing films which

'challenge traditional aesthetic, and cultural values, that mix games with fairytales to create hybrids with new rules.'

For Beckman play is central to her message, creating constructs and scenarios playouted before the camera, yet mirroring the games around which we build our daily lives.

Roman Stětina

STUDIO No.1 (Demonstration), 2013, Digital film
2 – 9 November

Roman Stětina's work focuses largely on the history of radio - its people, architecture and evolving technology. Stětina's elegant films create narratives, telling stories which function as historical asides to the mainstream of history.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY CALENDAR

In early summer 1789 a revolution in Paris led to the fall of the French absolute state and its replacement by a constitutional monarchy. Three years later, in August 1792, radicals overthrew the constitutional monarchy and established the First French Republic which survived until 1804 when Napoleon was declared emperor. The revolutionaries of 1789 wanted to make a clean break with the past. They divided the old French provinces into eighty-three departments named after the rivers that passed through them and set up a new currency and system of weights and measures based upon the number ten. The republicans went one stage further and created a new calendar built on the decimal system. France no longer had a past. Year I began on 22 September 1792, the day after the abolition of the monarchy.

The Revolutionary calendar bore no resemblance to our own. The year was divided into twelve months of thirty days. Each month contained three weeks of ten days, each day ten hours, each hour 100 minutes, and each minute 100 seconds. Every care was taken to ensure there was no connection with the old calendar. The months were given appropriate climatic or agricultural names; the week was called a *décade*; and the days were numbered one to ten. Each day was also given its own individual name drawn from animals, plants and minerals. Thus, Christmas Day was the day of the dog (Chien) and the fifth day of the month of snow (Nivôse). As there were only 360 days in the Revolutionary calendar, five extra days had to be added at the end of the year. These were known as the Sans-culottides, after the people of Paris who had provided the troops that had swept away the monarchy.

No-one, even dedicated republicans, found the calendar easy to use, and constructing a clock which kept decimal time was an engineering feat. The revolutionary week was particularly disliked by workers and France's Catholic majority: people got only one day off in ten rather than one in seven, and they could not usually attend church on the Sabbath. Although the republicans saw the calendar as a key plank in their campaign to destroy religious superstition, they gradually bowed to the inevitable. The decimal day was abolished in 1795 and the decimal week in 1802. The months eventually reverted to their traditional names in 1805. By then, as is clear from correspondence, nobody was using the Revolutionary calendar. It was revived briefly in 1871 when the collapse of France's Second Empire led to the temporary establishment of the Paris Commune. It has never been taken up again. Modern revolutionaries have

frequently carried through root-and-branch reform but they have never been tempted to change the calendar. Presumably, the alienation that this would engender is seen as a step too far. This raises the interesting question of how the Christian and Islamic calendars were ever successfully established to begin with.

Laurence Brockliss

*Professor of Early-Modern French History,
the University of Oxford, and Tutor in History,
Magdalen College*

QUIET REPUBLICANISM

Modern UK republicanism has been unfortunately little more than a vandalising impulse, taboo-shrunk to mere naughtiness: unable to upset the landscape, rebels are reduced to stealing Papa's stamp-album or carving their initials on the ancestral furniture. During the 1964-66 Labour government its most radical Minister was reduced to a campaign to remove the Queen's profile from some of our postage-stamps. His efforts were neatly foiled. But of course real Republicanism would have by contrast paradoxically little to do with the Monarchy as such. It can only acquire sense and public dignity as a refutation of what the Crown means: that is, as a refusal of the whole estate and a demand for the new constitutional habitat which must one day replace it.

Though I have touched on the subject a number of times, there are still some important lessons in the later decline and fall of Republicanism worth considering. The old Chartist question had been: How can Old Corruption ever be overthrown without getting rid of its most blatant and odious symbol? How can a new, democratic nation ever arise without destroying this bloated embodiment of the old one – the 'hoary, false nation' of the NormanYoke, Lordship, the Rotten Boroughs, and Property?

Around 1870, Republicanism was abandoned to sectarian movements increasingly self-defined by their isolation from popular feeling and the political mainstream. There have been one or two stirrings in the intervening century, but none capable of reconstituting anti-monarchism as a plausible presence.

One side-effect of this national-popular Monarchism was that Republicanism acquired an automatic connotation of being 'middle-class' or 'intellectual' in some deranged and suspect sense. As such it soon merited contempt from socialists as well as from proletarian Tories. Grinding in unison, the two mill-stones of Nation and 'class' did have the permanent effect of preventing even a fraction of the nation from holding to Republicanism. Working from below, 'class' consciousness now found itself with two alternative (in reality complementary) judgements to deliver on the subject: 'trivial' when set against the mighty engine of an All-British, Working-class Socialism, the Monarchy was 'everything decent about us' (as well as a load of fun) to those less enamoured of the mighty engine, and even to Socialists on their off-duty days. But Left and Right could now both agree wholeheartedly that anyone bothering about the Crown as such was only a nut.

Extract from The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy
Professor Tom Nairn
1988

cultural events of recent history. Brimfield's films use and reference the forms and tropes of popular entertainment to question our reverence for the sacred cows of culture.

A tragicomic humor runs through the work, in particular her films, often utilizing washed up theatrical archetypes and artist stereotypes as conduits to deliver her texts and narratives rewriting the history to which they grimly aspire.

Andy Warhol

Screen Tests #23, 1964-66, 16mm film
2 -7 December

Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests* series have become icons, not least because of the stellar status of many of their subjects. Made at the height of the Factory's notoriety – Warhol's legendary studio in New York – visitors to the studio would be asked to sit before the camera. Often no further direction was given and Warhol would wander away leaving the subject to decide when the process was over.

Part of Warhol's genius was to understand so well the potential for the camera to both create a façade but also to deconstruct it, either in an instant or over time. Here we see arch performer Salvador Dali's persona slowly disintegrate before the unflinching eye of the lens.

Ryan Trecartin

Popular Sky (section ish), 2009 , HD video
9 – 14 December

Trecartin's often epic, crazed and sometimes terrifying films are super sized magnifications of contemporary popular culture – a grotesque, logical extension of a society obsessed with communicating and consumption as subject matter. Trecartin celebrates a brash, glossy, yet darkly threatening world in which the camera is always watching and behavior is adjusted accordingly.

Adapting forms of presentation and narrative from reality TV, documentaries, You Tube and Facebook, it is sometimes difficult to decipher reality from fiction. This is precisely because these films are product of a world in which this distinction is increasingly blurred and the line between private and public becomes ever more porous.

STUART BRISLEY FILM PROGRAMME

‘Photography, film and sound have been part of my thinking around the question of film. I have seen these mediums in relation to performance which I understand to be a behavioural activity. Synthesis through film offers another perspective of performance. I try to make new works utilising film and video shot during performances. The films stand as independent works where the dynamo of the action has moved from transience towards considerations of an endless duration;’

Stuart Brisley 2014

Throughout his career performance has formed a mainstay of Stuart Brisley’s artistic practice. Many of these influential works have been closely aligned to context, placing a limitation on the possibility to experience them as a live event. Fortunately a considerable archive of documentary footage and film exist and for *State of Denmark*, Stuart Brisley has made a selection of films offering a unique over-view of his most important performance work.

Being and Doing, 1984, 55:00 minutes
A film by Stuart Brisley and Ken McMullen
A collaborative search towards the origins of performance connecting it not to Modernism but to preindustrial cultures. These rituals offer a drama where the division of performer and audience has not been institutionalised, testifying to powerful lineages.

10 Days, 1978, 51:23 minutes
The performance was first made in Berlin which took place between 21-31 December 1973 and remade during the same period five years later at Acme Gallery London in 1978 with camerawork by Ken McMullen. Brisley offered his food to his audience and lived without any source of food for a ten day period.

Incidents in Transit, 1992-2014, 42:00 minutes
This performance took place in Barcelona in 1992. The performance takes its title from an earlier visit by Brisley to Barcelona in March 1974 when the last two executions of the Franco regime took place while he was there. The Catalan activist, Salvador Puig Antich and a common criminal Heinz Chez were executed by the use of the garote.

Sweating the Hole, 1997-2009, 24:50
As with many works, performance derives from daily life, in this case, a plague of mice.

Black Red and White, 1997-2009, 10:38 minutes
Black Red and White takes place in a small room in which are displayed prints of opera singers. The images through the camera provide both front

The Last Breath, 2006-10, 13:42 minutes
The film is a culmination of 4 performances all titled *The Last Breath*. The subject is derived from memories of two experiences of approaching death. Ultimately death lies beyond rational consideration.

Next Door (the missing subject), 2010-12, 30:00 minutes
This performance was commissioned by PEER, London, and comprised a set of actions which were simultaneously filmed and photographed over a ten-day period close to the general election in May 2010. This proximity in time was crucial to the intent of the work.

Before The Mast, 2013-14, 27:30 minutes
A performance and film by Stuart Brisley
A 10 day performance corresponding to the month of ‘Frimaire’ in the French Republican Calendar. The Calendar established a new chronology and was an effort to sweep away history and centuries old religiously centred organisation of time. The seven day week was replaced by a new ten day decimal week, a sign of equality.

LIKE CANYONS AND RIVERS:
PERFORMANCE FOR IT’S OWN SAKE

Space in New York was abundant and relatively cheap. The work was incubated in particular buildings: 80 Wooster Street, in which Richard foreman staged his first performances; the exhibition-cum-work space at 112 Greene Street, where, as Peter Schjeldahl wrote, the exhibited pieces were “scarcely distinguishable from the ruined features of what used to be a rag packing factory” filmmaker Jack Smith’s live-in-movie studio-cum-theatre, the Plaster Foundation of Atlantis, at 36 Greene Street...

...the Plaster Foundation served as both Smith’s home and his theatre. Half of the loft’s middle ceiling has been removed. The remaining portion sheltered a collection of old chairs and sofas – eventually a rickety wooden grandstand – for whatever audience appeared. By way of announcement, Smith’s on going loft performances were listed in the Village Voice’s Off-Off Broadway directory. Those spectators who made their way to his theatre at midnight often had the feeling that what was being enacted was no more or less than Smith’s daily existence...

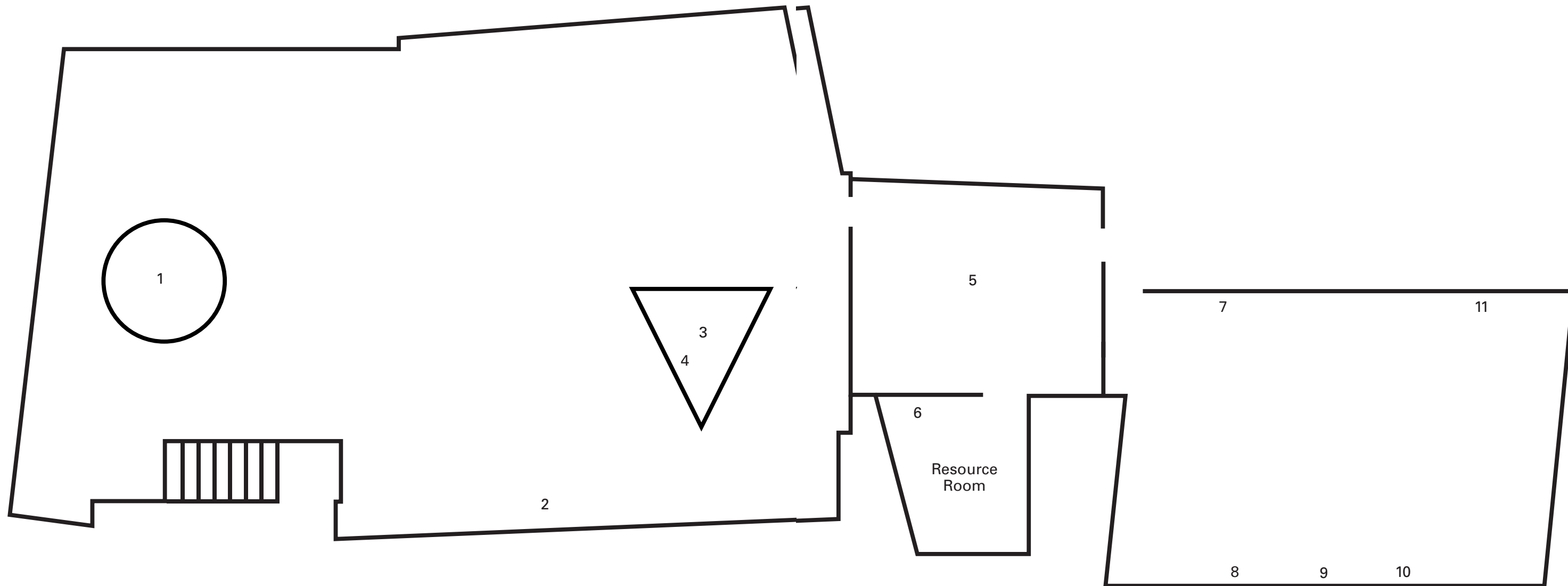
...Ericka Beckmann provided another amalgam of object theatre and psychodrama. Beckmann showed her Super 8 films at Artists Space in the Spring of 1977 and, two years later, at the Kitchen on a bill with movies that Stuart Sherman had been making to supplement his Spectacles... Using texts by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget as a script, Beckmann created enigmatic allegories for competition, organisation and initiation. In *Hit and Run* and *White Man Has Clean Hands* (both 1977) people disappear; furniture collapses, then scurries away as a pair of disembodied hands conduct a minimal score on ominous drum rolls or repetitive guitar riffs. The more elaborate *We Imitate; We Break Up* (1978) features a set of life sized marionette legs that teach Ericka how to dance and play soccer, then chase her all over the lot when she runs away with the loot...

...Television infected performance, prophesied by Ralston Farina and introduced by Michael Smith – who would make TV the subject of his March 1982 Whitney installation *Mike’s House* – was the new currency, even as video artists gravitated towards the music video... *Mike’s House* nevertheless anticipated by fifteen years the logic of reality TV shows the would dominate commercial television in the late 1990s...

...For the most part these artists have left not artefacts but traces. The work exists as fragile recordings, random documents, impressionistic descriptions, art world legends, and spectator memories; and, in some cases, not even those.

J Hoberman is a film critic and writer based in New York.

Extracts from *Like Canyons and Rivers: Performance for it’s Own Sake*, J Hoberman 2013, a exhibition catalogue essay for *Rituals of a Rented Island: Object Theatre, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama* – Manhattan, 1970-1980, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. 31 October 2013 – 2 February 2014.



Upper Gallery

- 1 *Hille Fellowship*
226 chairs
dimensions variable
1970 / 2014
- 2 *Before The Mast*
Ten archival print photographs by
Maya Balcioglu
each photograph 38 x 38 cm (unframed)
2013
- 3 *State of Denmark*
Iron, wood, clothing
dimensions variable
2014
- 4 *Cutting Edge Primogeniture (Jerusalem)*
Graphite on paper
52 x 67 cm
2014

Middle Galleries

- 5 *Peterlee Project*
Ink, paper and photographs, 46
boards, each 45.6 x 55.6 cm,
1976-1977 (courtesy Tate Archive)
- 6 *It Can Be Done*
Photographic triptych
77cm x 167cm
1986

Piper Gallery

- 7 *Royal Ordure*
Mixed media on canvas
152 x 122 cm
1996
- 8 *Missing Text, Interregnum 1 (6 May – 12 May 2010)*
Oil on linen
135 x 196 cm
2012
- 9 *Missing Text, Interregnum 2 (6 May – 12 May 2010)*
Oil on linen
135 x 196 cm
2012-13
- 10 *Missing Text, Interregnum 3 (6 May – 12 May 2010)*
Oil on linen
135 x 196 cm
2013
- 11 *Chair*
Wooden chair, papier mache, PVA, acrylic paint,
hardwood parquet floor, tar
dimensions variable
2011