

Whitechapel
Gallery

Emanuel Almborg

Learning Matter

27 Apr – 20 Aug 2017

Large Print Guide

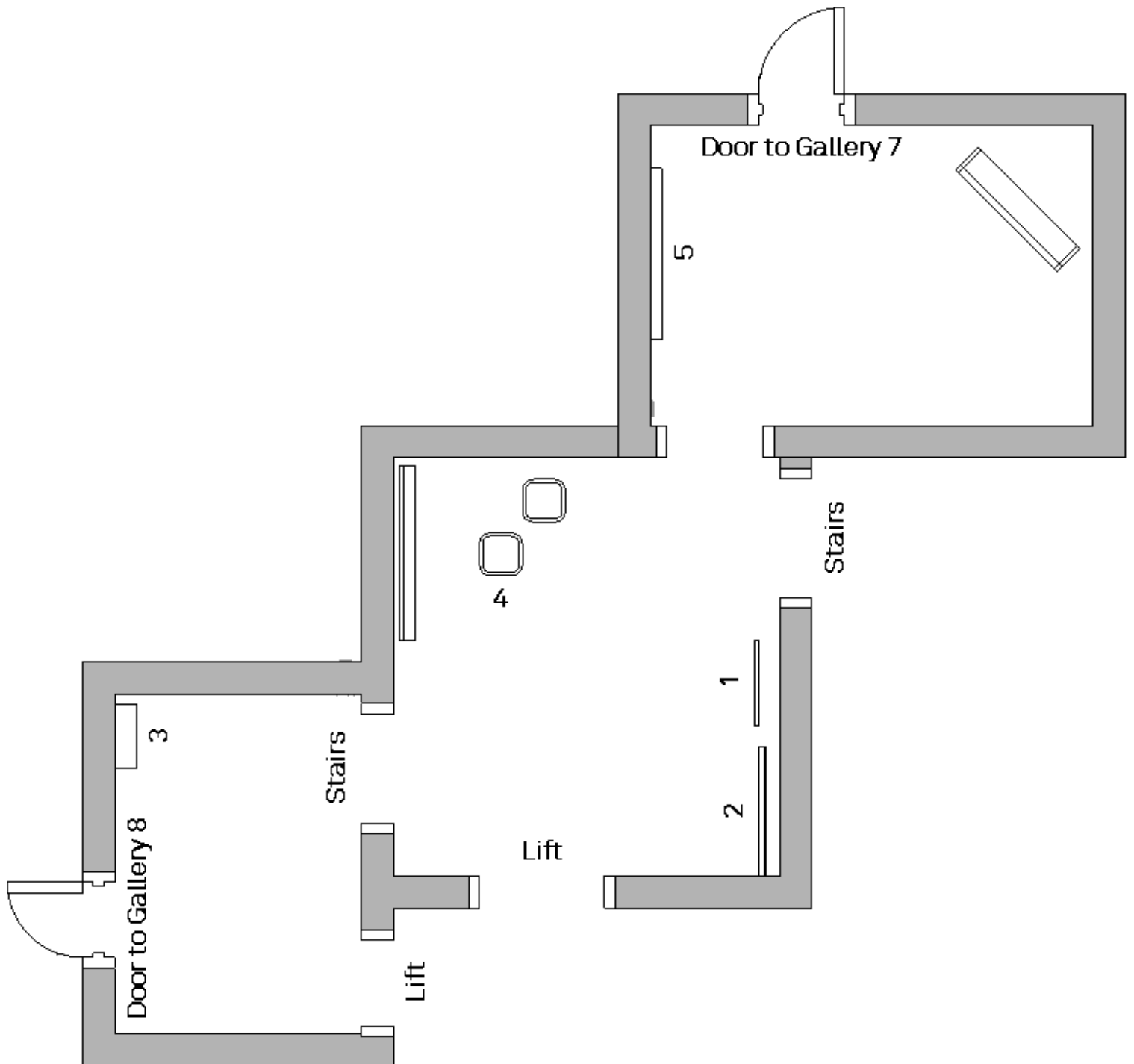
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Emanuel Almborg: Learning Matter

Floor Plan and Label Key



1.

Emanuel Almborg: Learning Matter

Swedish Artist Emanuel Almborg's (b. 1981) new commission, *Learning Matter* (2017) is presented alongside two of his previous films – *The Majority Never Has Right On It's Side* (2013) and *Talking Hands* (2016). The works on display are connected by the artist's interest in educational models and forms of mediation.

Exploring the relationship between everyday technologies, Almborg's commission has been developed in collaboration with his mother, educator Agneta Almborg, and a group of 7 – 10 year olds from Mayflower Primary School in East London. Using clay, photography and video, they investigated how smart phones and tablets mediate attention, affect attention and ways of being together. The workshops were documented by Agneta Almborg using her old Minolta 35mm camera. *Learning Matter* considers how material conditions and technologies shape social relations.

The Majority Never Has Right On It's Side focusses on her anti-authoritarian pedagogies at Summerhill – a democratic school A. S. Neill (1883 -1973). Using the schools video archive, Alborg traces its visual history, its utopian premissis, and the challenges and contradictions of creative alternatives today.

Talking hands combines 1960's archival footage from the Zagorsk school for deaf – blind children in Moscow with a conversation between Almborg and one of its former students, Alexander Suvorov. Established by the Marxist philosopher Evald Ilyenkov (1924 – 79), the school pioneered new ideas on how human consciousness develops in relation to material objects and tools.

2.

Learning Matter, 2017

20 black and white photographs (RC Prints) by: Agneta Almborg

These photographs document a series of workshops developed by Emanuel Almborg with his mother, Agneta Almborg, at Mayflower Primary School. Exploring the relation to everyday technologies and 'screen' culture, the group approached the subject through clay modelling, acting exercises and construction, using iPads in video interviews and research.

They discussed how everyday technologies are produced and how smartphones and tablets shape forms of thinking, imagination, attention and truth. The photographs were taken with a Minolta 35mm camera that Agneta hadn't used for over 30 years. They act as an interface between generations and material modes of capturing and visualising information. What might be lost and gained when more time is spent in front of 'screens'? *Matter* in the title refers to the materiality of technology; to how material conditions affect social relations; and to the etymological and philosophical connection between *motherhood* and *matter* as the material foundation for social reproduction.

3.

Workshops at Mayflower Primary School, Tower Hamlets.

Projects: Emanuel Almborg, *Learning Matter*, March 2017.
With students Fahmida Ahmed, Iqtidar Ahmed, Jannat Aktar,
Fahmid Hossain, Sadia Hossain, Zara Jaman, Mackay
Mayenschein, Ahmed Mohamed, Yunus Rahman, Mohammed
Yusef and teacher Benjamin Jones.

4.

The Majority Never Has Right on its Side, 2013

40 min, 4:3 HD Video

Using the video archive of Summerhill - founded by A.S. Neill in the 1920s -, Almborg traces the visual history of the school and presents its unique way of understanding education. Built on democratic principles such as 'freedom' and 'self-government', students and teachers have equal voting rights, lessons and exams are voluntary and pupils invent their own laws. Neill's foundational work developed out of an opposition to war and fascism.

A schoolmaster from Scotland, he was often described as a 'cynical utopian' and frequently quoted the playwright Henrik Ibsen's (1828–1906) anti-democratic maxim, 'The Majority never has right on its side'. The film also gives insight into the challenges and contradictions of creating alternatives today. During a workshop led by Almborg, one of the students' main concerns was how 'screens' had changed life in the community.

How do these technologies affect other students and schools? How are educational methods and children's relationships being shaped by technology? These questions became the starting point for *Learning Matter*.

5.

Talking Hands, 2016

48 min, HD and 16mm transferred to HD

The Zagorsk school for deaf-blind children was established in 1963 by Marxist philosopher Evald Ilyenkov and a group of psychologists. They developed ideas of how human consciousness emerges in relation to material culture, objects, and tools.

This film focusses on Alexander Suvorov, one of Ilyenkov's deaf-blind students, whom Almborg met in his home in a Moscow-suburb. For a few evenings they shared meals and talked with the help of two translators – from English to Russian and from Russian to tactile signing and back – a fragmented conversation marked by misunderstandings and mistranslations that became the basis for the film's dialogue.

Ilyenkov conceptualized the 'thinking body' as a fundamental feature of 'thinking' or 'reason' – a body's capacity to 'mould its own action actively to the shape of any other body, to coordinate the shape of its movement in space with the shape and distribution of all other bodies'.

Communism was the pedagogical project for such a vision and subject to emerge. As described by Suvorov, 'Who told you we see nothing and hear nothing? We see and hear through the eyes and ears of our friends, all people, the entire human race'. The film also features archive footage of the school. Its exact date and author are unknown.

The only information found was: 'Talking Hands'.

Credits

Directed, Edited and Produced: Emanuel Almborg; Script: Emanuel Almborg, Alexander Suvorov; Appearing in the film: Emanuel Almborg, Alexander Suvorov, Liza Bobriashova, Oleg Gurov; Production support: Maria Chehonadskih; Cinematography: Danila Goryunkov; Drums: Alexander Suvorov; Sound design: Jesper Norda, Emanuel Almborg; Editing: Marinella Angusti; Color grading: Ulf Lundén; Sound postproduction: Jesper Norda; Translation: Thomas Campbell

Voice (questions): Jonas Molander; Archive footage: "Talking Hands", 16mm (1960-70s), IPC RAO archive, Moscow.

Filmmaker and exact date unknown.

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