



Conversations and Actions Whitechapel Gallery

John Stezaker

whitechapelgallery.org/education



John Stezaker Love VI, 2006, collage. Private Collection, London. © The Artist.

Conversations and Actions

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This booklet has been written to help you explore the **John Stezaker** exhibition.

It contains a conversation that outlines key ideas and concepts around the artworks in the exhibition and in John Stezaker's art practice.

It aims to support your exploration of the exhibition and give you ideas to share with others in your group, whatever their age.

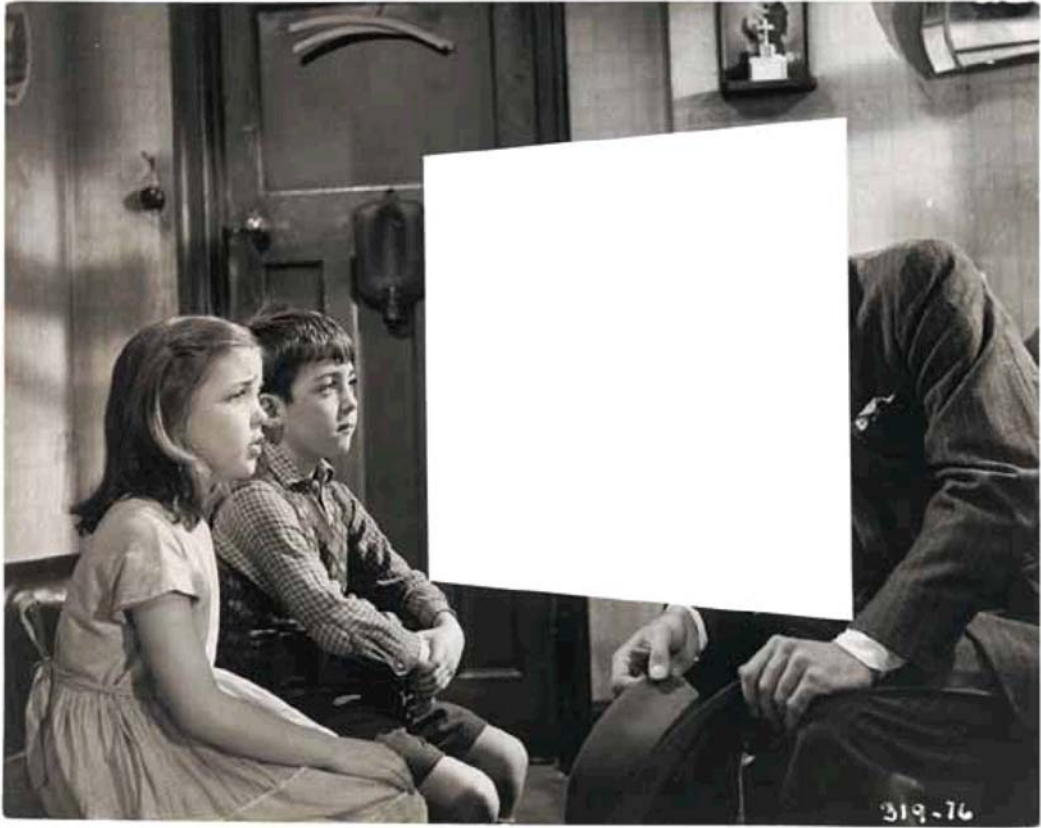
Throughout the booklet are actions that you can do in the Gallery. These appear in the boxes with the wavy lined edge and will help you consider

the artists' ideas, working processes or more directly the work and themes of the exhibition. These actions are easily adaptable to suit a wide-range of different interests and abilities.

Also, within the booklet are actions that can be used beyond the Gallery, these appear in the boxes with the diamond patterned edge. They too can be easily adapted.

Spread throughout are images that you can use as prompts, or as a reminder of the exhibition.

Have fun!



Tabula Rasa xi, 2008, Collage, 18.7 x 23.8 cm | 7.4 x 9.4 in



Mask X, 1982, Collage, 24.5 x 18 cm | 9.7 x 7.1 in

John Stezaker

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Daniel The title of this exhibition is just the artist's name, John Stezaker. It's a retrospective.

Rebecca The show is a collection of his works on paper, much of which are bodies of work that he is still working on. Some of the work has never been seen anywhere else before. He's really interested in images.

Daniel But his artworks aren't simply photographs and prints, they're objects. I can see the damage on the side of some postcards, like they may have actually been posted - they had a life before Stezaker found them and used them to make his artwork.

Rebecca He sources a lot of them from second-hand shops and through ebay, then made minimal interventions or changes to them, transforming them into something completely new in a very delicate way.

Daniel Cutting an image seems to be a quick and violent act to me.

Rebecca It's both a fast and a slow process. Stezaker says that although it can take him just thirty seconds to make the cut, it can take a year or two to make a decision about it - he really lives with his artwork.

Daniel I find the mask artworks slightly unnerving because the people in them are hidden by the postcards, we can see them but they can't look back at us. It's like Stezaker has blindfolded them.

Rebecca But the way the postcards line up with the hairlines, eyes and noses of the people underneath reveals a new face made up of parts of the top image.

Daniel The images he has chosen are of places where things originate from, like springs, waterfalls and caves. There is something behind them or coming out of them.

Rebecca Now, I'm not just wondering about the hidden faces, but what's hidden in the caves. They could be portals or entries into other spaces, bringing new life to the images they are covering.

Daniel I find it amazing how well he makes two images fit together without manipulating their sizes, enlarging or shrinking them. They fit by chance.

Rebecca The juxtaposition of images in most of his work reminds me of day dreaming. Like being in an office and thinking about being outside.

Daniel There's definitely an inside/outside feel, not just indoors and outdoors but what someone is doing and what they are thinking.



Pair III, 2007, Collage, 20,5 x 25 cm | 8.1 x 9.8 in



Pair IV, 2007, Collage, 19,5 x 25,2 cm | 7.7 x 9.9 in

The Process of Re-function

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Rebecca The way **John Stezaker** combines images changes them from what they were before into something new – like giving them a new life.

Daniel I've heard him describe images as lying in wait for him to discover, like homeless orphans. Once they become part of his collection they are saved and can be seen for what they are and become visible.

Creative Connections

Bring a selection of random **found** images into the Gallery, these could be:

- **Postcards**
- Old **photographs**
- Images from **magazines** or **newspapers**
- Illustrations taken from unwanted or second-hand **books**

In pairs take one image around the Gallery. Try and **make connections** between it and a number of different artworks throughout Gallery 1.

You could make a link between your image and the artwork through:

- **Shapes**
- **Colours**
- **Subjects**
- **Settings**
- An experience or a **memory** that both the artwork and found image remind you of

Bring out the possibilities of an image by physically linking it to another image

Use the same or similar found images as the last activity to **make collages**.

Try using two **different types** of image:

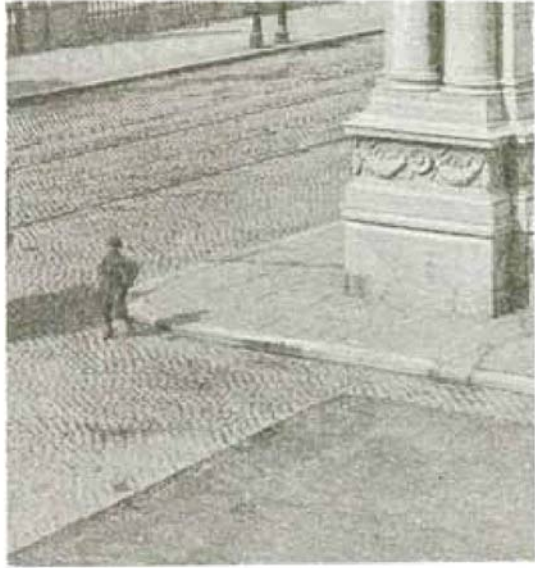
- **Film Stills**
- **Landscapes**
- **Objects**
- **Portraits**
- **Buildings**
- **A theme from your own work**

Combine **two images** by:

- Lining up a **face** with a **landscape image** to make it appear like human features.
- Use an image with **depth** on top of a **close-up** image to allow you to look through it.
- Put a close-up image on top of a landscape
- **Cut-away a shape** from one image that allows you to see through to another one underneath – this could be a silhouette.
- Mix colour and **black and white**.

Try **different** combinations of images before **you decide** on your final piece.

Keep it simple - don't be tempted to use too many images, **one or two** should be enough.



A selection from *The 3rd Person Archive*, 1.4; 1.8; 1.11; 1.13; 2.1; 1976–present. Image fragments

Common Denominators

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Daniel The Gallery space is divided into sections, but it's not chronological.

Rebecca The works are grouped by the way Stezaker has engaged with and used the images. Sometimes his series of works span long periods which overlap.

Daniel There's a sense of déjà vu, not just because some of his artworks remind me of things I think I've seen but can't quite pinpoint, but they also remind me of each other too. The same types of images appear in different bodies of work.

Creative Collections

Draw a simple **aerial plan** of part of Gallery 1 on an A4 sheet of either one of the long **walls on each side**, or one of the **'T' shaped wall sections** in the middle. Indicate where the divisions and partition walls are. Each of these areas has three **'groupings'** of work.

On your plan mark each area with a title that describes the way the artworks in that grouping or section are created.

- Removing
- Combining
- Altering
- Cropping
- Selecting
- Mirroring
- Similar
- Opposite
- Adding

Now look at the actual subjects in the images.

Use coloured lines to mark connections between the artworks in each section, joining any sections where artworks have used similar source images, for example:

- Postcards
- Portraits
- Landscapes
- Black and white
- Colour
- Film Stills

Remember to use a colour or other key for these lines.

3rd Person Archive (on the far wall from the entrance to Gallery 1)

Daniel *The 3rd Person Archive* is a collection of over 300 images taken from travel literature. By selecting an image, then cropping just part of it, Stezaker has made it into an artwork.

Rebecca He actually lost his archive, but remembering where he got the images from and the exact criteria he had used to select them, he recreated the archive. Later he found the original and discovered that both the new collection and the old looked almost identical.

Use an online image search to collect images inspired by a theme from Stezaker source images by using a search word such as film stills, portraits or landscapes or your own theme.

Develop a list of criteria for selecting which works go in your collection, for example they must:

- Contain a certain colour
- Be portraits of unknown people
- Must be paintings not photographs
- Only be landscapes with seas

Print out these images. Crop them following a rule of your own.

Organise them in a certain order.

Name your archive and talk through your process with a friend or write about it.

Ideas to spark your imagination

Develop your own activities around the following starting points:

Look at the *Marriage (Film Portrait Collage)* series of works for inspiration (next page).

- Use **mirrors**/mirror card along lines of symmetry on your own face. Work in pairs to draw or photograph each other.
- **Angle small compact mirrors** in front of your face to **reflect something else** in the room. Work in pairs to draw or photograph each other.
- Combine publicity photographs of modern celebrities – find them on www.imdb.com or in **celebrity magazines**.
- Use a **computer image editing software** to mirror, flip and rotate sections of a scanned found image or download image.
- Experiment using photocopies of **your own artwork** to cut and edit.
- Fold or cut portraits in half vertically. In groups experiment matching different combinations half-faces together. **Discuss** what works and how you **make decisions** on how the two halves match up.

Other works in the Gallery in which Stezaker uses similar techniques include the series *Lost Tracks* and *The Fall*.

Look at the *Love* series (see cover, and introduction page) for inspiration

- **Fold photocopies** of portrait photos in a concertina style to conceal sections
- Print the same image twice. **Make one cut** in one image from one edge to the other. Lay it on top of the other uncut copy.
- **Overlap two or three** of the same image.

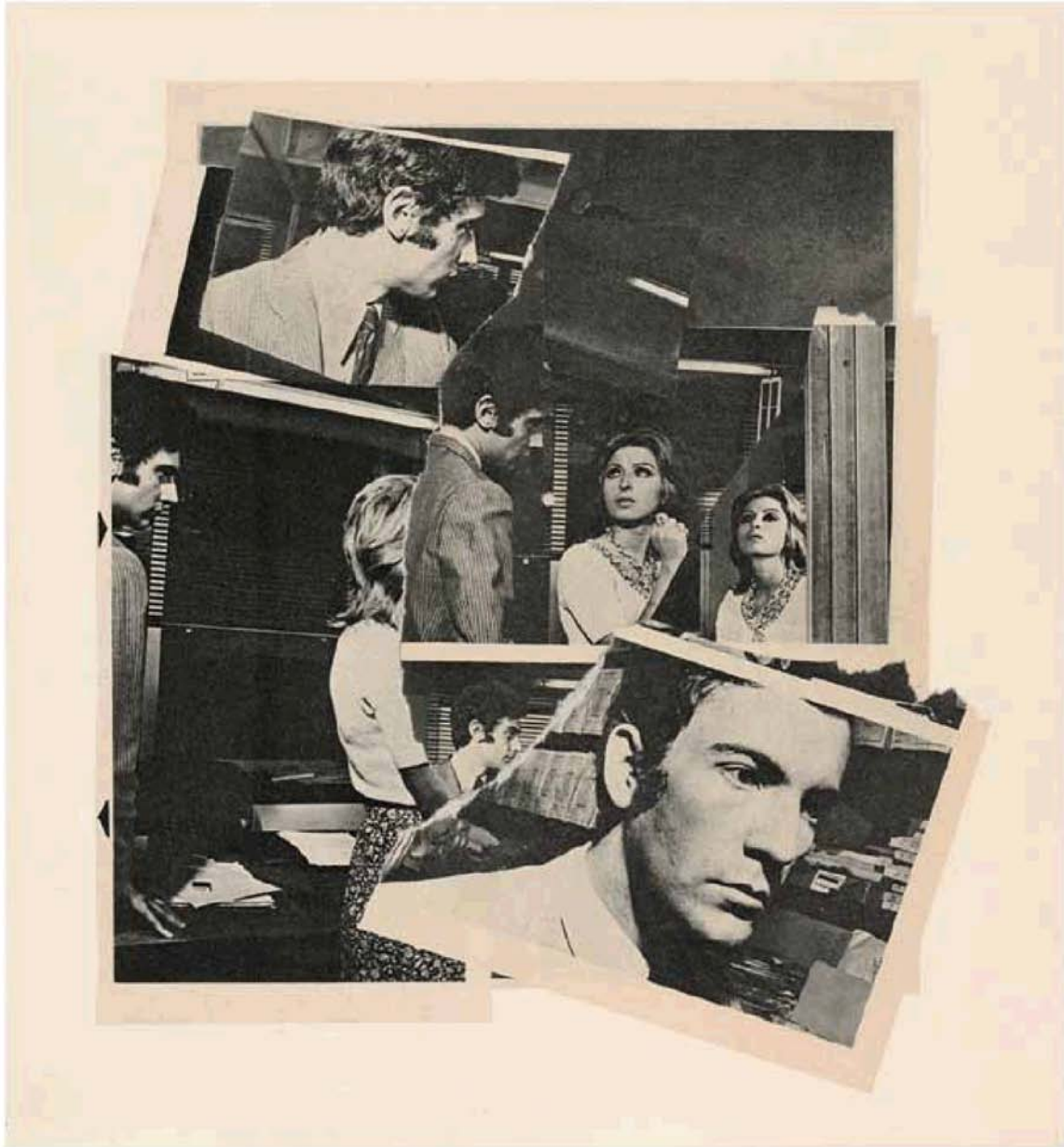
Try paying attention to only **one facial feature** such as the eyes when matching up.

Look at the *Enter... Exit the Third Person* series (Last page) for inspiration

- Try to create the feeling of **movement** by collaging fragments of enlarged and shrunk versions of an image with the original.
- Collage a series of **screen-shots from a film** to tell part of the story.
- Use photos you have taken with a camera set to **continuous frame rate**, (taking multiple images in a row whilst shutter button held down), to collage into one image.
- **Remove** elements from just one image.
- **Shift around** elements from just one image.



Marriage (Film Portrait Collage) LVI, 2007, Collage, 25.8 x 23.8 cm | 10.2 x 9.4 in



Enter... Exit the Third Person, 1978, Collage, Image: 28.6 x 25.1 cm | 11.3 x 9.9 in

This Conversations and Actions resource was written by artist Daniel Wallis.

To book your free group visit and use our Education Space (available Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during term time) please call Education on 020 7522 7888 or email: education@whitechapelgallery.org

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