

# Conversations and Actions Whitechapel Gallery

**Keeping it Real:  
An Exhibition in Four Acts:  
The D. Daskalopoulos Collection**



**Act 1**

10 June–5 September 2010



**Act 2**

17 September–5 December 2010



**Act 3**

17 December 2010–6 March 2011



**Act 4**

18 March–22 May 2011

## Conversations and Actions

This booklet has been written to help you explore a series of four displays drawn from the D. Daskalopoulos Collection, jointly titled, *Keeping It Real*.

It contains a series of conversations between two artists, **Rebecca Greathead** and **Daniel Wallis**, and Whitechapel Chief Curator **Achim Borchardt-Hume**.

This conversation outlines key ideas and concepts from some of the artworks that appear in each display, as well as discussing the relationship between the Whitechapel Gallery and public collections, with a focus on how work was selected from the D. Daskalopoulos Collection. It aims to support your exploration of the displays and gives you ideas to share with others, in your group, whatever their age.

The four 'Acts' of *Keeping It Real* will be spread over the period of a year so as each display opens, an extra section will be added to this document.

As some of these 'Acts' deal with aspects of the body we advise educators to visit the show to check suitability for your group prior to your visit.

The four acts that make up *Keeping It Real* are:  
The Corporeal, 10 June – 5 September 2010,  
Subversive Abstraction, 17 September – 5 December 2010,  
Current Disturbance, 17 December 2010 – 6 March 2011,  
Material Intelligence, 18 March – 22 May 2011

Throughout the booklet are actions that you can do **in the Gallery** (these appear in the boxes with the wavy lined edge) that 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 people.

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 to act as prompts or as a reminder of the exhibition.

Have fun!



# Keeping It Real

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Rebecca Why is the Whitechapel Gallery showing someone's private collection?

Achim Whitechapel Gallery has a history of showing work from both public and private collections from all over the world. When we extended the Gallery in 2009 we had a Collections Gallery made especially for this purpose.

Rebecca So why the D. Daskalopoulos Collection?

Achim No one had ever seen his collection before; it had never been published or publicly documented. Some work has been lent out to other galleries, but only because their curators were looking for specific works and were directed to him via dealers who knew he'd bought them.

Rebecca So, as Chief Curator at Whitechapel Gallery you were the first curator to have a chance to explore his whole collection?

Achim Absolutely. I was able to look through his database, pick out a long list of works I wanted to display and then go to Athens where he is based and see them.

Rebecca Why are you not showing his whole collection?

Achim He is well known as a collector of large installation works, but has many small pieces too; there are 400 works in his collection. The Collections Gallery (Gallery 7) here at the Whitechapel hasn't space for all the work, in fact we're having four micro-exhibitions one after another, I call them four 'Acts'.

Rebecca They must tell a sort of story then.

Achim Exactly. When I was planning the acts I was thinking of them like books - you read one, and then ask what now, where next? Maybe I'll have that. Sometimes I searched for artworks, sometimes they were just there.

Rebecca Did Daskalopoulos direct you and tell you which artworks he wanted to show?

Achim Not at all. He was fantastically open about it all. I knew there were certain iconic works we had to show, and I wanted to give a flavour of Daskalopoulos, what makes him tick. A lot of the artwork he buys has the quality of 'stuff': gunky, not shiny, visceral rather than cerebral; it's about life and death, male and female. That was my starting point for the first show.

Rebecca So, the exhibitions are all about finding out who Daskalopoulos is? I know that about 30 years ago he oversaw the transformation of a family dairy business into Greece's largest food company.

Achim In a way it's all about him, he's the missing piece of the puzzle, the person who brought the whole collection together. But I think when you come to see the exhibitions you can ignore him. It's what you want make of it. It's yours.



**John Bock, *Winona Ryder* (2009)**

# The D. Daskalopoulos Collection

**Daniel** It must have been interesting for you to go and select works from such a big collection, and it must have been equally enjoyable for Daskalopoulos to have the chief curator of a major international gallery explore and suggest ways to make sense of it.

**Achim** Yes. He said it opened his eyes to new ways of looking at some of the works and making connections between them. When I was selecting work for the four acts I found it grounding to have someone who I was forced to tell my ideas to, to check I wasn't going off the rails.

**Daniel** As a visitor to the Whitechapel Gallery I'm really excited about having the opportunity to see works I can't see in other London galleries, but I am wondering what Daskalopoulos might get out of exhibiting here?

**Achim** He is passionate about art and education, but in Athens where he is based there isn't really a strong contemporary arts scene. An exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery will help raise the profile of his collection and open up further possibilities for its use.

## Actions **Beyond the Gallery**

A collection of any form will reflect the **personality** of the **collector**.

Think about whether you already have any collections?

Make an **internet search** using the words 'art collections' or 'contemporary art collection' to find examples of online collections. Many galleries have their own collections, so look at their websites too.

You could similarly use **art books** or any **images collections** you have available.

Look through some of the collections and **select** a work that **interests** you.

Using this as starting point to form your own **personal collection**, choose other works that are **related** in some way. For example, by subject matter, colour, theme, mood, artist etc.

You could try to collect 6 – 10 images which all relate to each other or you could collect using a Chinese Whispers technique by selecting each work in relation to the previous one: e.g. work 2 might echo the colours of work 1, work 3 might share the mood of work 2 and so on.

Ask someone else in your group to try and 'read' your images to help unpick the method you used to choose and collate them.

Ask them to think of other ways to group or link images. Discuss together how you might exhibit them to an audience.

**Design an exhibition to display these works:**

- **What sort of space would you like to see them in?**

- **How would you curate the show and arrange the artworks?**

- **Think of a title for the show, or for the collection.**

- **Make an advertisement for your show and write a press release.**

## Actions **Beyond the Gallery**

For a series of activities focusing on curation which will complement the Actions from this

*Conversation and Actions* please refer to **The British Council Collection: Great Early Buys Teacher's Pack** which can be downloaded from:

<http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/education/schools/teachers>



David Hammons *Untitled* (1975)



Sherrie Levine *Fountain (Buddha): 5* (1996)

# Act 1: The Corporeal

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Daniel There seems to be a lot of artwork about the body in this exhibition.

Rebecca Not the more traditional parts of the body either! I can see some prints of a penis here made by *David Hammonds*.

Daniel He has also made a printed trace of his body by covering himself in margarine and pressing himself against a board.

Rebecca His work exposes the mere traces of black artists within Western Art history.

Daniel There is a torso here on the floor; it looks like it is made from wax. With real hair embedded in it.

Rebecca It has both female and male parts.

Daniel There are other works made from hair, a piece by *Despina Isaia* where the hair has been crocheted and hair which is woven into a graphic pattern by *David Hammonds*.

Rebecca The delicate blue drawing by *Jim Hodges* is made using saliva to transfer ink from one piece of paper onto another.

Daniel Even the works that are not obviously body parts make reference to the body.

Rebecca A vulnerable body with holes and protrusions rather than an idealised version.

Daniel I can see *Marcel Duchamp's* infamous urinal, is it the original one?

Rebecca The original *Fountain* he tried to exhibit in 1917 was rejected and subsequently lost. This is one of several handcrafted replicas that *Duchamp* authorised to be made in the 1960s.

Daniel So what was supposed to be a ubiquitous object has become something quite different.

Rebecca What about this golden one next to it? It's called *Buddha*, and actually looks like a Buddha from the front.

Daniel This was cast in bronze by *Sherrie Levine* from a urinal made by the manufacturers of *Duchamp's* original 'readymade'.

Rebecca Have you looked at this piece by *Jimmie Durham* with bullet holes as you come in the door? I find it rather sinister, yet funny at the same time.

Daniel Have you noticed the bullet marks are at chest height?

Rebecca Yes, in amongst these other works it is another reminder of our leaky bodies.

### Actions In the Gallery

Look for the **different** body parts shown overtly or alluded to by the artworks. If you put them together could you make up a **whole body**?

Think about how you **feel** when looking at some of the works.

Do they make you uncomfortable? Why might this be?

Do they make you more **aware** of your own **body**?

Do you think this was the artist/s intention?

The bronze female form on the wall by Sherrie Levine is actually cast from an **African mask** worn as an initiation rite for young men:

Can you tell it's a **mask**? How?

Why do you think the artist has chosen to incorporate this subject matter in the work?

Are there other works that you think are **gendered i.e.** distinctly male or female?

Are there any artworks which have aspects of **both** sexes in them?

### Actions Beyond the Gallery

Experiment with hand- and foot-**print** making to make **new shapes** maybe with **reference to other parts of the body** or even other objects.

Research the use of **hair** in art:

Look for **other artists** who use hair in their work: Search the internet for images using the following names along with the word 'hair'. Ann Hamilton, Emily Bates, Tom Friedman, Renee Stout, Doris Salcedo, Tania Bruguera...

**Hair can carry enormous power and meaning both attached to the head and cut from it. These meanings can differ according to culture and time:**

**Explore the meaning** of different haircuts and styles: historically (eg. Ancient Egyptians) or socially (eg. punk hairstyles, braiding, shaving).

In some countries hair plaiting and braiding is a form of **Art and Craft** included by the **school curriculum**.

Shaving hair can be a form of **punishment** or **dehumanisation** (think about the Holocaust), used to **empower** or create an **aggressive** image (Skinheads) or as a form of **piety** (Buddhist monks).

When Britney Spears shaved her head in 2007, it was front page news. Why?

**Long hair** can be equally potent, as a symbol of **sexuality** or conversely as a sign of **respect** to ones religion as in Sikh culture. It's meaning differs between men and women. Think about the saying, *Letting your hair down* – what does it actually mean?

Hair cut from the head can provoke very differing emotions:

Think about the different emotions evoked between looking at a baby's first curl and finding a stranger's hair caught in the plug hole.

Many of the works in the exhibition make reference to parts of our bodies that are usually hidden i.e. parts with hair! Historically Western Art did not show pubic hair.

While removing all the hair from our heads can be shocking, sometimes not removing hair from legs or underarms can be even more outrageous. Is this the same for men as for women?



Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* (1917/1964)

## Act2: Subversive Abstraction

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The Conversation for Act 2 is between artist Rebecca and Briony, aged 9.

Rebecca What do you think of this display?

Briony When I came in, I thought there were lots of paintings, but looking more carefully – they're not paintings.

Rebecca One of the walls is painted red, although initially it looks more like wallpaper you might see in a grand room. The gold pattern is applied with a roller, allowing no sign of the artist's brushwork.

Briony I like the artwork made from beads, I can see shapes of trees and things, but swing it aside and you could see the wall.

Rebecca You mean the piece made from braiding beads by Kori Newkirk. It's the opposite of a stage curtain that opens to reveal the scene behind.

Briony Can I pull the beads?

Rebecca Unfortunately not, it would fall apart if too many people did this! Imagining what is inside, or behind something can be more exciting than actually experiencing it.

Briony I can imagine it would swish like the wind!

Rebecca I like this knot by Lynda Benglis, it is as thick as an arm.

Briony I read in a book about someone tying a knot in their handkerchief to remind them of something they had to do.

Rebecca Yes, seeing a knot can make you feel something is out of place.

Briony I don't really like it, it's like a tied up snake.

Rebecca Further along the wall is a piece by Robert Gober. Do you think this door looks as though it's also tied in a knot?

Briony Oh yes, especially if you look from the side.

Rebecca If you go through the far door there are two delicate paintings by Julie Mehretu.

Briony There are tiny little marks made with a brush like clouds and hair but these triangles seem out of place.

Rebecca I think that many of the works in this exhibition contain something that seems out of place. Shall we look again at each piece to see if that's the case?

### **Actions in the Gallery**

**Make a list** of the artworks that you feel have similar qualities to **landscape paintings** in some way

**Discuss** reasons for your choices as a group

Briony There is something hanging from the ceiling that looks as though smoke is coming out of it. When I look up inside it makes me think of a drainpipe that goes a long way

Rebecca It is by a Greek artist called Nikos Kessanlis. The piece is made from things lying around his studio: an old toilet cistern, some rags and bits of wire.

Briony Why is this white, shiny work called Avalanche?

Rebecca Maybe it seems unstable like a snowdrift about to tumble down the mountain?

Briony Oh look, the black pole underneath doesn't touch the ground.

Rebecca If you look carefully, it's not actually supporting the heavy ceramic shape. The whole work feels more precarious when you notice that.

### **Actions in the Gallery**

Looks for artworks that **flow, drift, leave their frame** or the wall (or look as though they might be about to do this)

#### **Look at the work entitled Flight Fantasy by David Hammonds:**

Looped upon the luxuriantly painted wall are pieces of hair (collected from a Harlem barbers) attached to wire. There are also pieces of net and crystals.

View the work both from a **distance** and from **close up:**

**What do you notice** about the wire and hair?

Do you think it creates **movement?** How? In which direction?

**Is there an element of discomfort** to the dark shapes, for example swarming insects, or something more romantic like flocking birds?

**As a group, discuss the title** of this work – **what kind of flight** might the artist be referring to?

Escaping, fleeing, taking wing or travelling toward something. Physically or in the mind?

**Are there other works in the show that might relate to this theme?**

#### **Look at Mike Kelley's Transplant:**

The geometric forms on the blankets are reminiscent of paintings by artists such as Bridget Riley yet these grubby items are a long way from the pristine appearance of modernism. Rather than attempting to transcend reality this work is uncomfortably real.

### Actions in the Gallery

Discuss the animals on the blankets:

Is there a **relationship** between the two animals? **What** might it be?

Do you have an **emotional reaction**: for example feeling sorry for them?

Can you find a **narrative in this work**? Groups might get together and make up a short story.

Think about how **memories of childhood** might **effect our experience** in the Gallery.

If you're a teacher working with a younger group, discuss how your relationship with this work might be **different** to your student's reactions.

### Actions Beyond the Gallery

Two of the three works by **Dieter Roth** contain cheese and one chocolate. They have been pressed between sheets of plastic and their decaying process is an important element.

Make a work which will **change with time** – you could try pressing perishable substances between plastic. (You might need to work outside if something is likely to become smelly or a health hazard)

Or you could use materials that will **crumble, rust, gather moisture** or change in some other way.

You may be able to make a work that **appears over time** – lemon juice on paper with heat applied, a photogram, crystallising sugar or salt.

**Document** the changes your artwork goes through. The work entitled **All Her Clothes are Swept Aside by Her Face** by **Daniel Subkoff** is made by adding no paint, but ripping the canvas:

Start with a **blank canvas** – paper, card, fabric or even a stretched canvas and find ways to make an artwork **without adding extra materials**.

You might **cut, tear, stab, scratch, bend, fold or score**.



**Kori Newkirk, *Virgil* (2002)**



**Nikos Kessanlis, *Untitled (Gesture)* (1961)**

## Act3: Current Disturbance: Mona Hatoum

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This conversation is between artist Rebecca Greathead and two members of the Whitechapel Gallery's weekly Young Curator program. Mahfuzur is studying Graphic Design and Novoyu is hoping to take up a place studying Art History.

Rebecca Mona Hatoum is interested in making work that provokes a physical response. Was that your experience of the installation?

Mahfuzur I found it hypnotic and surprisingly soothing.

Novoyu It was hard to leave the room; I kept wanting to hear more. Outside the room I was left with traces of the sound in my ears and the light in my eyes.

Rebecca Yes, having read about the work I expected the experience to be more disturbing.

Mahfuzur The noise almost became uncomfortable at some points but then it released you.

Rebecca What did you think about the structure?

Novoyu It was like lots of cages for animals.

Rebecca I thought of battery hens or rabbits in a laboratory.

Mahfuzur Now we have begun to talk about it I can't help thinking about interrogation or torture.

Novoyu But the actual experience of the work is pleasant; the components should make it more chilling.

Mahfuzur Seen from outside the lights look quite pretty – like fairy lights.

Rebecca Yes, but when you get closer the zig-zag elements in the bulbs and the noise really make you think about the electricity running through it all..

Mahfuzur I noticed that you can't get into the central space, although I don't think you'd want to!

Novoyu Yes, the wires are messy and it looks dangerous.

Rebecca It contrasts with the neat and orderly outside space.

Novoyu Do you think the artist was thinking about the body when she made this work?

Rebecca A lot of her work involves the body, so yes, it seems likely. One of her works is a projection of the inside of her body taken using an endoscope.

Mahfuzur So the wires are like guts and the cages a kind of skin.

Novoyu Yet you can see the interior and the exterior at the same time.

Mahfuzur This piece is full of contradictions.

This work is noisy so activities within the Gallery space itself might be difficult. If you are with a small group you could find a quieter part of the Gallery to work in, but with a larger party you are advised to contact Education Staff in advance to book one of the Gallery's free Education Spaces (bookable Tuesdays, Wednesdays & Thursdays throughout term-time).

### **Actions in the Gallery**

(Please note that these don't need to be carried out in any particular order, you can pick and choose which activities are suitable for your particular group).

**1. Ask the group to imagine** the whole work as some kind of **creature** (you may want them to write down their responses):

Is it **friendly** or **wicked**?

Is it **happy, sad, angry** or **scared**?

Is it **snoring, growling, grunting** or **crying**?

Can you **describe** its **body parts**?

**2. Get into groups of 4 or 5:**

Ask each member to **choose** which **part** of the **creature** they will be (for example, its eyes, its voice, its brain or its blood).

Allow some time for individuals to imagine and **rehearse** an **action, noise** or both which could describe their chosen body part functioning.

Finally **work together** as the different parts of the creature and **bring it to life**.

### Actions Outside the Gallery (or in the Education Studio)

When an artist creates a large-scale installation such as *Current Disturbance* they often make a **proposal** to a Gallery. This might be in the form of **drawings, photographs, models, written descriptions** or a combination of some or all of these techniques. This work was, however, originally designed to go in a project space in San Francisco and was later bought by D. Daskalopoulos for his art collection. It comes in 12 modular cage-like structures and can be built to fit the shape of its environment i.e. originally it was square in shape and at Whitechapel Gallery it is rectangular.

3. Make a **proposal for an installation** that attempts to evoke feelings of **discomfort** and **pleasure** simultaneously. It should feature:

An **impenetrable** structure.

Elements **controlled** by a changing electrical current.

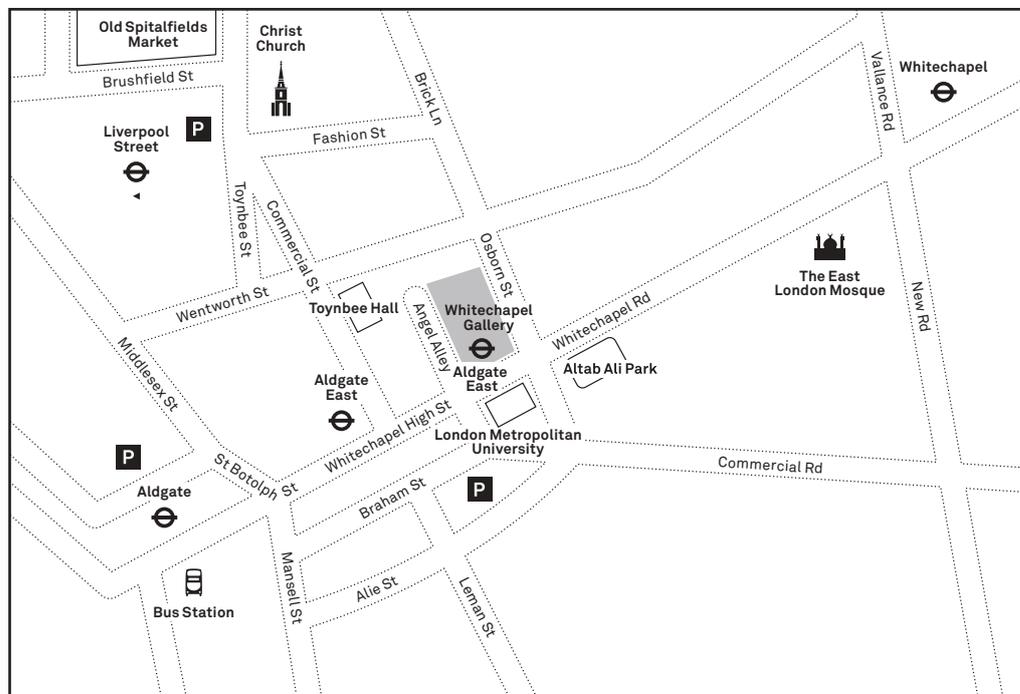
Elements that are **familiar** or **recognisable**.

You might want to add instructions for installation, specifications for sound levels and speaker positioning as well as any other elements particular to your installation.



**Mona Hatoum, *Current Disturbance* (2002)**

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## Find out more

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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](mailto:education@whitechapelgallery.org)

If you have enjoyed this *Conversations and Actions* or have any other feedback please do contact us.

For more *Conversations and Actions* visit [Whitechapelgallery.org/education/schools/teachers](http://Whitechapelgallery.org/education/schools/teachers)

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## End Conversation: This Is Just A Test

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Daniel This is an exhibition that utilises memories, building up experiences from each of the Acts.

Rebecca The first Act, *The Corporeal* is designed to be like a heartbeat, keeping a rhythm for subsequent Acts to build on.

Daniel And the second, *Subversive Abstraction* explores how, in attempts to create a pure language of art, the physical body still intrudes.

Rebecca For the third Act a huge piece by Mona Hatoum reflects some of the themes previously introduced. *Current Disturbance* describes it's buzzing and uneasy presence.

Daniel Finally, *Material Intelligence* combines works that tend to utilise everyday materials and technologies.

Rebecca So I guess these works could be shown together if there was enough room?

Daniel They could, but the effect would be different. Having time to digest encounters before moving on to the next can provide a richer experience.