

Gerard Byrne: A state of neutral pleasure

Gerard Byrne is interested in how information, in the form of the written word, can have a resonance beyond its original context and meaning.

Drawing from a diverse range of sources including plays, magazine interviews and art journals, Byrne explores how historical documents can be reconsidered in the present moment. His first comprehensive UK survey brings together film installations and photographs that engage with the idea of the object throughout the twentieth century.

Byrne's investigations encompass the idea of 'objecthood' as applied to the human body through the changing politics around sex and sexuality, and to the art object through the evolving discourse around its production and display.

Gallery 1 presents three works in a rolling film programme. The first, *A man and a woman make love* (2012) is a multi-screen installation reinterpreting Surrealist group discussions initiated in 1928 by André Breton between artists and writers such as Jacques Prévert and Yves Tanguy on the subject of eroticism and sexuality, originally published in the magazine *La Révolution surréaliste*.

A thing is a hole in a thing it is not (2010) borrows its title from a statement by Carl Andre, and re-stages seminal debates from the 1960s around the significance of Minimalism as a newly emerging art form. It references Michael Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood' (1967), an infamous critique of Minimalism's theatricality that is tested throughout Byrne's work.

Homme à femmes (Michel Debrane) (2004) restages an interview by journalist Catherine Chaine with philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre that takes his relationships with women as its starting point.

Find out more:

Gerard Byrne: *A state of neutral pleasure* is organised by Whitechapel Gallery in collaboration with Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm.

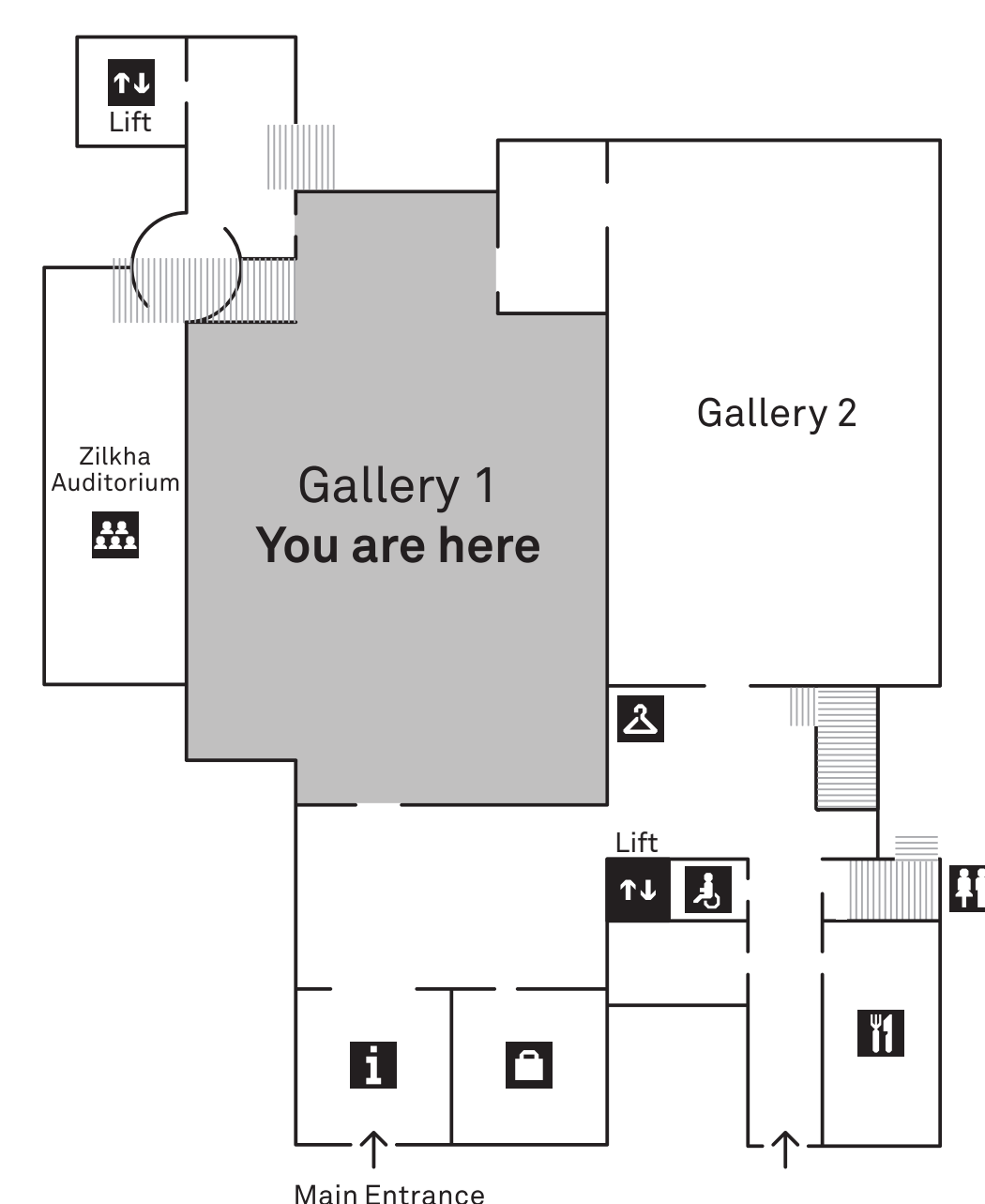
A fully illustrated catalogue is available from the bookshop at a special exhibition price of £19.95.

Buy a limited edition work of art by Gerard Byrne at the Information Desk.

A series of events will take place throughout the exhibition. Please see the Season Guide for details.

With special thanks to Joseph & Marie Donnelly and Adrian & Jennifer O'Carroll for supporting the exhibition catalogue. Gerard Byrne is represented by Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm; Green On Red Gallery, Dublin and Lisson Gallery, London.

The exhibition is supported by Culture Ireland as part of Ireland's EU Presidency Culture Programme 2013.



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While Gerard Byrne is most known for his film and video works, his practice also encompasses performance, installation and photography.

Presented in this section of Gallery 1 is a selection of images that reference the written word as it appears in the form of the theatrical play. The title of Byrne's ongoing series *A country road. A tree. Evening.* (2006-ongoing) is derived from the first stage direction of Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's influential play *Waiting for Godot* (1948). These photographs of dramatically lit, bare trees were shot in winter on various locations that have an association with Beckett in his native Ireland and his adopted home in France at the time that he wrote the play. They set up the intriguing proposition that the play's imagined setting has a shifting relationship through space and time to real physical places.

Byrne has had a longstanding interest in theatre as an art form which emerges throughout his practice. For Byrne, theatre is a mode of representation and interpretation of the written word into a spoken form. By working with actors this process of translation provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between the text and the body.

Byrne's explicit engagement with theatre also stands as a response to one of Michael Fried's main critiques of Minimalism as being inherently theatrical and as such, an unstable art form because of its dependence on the presence of the viewer.

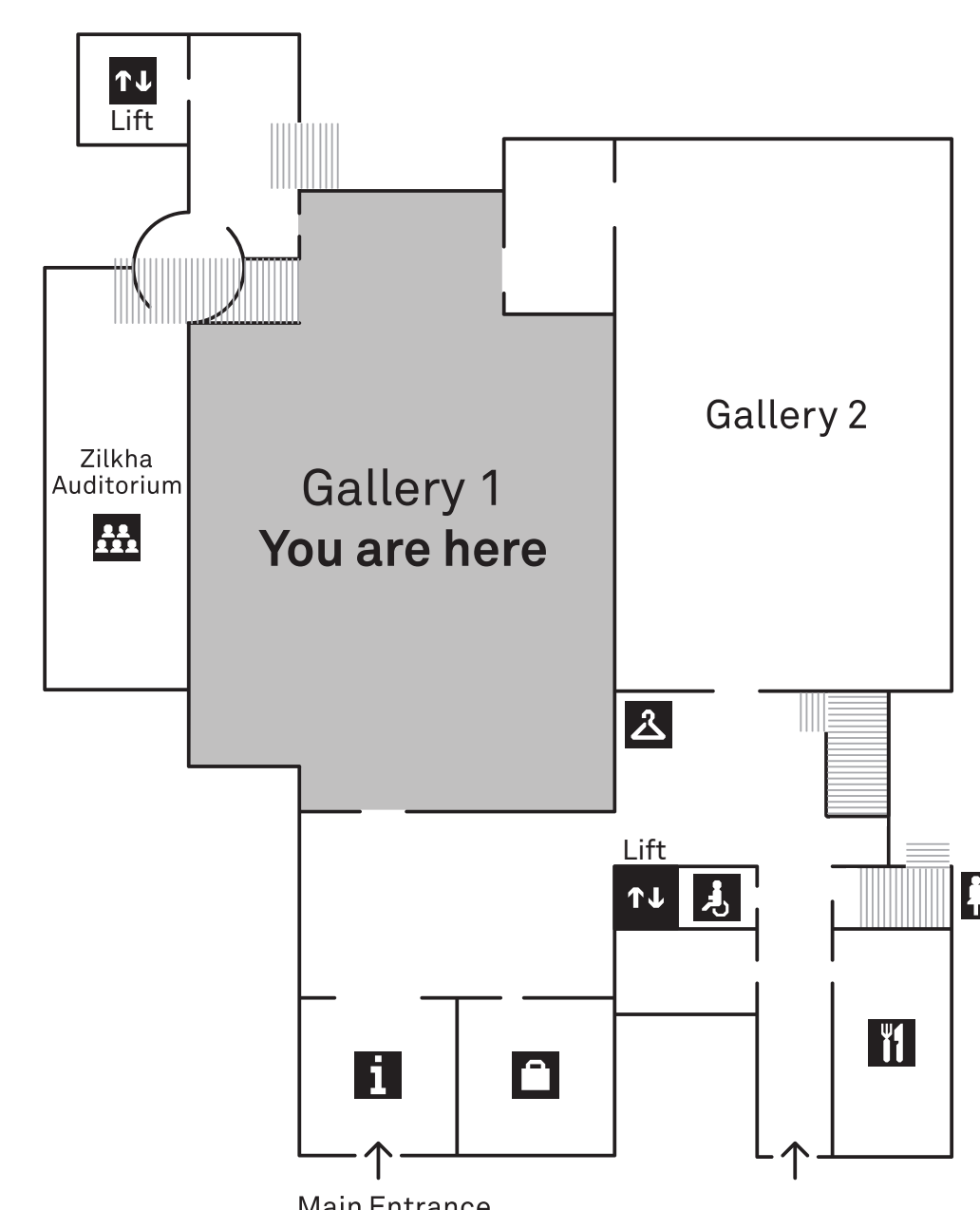
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The written word, in the form of the magazine interview, is explored and used as a source material for making work by Byrne.

Gallery 8 brings together three monitor-based works *Why it's time for Imperial, again* (1998–2002), *New sexual lifestyles* (2003) and *1984 and beyond* (2005) all of which encompass ideas of sexuality and the object, as presented in print media between the late 1960s and early 80s.

Why it's time for Imperial, again takes as its starting point an advertisement for the new Chrysler Imperial car, first printed in *National Geographic* magazine in 1980. The original text imagines a conversation between Chrysler CEO, Lee Iacocca and Frank Sinatra discussing the merits of this new luxury car. Byrne's restaging of the text, within a gritty urban setting, contrasts sharply with the desirability of the object in question.

New sexual lifestyles focuses on a round table discussion on the future of sex originally printed in *Playboy* magazine post-sexual revolution in 1972. Byrne's revisiting of the text is located within a contemporary Irish setting. Played across three monitors, the questions and answers are randomly replayed in multiple versions adding another layer to representing of the original material.

This device is also used in *1984 and beyond* which re-enacts a discussion between twelve well-known science fiction writers, including Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, on their vision of the future. Originally published in *Playboy* magazine in the 1960s, the conversation shows the optimistic views of the writers at a time of political unrest in the United States.

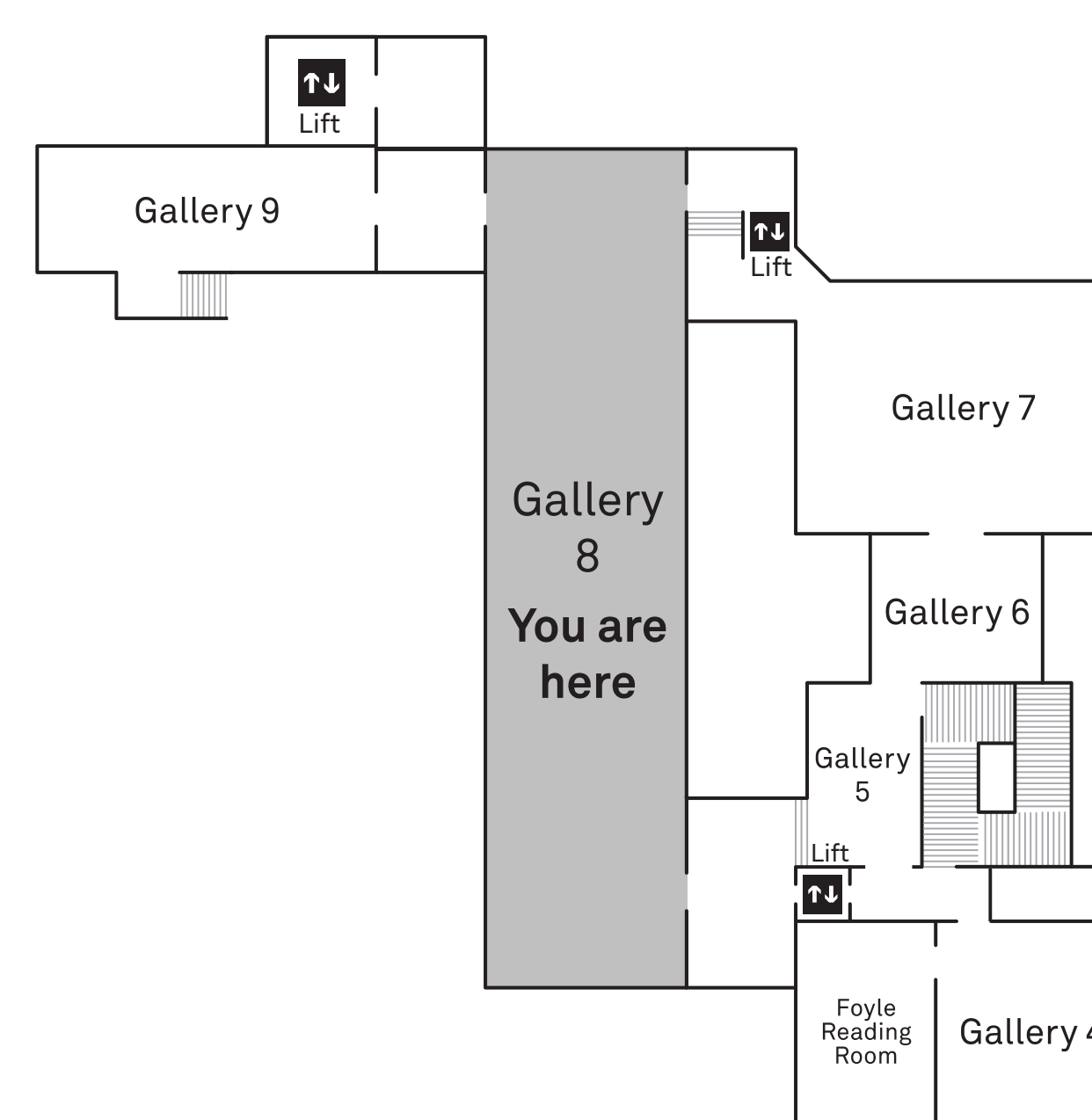
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While the restaging of texts is a key aspect of Gerard Byrne's work, the representation of time also plays an important role.

Time is investigated in Byrne's practice not only in terms of its linearity, but also in how it can become complex and multi-layered. In each of his works, through devices such as reinterpretation, translation and restaging, the present moment is overlaid with the recent, lived past. This device becomes explicit through the costuming and props in the moving image works shown in Gallery 1.

In contrast, the works in Gallery 9 explore representation of time in different ways including images from his ongoing series of newsstands. These large-scale photographs capture the magazines available in a newsagent's on a given day. The time between the instant the photograph was taken and its subsequent display become overt through the titling of the works, where the time frame is described in words such as 'three months and twenty days ago'. In addition to offering a snapshot of socio-political history, they also demonstrate Byrne's interest in the magazine as source material for his film and video works.

Showing alongside the Newsstand images is *'68 mica and glass* (1998). This highly choreographed 16mm film shows two conservators disassembling and reassembling Robert Smithson's *Untitled (Mica and Glass)* (1968). The work offers a pertinent echo of *A thing is a hole...* highlighting Byrne's interest in the discourses generated around Minimalism in the 1960s whilst also providing a meditation on time. The work is never shown in a state of completion, with the conservators caught in a permanent performative loop.

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