



**Conversations
and Actions**
Whitechapel Gallery

The London Open
4 July – 14 September 2012

whitechapelgallery.org

The London Open

The London Open exhibition is a snapshot of the latest art from London. This year, the Whitechapel Gallery's triennial open submission exhibition was open to all artists aged 26 or over living and working in the London postal district (i.e. N, NW, SW, SE, W, WC, E and EC postcodes). Artwork for this new version of the Whitechapel Gallery's open submission exhibition was chosen by writer Patricia Bickers, artist Rodney Graham, collector Jack Kirkland, curator Marta Kuzma and Kirsty Ogg, curator, Whitechapel Gallery. Applications were accepted from artists working in any medium. Students and artists working collaboratively were eligible to apply, and work submitted must have been made during or after the year 2000.

Whitechapel Gallery has organised open submission exhibitions since 1932. Initially the open shows focused on the creativity of east London's artistic community. The exhibition's format has since been remodelled as The London Open in order to expand the reach of the exhibition across London and to celebrate the open's 80th anniversary at the Whitechapel Gallery. The Gallery's open submission exhibitions have shown artists including **Grayson Perry**, **Bob & Roberta Smith** and **Rachel Whiteread** early in their careers.

The London Open 2012 reveals the latest art trends in the contemporary art world, exhibiting the work of 35 established and emerging artists. Political and social subject matter is a theme throughout the exhibition, and the show features artists who use performance and DIY approaches to making work, whilst others investigate kitsch, outsider art and countercultural groups.

Artists: **Pio Abad**, **Peter Abrahams**, **Caroline Achaintre**, **Greta Alfaro**, **Sol Archer**, **Thomas Ball**, **Martin John Callanan**, **Dale Carney**, **Paul Carter**, **Alice Channer**, **Leigh Clarke**, **Nicholas Cobb**, **Lucienne Cole**, **Beth Collar**, **Chris Coombes**, **Shona Davies**, **Jon Klein & Dave Monaghan**, **Arnaud Desjardin**, **Sarah Dobai**, **Shaun Doyle** and **Mally Mallinson**, **Ana Genoves**, **Mark Harris**, **Emma Holmes**, **John Hughes**, **Nikolai Ishchuk**, **Robert Orchardson**, **Heather Phillipson**, **Ruth Proctor**, **Amikam Toren**, **Charlie Tweed**, **Roy Voss**, **Paul Westcombe**



Sol Archer *Palace in the left* 2011 HD Video ©Courtesy the artist and Dreck.co.uk

Introduction: Conversations & Actions

Written by the Whitechapel Gallery's Education Department, *Conversations & Actions* introduces teachers, secondary school and college students to The London Open by suggesting questions to elicit conversation in the Gallery or before your visit. In 5 sections, key themes in the exhibition are outlined through a number of works in focus, followed by suggested ideas for practical activities inspired by the exhibition and artworks. The resource is for use both in the Gallery and back in the classroom. Illustrations are used throughout, with links to further information about some of the artists. The resource is by no means exhaustive, and we recommend doing your own research around the exhibition, including picking up a copy of the catalogue if you can.



Emma Holmes, *Schizm Magazine Issue Two*

Getting Started

What's a triennial exhibition? What's does 'open submission' mean?

Do some research on the people who selected the artists for The London Open – who are they and what is their expertise?

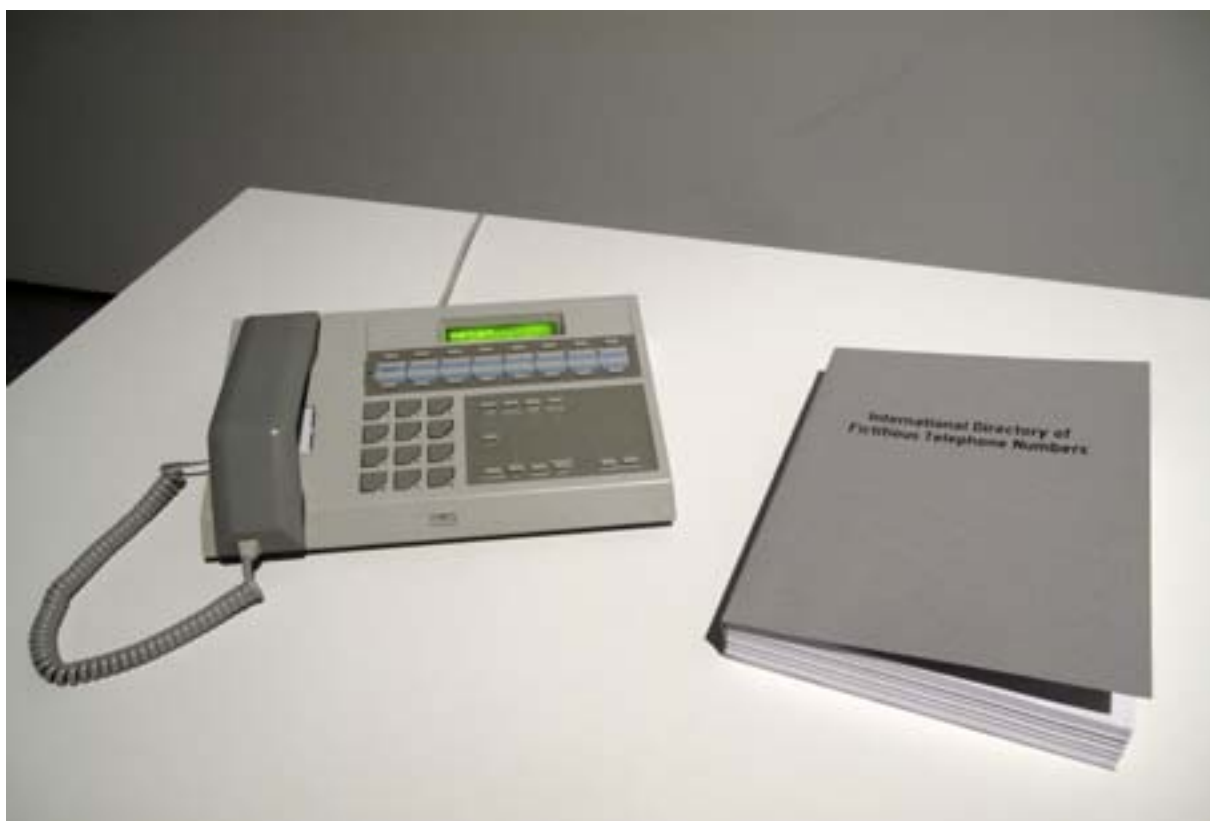
Do you think The London Open should be open to artists from across London or just the East End. Why?

What's the difference between an established and an emerging artist?

Can you think of any examples of the work of Grayson Perry, Bob & Roberta Smith or Rachel Whiteread?

One of these artists has just unveiled a new permanent work of art at the Whitechapel Gallery – can you find it?

Not all of the artwork is contained within the exhibition space – can you hear/ see any work in the foyer of the Gallery or elsewhere?



Martin John Callanan, *International Directory of Fictitious Telephone Numbers* (2012)

BUSINESS

BUSINESS

AS

AS

USUAL

USUAL

Arnaud Desjardin, *Business as Usual*, 2011 (Artist's book)

Gallery 1: Do It Yourself

Curating The London Open

Look around Gallery 1 for 5 minutes on your own. How many different visual art forms can you see? What grabs your attention? Choose a work and describe it to a partner/ the group – why were you attracted to it? Can you talk about what it's about and why you think the artist made it? How would you describe the way the exhibition has been curated? Are similar art mediums exhibited together? Or are works with similar themes close to each other? Which works could you describe as conceptual?

Works in focus

Break into groups and choose one of the following works and artists each, all of whom use the medium of print in different ways.

Arnaud Desjardin, *Business as Usual*, 2011

Emma Holmes, *Schizm*, 2012

Martin John Callanan, *International Directory of Fictitious Telephone Numbers* (2012)

What is going on in your focus work?
Can you interact with or use this work in any way? How?
How has the medium of print been used by the artist?
Why have they chosen to use print and to what effect?

The London Open starts with art practices that use text-based and conceptual art approaches to making. It houses Arnaud Desjardin's live printing press, while issues of Emma Holmes' zine 'Schizm' are framed by Robert Orchardson's sculptures that reference a set for a 1955 production of King Lear. An interest in the dissemination of works through self-publishing, the internet and the public realm is clear within the show. The written word is used again in the form of letters in Martin John Callanan's *Letters 2004-2006*.

Action: In Gallery or Beyond

Have you ever used print to make an artwork? If so, how?
If not, think of ways you could do this, inspired by the works in focus above.

For example, artist Emma Holmes produces *Schizm* by inviting a group of artists to submit images or pieces of text to her around a given theme (such as 'regeneration' or 'idealism'). She doesn't worry about the quality of the images or the way the information is juxtaposed - in fact, this is what she is most interested in.

Can you attempt to make a similarly lo-fi zine around a theme you are interested in investigating? Why not try and make one in a similar way to Holmes by working with your whole group on it?

- Decide who will put the zine together and who will edit it.
- Choose a theme (perhaps you could decide on one already present in The London Open?).
- Invite everyone to submit images and/ or pieces of text linked to the theme in some way.
- Decide what the cover will be and how you will go about putting the whole lot together. Perhaps you can find some ideas in the work of Arnaud Desjardin to do this?!

Further information: Emma Holmes

Emma Holmes has created a special children's version of *Schizm* with activities and exercises to guide children and their families around The London Open. Pick up a copy at reception.

More information on *Schizm* can be found here
schema44.org/home_Schizm_Magazine.html



Leigh Clarke, *Heads of State*, 2012 (Plaster, steel, industrial paint)



Nicolas Cobb, *Untitled (2)* from the series *The Car Park*, 2010 (Inkjet print)

Gallery 1: Activism

Social & Political

Many of the works in The London Open are politically or socially engaged in some way. Why do you think this is so? What is happening in our world at the moment that might influence this? Which works in this part of the exhibition do you think are particularly socially or politically engaged?

Works in focus

In groups again, look at the following works and artists, whose work is socially or politically engaged in some way.

Pio Abad, *Loot* (Magenta), 2012

Leigh Clarke, *Heads of State*, 2012

Nicolas Cobb, *Untitled (2)* from the series *The Car Park*, 2010

What media has been chosen by these artists to make political or social statements?

What are the artists trying to say, and how does the use of their chosen medium help their case?

How does the use of art to make a statement like this compare to the use of the media or journalism for this reason? What are the differences and are there similarities?

Leigh Clarke's *Heads of State* (2012) comprises 30 reverse casts of masks commonly worn during political demonstrations, representing figures such as Robert Mugabe, Angela Merkel and Vladimir Putin. Nicholas Cobb's photographs of scale-models imagine Bluewater shopping centre's car park as a site of civil unrest. Ideas of consumption are dealt with in Pio Abad's imitation Versace silk scarf print of Saddam Hussein's gold taps, which considers how fake consumer goods circulate on the black and grey markets.

Action: In Gallery or Beyond

Nicolas Cobb's work is made by creating realistic architectural model dioramas which he constructs in his studio on a 3 metre square tabletop. They are lit from many viewpoints, photographed and then destroyed.

Try making your own diorama back in your classroom/ studio in a group.

- Think of an imaginary, apocalyptic scenario from the future in a location familiar to you. It could take place around your home, in a place that you visit frequently, your school or even the Gallery.
- Make a set for your scene using everyday objects, or draw elements of your chosen scene on card or paper.
- Identify some characters and other objects for your diorama – you could bring in old toy cars and figurines that you think would work.
- Light the diorama using existing lighting in the space you are working in, or using torches and other sources of light you bring in from home.
- Decide whether your diorama will be static or whether it will have moveable parts etc. and if there will be a story/ narrative.
- Photograph and/ or film the final diorama and scene. Destroy the evidence if you wish!

Further information

To see more of Cobb's photographs and to read an interview with him see londonphotography.org.uk/showcase/2009/12/nicholas-cobb/.



Lucienne Cole, *As Tears Go By* (2011) Video



Beth Collar, *Mediaeval Window* (2011) Digital video

Gallery 9: Pop Culture

Works in Focus

Some of the work in The London Open is influenced by pop culture that you may be familiar with. Many of these works are present in Gallery 9 as part of a display of moving image work. These works also question the artificial, how we represent ourselves and how we interpret people and scenarios. Break into groups and focus on one of the following works:

Lucienne Cole, *As Tears Go By* (2011)

Beth Collar, *Mediaeval Window* (2011)

Rehana Zaman, *Iron Maiden* (Ambridge) (2011)

What's going on in these works?

Who is the main character in the work? Is the artist present? If not, how is their presence felt – what kind of situation have they created?

How does the main character behave in the film?

What influences your interpretation of the character?

Lucienne Cole is a performance artist who makes videos such as *As Tears Go By* (2011) which is set in Braziers Park (Oxfordshire, England) – a place associated with 1960s pop icon Marianne Faithfull. The artist sings a sad and melancholic version of Faithfull's hit, which is appropriate as the song is about a woman looking back on her life. Beth Collar explores ideas of Englishness, history and re-enactment (an educational activity in which participants attempt to recreate some aspects of a historical event or period) in her video *Mediaeval Window* (2011), which uses re-enactment societies as a way of trying to find out more about peoples' individual and national identities. Collar does this through the construction and deconstruction of characters in her film, while layering the spoken word of characters with a voice-over. Rehana Zaman approaches the characters in her films in a similar way and also uses the device of voice-over – for example in *Iron Maiden* (Ambridge) (2011), she develops the character of an actress who featured in the long-running Radio 4 soap, *The Archers*.

Action: Beyond the Gallery

What pop music do you listen to?

Have you ever thought about doing your own cover version of any of this music?

There are lots of examples of artists doing this, such as the Radio 1 Live Lounge series, where artists perform cover versions of other artists' music.

- Choose a pop song that is in the charts at the moment, or that you simply can't get out of your head!
- Decide what kind of cover version you will do of this song – it might be a classical rendition of an electronic song, or you might choose to tap dance to the tune of a piece of music (which is what artist Lucienne Cole did at the opening of The London Open as part of a performance).
- Get someone to volunteer to perform the cover version; if no one volunteers to play an instrument or dance, why not choose to sing the cover version together in a way you wouldn't usually.
- Listen to your chosen pop song and write down the words, discussing the intended meaning with your group.
- Rehearse your cover version and decide how you would like to document it.
- Set the scene and act out your performance. Has the act of putting together and performing the cover version made you think differently about the piece of music?

Further information

To see *Party Piece*, another of Lucienne Cole's performances see The New Art Gallery Walsall's Youtube account.

thenewartgallerywalsall.org.uk/



Caroline Achaintre, *Zibra* (2011) Hand tufted wool



Alice Channer, *Body Conscious* installation view at The Approach, London (2011)



Ana Genovés, *Small Blocks*, 2011, Polystyrene, cement, paint

Gallery 8: Sculpture and the Body

Curating The London Open

Look around Gallery 8 for 5 minutes on your own. How many different art forms can you see? What grabs your attention? Choose a work and describe it to a partner/ the group – why were you attracted to it? Can you talk about what it's about and why you think the artist made it? How would you describe the way this part of the exhibition has been curated? What work would you describe as abstract, and what would you describe as figurative? Could you describe some work as having both qualities?

Works in Focus

Many of the works in the first part of Gallery 8 have been made using traditional craft-making techniques, or comment in some way on our relationship to consumerism, our own bodies and social space. Take a closer look at one of the following artists in focus in groups:

Caroline Achaintre, *Zibra* (2011)

Alice Channer, *Body Conscious* (2011)

Ana Genovés, *Small Blocks* (2011)

What is your chosen work made of? How has it been made – has it been crafted by the artist or industrially manufactured? Why has the artist used these materials and production processes? Does the title of the work change your interpretation of it? How does your body relate to the scale of the work?

Caroline Achaintre emphasises the importance of craft techniques and processes of making in her work. Her large-scale, hand-tufted wall hanging and ceramic objects take an innovative approach to the materials they are made with. Her objects test the limits of the materials she uses, so much so that they can be described as both abstract and figurative. Ana Genovés' painted concrete sculptures, although abstract, refer to familiar architectural forms, such as steps, cubicles and platforms, and use a scale similar to the human body. Alice Channer uses clothing as a way to investigate consumerism and the ways in which we decorate our bodies. The artist talks about the relationships she creates between her sculptures and the space within which they are shown as a way of 'dressing the space'.

Action: In the Gallery

Spend some more time with the sculpture in Gallery 8 by using them as subjects to draw. At all times think of the scale of the work in relation to your own body. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- How many times can you see yourself reflected in Alice Channer's *Body Conscious* work? Try drawing your reflection, or just the horizon line between the floor and the walls.
- Try drawing Ana Genovés' small blocks from different points of view on the same page.
- Draw the patterns and shapes you observe in the work – such as the zig-zags in Caroline Achaintre's wall hanging or the curve of Channer's *Body Conscious*. Repeat the pattern to develop your own abstract work.

Further information

Achaintre and Channer were recently in another exhibition in the UK together. Check it out here: eastsideprojects.org/current/caroline-achaintre-sara-barker-alice-channer/.



Nikolai Ishchuk, From the series *Offset* (2011 - ongoing)



Paul Carter, *Window Seat Rm 3*. (2007)



Paul Westcombe, *Silently seething around the dinner table* (2012), watercolour, ink, acrylic on used paper coffee cup

Gallery 9: Found Objects

The final grouping of work in The London Open celebrates kitsch, outsider art, alternative cultures and the more negative aspects of British culture. Some of the artists whose work has been installed in Gallery 9 use found objects that have been altered in different ways, in stark contrast to the artists that have been explored in the last section.

Look at how the work in the rest of Gallery 9 has been made. Which work has been made with materials that have been found?

Works in Focus

In groups, discuss the themes present in the following works and how the materials they are made of relate to the theme:

Nikolai Ishchuk, From the series *Offset* (2011 - ongoing)

Paul Carter, *Window Seat Rm 3*. (2007)

Paul Westcombe, *Silently seething around the dinner table* (2012)

What do you think the work is about?

How do the found objects the work has been made from change the nature of the work – how would they differ if they had been crafted by the artist or made with new materials from an art supply store?

Nicolai Ishchuk's photographic series *Offset* (2011) has been made from family photographs that he found. He uses the relationship of the individual within the family unit as a tool to explore the possibilities of pictorial space, focusing attention on the negative volumes that are created between figures as a way to examine both the literal and metaphorical spaces that exist between members of a family. Paul Carter's sculpture *Window Seat Rm 3*. (2007) uses items associated with architectural space, such as window frames and doorways, to explore the metaphor of the hotel room as an in between, transient space. Paul Westcombe's intricate pen and ink drawings on used take-away coffee cups present a warped vision of contemporary British society.

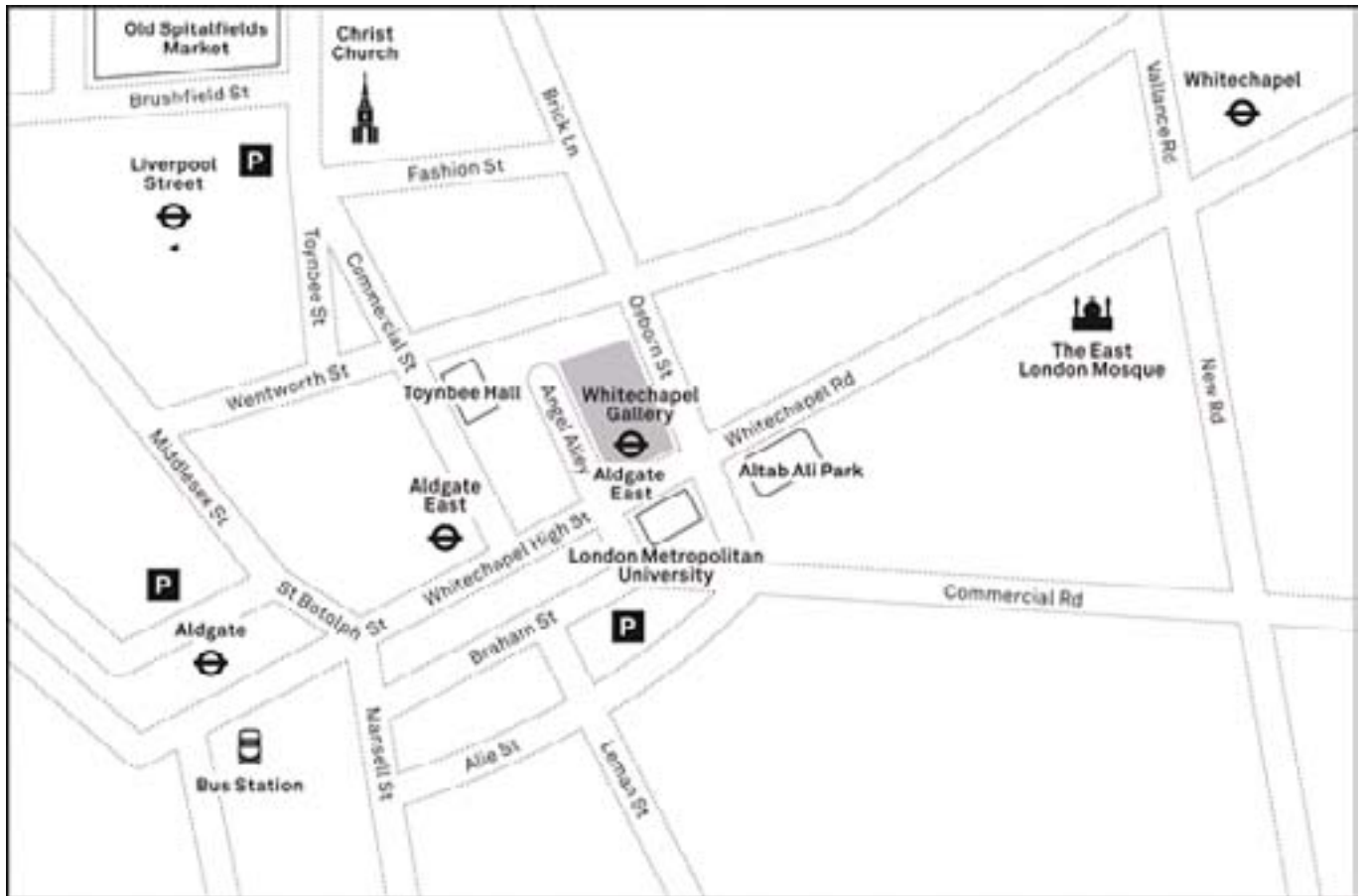
Action: Beyond the Gallery

Paul Westcombe uses domestic objects such as maps, Underground travel receipts or the actual architecture of the location of a wall drawing as starting points and as the basis for his work. The images he draws on them are from his imagination, sometimes the result of extreme boredom (such as a series he created when working 12 hour shifts as a car parking attendant).

- Back at home or in your classroom, observe any bits of throwaway rubbish or papers that are in eyeshot – they could be newspapers, receipts, envelopes - anything at all.
- Start drawing from your imagination using pencils, pens or paint – even a biro!
You may be inspired by your surroundings, or by the themes that have come up in The London Open exhibition. Try and lose yourself in the act of drawing.

Further information

To see more examples of Paul Westcombe's work including wall drawings, visit paulwestcombe.com.



Find Out More

A catalogue accompanying The London Open at the Whitechapel Gallery is available from the bookshop. For more information please go to our website: whitechapelgallery.org

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.

More information on School, Family and Young Peoples' Programmes linked to the exhibition are available here whitechapelgallery.org/education.

A Navigation Manual for Children put together by London Open artist Emma Holmes is available from reception.

If you have enjoyed this Conversations & Actions or have any other feedback please do let us know. For more Conversations and Actions visit whitechapelgallery.org/education