

Giulio Paolini: To Be or Not to Be

9 July - 14 September 2014 (Media View: 8 July 2014)

Galleries 1, 8 & Victor Petitgas Gallery (Gallery 9)

Admission Free

Italian artist Giulio Paolini's (b.1940) installations are deeply rooted in art history from the Renaissance to today - with plaster casts of classical sculptures to reproductions of iconic paintings by Chardin, Lotto and Velázquez. The Whitechapel Gallery presents the first major UK exhibition of his work since 1980, including key works from the 1960s to the present day and a new installation created specially for the show.

Giulio Paolini is a leading figure in Conceptual Art and came to prominence as part of a generation of Italian artists including Michelangelo Pistoletto and Mario Merz. His belief that a work of art is not just itself in the 'here and now' but also the record of earlier traditions, has led him to investigate art's relation to the past. Driven by an exploration into the nature of images, the making of art and the role of the artist, Paolini asserts that 'to be authentic, a work of art must forget about its author.'

Giulio Paolini: To Be or Not to Be, referencing William Shakespeare's Hamlet, features Paolini's sculptures, installations and photographs which explore the relationship between the artist and the artwork. Visual clues about the presence and role of the artist are scattered throughout the works, from self-portraits to recurring motifs of the artist's hands and eyes.

Gallery 1 includes a comprehensive array of pivotal historic works. In the centre of the gallery, the large-scale floor piece *Essere o non essere* (To Be or Not to Be) (1994-95) is laid out like a checkerboard strewn with canvases, pencils and drawings, pointing to a continual process of construction and deconstruction. Other highlights include *Delfo* (Delphi) (1965), a photographic self-portrait of the artist wearing dark glasses, confronting the viewer from behind the wooden supports of an unstretched painting and *Académie 3* (1965), featuring vibrant blue brushstrokes superimposed onto a photograph of Paolini himself. Gallery 1 continues with one of Paolini's most iconic works, *In Giovane che guarda Lorenzo Lotto* (Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto) (1967), an actual-size reproduction of a 1505 portrait by Italian Renaissance painter Lotto, reversing the roles of the artist and the viewer.

In Galleries 8 and 9 a sequence of installations are theatrically staged, playing on shadows and light. Often appearing as if the artist has just left, the works focus on the artist's studio and working processes. In *Big Bang* (1997-8) a miniature artist's studio is surrounded by works in progress with canvases and scrunched up papers seemingly thrown across the floor. Throughout the space, *Contemplator enim* (1992), a complex plexiglas structure, features images of two valets taken from eighteenth century theatre, each presenting placeholders for images to the visitor. The exhibition closes with a new installation, *L'autore che credeva di esistere (sipario: buio in sala)* (The Author Who Thought He Existed (Curtain: Darkness Falls Over the Auditorium)) (2013), which evokes an abandoned artist's studio with an upturned chair and a workspace covered in layers of drawings and papers.

Press Release

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Notes for Editors

- Giulio Paolini was born in Genoa, Italy, in 1940. In 1959 he graduated from the Giambattista Bodoni State Industrial Technical Institute for Graphic and Photographic Arts. He began his artistic research in 1960 and created the key work *Disegno geometrico*. In 1964, Paolini had his first solo exhibition at La Salita in Rome. He was invited by Germano Celant to take part in a series of Arte Povera exhibitions from 1967 to 1971. Paolini was nominated as Chevalier des Arts et des lettres in 1995 and then Officer in 2002. Paolini's work was included in past editions of DOCUMENTA, Kassel, in 1972, 1977, 1982 and 1992. In 2004 Paolini together with his wife, Anna, and his closest collaborators, founded the Giulio and Anna Foundation. He currently lives and works in Turin, Italy.
- *Giulio Paolini: To Be or Not to Be* is co-curated by guest curator Bartolomeo Pietromarchi and Daniel F. Herrmann, Eisler Curator and Head of Curatorial Studies, Whitechapel Gallery, with Emily Butler, Assistant Curator, Whitechapel Gallery.
- *Giulio Paolini: To Be or Not to Be* is organised in collaboration with MACRO, Rome and is an expanded version of the exhibition which was on display there from 29 November 2013 – 9 March 2014.
- The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by MACRO which features essays by leading international scholars including Gabriele Guercio, Barry Schwabsky, Bartolomeo Pietromarchi and Daniel F. Herrmann.
- Giulio Paolini is creating a new limited edition, *Dopo tutto* (After All) (2014) for the exhibition.

Visitor Information

Free. Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm, Thursdays, 11am – 9pm.
Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR.
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Press Information

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