

Press Release

Supporting Artists: Acme's First Decade 1972-1982

7 September 2013 – 23 February 2014

Whitechapel Gallery, Pat Matthews Gallery (Gallery 4)

The Whitechapel Gallery presents a new archive display exploring the first decade of **Acme Studios**, the pioneering artists' initiative which, since 1972, has played an important role in establishing east London as a centre for the visual arts.

Over 40 years Acme has provided London's artists with affordable studios and housing through its innovative approach to the property market and planning policies in the city. This display will include photographs, film, rare exhibition posters and other materials from the extensive Acme archives alongside artist testimonials charting the early years of the organisation.

Acme was founded in the early 1970s by a group of recent graduates, led by **Jonathan Harvey** and **David Panton**. At a time when many houses in London were destined for demolition as part of large-scale 'slum-clearance' schemes, Acme registered as a housing association with the aim of temporarily acquiring derelict houses and shops from the Greater London Council which could be repurposed as spaces for artists to live and work in. Artists were given the freedom to repair and redevelop these properties according to their specific needs and this display will revisit ambitious projects such as **Bobby Baker's** *Edible Family in a Mobile Home* (1976), a large-scale sugar and cake installation which took over her prefab Acme house.

Over its first decade Acme grew from two disused shops in Bow to over 250 properties, including almost an entire street of houses in Beck Road, Hackney and factories across London. The organisation was instrumental in forming pockets of creative communities which still exist in the city today.

The display will also be the first to look at key exhibitions from the history of **The Acme Gallery**, which opened in 1976 and closed in 1981 when the building was demolished. Housed in a former banana factory in Covent Garden, the gallery hosted major shows by artists including **Stuart Brisley**, **Helen Chadwick**, **Albert Irvin**, **Jock McFadyen**, **Darrell Viner** and **Anthony Whishaw**.

Artists often collaborated with The Acme Gallery and were encouraged to challenge conventional ways of exhibiting and interacting with art. In keeping with Acme's approach to short-life housing, artists were given the freedom to deconstruct and experiment with the fabric of the building with very few limitations. The 'pyrotechnic sculptor' **Stephen Cripps** performed a number of times in the Gallery, sometimes driving visitors outside due to the sparks and smoke. For a work titled *An Eight Day Passage* (1977), the artist **Kerry Trengove** tunnelled into the ground floor of the gallery, emerging eight days later in the adjoining basement 20ft away.

Notes for Editors

- The exhibition coincides with the 40th anniversary of Acme Studios. For more information visit www.acme.org.uk
- A programme of events including screenings, talks and tours will accompany the display. The artist **William Raban** has been commissioned to create a new film on the first 10 years of Acme

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Studios. The work will be launched at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2014. Further details to be announced.

- The display has been curated by Nayia Yiakoumaki, Curator Archive Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery and Jonathan Harvey, Chief Executive of Acme Studios with Dr. Arantxa Echarte, Research Consultant.
- The Whitechapel Gallery archive exhibitions are generously supported by Catherine and Franck Petitgas and The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm, Thursdays, 11am – 9pm. Admission free. Whitechapel Gallery, 77 – 82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX. Nearest London Underground Station: Aldgate East, Liverpool Street, Tower Gateway DLR. T + 44 (0) 20 7522 7888 info@whitechapelgallery.org

Press Information

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