

Gallery 2 & Gallery 7

19th September 2019 – 5th January 2020

**“la Caixa” Collection of Contemporary Art
Selected by Tom McCarthy**



Large Print Guide

*We had fed the heart on fantasies,
The heart's grown brutal from the fare,
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare*

– W.B. Yeats, 'Meditations in Time of Civil War',
1922

Taking his title from a poem by W. B. Yeats, the novelist **Tom McCarthy** plays on the double meaning of 'stare': to look intently, and an archaic word for a starling. His selection of works from "la Caixa" Collection is presented across two galleries and begins in Gallery 7 upstairs with a photograph of a mysterious spherical object in a desert landscape by **Sophie Ristelhueber**.

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This ambiguous image evokes for McCarthy not only Shelley's poem *Ozymandias*, in which a 'shattered visage' lies in the desert, but also imperial detritus on the surface of the planet Tatooine in *Star Wars*, which in turn led to a meditation on systems of surveillance and control and their collapse.

Steve McQueen films himself watching a TV report on troops training for military operations in a darkened hotel room, raising questions about whether media representations of conflict and violence can shed light on an external reality. A teetering sculpture by **Isa Genzken** – contorted metal bookshelves found in Lower Manhattan in the aftermath of 9/11 – serves as a possible memorial for the twin towers and the collapse of Western hegemony.

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Ruin and decline are at the heart of **Aitor Ortiz's** photographs of modernist buildings, one of which is an empty concrete shell, while **Pedro Mora's** installation of redundant reels made of zinc offers us no clues on the reading and retrieval of memory.

The two works featured in this gallery create open-ended narratives. **Eugenio Ampudia's** *Habitable Space (Day)* invites us to cross the threshold towards a light-filled portal, playing on the illusionism of photography to offer fictional utopias. The flip side is explored by **Eve Sussman's** film about an imagined Central Asian oil town whose citizens are subject to state surveillance. Not only are the film's characters controlled by an external power but so is the viewer's experience, as the narrative is determined by a computer algorithm.

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"la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art

Part of the Whitechapel Gallery's programme of presenting international collections rarely seen in the UK, this display is drawn from the renowned collection of "la Caixa" Foundation in Spain.

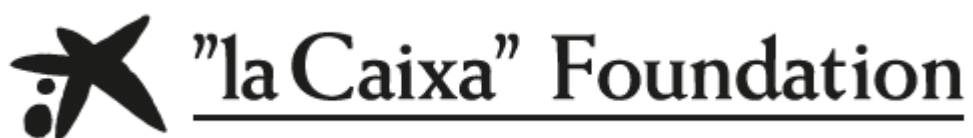
Founded in 1904, "la Caixa" has pursued a mission of social engagement and outreach for 115 years. In the early 1980s, "la Caixa" Foundation began to organise exhibitions, presenting contemporary work in dialogue with twentieth-century art.

"la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art was established in 1985. The core of the collection is devoted to Spanish and international art from the 1980s to the present, but also includes works by outstanding artists from the 1960s and 1970s.

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Guided by a director and committees of international advisors, the collection has strong holdings of Spanish, Italian, German, British, American and Latin American art and numbers more than 1,000 works, encompassing painting, photography, moving image and large scale installations.

From January 2019 to April 2020, Whitechapel Gallery is presenting a series of exhibitions, each conceived by a writer and accompanied by a new piece of writing based on their selection.



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Large print labels



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Eugenio Ampudia

(b. 1958, Valladolid, Spain)

Espacio habitable (día) (Habitable Space [Day]), 2003

Colour photograph on aluminium and electrical installation

Inspired by the idea of creating an inhabitable space inside books, Ampudia dug out the interior of eighty of his exhibition catalogues and built a model of a space characterised by different levels accessed via staircases. He took two photographs during day and night and enlarged them to the size of a door. Aware that the illusionism of photography is capable of boring through the wall and opening up a mental space...

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...Ampudia intensified the viewer's experience by creating a light box in which the flow of light heightens the effect of a penetrable threshold.

Both the book and the action of inhabiting the social spaces of cultural institutions feature in Ampudia's work as he critically and playfully points to the need to demystify both and make them more accessible.

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Isa Genzken

(b. 1948, Bad Oldesloe, Germany)

Bookshelves, 2008

Metal, plastic, spray paint, textile, animal teeth
(fragment)

Like many of Genzken's architectural sculptures, this assemblage of twisted metal teeters between construction and ruin. Found on the streets of Lower Manhattan after 9/11, the bookshelves form part of a group of sculptures titled *Ground Zero* (2008) which propose a troubled 'architectural imaginary' of everyday domestic objects arranged in tower-like structures.

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Genzken fused art and architecture in a sequence of works from the 1970s referencing everyday building features – doors, windows, rooms – that she casts in plaster and concrete. She moved her sculptures from the plinth to the floor, creating staged environments in which mannequins, dolls and toys stand in for the human figure caught up in scenarios that point to the precariousness of contemporary existence.

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Steve McQueen

(b. 1969, London, UK)

Illuminer, 2002

Single-channel video projection, looped, colour, sound

McQueen shot *Illuminer* in his Paris hotel room in early November 2001. He placed his digital video camera on top of the TV while a documentary on the training of US troops for a mission in Afghanistan was running. As the camera's auto settings struggle to adjust to the light emitted by the flickering screen, the image shifts colour – mainly blues and purples – and focus.

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Although made spontaneously and with an economy of means, the video has a timeless quality harking back to the Renaissance chiaroscuro technique of contrasting light and shadow in drawing and painting. McQueen, whose work as an artist and filmmaker treads the line between light and dark, interior and exterior worlds, life and death, recalls: 'I was only illuminated by violence. Violence made me present.'

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Pedro Mora

(b. 1961, Seville, Spain)

Memory Exercise, 1991

Zinc strips, iron and cardboard

Mora is interested in memory and how we store our interior recollections in external object form. Although these objects look like film reels, they are made of zinc and stored in plain cardboard boxes rather than durable metal cans. The letters scrolling down the tape appear to be a mixture of languages, familiar but indecipherable making this archive of memories unknowable. The reels could be master tapes from sound recordings or celluloid film but made from a process now largely superseded by electronic and digital technologies.

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Interested in broadening the role of the artist in society, Mora has been described as a 'sociologist, engineer, designer, producer'. His objects and installations are not as they appear at first glance inviting viewers to create their own narratives.

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Aitor Ortiz

(b. 1971, Bilbao, Spain)

Destructuras 069, 2002

Black-and-white digital print mounted on aluminium

This work forms part of *Destructuras* an ongoing series of black-and-white prints that Ortiz began in 1995. Ortiz's images are derived from the characteristic elements of architecture – scale, perspective, structure, volume and space – and from those of photography – frame, colour (always black-and-white), optical distortion and light – which gives them an aura of timelessness.

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Ortiz chooses simple, essential forms that allow him to refine architectural structures into images that shift photography towards abstraction and fiction. He plays with illusion and scale using a decentred angle in this image of a building made up of serialised units which could be read as part-completed utopian living spaces or an empty and desolate architectural ruin.

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Sophie Ristelhueber

(b. 1949, Paris, France)

Fait # 60, 1992

Colour photograph, silver print mounted on aluminium, with golden polished frame

This image is from Ristelhueber's series *Fait* (1992), seventy-one photographs, taken in Kuwait after the end of the Gulf War. Aerial shots record the abstract scars of warfare from the meandering lines of supply routes to plumes of smoke rising from burning oil fields and insect-like vehicles abandoned in the desert. Interspersed with these views are detailed images of debris photographed at ground level – from spent artillery shells and damaged equipment to blankets and articles of clothing covered in sand.

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Fait is a record of these traces before their eventual erasure by the desert while the shift in scale makes it difficult to discern what we are looking at.

Fait # 60 could be read as a helmet or a much larger object such as a heavy artillery turret.

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Eve Sussman & Rufus Corporation

whiteonwhite:algorithmicnoir, 2009–11

Video projection, code screen, unique programming code, audio and video files

The loose narrative of this film, shot mainly in Aktau, Kazakhstan, follows Michael Holz, a geophysicist code-writer living and working in a retrofuturist dystopian metropolis named City-A (in reference to Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 film *Alphaville*) operated by the New Method Oil Well Cementing Company.

The film is edited in real time by a computer algorithm that ensures each visitor's experience is different. Named 'serendipity machine', it delivers ever-changing combinations of 3,000 film clips...

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...80 voiceovers and 150 pieces of music fed to it, determined by pre-attributed tags. The scrolling metadata is presented on a computer monitor alongside the projected film. Not only are the film's characters being controlled by an external power, but so is the narrative and the experience of the viewer.

This display is accompanied by a fully-illustrated publication featuring Empty House of the Stare by Tom McCarthy available from the bookshop.

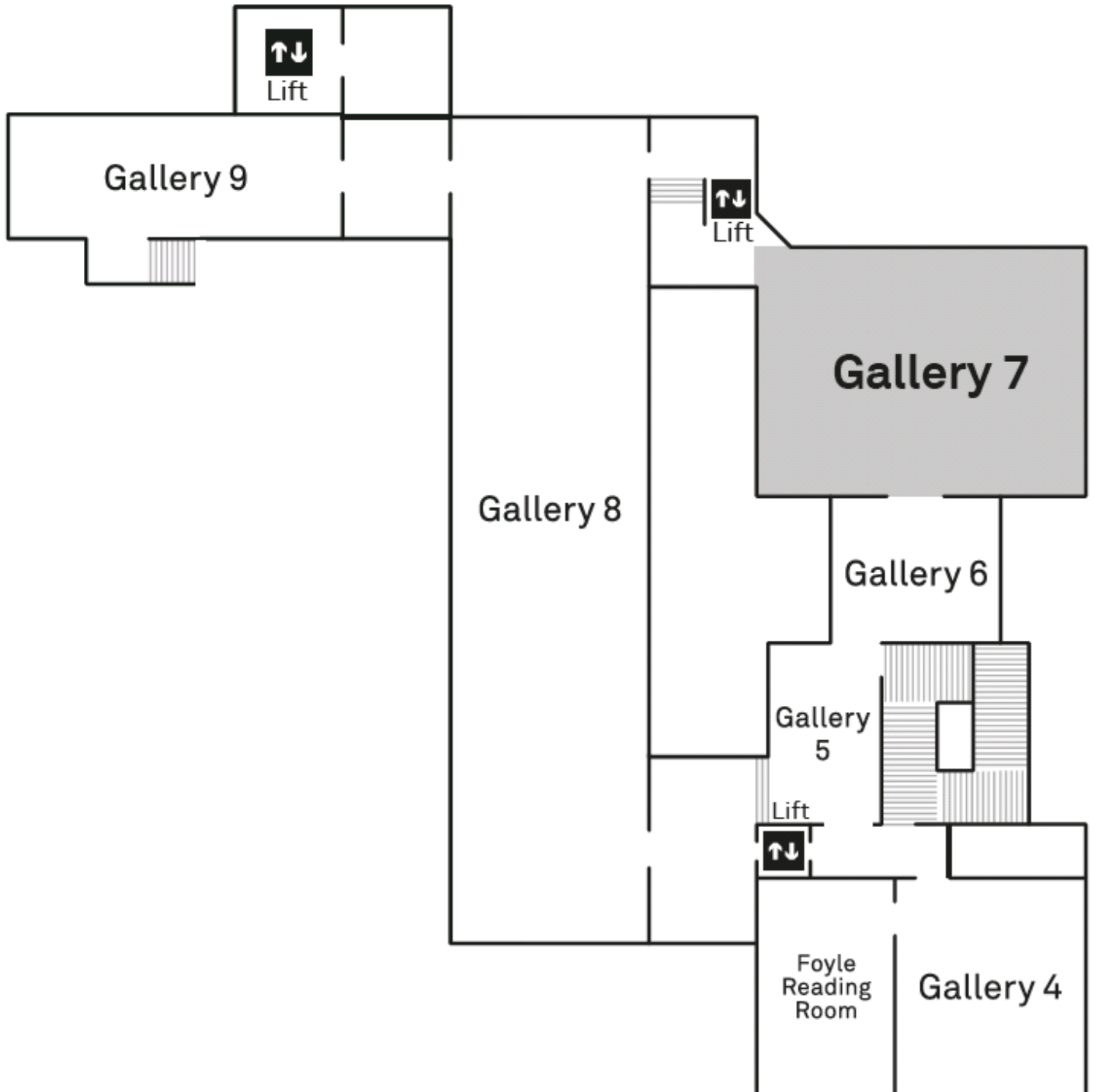
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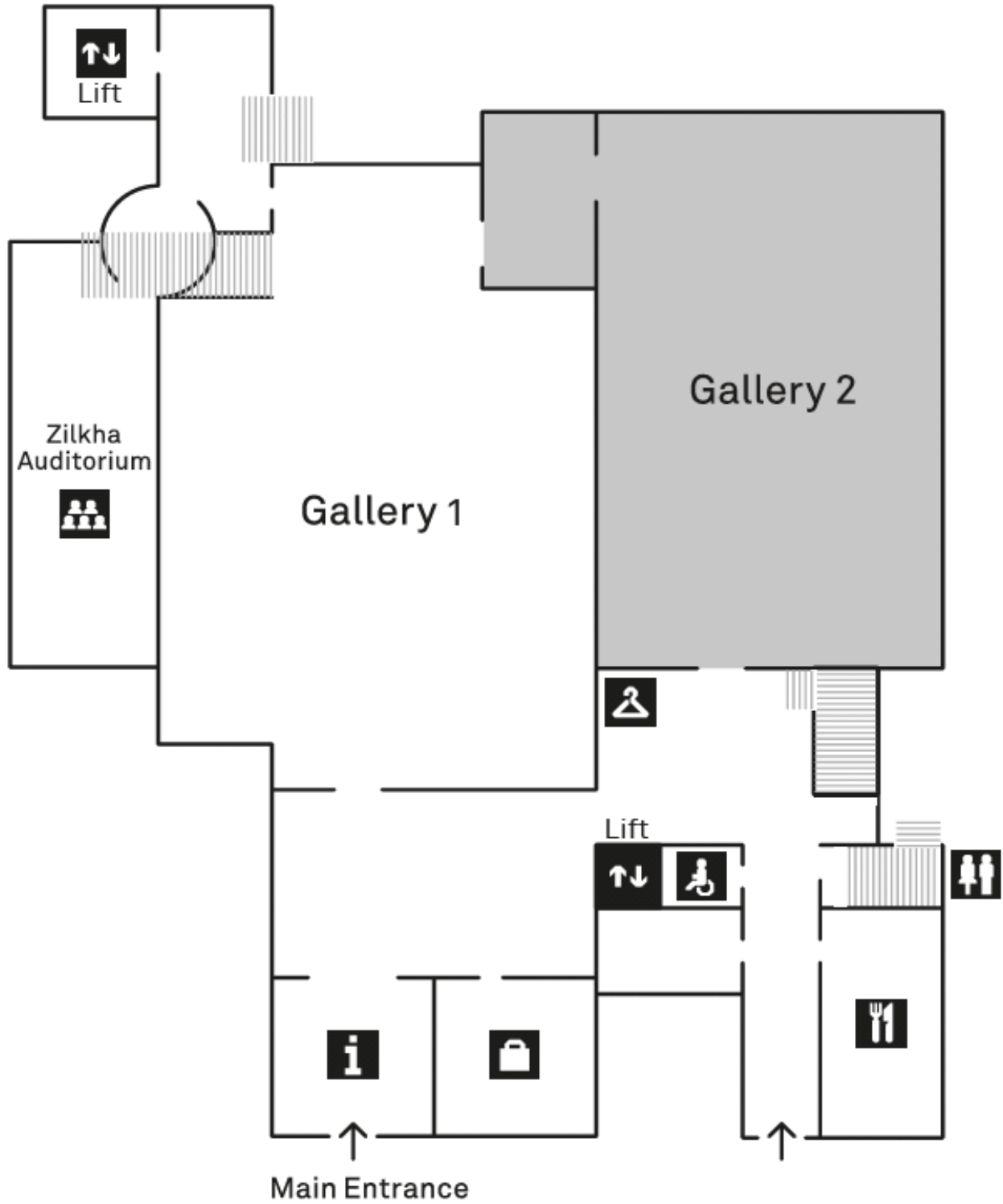
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**“la Caixa” Collection of Contemporary Art
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“la Caixa” Collection of Contemporary Art Selected by Tom McCarthy in Gallery 2



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