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Chapel

Free Exhibition Guide

# [Re]construct



An Arts Council Collection National Partners  
exhibition curated by Yorkshire Sculpture Park

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# [Re]construct

Text by Sarah Coulson, Curator

*My house is diaphanous, but it is not of glass. It is more the nature of vapour. Its walls contract and expand as I desire. At times, I draw them close about me like protective armour... But at others, I let the walls of my house blossom out in their own space, which is infinitely extensible. Georges Spyridaki*

Selected largely from the Arts Council Collection, this exhibition explores sculptures and video works that incorporate architectural details and buildings, manipulating and reconstructing their forms to make us look again at the world around us. By weaving human stories and characteristics into the built environment, the artists consider how a building is not just an empty shell, but is shaped by the lives of the people within it and filled with their memories.

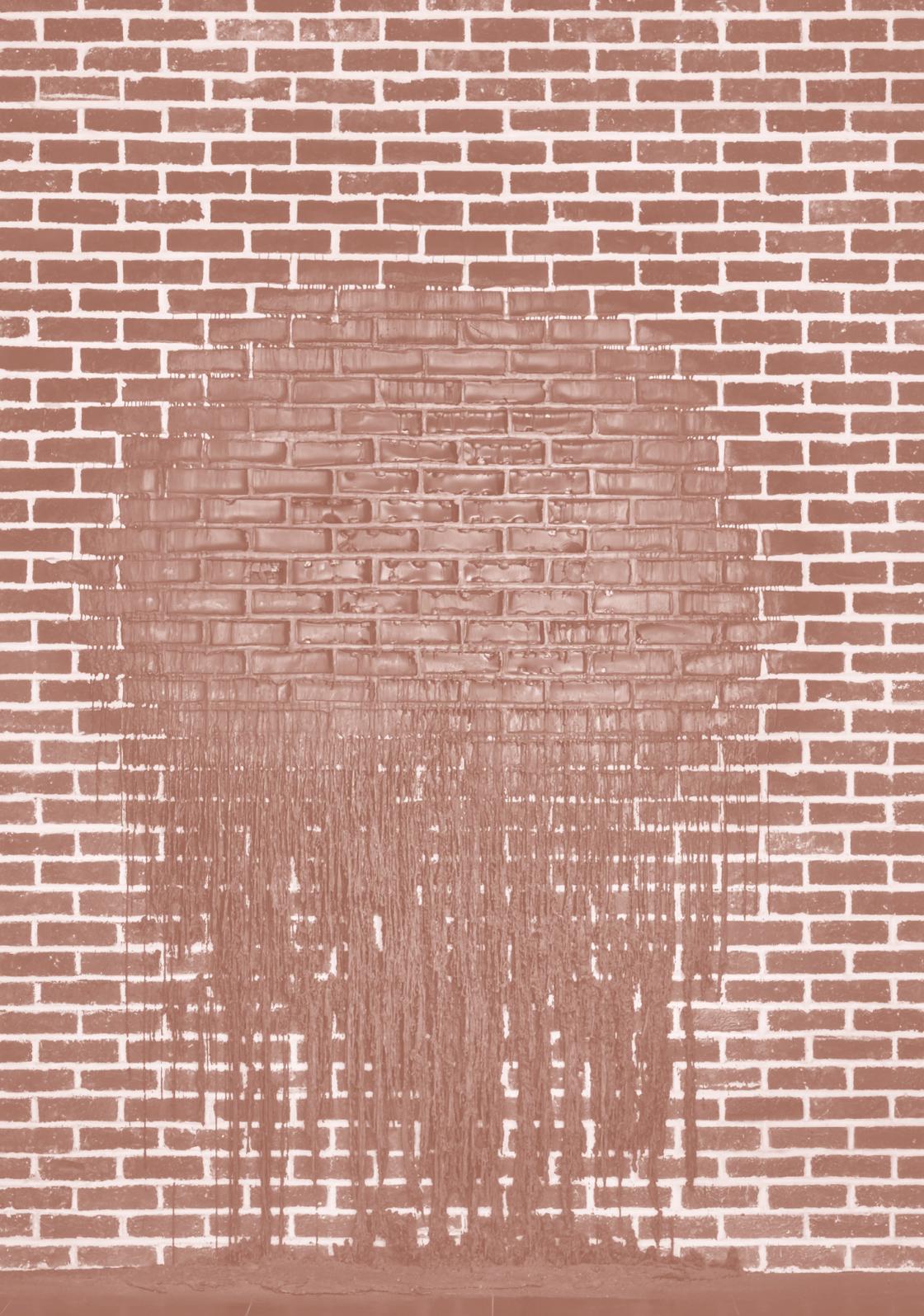
Some works question our ideas about the materiality and permanence of the built environment, with bricks made of wax and a reassembled structure that was once ruined. Others insinuate themselves into the fabric of the building, their presence subtly altering the architectural status quo. Video works by Lucy Gunning, Emily Speed, Adam Dade and Sonya Hanney, and John Wood and Paul Harrison explore our relationships with the spaces around us, and how we occupy them both physically and emotionally.

Commissioned in 1744, the YSP Chapel is an exceptional space, which also embodies the extraordinary way in which buildings can engender distinct qualities such as peacefulness and spirituality. Here the works on display intensify an already heightened relationship between the viewer and their immediate environment.

Cited in Gaston Bachelard, **The Poetics of Space**. Massachusetts: Beacon, 1994. p51

Front cover: still from Emily Speed **Rooms Designed for a Woman** 2017

Back cover: YSP Chapel. Photo: Jonty Wilde



## About the Arts Council Collection

**[Re]construct** is one of a series of exhibitions at YSP as part of the Arts Council Collection National Partners Programme.

As a National Partner YSP will provide a year-round home for art works from the Arts Council Collection, hosting a special programme of exhibitions and events, plus outreach and digital programmes, enabling even more people to see and enjoy works from the Collection. Alongside YSP, the four National Partners are Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, Birmingham Museums Trust, and The Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool.

The Arts Council Collection is the UK's most widely seen collection of modern and contemporary art. It holds nearly 8,000 works of British art from 1946 to the present day and is available for loan to public spaces across the UK. With more than 1,000 loans made to over 100 venues a year, it is seen by millions of people annually in public spaces from galleries and museums to hospitals, libraries and universities. The Arts Council Collection is one of the most important collections of modern and contemporary British art in the world and includes work by Francis Bacon, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Lucian Freud, Cornelia Parker and Grayson Perry among many others. The Collection continues to support emerging artists by acquiring their work at a critical early stage of their careers.

CLAIRE BARCLAY (b.1968, Scotland)

**Untitled (turned pole)** 1996

Wood

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Claire Barclay has a fascination for materials and a particular interest in both craft and industrial processes of making rather than established techniques of fine art. She says her works are “inspired by things that I see in everyday life” more than by other artworks and that she is especially interested in how “material and form trigger an emotional and psychological response... through people engaging with their tacit understanding of the material environment”. Viewers might recognise forms within her work that are typically found in a very different context and create a personal narrative between the two – such as **Untitled (turned pole)**, that could possibly be a chair leg, bannister spindle, or other furniture or architectural detail.

Traditional craft skills of hand production, such as wood turning, carpentry, pottery, weaving and crochet, feature prominently in Barclay’s work. These are often paired with precise, machine made metal elements, which prevent a sense of nostalgia whilst also stating the case for the continued relevance of tangible objects made by the human hand in the post-industrial, internet age.

Barclay is a very intuitive maker and often uses the gallery space as a studio, creating work in situ and responding to the specifics of the environment and architecture. She is known for large scale installations that bring together many complex and interrelated elements in relationship with one another.

**Untitled (turned pole)** clearly relates to the wood panelling in the Chapel. Leaning precariously against the wall its context is removed and we focus on it more as an object.

ALEX CHINNECK (b.1984, UK)

**A hole in a bag of nerves** 2017

Paraffin wax bricks and mortar  
Courtesy the artist

*I try to make the everyday world extraordinary and I try to blur familiarity with fantasy... using the kind of material and the structures and the scale and aesthetics of the everyday world that surrounds everyone*

Alex Chinneck subverts and reimagines architectural structures, often using visual illusion to create spectacular installations. His ambitious projects include an upside down building façade, over 300 identically smashed windows made for an abandoned factory, and an inverted electricity pylon that appears to have fallen from the sky. Working on a monumental scale, he employs the techniques and processes of manufacturing, industry and engineering to bring his complex projects to fruition.

The planning and execution of Chinneck's works require high degrees of precision and control, so he describes their titles as "my last place for a bit of abstraction or poetry". Many of them refer to very human concerns and feelings. **A hole in a bag of nerves** was made for the Chapel; it appears to be a regular brick wall that might always have been here. Yet all is not as it seems. Rather than being solid and stable, the entire wall is made of wax bricks and an organic mass of drips cascades down from a circular hole which has been melted into it, playing with our understanding of materials and permanence.

In 2016 Alex Chinneck's studio was appointed to deliver the Tinsley Art Project: the largest public art commission ever conceived for Sheffield. The project, currently in feasibility stage, will be a new beacon for the city, and a monument both to the past and to Sheffield's continued role as a powerhouse of manufacturing and creativity.

SUSAN COLLIS (b.1956, UK)

**State Border** 2010

Sonokeling rosewood, bog oak, white holly, and walnut  
Courtesy the artist and  
Seventeen, London

**Untitled (rawl plugs)** 2007

Brown goldstone and onyx  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank  
Centre, London

Susan Collis confounds our expectations of materials and their use. Subtle and playful, her works could easily be overlooked within a gallery or dismissed as having been forgotten by technicians when clearing up after the installation of an exhibition. She carefully and painstakingly reproduces random, ordinary objects and inconsequential occurrences in precious materials. Paint splatters on the floor are actually inlaid mother of pearl, dust sheets that appear stained are in fact embroidered, and coffee stains on a table are complex marquetry. By remaking banal things in a special way, Collis shows us the importance of looking closely and paying more than fleeting attention to our surroundings.

**Untitled (rawl plugs)** could have been left after a shelf or artwork was removed. Embedded in the wall, these tiny and seemingly unremarkable objects replicate the mass produced and incredibly cheap plastic wall plugs found in almost every domestic toolbox, yet they are meticulously made from onyx and brown goldstone. Like Claire Barclay's work, there are also comparisons drawn between the time, labour and skill involved in the handmade as opposed to the mass produced.

**State Border** is a more abstract work; it does not recreate a particular found object or rely on concealment in the same way as **Untitled (rawl plugs)**, but it does evoke a similar sense of revelation. A seemingly scratched and discarded piece of board leaning casually against the wall, it is created from a number of very special woods including white holly, which is often used for musical instruments.

MARTIN CREED (b.1968, UK)

**Work No.135** 1996

Aluminium, cement, plaster and emulsion

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

*You can't separate anything from people's experience of it*

Martin Creed uses many ordinary, everyday materials to make his work, including sticking plaster, Blu-tack, stacks of plywood, balloons, and folded paper. Minimal and gently subversive, this aspect of his practice considers what can be made with things that have no material value and are taken out of context.

**Work No.135** is a protrusion that grows from and becomes part of the wall itself, finished in the same material and painted white so that it appears simultaneously at home and incongruous. Constantly changing shadows are cast across it throughout the day: at certain times it seems almost to disappear and at others it is extremely prominent and physical. Like a living growth, it interrupts our preconceptions and animates the structure of the building, inviting us to look more closely. Creed refers to such works as "doing something with the world", meaning they subtly twist or alter what was already there rather than producing an entirely new object. The artist often uses the related term *the whole world + the work = the whole world* and has made works with this title.

All of Creed's works are titled with a number, although these do not follow strict numerical order and he misses out numbers randomly, thus setting up a seemingly objective, accurate system of classification only to undermine it purposefully.

ADAM DADE (b.1973, UK) & SONYA HANNEY (b.1975, UK)

**Stacked Hotel No.6** 2000

Video: 3 hours, 55 minutes

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

To be in a hotel room is to be away from home and familiarity; it is a temporary place for a traveller passing through. Whether for holidays, solitary business travel, or even illicit affairs, we perform many of the basic actions there that we would in our own domestic space – washing, sleeping, watching television, drinking a cup of tea. Yet a hotel room is a construct; it is someone else's design created to mimic the comforts of home, which we inhabit rather than live in, whilst becoming part of a fleeting and anonymous community of fellow guests residing in often identically styled rooms. It is this strangeness that artists Adam Dade and Sonya Hanney unpick in their **Stacked Hotel** works.

The first in the series was made on the Greek island of Rhodes in 1998 and they have since repeated the process in a number of different locations. All follow the same principle: the artists book a room and then systematically dismantle its entire contents in secret, stacking them into a geometric form before meticulously returning them to their original places. In **Stacked Hotel No.6** this action takes place over almost four hours in real time.

In slowly peeling back the superficial layers, the artists strip the furnished room down to a bare and characterless box. Occasionally the physical signs of an unknown previous occupant's presence slip through, such as the magazine that has fallen underneath the bed.

Once at the stage of reconstructing the room's contents, the focus shifts from the subversive act to more formal, sculptural concerns and the arrangement of objects is carefully considered, being rearranged several times to achieve the desired end result.

ANYA GALLACCIO (b.1963, UK)

**can love remember the question and the answer** 2003

Mahogany, glass and flowers

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

*If one were to give an account of all the doors one has closed and opened, of all the doors one would like to re-open, one would have to tell the story of one's entire life.* Gaston Bachelard

In this compelling work Anya Gallaccio brings together two very different materials: a pair of large, old mahogany doors and sixty bright red gerbera flowers. The doors are heavy and enduring, whereas the flowers are organic and will decompose during the course of the exhibition. Doors are extremely significant architectural features as they mark the boundary between our public and private lives and symbolise potential; a place of transition or hope.

Dying flowers and rotting fruit were often used in vanitas paintings (meaning vanity or futility), which were particularly popular during the seventeenth century and were intended as reminders of our mortality. Gallaccio takes this idea further by using flowers that actually rot in real time, transforming from identical, beautiful specimens to repellent, decaying matter. She cannot control this process and the progress of the work becomes a metaphor for life and the inevitable passage of time.

Gallaccio's work addresses ideas around sanitised perfection and the narrow view that things can only be perceived as beautiful for a short time and while they are flawless. She also refers to another set of opposites when she says, "my thing about working with flowers has been the tension between the way flowers are perceived to be sentimental, and the fact that I'm not in the least that way myself".

Gaston Bachelard, **The Poetics of Space**. Massachusetts: Beacon, 1994. p224

Anya Gallaccio, quoted in Sebastian Smees, **A Dying Art**, The Telegraph, 29.05.2004 [telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3617902/A-dying-art.html](http://telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3617902/A-dying-art.html) [last accessed 22.03.2017]

LUCY GUNNING (b.1964, UK)

**Climbing Around My Room** 1993

Betacam SP video: 7 minutes 30 seconds

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

*Everyone thinks it was me climbing because it was called **Climbing Round My Room**. It is about investigating one's internal space, and it was hard work, I had to climb as much as she did to film her!*

A woman climbs around the perimeter of a virtually empty room, carefully using fixtures such as the skirting board, brackets, a wardrobe, hooks and door handle to navigate it without touching the floor; controlled actions that recall a child's game. She has incredible agility and negotiates the stark space as though it is a rock face, at times gripping only with her fingers and toes. She wears an overtly feminine, scarlet dress that is strangely incompatible with the intensely physical nature of her actions. Her feet are ingrained with dirt, and her legs are bare; they become marked and scratched as she heaves and squeezes her body into the spaces between and along shelves. At times her journey seems to be enjoyable and at others it feels claustrophobic and precarious.

Gunning's work explores how we inhabit a space physically and subverts the idea of a domestic space being one in which women perform specific roles. It also engages with the idea that the body is the container of the soul within, marking the difference between external and internal space. These physical actions relate directly to psychological exploration and represent for our private thoughts and considerations.

As with Dade and Hanney's **Stacked Hotel No.6**, this work has to be displayed above head height and it is important to Gunning that the room in which it is shown somehow becomes insinuated into the work itself.

Lucy Gunning, quoted in Karen Wright, **In the Studio: Lucy Gunning, artist**, The Independent, 10.05.2013

DENIS MASI (b.1942, USA)

**Double Cross (study / red)** 1990

Steel, mirror, wire and glass

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Denis Masi works across many different media, including sculpture, performance, film and painting, but the primary concern that unites his experimental practice is an exploration of the systems of power within society. **Double Cross (study / red)** is part of a series made in the late 1980s and 1990s that considers ideas of exclusion, protection and surveillance. Using details such as barred windows, louvres, grilles and flues he references the harsh and unforgiving architecture of institutions and authority.

Everything about **Double Cross (study / red)** shouts control. It prevents both access and escape. The wired glass panel is of the type used in secure applications as it is incredibly strong and remains held in place even when smashed and broken. Behind the glass panel is a mirror so that you cannot see 'inside' and are faced only with a reflection.

Encasing this 'window' are utilitarian box section steel bars, reminiscent of a prison cell or secure building, something that is intentionally emphasised by its position high on the wall. As well as its visual reference to the opaque cross on the glass, which might suggest a medical connection, the title also relates to deception and betrayal.

ALEX PAIN (b.1989, UK)

**Tor** 2012

Foam, copper and chemicals

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

*If I'm honest I look at buildings and surroundings much more than I look at other artworks because that's what interests me, excites me even*

**Tor** was made in response to the architecture of the Ducal Palace at Nottingham Castle, where Pain had his first solo exhibition in 2012. Certain isolated details of its architecture were reproduced and used as building blocks; going through a process of "distortion and distillation" before becoming both the subject and the material of Pain's sculpture. Formally, **Tor** is totemic and relates to columns as well as the scale of the upright human body.

The work brings together common construction materials that contrast with each other in terms of value, weight, texture and purpose. Some perform important functions but ones that are hidden from sight, such as foam, and others are highly visible and used largely for embellishment, such as copper. In **Tor** however, it is the copper that remains virtually hidden, only evident where the stacked elements seem not to align properly. Pain questions the hierarchy of materials and draws attention to the concealed and ignored elements of the built environment.

CORNELIA PARKER (b.1956, UK)

**Neither From Nor Towards** 1992

Bricks and wire

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Suspended in the Chapel nave, Cornelia Parker's **Neither From Nor Towards** comprises weathered bricks from a row of houses that fell into the sea due to the gradual collapse of cliffs on the south coast of England. Parker collected some of the bricks from the shore after years of erosion by the waves. She then reconstructed these components, so when seen from above they form the simple shape of a house, complete with pitched roof.

Hinting at the former life of the material and its long gone inhabitants, the work is held in silent stasis. A resurrected ghost of its former self, its stillness is at odds with the violent rupture of the houses' destruction by the forces of nature. The dialogue created between past and present is complex and intriguing, and draws attention both to the passage of time and the intensity of the current moment.

By suspending her works in space, Parker encourages a very direct relationship with the viewer and makes us think about the empty spaces between the individual elements. These gaps are almost inevitably filled by our imaginations, with stories and images of how we envisage the houses might have looked and who might have lived in them before their destruction.

Parker often uses found objects in her work, saying "I like the idea of using things that everybody knows to try and describe something you don't know, that's unfathomable".

NINA SAUNDERS (b.1958, Denmark)

**Ladies Waiting Room** 1995

Plastic, foam and wood

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

*I spent an awful lot of time on trains as a child when my parents divorced, always uncomfortable, upset, out of place and waiting for change. The piece is also about the many women who have to fit their lives into awkward compartments. It also refers to the obsession with slimming that dominated the lives of many women.*

Nina Saunders is known for using and adapting domestic objects. Many of her works have a strong element of surrealism, including chairs and sofas that appear to melt, contort and take on human characteristics, or even have taxidermy animals embedded into them. Although Saunders subverts everyday furniture and strips it of its usual function, she retains recognisable forms and typical materials, including familiar upholstery fabrics such as chintz, damask and leather.

As well as interrogating form, Saunders also considers the emotional side of the furnishings with which we surround ourselves, and how we attach memories and personal value to them. She aligns **Ladies Waiting Room** with a difficult and transitory place in her own life, and reflects this psychological discomfort in the work's form. This sofa, if it is to accommodate the women of its title, is unfeasibly small, and with individual armrests between each tiny seat, feels constricted, impossible and stifling.

EMILY SPEED (b.1979, UK)

**Rooms Designed for a Woman** 2017

Film: 6 minutes

Courtesy the artist

*The idea of shelter and the inhabitant is at the core of much of my work; how a person is shaped by the buildings they have occupied and how a person occupies their own psychological space. The word inhabitant contains the root habit (dress) and implies a habitat (dwelling) and my work often has this double function of being both shelter and clothing.*

This new film by Emily Speed explores the distinctions between an architect as the person who determines the nature of the places we live in and the inhabitants who reside in them. There are many complex relationships at play, relating to scale, power, consumption and ownership; these revolve around the idea of the architectural model as a thing of possibility and perfection, that can never be entirely replicated in reality.

Images of a male architect standing over a model-sized version of the space are contrasted with those of the female body lying within it, literally filling it up. The way we are shaped by the places we live, is signalled in the way the woman takes on the same texture as her environment (malachite, velvet and marble interiors). She becomes part of it; wrapped in the same skin.

The tradition of donor portraits, particularly in Italian painting from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, is a major influence for Speed. In these depictions of wealthy benefactors, small-scale but architecturally impressive buildings were often presented on an outstretched hand as votives and a symbol of wealth. This imagery is echoed here with a miniature building on the woman's palm. Speed is also interested in the long tradition of architectural cakes. Here, the man presents the cake but the women eat it, so the building is the metaphorical container of the body whilst simultaneously being inside and enveloped by it.

Emily Speed statement, [contemporaryartsociety.org/artist-members/emily-speed/](http://contemporaryartsociety.org/artist-members/emily-speed/) [last accessed 22.03.2017]

JOHN WOOD (b.1969, UK) AND PAUL HARRISON (b.1966, UK)

**Device** 1996, video: 3 minutes.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

**Device** 1996, ink drawings. **Six Boxes** 1997, video: 4 minutes 24 seconds

Courtesy the artists and Carroll / Fletcher, London

*When we began it always had one or both of us doing some kind of performative action that was often to do with the architectural space that we were in. It first began much more geometrically using objects that we'd built around the human figure: what boxes you could fit in, what happens if you stand on a semi-circle and things like that...*

John Wood and Paul Harrison make collaborative works that scrutinise how the human body negotiates physical space and how it behaves within constructed environments and contrived situations. Although the artists remain deadpan, their video works are often surreal, humourous and hazardous. As well as repurposing everyday objects such as tables and chairs, they construct simple, rudimentary apparatus and props to enable very particular, controlled movements and to extend the body. The actions they undertake have no apparent purpose beyond being physical and formal investigations.

**Device** was made according to simple rules: "The idea was to make devices that enabled a figure to move in six directions across the screen: left/right, right/left, up/down, down/up, diagonal left/right, diagonal right/left".

**Six Boxes** features six boxes, some only barely bigger than the body, which are investigated by actions such as being lowered slowly down inside them, jumping within them, or using a very simple pulley system to makes the space react to the movements of the body within.

Bloomberg Tate Shots **John Wood and Paul Harrison**  
[tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/john-wood-and-paul-harrison](http://tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/john-wood-and-paul-harrison) [last accessed 22.03.2017]

Frieze.com **John Wood and Paul Harrison: Four Works**, 13.10.2016  
[frieze.com/media/john-wood-and-paul-harrison-four-works](http://frieze.com/media/john-wood-and-paul-harrison-four-works) [last accessed 22.03.2017]

