

The Lie of the Land **MK Gallery 16 March – 26 May 2019**

Through a playful and provocative display this inaugural exhibition charts how British landscape was radically transformed by changes in free time and leisure activities since hunting and shooting, the recreations of the aristocracy, were enjoyed on the rolling hills of their private estates. In part, tracing a line between Capability Brown's aristocratic gardens at Stowe and the social, urban experiment at neighbouring Milton Keynes, the exhibition teases out the aspirations that underpin our built environments.

The exhibition examines the modernisation of leisure propelled by industrialisation, a theme developed from Canaletto's painting of the fashionable public entertainment venue, Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. The Victorian era, with its social reforms aiming to improve urban living conditions, is represented by the Parks Movement, including John Loudon's Derby Arboretum, and designs for Bournville. *The Lie of the Land* identifies the role of colonialism in the development of 19th century landscapes including the Great Exhibition's spectacle of imperial exploits and the demand for 'exotic' horticultural imports, spurred by the growing popularity of gardening as a private hobby. Alongside works by early science fiction writer Jane Loudon and the founder of the Garden City Movement Ebenezer Howard, the exhibition also includes the first-ever lawnmower, John Ruskin's rock collection and influential horticulturalist Gertrude Jekyll's gardening boots.

The Lie of the Land showcases the various ways artists and designers including Thomas Gainsborough, JMW Turner, Ithell Colquhoun and Helmut Jacoby have, across timeframes, tried to understand, map and transform the landscape, including mathematical perspectives, aerial viewpoints and intimate travelogues. It also explores the built constructions of leisure, whether William Roberts's dim interior of a theatre or Laura Knight's sunlit ripples on a public lido. From the late-18th century, large-scale public spectacles became hugely popular as a result of technical advances and increasing free time. Hot air ballooning, horse racing and concerts heralded the commodification of leisure. By contrast, grassroots-initiated activity such as raves, carnivals and urban sports are traced in the work of, for example, Jeremy Deller and Errol Lloyd and use of public spaces for protest are explored, including the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp occupation.

As the 20th century progressed, rapid changes in society, the nature of work and class structure and new technologies accelerated architectural fantasies. Some of the best were centred on the idea of play, such as Cedric Price and Joanna Littlewood's *Fun Palace* (1961). In Milton Keynes, chief architect Derek Walker proposed a city greener than the surrounding countryside where cars, electronic communication and nature reinvented the idea of the town-country for the 1970s. Radical urban theory was to be combined with the LA lifestyle and the thrill of pop culture – also reflected in the art of Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi.

The Lie of the Land highlights campaigns to democratise space, from the 17th century egalitarian Levellers to the 1930s Ramblers. We look at how people use public space, and the communities that have been excluded through structures of race, gender, disability and class, explored in works by artists including Jo Spence, Rose Finn-Kelcey and Ingrid Pollard. Exploitation and corruption are also addressed in the work of Olivia Plender and Yinka Shonibare MBE and the relationship between spectacle and surveillance in contemporary society also comes under scrutiny, through Emma Hart's trompe l'oeil satellite dishes and Lawrence Lek's virtual reality workplaces.

Overall, the exhibition aims to capture a visionary spirit of grand designs tempered by the realities of political expediency. Public resources are under increasing pressure and



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'placemaking' and 'regeneration' remain central to urban development. *The Lie of the Land* looks reflexively at the role of culture in this process, drawing inspiration and seeking lessons from the past.

Artists and Architects

Edward Alcock, David Alesworth, Archigram, Edwin Beard Budding, John Berger, James Boswell, Boyd & Evans, Thalia Campbell, Canaletto, Philip Castle, Ithell Colquhoun, John Csaky, Jeremy Deller, Sarah Ann Drake, Malcolm Drummond, Susanna Duncombe, Peter Dunn, Tracey Emin, Rose English, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Norman Foster, Elizabeth Frink, William Powell Frith, Buckminster Fuller, Thomas Gainsborough, Walter Goodall, Walter Greaves, Richard Hamilton, Emma Hart, Ebenezer Howard, Julius Caesar Ibbetson, Evelyn Grace Ince, Helmut Jacoby, Bob Jardine, Gertrude Jekyll, Gareth Jones, Michael Kirkham, Laura Knight, Mabel Francis Layng, Ann Lee, Loraine Leeson, Lawrence Lek, Linder, Joan Littlewood, Errol Lloyd, Jane Loudon, John Loudon, Laurence Stephen Lowry, Edwin Lutyens, Andrew Mahaddie, Robert Medley, Brian Milne, Henry Moore, William Morris, Marlow Moss, Joseph Nash, Paul Nash, Balthazar Nebot, Nils Norman, Marianne North, Eduardo Paolozzi, Joseph Paxton, Olivia Plender, Ingrid Pollard, Cedric Price, Project Art Works, Jacques Rigaud, Bridget Riley, John Robertson Reid, William Patrick Roberts, John Ruskin, Benton Seeley, Yinka Shonibare MBE, David Shrigley, Alison and Peter Smithson, Jo Spence, Thomas Struth, Superstudio, James Tissot, James Walker Tucker, Joseph Mallord William Turner, John A. Walker, Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward, Ed Webb-Ingall, Carel Weight, Stuart Whipps, Rachel Whiteread, Althea Willoughby, Audrey Weber, Stephen Willats, Harold Williamson, John Wootton, James Wyld, John Yeadon

Curatorial team:

Sam Jacob, Anthony Spira, Claire Louise Staunton, Fay Blanchard with Tom Emerson, Gareth Jones and Niall Hobhouse.

About MK Gallery:

MK Gallery re-opens its doors in early 2019 after a major renovation and expansion, designed by award winning 6a architects and funded by central and local governments and trusts, foundations and philanthropists. The new, fully accessible, facility will more than double the Gallery's footprint with enhanced exhibition galleries, a new auditorium and social and learning spaces.

The Gallery opened in 1999 with a solo exhibition of Gilbert & George and has since presented over 60 wide-ranging exhibitions of contemporary art including solo exhibitions of Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Craig-Martin, Nasreen Mohamedi, Olivia Plender, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Melanie Smith and Andy Warhol. The Gallery also runs a dynamic outreach and events programme, and is a regular publisher and commissioner of new work, often in partnership with an extensive international network. More information can be found at: www.mkgallery.org/about.

Due to popular demand, the Gallery's new programme will diversify to present new perspectives on historical art alongside its acclaimed contemporary programme. Milton Keynes has been described as a 'cultural cold spot' but the new facility is designed, with the Local Authority, as part of a bid for cultural regeneration in anticipation of the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford corridor.

City Club:

The new building and surrounding landscape have been informed by the original plans for 'City Club', an unrealised but mind-boggling culture and leisure complex designed in the 1970s to occupy a whole block of Central Milton Keynes. As such, the design of the new MK Gallery sits at the heart of the 'Lie of the Land' exhibition as a contemporary expression of cultural and civic ambitions.



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Among the many wonders of 'City Club' were a wave pool, a rodeo and a souk, as well as a theatre and art gallery. MK Gallery has also borrowed the name of the scheme for a programme of new art, performances, family activities, happenings and talks during its renovation and expansion. Designs for the landscape both within and adjacent to the gallery, by artists Gareth Jones and Nils Norman, combine signage, street furniture, play equipment and sculpture to create new public spaces at the heart of Milton Keynes.

More information can be found at www.CITYCLUB.ORG.

Biographies:

Fay Blanchard, Exhibitions Organiser at MK Gallery. Prior to joining MK Gallery in 2017 Fay worked as Curator, Visual Arts with the British Council (2013-17) curating and managing international exhibitions including: 'Michael Landy Saints Alive' (2014-15, Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City), 'Private Utopia: Contemporary Art from Britain' (2014-15 Japan), 'Grayson Perry: The Vanity of Small Differences' (2016-17 Western Balkans tour) as well as delivering international curatorial and exhibition management professional development resulting in co-curated group exhibitions in Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia. Fay has worked with exhibitions and collections for over 10 years including roles at the following museums and galleries: UCL Art Collections, Kettle's Yard, Tate and the National Portrait Gallery.

Tom Emerson is a founding director of 6a architects and Professor of Architecture at the ETH Department of Architecture in Zurich. With 6a architects, Tom has developed a particular reputation for designing award winning contemporary art galleries including the South London Gallery, Raven Row and Juergen Teller's studio, and will be responsible for the re-development of MK Gallery. Tom and his students constructed the Pavilion of Reflections to Manifesta 11 and co-authored *Never Modern* (2013) a book that explores the role narrative, history and appropriation in architecture.

Niall Hobhouse is a writer and collector of architectural drawings, sketches and models. He founded The Drawing Matter Collections archive in Somerset, which contains a growing body of work that includes a range of architectural material focused on drawing as the exploration and discovery of ideas. He is currently a Trustee of the London School for Architecture and has served on the boards of institutions including the London School of Economics, the Sir John Soane's Museum and the Canadian Centre for Architecture. He is an Honorary Fellow of the RIBA. Niall has curated several exhibitions, drawing mainly on his own collections and exploring a wide range of architectural subjects, at the Swiss Architecture Museum, Hauser and Wirth Somerset, and the Courtauld Institute of Art.

Sam Jacob is principal architect for Sam Jacob Studios, Professor of Architecture at the University of Illinois and formerly founding director of FAT Architecture. His work spans scales and disciplines ranging from master planning and urban design through architecture, design and art projects. Sam curated *Clockwork Jerusalem* in the British Pavilion at the 2014 Venice Architecture Biennale, and is working on a 'post-rural' masterplan for a settlement in South East England. <http://www.samjacob.com>.

Anthony Spira, Director, MK Gallery since 2009, was previously curator at Whitechapel Gallery, London (1999-2009) and Jeu de Paume, Paris (1994-6). His twenty years of curatorial experience includes: group shows from 'A Century of British Sculpture, Jacob Epstein to Rachel Whiteread' (Jeu de Paume 1996) to 'Cadences, Hendrick Goltzius to Wassily Kandinsky' (MK Gallery 2014); and over 30 solo exhibitions and publications with a broad range of artists from Hans Bellmer, Andrea Buttner and Rodney Graham to Nasreen Mohamedi and Mark Wallinger. Anthony sits on the board of commissioning organisation Pavilion in Leeds and Pagrav South Asian Dance Company.



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Claire Louise Staunton is Research Curator at MK Gallery, Curator of Inheritance Projects and was formerly the Director/Curator at Flat Time House. She has had a long-standing interest in urban masterplanning and its convergence with art and curatorial practices. Claire Louise has organised exhibitions for national and international institutions including Institute of Contemporary Arts, BALTIC, Hepworth Wakefield, ZKM Karlsruhe and Devi Art Foundation New Delhi with a range of artists and architects including Jane Drew, Artist Placement Group, Jakob Jakobsen, Patrick Staff, Celine Condorelli, Edward Krasinski. Claire Louise launched the creative academic journal NOIT co-published by Camberwell and Flat Time House and has contributed to Frieze, PARSE Journal and Rhizome.



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