

A poet of images, Ian Wallace explores the interplay between form and content, using photography as a vehicle for developing an avant-garde art that weds the strategies of conceptualism with the pictorial tropes of painting. In doing so since the late '60s, he became the pioneer of a photoconceptualism that fundamentally influenced and reconfigured contemporary art practice in Vancouver, not least through his teaching such artists as Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Ken Lum and Stan Douglas.

Wallace's art encourages a sophisticated involvement from the viewer. His works awaken the allegorical, symbolic potential of everyday subject matter, investing ostensibly non-eventful scenes with meaning. For his first exhibition at Hauser & Wirth - which coincides with a presentation of his work in three concurrent chapters at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Witte de With, Rotterdam, and Kunsthalle Zürich - Wallace is showing four new, interrelated works. Each comprises of a quartet of canvases that relate collectively to the context in which they are shown. Their photographed subjects are, respectively, the Elgin Marbles, the section of the Piccadilly street facing the gallery, people gathered on the floor of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall watching a performance of Ben Vautier's Audience Piece No. 10, and the construction of new walls in the gallery Hauser & Wirth.

The installation sets up a number of tacit relationships. Bodies are represented as seen and seeing subjects in the form of the Tate spectators (The Audience) and the sculpted torsos at the British Museum (The Marbles) that face each other across the gallery. The remaining two groups of works likewise offset and reflect each other: while the images in The Street refer directly to the space behind the wall on which they are hung, the canvases in The Wall dwell on the plastering and painting of this same wall some months before. Typically of Wallace's works, these images emphasise presence, fostering an existential awareness on the part of the viewer through self-reflexivity and their specificities of time and place.

Each canvas is itself a composite structure. Their laminated photographs are flanked by strips of painted monochrome, a technique that the artist has employed since the 1980s.

'The photographic aspect is bringing meaning and representation of the everyday into focus; the monochrome is almost like the antipode of photographic meaning - its about historical positioning,' Wallace has explained. This joining together of figuration and abstraction creates a delicate conjunction of incompatibles whose reconciliations might take place in the viewer's mind. In this way the artist's pensive, reverberating art calls attention beyond its apparent subject matter to the act of looking itself.

Ian Wallace (b. 1943) has long been an important figure in the Vancouver art scene, teaching at the University of British Columbia, from 1967-70, and then at the Vancouver School of Art (now the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design) from 1972-1998. He has had numerous exhibitions in Canada and the USA where his works are exhibited in the collections of leading museums including MoMA, New York, MOCA, Los Angeles, and National Gallery of Canada/Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, Ottawa. 'Ian Wallace' is at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (18 October 2008 - 11 January 2009), Witte de With, Rotterdam (8 November 2008 - 15 February 2009), and Kunsthalle Zürich (15 November 2008 - 11 January 2009). An extensive monograph will be jointly published by the organizing institutions.

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