

Ryan Gander Life's a bite

March 20
— May 30,
2025

Basement Roma is pleased to announce *Life's a bite*, the first solo exhibition by Ryan Gander in Rome.

The exhibition contributes to Basement Roma's experimental programming which, since 2012, has invited artists to conceive and present new work, and to rethink the format of solo exhibitions.

Life's a bite is, in part, a response to site and place — both architecturally and conceptually — yet it also points beyond the confines of the gallery to speak pervasively of contemporary anxieties regarding our existence. The exhibition introduces a set of newly created artworks and includes the latest use of animatronics in Gander's oeuvre, which so far has featured to enliven simulacrum sculptural works of a gorilla and mice, and to stir a caricature rendition of himself as a puppet.

Treating Basement Roma as a stage, Gander has transposed the staff's working office into the large gallery space which is presented during the exhibition for public view. Elsewhere, sections of a suspended office ceiling suggest the former presence of corporate activity, recalling a sense of busyness and aspiration from yesteryear, together with the tedium so often associated with generic office interiors the world over.

Engineering tension within the exhibition arena and focusing upon the mise-en-scène are recurring elements in Gander's work, and date back to his first solo exhibition in 2002 at The International 3, Manchester which presented an encompassing installation but with emphasis given to the significance of a small element — a crack in a blind. These elements also connect with exhibitions made in subsequent years, in 2011 for Artangel — which meandered through a series of dark and starkly lit rooms in various states of accessibility, some locked, others open and partially unreachable — and DOCUMENTA 13 where, as with this exhibition, the focus was placed on the vastness of an apparently empty exhibition space.

Embedded within the structure of this exhibition lies the voice of a child, imparting a seemingly more reassuring, uplifting and effusive character. Upon closer inspection, one realizes that the sound is emitted through a magpie perched above the ceiling as if resting temporally to announce its innate wisdom (*The Magpie's Tale (Life's a bite)*, 2025).

The audio component of the exhibition, as we hear, is a recital of a fable — a narrative written by the artist — whose dialect and structure infers centuries-old parables in which repetitive and cyclic modes of storytelling would be employed to underline moralistic and fundamental truths. Although now an outmoded form of narration, the text offers poignant commentary on our current existence, operating as a cautionary tale. We might consider many of its sentiments in relation to the incessant proliferation of technology and to the economy of our attention and concentration that is arguably dwindling in its wake, drawing connection with the activities performed by way of the office placed within the larger gallery space.

The Magpie's Tale (Life's a bite) indeed suggests many complexities in our contemporary forms of interaction, from our reliance upon social media with its purported promise to form a collective connection, to the conundrum we currently find ourselves facing when considering the unwavering force of AI. The work advocates for a more mediative and gradual way of being, standing in opposition to the gluttony so often associated with the pursuit of the self via digital technology. Rather, its unfashionable form of storytelling introduces an avant-garde path — one which could usurp the speeds associated with those domineering forms of knowledge exchange today and many of its idioms, while fundamentally questioning them. This finds more acute pertinence, perhaps, when knowing that the artist's 15-year-old daughter is the narrator, who herself has played a role in a number of his works previously and which themselves serve as a recording of her own development — from the series of marble works that historicize her early childhood activity of making dens, to the trilogy of mice works made over several years where we again can hear her voice.

Other works presented in the exhibition, *I'm never coming back to New York again* (2016) — a set of pound sterling bank notes that rustle in a wall — and "God blind me!" *The widow exclaimed* (2025) — several sheets discarded on the floor taken from a book of a transcript of *The Magpie's Tale (Life's a bite)* — can be viewed as standalone pieces. Yet, within the dimension of this context, they serve as extensions of the overall narrative, offering additional commentary through physical forms, but also potentially allowing the trajectory of the plot to splinter. One might wonder if the animatronic sculpture of a tiny mosquito randomly twitching as if about to die in the work *Everything is Political* (2025) is part of the picture or the consequence of an entirely unrelated event. While playing with happenstance and mysticism, it is greed and the failure of capitalism that are the two dominant concepts of the story here. Yet, a disclaimer permeates: maybe life is both best living by and surrendering to the spirit of the maxim, life's a bite. (Text by Adam Carr)

Wednesday–Saturday
2:30 pm–7:00 pm
and by appointment

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Basement Roma is a no-profit
contemporary art center
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Basement Roma

Ryan Gander (Chester, UK, 1976) lives and works in Suffolk. He studied at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, NL and the Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht, NL. The artist has been a Professor of Visual Art at the Universities of Huddersfield and Suffolk and holds an honorary Doctor of the Arts at the Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Suffolk. In 2017 he was awarded an OBE for services to contemporary arts. In 2019 he was awarded the Hodder Fellowship at Princeton University. In 2022, he was made RA for the category of Sculpture. Since 2024, he has held the position of Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy Schools, London, UK. Recent solo shows have been held at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Helga de Alvear, Cáceres, ES; Ishikawa Cultural Foundation, Okayama, JP; Tokyo Opera City, JP; TARO NASU, Tokyo, JP; Lisson Gallery, New York, US; Kunsthalle Bern, CH; Esther Schipper, Berlin, DE; BASE / Progetti per l'arte, Florence, IT; gb Agency, Paris, FR; Lisson Gallery, London, UK; The National Museum of Art, Osaka, JP; Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, SK; Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, CA; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, AU; Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore, SG; Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester, UK. Major projects include Manchester International Festival 2023, UK; Glass Exchange, National Glass Centre, Sunderland, UK; Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art 2018, Liverpool, UK; Sydney Biennale 2018, Sydney, AU; Performa 15, New York, US; British Art Show 8, Leeds, UK; Panorama, High Line, New York, US; Imagineering, Okayama Castle, Okayama, JP; The artists have the keys, 2 Willow Road, London, UK; Unlimited, Art Basel, Basel, CH; Parcours, Art Basel, Basel, CH; Esperluette, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR; dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, G; Locked Room Scenario, commissioned by Artangel, London, UK; ILLUMInations at the 54. Venice Biennale; Intervals at Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC, US and The Happy Prince, Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Central Park, NYC, US.

The exhibition is made possible thanks to the support of Basement Roma Members. Basement Roma is a no-profit organization and a center for contemporary art run by CURA. since 2012.

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Available in April 2025
Price on request

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"Life's a bite" hat
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