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Ian Hamilton Finlay

Fragments

Opening & book presentation: May 8, 2025, 6–9 pm

May 9 – June 21, 2025

Galerie Hubert Winter is pleased to present an exhibition marking the centenary of the birth of the Scottish artist Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006). *Fragments* is both a major new book and eight exhibitions that will take place internationally during May 2025 in Basel, Brescia, Edinburgh, Hamburg, London, New York, Palma de Mallorca and Vienna, curated and edited by Pia Maria Simig.

An artist, poet and landscape designer, Ian Hamilton Finlay reinvigorated the classical tradition in a body of work that encompasses a variety of creative forms to celebrate the sustaining power of words. He is best known for his garden at *Little Sparta*, set in the Pentland Hills, near Edinburgh, where he lived and worked for the last 40 years of his life, and for his guillotine installation, *A View to the Temple*, at Documenta, Kassel, 1987. He significantly influenced the concrete poetry movement, and his extensive printed poetical and graphical works were published by *Wild Hawthorn Press*, which he co-founded in 1961. His visual art work, achieved in collaboration with expert artists and craftspeople, can be found in museums, parks and gardens worldwide.

In the exhibition, various works from the 1960s to the -90s and a variety of materials are on display in juxtaposition, focusing essentially on the maritime in Ian Hamilton Finlay's work; an important aspect and a dominant theme in his oeuvre. Finlay repeatedly deals with the subject of fishing boats, sailing boats or warships and is fascinated by their names, shape, construction or history. As Tom Lubbock writes, "*it's characteristic of Finlay not to treat the sea or sea-faring in the abstract. The sea itself hardly appears in his exhibition at all: rather the sea as a place of work or a theatre of war. Fishing boats and battleships predominate.*" [1] Works such as *Wings (Dinghy)* (1997) or the neon piece *netc.* (1975) show the concrete poetry and the play with words that particularly characterize the artist's work. In a letter to a colleague, Finlay explained that *netc.* is a combination of the word net and the abbreviation etc. and is thus intended to express the various parts (such as ropes and creels) associated with fishing.

In contrast to those nets and other objects that can be associated with sea fishing in general, *Reef-Points* (1998) are specific to work on sailboats. On view is a series of aluminum reliefs based on the pattern of reefs on sails. Reef points are "*small flat pieces of plaited cordage or soft rope, tapering from the middle towards each end, [...] used for the purpose of tying up the sail in the act of reefing. [...] The intention of each reef is to reduce the sail in proportion to the increase of the wind.*" [2] The ropes piercing through the fabric at different points of the sail create a pattern that is unique to each boat whilst being necessary to steer it through waves and winds.

Like Ian Hamilton Finlay does gently and deliberately within the defined framework of his garden *Little Sparta*, humankind throughout history constantly interferes with the environment on large scale

BREITE GASSE 17
1070 VIENNA, AUSTRIA

T. +43 (1) 524 09 76 / F.-9
OFFICE@GALERIEWINTER.AT
WWW.GALERIEWINTER.AT

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and without limit, conquering land, sea and sky. In works like *Japanese Stacks* (1978-79), *Battle of Midway I & II* (1977), and *Carrier Strike* (1977) concise metaphorical constructions become visible: the warship as classical temple, the ironing board or beehive as aircraft carrier, irons as smaller boats forming a flotilla, bees as planes. These tools and symbols of war interest Finlay in relation to the vocabulary of classical architecture, domestic space and the natural environment.

Ian Hamilton Finlay – Fragments takes place in May 2025 at: Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh; Kewenig Gallery, Palma de Mallorca; Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia; Victoria Miro Gallery, London; David Nolan Gallery, New York; Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg; Stampa Galerie, Basel; Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna.

Ian Hamilton Finlay – Fragments

Published on 8 May 2025 by ACC Art Books and edited by Pia Maria Simig, *Fragments* draws together one hundred works by Ian Hamilton Finlay, each accompanied by a short, fragmentary text by the artist and myriad distinguished writers who wrote about Finlay's work during his lifetime. It features introductory essays by Stephen Bann (CBE, Emeritus Professor of History of Art at the University of Bristol) and Tom Lubbock (chief art critic of The Independent from 1997 until his death in 2011) and includes 100 full colour plates. Additional texts by: Yves Abrioux, Stephen Bann, Prudence Carlson, Patrick Duncombe, Julia Eames, Patrick Eyres, Alec Finlay, Ian Hamilton Finlay, George Gilliland, Harry Gilonis, and Tom Lubbock. Designed by John and Orna Designs.

[1] Tom Lubbock in: Ian Hamilton Finlay. *Maritime Works*, Tate St Ives, St Ives 2002, p. 8.

[2] W. H. Smyth, *The Sailor's Word-Book. An Alphabetical Digest of Nautical Terms, including Some More Especially Military and Scientific, but Useful to Seamen; as well as Archaisms of Early Voyagers, etc.*, London 1867, p. 565-566.

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