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First Comprehensive Survey of Rachel Whiteread's Work Makes American Debut at National Gallery of Art, Washington



Rachel Whiteread, *Ghost, Ghost II*, 2009, polyurethane (fourteen parts), Agnes Gund Collection.
© Rachel Whiteread 2018. Photo: © Tate (Joe Humphrys)

Washington, DC—For the past 30 years, acclaimed British artist Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963) has created a body of work that is wide-ranging in scale and medium, yet consistent in its process of casting the objects and spaces of everyday life. Whiteread deploys replication, reorientation, and repetition to trace a social past while bringing it into the present. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from September 16, 2018, through January 13, 2019, **Rachel Whiteread** is the first major survey of the artist's work. More than 100 objects—from her first casts of domestic furniture to

her recent study for a commission for the new United States Embassy in London—will fill the Concourse galleries of the East Building and extend into its public spaces. Unique to the presentation in Washington is *Ghost* (1990), the artist's first room-sized sculpture, which recently underwent a major conservation treatment. Another highlight is the installation in the East Building Atrium of Whiteread's *Untitled (Domestic)* (2002), a 22-foot-tall plaster cast of the negative space of a fire escape staircase.

"Rachel Whiteread's *Ghost* has been a centerpiece of the Gallery's collection of contemporary art ever since it was given to us by The Glenstone Foundation in 2004. We are pleased to be able to celebrate *Ghost*, Whiteread's breakthrough work, in the context of her entire practice," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "The Gallery is fortunate to have Tate Britain as a partner in this significant project. We are also grateful to the artist for her close collaboration in planning the exhibition over the past five years, for her willingness to share works and ephemera from her own collection that have not previously been seen publicly, and, most important, for her contributions to the art of our time."

Exhibition Support

The exhibition is made possible by Dr. Mihael and Mrs. Mahy Polymeropoulos. It is also supported by Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman and The FLAG Art Foundation. Additional funding is provided by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Exhibition Organization and Curators

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Tate Britain.

The exhibition is curated by Molly Donovan, curator of art, 1975–present, National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Ann Gallagher, director of collections (British art), Tate Britain, London.

Exhibition Tour

Tate Britain, London, September 12, 2017–January 21, 2018

Belvedere 21-Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna, March 8–July 29, 2018

National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 16, 2018 – January 13, 2019

Saint Louis Art Museum, March 17–June 9, 2019

Exhibition Highlights

Rachel Whiteread begins with the artist's earliest explorations in casting the negative spaces in or around domestic objects and architecture. The exhibition presents the four works made in 1988 that constituted Whiteread's first solo exhibition that year at the Carlisle Gallery in London: *Closet*, a cast

of a single wardrobe; *Shallow Breath*, a cast of the underside of a bed; *Mantle*, a curtain-clad glass topped dressing table; and *Torso*, Whiteread's first cast of a hot water bottle. The artist would continue to cast water bottles in a variety of materials and colors—from pink dental plaster to yellow resin, golden colored rubber, gray concrete, and silver leaf. The exhibition presents a group of nine, underscoring the different character of individual objects within a single typology.

A key work unique to the Washington venue is *Ghost* (1990), Whiteread's first architecture-scale sculpture. The life-size cast was made of a North London row-house parlor of the sort in which Whiteread lived nearby as a child with her family. Over the course of three months, Whiteread painstakingly cast plaster of Paris relief panels of the room's walls, fireplace, door, and sash window in gridded sections, which she then installed over an armature, facing out toward the viewer, to create a positive form from a negative space or, as she said, to "mummify the air in the room." *Ghost* became a turning point in her career—after it debuted at London's Chisenhale Gallery, Whiteread was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1991.

Ghost would lead Whiteread to her next ambitious work, *House* (1993), the cast of an entire Victorian home in East London that had been slated for demolition. Although it was on view for only 80 days, *House* made Whiteread the first woman and the youngest artist to receive the coveted Turner Prize. The work is represented in the exhibition with preparatory drawings, a documentary film, fragments of concrete, and archival images of the completed work. As her first public work, *House* led to subsequent public commissions—such as *Water Tower* (1998) in New York City, her *Holocaust Memorial* (2000) in Vienna, and *Monument* (2001), designed for the Fourth Plinth in London's Trafalgar Square. These public works are highlighted in the exhibition with related sculptures, including *Untitled (Plaster Table)* (1995/1996), and *Untitled (Library)* (1999), both made while Whiteread developed her plans for *Holocaust Memorial*. Her *Wall (Apex)* (2017) corresponds to the artist's latest commission—*Flat Pack House* (2017), for the new United States Embassy in London.

Drawing has consistently been an independent and crucial part of Whiteread's practice, in addition to serving as preparation for her sculpture. **Rachel Whiteread** presents a significant compliment of the artist's drawings in a range of media that include pencil, gouache, ink, and collage. The exhibition also features her rarely exhibited photographs from the 1990s of the kind of domestic objects explored in her sculptures—light switches, doors, discarded furniture, and trash cans. A set of 12 photographic screenprints entitled *Demolished* (1998–2012) records the controlled explosions of three residential blocks in East London to illustrate the artist's focus on social change and dislocation.

In the Library: Rachel Whiteread's *Ghost*

In conjunction with the exhibition, the National Gallery of Art Library will offer a detailed installation of materials related to Rachel Whiteread's sculpture *Ghost* (1990). Ephemera that document the history of the sculpture, including its creation and early exhibitions—as well as photographs featuring several

generations of the former inhabitants of the home at 486 Archway Road, the location from which the sculpture was cast—will be presented to reveal the human dimension of this seminal work. In addition, a new acquisition to the Gallery's collection of rare books, *Testament* by Irish author Colm Tóibín with images by Rachel Whiteread, will be displayed for the first time. *In the Library: Rachel Whiteread's "Ghost"* is on view from September 17, 2018, through January 11, 2019, in the East Building Study Center, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Ghost Conservation

Whiteread's breakthrough work, *Ghost*, stands 9 feet high, 11 1/2 feet wide, and 10 1/2 feet deep, and is made of 86 plaster of Paris panels over a metal armature. In a recent conservation treatment undertaken in partnership with Whiteread, an interdisciplinary team of conservators, curators, mount-makers, engineers, and designers strengthened the structural integrity of *Ghost*, focusing both on the armature and on each individual panel. Because of the fragile material and architectural nature of the sculpture, this conservation project was one of the most collaborative and extensive ever undertaken by the Gallery. In the course of the treatment, the team created a support system for the entire sculpture using new materials, like Jesmonite, a natural resin composite, which is familiar to the artist, and others not traditionally associated with fine art conservation, as in 80/20 framing system.

Rachel Whiteread

Rachel Whiteread was born in Ilford, Essex, in East London on April 20, 1963. Her mother, Patricia, was an artist who was involved with the organization of landmark feminist exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Her father was a lecturer in geography. Whiteread studied painting at Brighton Polytechnic. After learning casting there from artists Richard Wilson and Edward Allington, she studied sculpture at the Slade School of Fine Art at University College, London, with sculptors Phyllida Barlow and Alison Wilding. Whiteread gained recognition soon after graduate school, being shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1991. In 1993 she was the first woman, and the youngest artist, to win the Turner Prize. She was selected to represent the United Kingdom at the 1997 Venice Biennale, where she won the award for best young artist. Since then, Whiteread's work has been exhibited and collected by museums and galleries worldwide, and she has been awarded a number of commissions, among them *Water Tower* (1998) in New York; *Holocaust Memorial* (2000) in Vienna; *Monument* (2001) for Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth; *Embankment* (2005) for Tate Modern's Turbine Hall; *Boathouse* (2010) in Gran, Norway; *Tree of Life* (2012) at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, on the occasion of the London Olympics; *Shack I* (2014) and *Shack II* (2016) both in the Mojave Desert; *Cabin* (2016) on New York's Governor's Island; and *Flat Pack House* (2017) for the United States Embassy in London. Whiteread has been the recipient of countless awards and honors: Commander of the Order of the British Empire (2006), the International Medal of Arts from the United States Department of State (2016), and the Ada Louise Huxtable Prize (2017), among others. Rachel Whiteread lives and works in London.

Catalog and Related Programs

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalog with contributions by the exhibition's curators, an interview with the artist and James Lingwood, director of Artangel, and essays by Brian Dillon, writer, critic, and head of the writing program at the Royal College of Art; Briony Fer, professor of history of art and research director at the University College, London; Harald Krejci, curator, 21er Haus; Linsey Young, curator of contemporary British art at Tate Britain; and Lynn Zelevansky, formerly the Henry Heinz II Director of the Carnegie Museum of Art. Featuring 150 color illustrations, the 240-page catalog will be available in hardcover and paperback at shop.nga.gov, or by calling (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; faxing (202) 789-3047; or emailing mailorder@nga.gov.

Lecture

Introduction to the Exhibition—Rachel Whiteread

September 16 at 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Molly Donovan, curator of art, 1975–present, department of modern art, National Gallery of Art, Washington. A signing of the exhibition catalog follows.

Public Symposium

Rachel Whiteread

October 26, 10:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Keynote by Mari Lending, professor of form, theory, and history, The Oslo School of Architecture and Design. Additional presentations by artists, scholars, and curators.

Concert

PUBLIQuartet

with Ian Rosenbaum, percussion

October 28, 3:30 p.m.

West Building, West Garden Court

PUBLIQuartet's genre-bending programs span the classical canon and also feature open-form improvisations that expand the techniques and aesthetic of the traditional string quartet. This program in celebration of *Rachel Whiteread* features three original works from the quartet's MIND|THE|GAP initiative—developed to generate an interest in new music and keep traditional classical music relevant to modern audiences, as well as composer Andy Akiho's *LigNEouS* for string quartet and marimba, featuring percussionist Ian Rosenbaum, for whom the piece was written.

Films

Lifting Traces: Memories of London

October 27, 2:00 p.m.

October 28, 4:00 p.m.

November 11, 2:00 and 4:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

In tandem with the exhibition *Rachel Whiteread*, this series expands on ideas set forth in Whiteread's 1993 work *House*. Utilizing documentary and experimental techniques, artist films explore housing issues, psychogeography, and the ideas of home and community in Britain's capital. This series highlights the works of William Raban (who introduces two programs) as well as other London-based contemporaries of Whiteread, among them Jon Smith and Moira Sweeney.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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PRESS KIT

Exhibition Press Release

[Exhibition Checklist](#) (PDF 300 kb)

[In the Library: Rachel Whiteread's "Ghost"](#)

Audio:

[Press Event: Rachel Whiteread](#)

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