

the **Whitworth**

Elizabeth Price: A LONG MEMORY

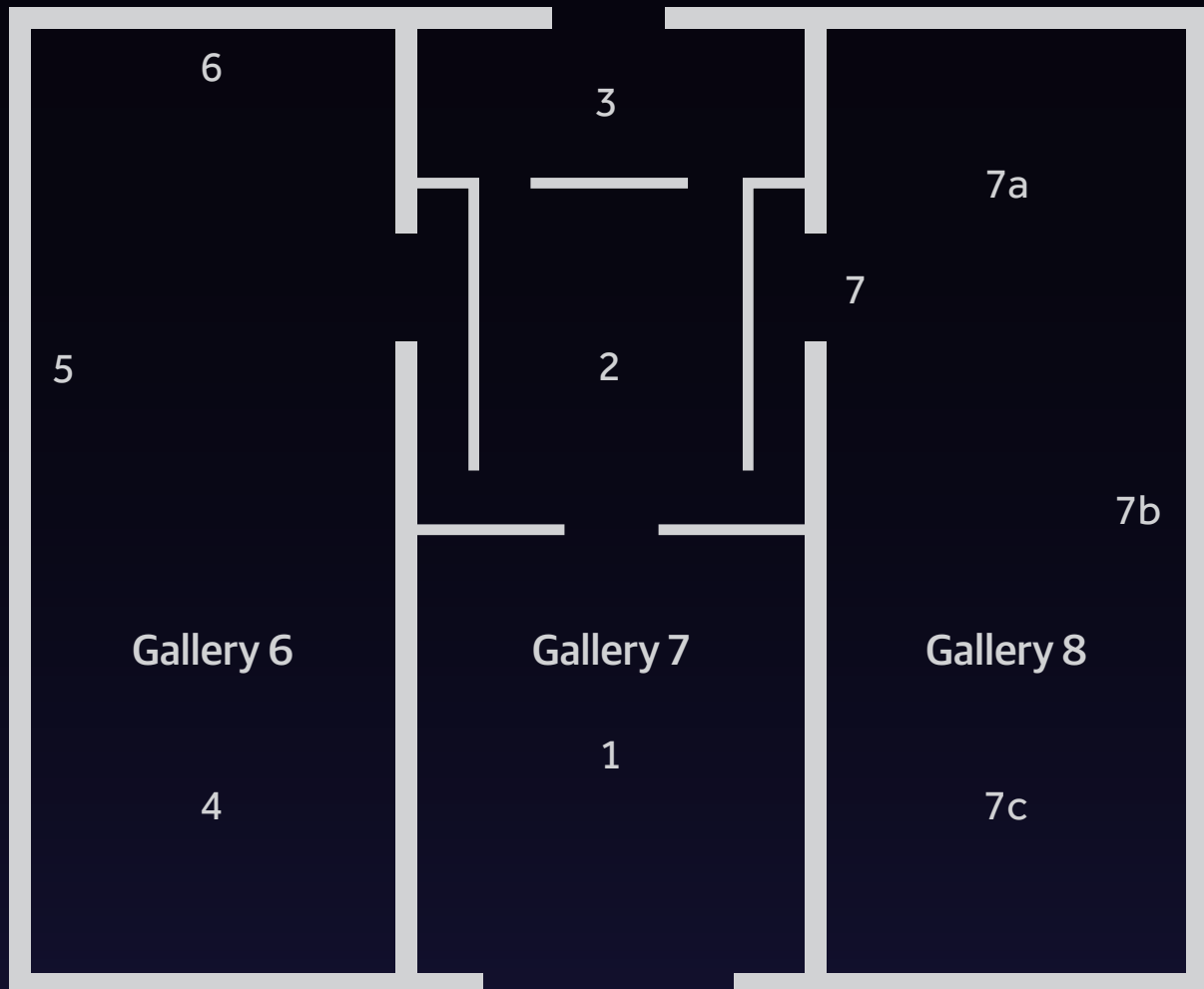
Exhibition Guide

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Exhibition floor plan



1. GETT REDY
2. ALBERT WALKER ARCHIVE
3. INKY SPIT, FLOPPY DISQ, VOX GERL
4. THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979
5. K
6. AT THE HOUSE OF MR X
7. SLOW DANS
- 7a. KOHL
- 7b. FELT TIP
- 7c. THE TEACHERS

Elizabeth Price: A LONG MEMORY

At the centre of this exhibition is a cache, an archive of photographs taken in the 1980s by retired miner Albert Walker of the last coal mines in Britain. Elizabeth Price studied these photographs and their history and made the video KOHL from them. That work is shown in this exhibition and the cache remains, ready to be used by another. Archive, history, class, music, dance and technology – all at the core of Elizabeth Price's work and shown here in her most extensive exhibition to date.

This central room, filled with daylight, shows two new series of works on paper by Price made specially for this presentation: large-scale pinhole photographs that capture the light projected through layered stencils, and prints made using only water on black paper. These inscribe single letters on black tissue. Whilst the image is subtle, the whole paper surface is transformed. Words are spelt out: INKY SPIT, FLOPPY DISQ, VOX GERL, touching on the wet and the dry, ephemeral and enduring qualities of writing.

On either side of this room are two blacked-out galleries showing videos that are full of projected light, colour and music. In the gallery to the left, acclaimed works by Price are shown: her first major work AT THE HOUSE OF MR X, which takes us through the Modernist house of a wealthy art collector; her Turner Prize winning THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979, remembering that fatal fire in Manchester and shown in this city for the first time; and K, which connects the overlapping histories of weaving, dancing and digital moving image in a futuristic tale of professionalised mourning. These videos present social history, gesture, technology and music within an architectural setting that nods to the medieval, the modern and the futuristic, specially designed by the artist.

In the room to the right is the newly completed video trilogy SLOW DANS, consisting of KOHL, FELT TIP and, premiered here, THE TEACHERS. Expressed through a fictional past, an imagined future and a parallel present, each work touches upon recent social and political histories ranging from the systematic abandonment of coal mines, through technological and demographic revolutions of the office, to the corporatisation of education.

Throughout this exhibition, Elizabeth Price makes connections between these seemingly unlikely subjects, allowing narrative to flow between them and new meanings to arise. It is in these spaces, shaped by her, that Price's exceptional qualities as an artist show themselves most clearly.

Gallery 7

GETT REDY

Each of these photographs is unique, made using a specially constructed large pinhole camera and various stencils and transparencies. Most of the photographs feature found images of the human tongue, created using a range of digital image technologies. Some of the objects pictured are drinking vessels selected by Price from books on glassware, and evidence her pre-occupation with exploring analogies between flows of liquid, light and digital information.

ALBERT WALKER ARCHIVE

Albert Walker (1932-1997) was born in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, and after working for a short time in a glass works signed on as a miner at Dodworth Colliery in 1948. Walker later served for four years in the Merchant Navy, before returning to work at Old Silkstone, Orgreave and Thurcroft Collieries - until he was made redundant in 1985 during the Conservative Government's mass closure of mines in the mid-1980s, which led to the year-long Miners' Strike. During his time as a miner, Walker worked first at the coalface and later became a safety worker, sampling and controlling dust in the mine, giving first aid and driving the ambulance.

As a boy Albert Walker had set up a dark room in a shed and his interest in photography carried on through his working life, taking photographs of churches and castles on family holidays. He had also begun to take photographs of colliery architecture and engineering in the late 1950s

and 1960s. On being made redundant at the age of fifty-five he turned his attention entirely to photographing mines, aiming to document all of the coal and tin mines in Britain. It was at this point that Albert Walker found his subject and his way of presenting it. His focus was always the tower that was used to haul miners and coal up and down the shaft which has different names according to where you are in the country - headgear, headframe, winding gear, gallows frame, poppet head, headstock, shafthead frame, hoist frame, pit frame. Walker processed and printed the film and photographs himself. There are several styles of presentation that Walker uses but his most usual and most striking involves trimming a 10 x 8 inch print with crimping shears and mounting this on a piece of thin cardboard. Beneath this he would paste a crimped rectangular label onto which was stencilled in capitals the name of the colliery. He would add a black border to this cartouche and to the edge of the backing card. This was then placed between the adhesive pages of a conventional 1980s family photo album or into a ring-binder.

As Walker continued his project to photograph all of the mines, most of them were being closed down by the Conservative Government of the time. His style of presentation, with its black edge, evokes the nineteenth century mourning card and his photographs were to become a memorial to both his working life and also coal mining in Britain. In 1984 there were over 160 working deep coal mines in Britain. All are now closed.

Courtesy of the National Coal Mining Museum for England.
Purchased from Nora Walker in 1998.

INKY SPIT, FLOPPY DISQ, VOX GERL

Instead of ink Elizabeth Price has used water as her medium for these prints, spraying it over a latex stencil and onto the paper beneath. Where the water coats the paper it dims the sheen of the paper's glazed surface, producing a subtle black on black image, discernible as you

catch it in the right light. More significantly the water impacts the shape of the entire sheet, contouring its surface with minute ripples, gathers and tucks which delineate the image. In each print this is a single letter. Together the twenty-five prints make up a string of words INKY SPIT, FLOPPY DISQ, VOX GERL. Strangely spelt, phonetically understandable, made from a water stain, they suggest an unfixed language, with potential to be remade or adapted. Once again, flows and residues of liquid are equated with writing, knowledge and digital memory.

Gallery 6

AT THE HOUSE OF MR X 2007

Single channel video projection

Duration: 20 minutes

This video takes as its subject the home of an anonymous art collector, designed and built in the late 1960s. Only briefly inhabited, the House and its contents remain immaculately preserved.

The film is organised as a visit to the house, starting with the most public, social spaces, moving eventually to the most intimate. During this tour a whole day seems to pass. The elegant geometry of the spaces, the varied materials of the architecture, and the luxurious modernist furnishings are attentively documented. In particular, the camera dwells upon gleaming, reflective surfaces: the lustre of coloured glass; bright plastics and the liquid-shine of chrome.

The tour is directed by a silent narrator, present as an on-screen script, punctuated with percussion and close-harmony vocal arrangements. This narrator is the Guide for the tour, and the only protagonist in the film. Its script is collaged from documents relating to the House, art collection, and business ventures of the former resident, who generated his wealth through cosmetics brands Outdoor Girl and Mary Quant. As you move through the luxurious interiors the tone shifts from deadpan taxonomical description to the solicitation and innuendo of advertising copy. (EP)

K 2015

Two channel video projection

Duration: 7 minutes

In this two channel installation (one screen presented horizontally the other, vertically), a flickering photographic animation of the sun is presented at the top of the vertical projection. This 'shines' down

on a digital animation of a mechanical production line, located on the horizontal screen. Images of pop music performers migrate between the two screens, seemingly responding to both the light of the sun, and the motion of the machinery.

These three different kinds of imagery - the sun, the machines, the dancers - were sourced from very different cultural contexts, and originated using different image technologies. One purpose of the story in K, is to weave these incompatible elements together, and the theme of the futuristic fiction that attempts this is mourning.

Implicit and explicit references to weaving run throughout. It is used as a metaphor for the creation of fiction, and intended as a visual counterpart for polyphony - a musical or dramatic form in which many voices speak or sing together. The dipping and circling motion of a mechanical loom is also used to suggest the imagined gestures of the mourning dance. The convergence of all the different technologies existing in the work also reminds us that the origin of computer memory lies in the history of the mechanical loom.

Price chose the title K to be the abstracted image of a stitch or knot when horizontal: **⚡**; but as a dancing figure when vertical: **K**. (EP)

THE WOOLWORTHS CHOIR OF 1979 2012

Single channel video projection

Duration: 18 minutes

This work is structured as three overlapping episodes. The first part features archival photographs of Gothic churches, 3D-animations and captions from art-historical documents, used to outline a particular area within the church known as the choir: a partial enclosure furnished with carved pews.

A musical interlude follows, in which very different archival materials are employed. Low-resolution, internet-streamed video and film recordings

of musical performances are edited together, to create a single flowing choreography from disparate dances and gestures. In this way, a group of singers - a human choir - is constituted, to figuratively occupy the architectural choir already established.

The third part proceeds to unfold the events of a fatal fire in a Manchester department store, using all the documents that were produced in its aftermath. These include news footage, witness statements, inquest testimony, and filmed reconstructions.

The architectural *choir* and the musical *choir* are related forms, both derive from the *chorus* of classical Greek theatre: a circle of singers and dancers who narrate the action. These meanings underpin the structure of the whole work: in the sequence of the three episodes, an auditorium is constructed, a chorus assembled, and finally, a tragedy is narrated.

A single image is used to connect the parts, that of a hand gesture: a twisting wrist found in the funerary art of the gothic choir, in the sensuous dances of the musical performers, and in the traumatised gestures of the witnesses and escapees of the Woolworths fire. This twisting wrist also alludes to the artistic gesture of the whole work, a flexing and binding of the disparate historical materials themselves, into a dissonant composition, through digital moving image technologies. (EP)

Gallery 8

SLOW DANS 2019

Ten channel video projection

Duration: 25 minutes

For this exhibition Elizabeth Price has made the new video THE TEACHERS which completes the trilogy SLOW DANS, consisting of KOHL, FELT TIP and THE TEACHERS. Expressed through a fictional past, an imagined future and a parallel present, each work touches upon recent social and political histories ranging from the systematic abandonment of coal mines, through technological and demographic revolutions of the office, to the corporatisation of education.

KOHL 2018

Four channel video projection

Duration: 6 minutes

When coal mines are abandoned, one invisible result is that groundwater swiftly floods the underground tunnel systems. This information provides the premise for KOHL, a four channel video which imagines all the subterranean architectures of coal mining - the only mining architectures that still exist - unified as a single network by the liquid that now courses through them.

The title KOHL gives a name to this liquid which, within the fiction of the work, acts as a febrile medium of transmission. Sound travels through it, and in particular, it conveys voice - songs and jokes - as expressive bodily emissions, related to tears and to spit. This conception draws on a series of contingent connections in which ancient histories of coal, ink, make-up and alcohol converge. (The English word alcohol is taken from the Arabic word 'kuhl' - which denotes a liquid, black, eye make-up. Kohl was originally made using antimony, a poisonous trace metal often found in coalfields).

The story is delivered by four narrators, each 'speaking' through a different projection. The projectors and screens are all oriented vertically, to stand in at various points during the story for flooded mine shafts, carboniferous swamps, ink wells, blackened lungs and digital caches.

The work features the 35mm photographs of Albert Walker, courtesy of the National Coal Mining Museum for England, Wakefield. These show mine head architectures during the main period of mine abandonment in the UK, between the late 70s and the late 80s. (EP)

FELT TIP 2018

Two channel video projection

Duration: 9 minutes

Commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella, Nottingham Contemporary and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis

In jokes, slang and innuendo, single things can take on multiple names, and different things may share the same name. This elasticity of naming and meaning underpins the short, narrative video called FELT TIP. The title of the work itself is the single name lent to many different things, shown, described or implied during its course.

A 'felt tip' is slang for a man's neck tie, when worn by a woman - or so the narrators claim. In the fictional and futurological office world that they describe, a 'felt tip' is also a colloquial term for the fingertips of administrators - predominantly female - who are employed to retain vast corporate archives encoded within the DNA at the ends of their fingers. And within this fiction, it is also still a pen - with a soft, fabric wick.

The slang of 'felt-tip' for a neck tie mocks an older innuendo: the weary, phallic symbolism of the executive's tie. The endurance of this association is surprising. The resemblance is not great, and -

notwithstanding the upscale - not entirely flattering. Indeed, if the link the tie makes is between itself - a decorative textile - and a dick, it probably would never have caught on. A more likely symbolic function is to associate the penis with that traditional instrument of executive authority, the fountain pen, which the tie actually does closely resemble. It looks like a big pen nib.

This is what the narrators of FELT TIP believe anyhow, who are incidentally also the administrators described above. They seize upon the gender and class significance of the tie, and merrily exploit its similarity to another pen - the felt tip - and to other body parts, including the felty point of the tongue, the soft tip of the finger, and the clitoris.

To write is also to commit to memory. This is true individually and collectively. In the digital age we may now only use ink in certain legal rituals, but we still use the word 'write' to describe how we encode files to memory storage. The administrative narrators of FELT TIP, employed to physically bear knowledge which is not their own, usurp and subvert the symbolic efficacy of the neck tie. They use it as a prop to compose a history of inscription - from ink to bytes via the Jacquard loom - and in so doing compose a marker for their own unwritten sexual history. (EP)

THE TEACHERS 2019

Four channel video projection

Duration: 10 minutes

Co-commissioned by Artangel and the Whitworth

A chorus of four narrators describe a strange contagion of elective muteness which once spread rapidly through certain professional groups. The worlds of publishing, museums and galleries were all affected to some degree. but only academia succumbed to the affliction entirely. It is primarily because of this - the narrators declare in unison - that all those who declined to speak as part of this phenomenon, soon became known as THE TEACHERS.

As a proxy for speech, those affected made elaborate costumes and performed sombre rituals or slow dances. These became infamous for their absurd and profane gestures, and their singular use of oral percussion. For whilst all THE TEACHERS renounced speech, a minority still made a few distinct, non-verbal sounds. These include clicks, howls and hisses.

The spine of a book is so called, because early bookbinding used animal hide to make covers, and for the sake of symmetry, aligned the spine of the hide with the fold of the book. The imagery of THE TEACHERS - points to a connection between the opening and closing of the pages of a book with the opening, closing and turning gestures of a human body. In the video these gestures comprise a kind of dance, that is grave, comic and pornographic. Its solemn rotation recalls the lingering sensuality of the last slow dance in a teenage disco, and a bleak, funereal lamentation. (EP)

Elizabeth Price Elizabeth Price was born in Bradford, Yorkshire in 1966. She grew up in Luton, Bedfordshire and attended Putteridge Comprehensive Secondary School. She studied at the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford and the Royal College of Art, London. In 2012 she won the Turner Prize for her solo exhibition, 'Here', at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. Price makes immersive video installations, which feature diverse historical materials including film and video footage, archival documents, plans and photographs and popular music. Her works are painstakingly produced, often taking over a year to complete, and she regularly revisits older pieces, creating new and updated versions. She punctuates the visual material on the screen with bold, graphic interventions. Texts and slogans recall the aesthetics of advertising as well as political propaganda and combine corporate and academic theories of the world, to create a strange ritualistic undertone. Aural motifs are created from the music and rhythm of finger clicks, claps, percussion and samples of vocal harmonies.

Texts marked EP have been written by Elizabeth Price.
All works are courtesy of the artist.

SLOW DANS is a collaboration between Artangel, Film and Video Umbrella, Nottingham Contemporary, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and the Whitworth, The University of Manchester. THE TEACHERS was co-commissioned by Artangel and the Whitworth.

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