The Fruitmarket Gallery
Exhibition Archive

The Mirror & the Lamp

Exhibition 19 July – 31 August 1986

For the period of the Commonwealth Games and the International Festival the Gallery is presenting a thematic exhibition, which brings together the work of over a dozen artists from Britain, Europe and America. The most unusual and immediately striking feature of the exhibition is the involvement of the viewer by means of mirrors and room installations. This is intended to draw attention to the ways in which viewers see themselves in relation to the work of art. It also explores the ways in which contemporary artists portray themselves and others. Traditional media are included alongside recent developments such as life-sized Polaroid prints (never before seen in this country) and slide projections.

The title of the exhibition refers to two distinct views of the human mind: as a mirror reflecting the world and as a lamp illuminating it. The works on show date between 1962 and 1986 and together provide an opportunity to explore the presence of these ideas in contemporary art. The mirror and the lamp have also come (by the use of distortion and fragmentation) to allow artists to explore the complexity and uncertainty of contemporary experience.

Helen Chadwick's *Vanitas* (1985) consists of a small Venetian mirror in the shape of a human face and is engraved with an image of weeping eyes. When the viewer looks into the mirror they see their own eyes and face reflected in the glass and surrounded by elaborate drapery. On one side the drapes are in fine condition and are gathered by a woman's arm. On the other side the drapery is tattered and torn and is gathered by a haunting skeletal arm. The work is made from collaged photocopies (a technique which fully exploits the possibilities of modern technology) but nonetheless is closely connected to a traditional form of painting intended to remind the viewer of the constant presence and inevitability of death. The *Two Candles* (1982) and *Skull* (1983) of Gerhard Richter although painted in a realistic manner also refer back to symbolic elements within the tradition of *Vanitas* paintings.

The lamp is seen in the projected light of Christian Boltanski's *Shadows* (1984) and in James Coleman's enigmatic *Connemara Landscape* (1980). It also refers to the images of childhood inspiration in Dokoupil's paintings of the young boys in Gilbert & George's photo-pieces.

This exhibition has been selected by Frank Francis of The Fruitmarket Gallery and critic and writer Michael Newman. The Mirror and & Lamp will travel to the ICA.

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