

A still life by Chardin
Lisson Gallery, London
7 July – 26 August, 2017
Organized by Maxwell Graham

With works by Audrey Barker, Hanne Darboven, Moyra Davey, Jef Geys, Dan Graham, Pati Hill, Henrik Olesen, Cameron Rowland, Maud Sulter, B. Wurtz, Trisha Donnelly, Laurie Parsons, and Cathy Wilkes

Jean-Siméon Chardin was born in 1699 in Paris, the son of a cabinet maker. He spent his entire life in Paris. His first wife died in the fifth year of their marriage. Both of his daughters died young, one at the age of three one at the age of one. His son, Jean-Pierre, also a painter, was kidnapped for a time by English pirates off the coast of Genoa, and drowned in a canal by his own will in Venice in 1772, at the age of 41. That same year Jean-Siméon Chardin had kidney stones.

In the hierarchy of genres, which was broadly accepted in the 18th century, history painting was ranked the highest, followed by portrait painting, then genre painting, then landscape painting, then animal painting, and then Still Life. More than anything else, Chardin painted still lives, often very slowly, and often at a very small scale. He painted wicker baskets, plumbs, breadcrumbs, pewter dishes, grapes, a silver goblet, glasses of water, a pestle and a mortar, walnuts, pewter jugs, earthenware pitchers, flasks, dead partridges, dead hares, dead salmon, dead rays, apples, Seville oranges, dead mallards, onions, leeks, turnips, straw, chestnuts, more knives, teapots, apricots, olives, wild strawberries, white carnations, coffee pots, a copper cistern, stone ledges and white tablecloths.

“Chardin is the irrefutable witness who makes other painters look like liars.” [1]

In 1728 Chardin was accepted into the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. In 1742 he was quite ill and neither finished nor exhibited any paintings. In 1757 he moved into the Louvre, where he would spend the rest of his life. In 1770 he became the first painter to the king and the director of the Académie. He died on December 6, 1779 at the age of 80. In his estate he held approximately 5,638 livres of furniture.

Marcel Proust wrote in 1895: “Had you not already been unconsciously experiencing the pleasure that comes from looking at a humble scene or a still-life you would not have felt it in your heart when Chardin, in his imperative and brilliant language, conjured it up. Your consciousness was too inert to descend to his depth. Your awareness had to wait until Chardin entered into the scene to raise it to his level of pleasure. Then you recognized it and, for the first time appreciated it. If, when looking at Chardin, you can say to yourself, ‘This is intimate, this is comfortable, this is as living as a kitchen,’ then, when you are walking around a kitchen, you will say to yourself, ‘This is special, this is great, this is as beautiful as a Chardin.’ ... In rooms where you see nothing but the expression of the banality of others, the reflection of your own boredom, Chardin enters like light, giving to each object its color, evoking from the eternal night that shrouded them all the essence of life, still or animated, with the meaning of its form, so striking to the eye, so obscure to the mind. ... an ordinary piece of pottery is as beautiful as a precious stone. The painter has proclaimed the divine equality of all things before the spirit that contemplates them, the light that embellishes them.” [2]

Malraux wrote in 1951: “Chardin is not a minor 18th-century master who was more delicate than his rivals; like Corot he is a subtly imperious *simplifier*. His quiet talent demolished the baroque still-life of Holland and made decorators out of his contemporaries; in France, nothing can rival his work, from the death of Watteau to the Revolution.” [3]

Audrey Melville Barker had the seventh exhibition at Lisson Gallery, in London, from 1-30 December 1967. In a review of the exhibition in *The Observer*, Nigel Gosling wrote “The English would seem natural practitioners of the eerie art of the ‘Magic Box’ like those of the American Cornell. But few do, but several of Audrey Barker’s ‘Compartments’ have the right fragile mystery.” Earlier that year, Barker visited Joseph Cornell in Utopia Park, Queens, New York and he gave her two of his boxes. Barker was born in London in 1932. Tuberculosis contracted during the second world war, led to eight years of childhood in a hospital, lasting bone damage and arthritis. She made little work in the 1970s due to illness. She purchased and restored a mill which she developed into an art space and shelter for persons with disabilities. She refused invitations from the ICA in London because of a lack of proper accessibility to upper galleries. Barker’s work ranged from doll making to painting to exhibition organising, often focusing on alternative sensorial modes of communication. At

an exhibition she conceived in 1997 at the Blackie Gallery in Liverpool, a fax machine was installed, on which visitors corresponded with Barker. These faxes were then displayed on the walls of the gallery.

In 1973, there was another exhibition at Lisson Gallery, by an American artist, which took place in the basement.

Pati Hill worked as a model, and was on the cover of *Elle* Magazine in 1950. She wrote numerous books of poetry, four novels including the seminal *IMPOSSIBLE DREAMS* and contributed on many occasions to the *Paris Review*. In 1962 she began collecting “informational art.” Sometime after that “I began collecting objects. I kept them in a laundry hamper and when the hamper overflowed I would take them to a copier in a nearby town and record the ones that still intrigued me, then throw the originals away or put them back into circulation.” In 1975 she had her first exhibition at Kornblee Gallery in New York. She was married to the New York gallerist Paul Bianchini, who hosted an interesting exhibition in 1965. About the copy machine Hill observed “It is the side of your subject that you do *not* see that is reproduced.” [4]

“When I first decided on this box of photos as something to exhibit, I was excited. Having had increasingly ambivalent feelings about exhibiting a fixed object in a fixed environment, I was searching for new entrances on a given situation. This would be the same old song, but because it was so disarmingly personal and expository, it would involve me more completely in the situation.” Laurie Parsons, 1991

[1] Green, Julien. *Oeuvres completes*, III, pp.1348-9, 1949

[2] Proust, Marcel. “Chardin: The Essence of Things” trans. Mina Curtiss, in *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, ed. John Sturrock, pp.100-107, 1994

[3] Rosenberg, Pierre. *Chardin*, pp.234, 2000

[4] Hill, Pati. *Letters to Jill : a catalogue and some notes on copying*, pp. 18, 22, 118, 1979



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Installation View



Archival Exhibition Documentation
Photographs by Jef Geys
A still life by Chardin
Lisson Gallery, 7 July - 26 August 2017



Archival Exhibition Documentation
Photographs by Nicholas Logsdail
Michael Asher
Lisson Gallery
24 August - 16 September 1973

"My proposal for this space was to cut an architectural reveal, 1/4 inch wide and 1 1/2 inches deep, into the wall at floor level, around the perimeter of this room. The architectural reveal began and ended at the entry/exit passageway, without turning into the passageway, since that functioned as a transition zone between two exhibition spaces."



Archival Exhibition Documentation
Audrey Barker
Lisson Gallery
1 - 30 December 1967



Laurie Parsons
Box of Photos, 1991
Assorted materials
14 x 43.2 x 68.6 cm
5 1/2 x 17 x 27 in



Laurie Parsons
Box of Photos, 1991
Assorted materials
14 x 43.2 x 68.6 cm
5 1/2 x 17 x 27 in



B. Wurtz
Stereo, 1986
Wood, metal
50.2 x 55.2 x 17.8 cm
19 3/4 x 21 3/4 x 7 in



B. Wurtz
Stereo, 1986
Wood, metal
50.2 x 55.2 x 17.8 cm
19 3/4 x 21 3/4 x 7 in



Moyra Davey
Hoboken, 1999-2017
4 c-prints, tape, postage, and ink
Overall dimensions: 20 x 49 in



Moyra Davey
Hoboken, 1999-2017
(detail)



Henrik Olesen
Untitled, 2017
Wood, acrylic, screws
199 x 5.5 x 4 cm
78 3/8 x 2 1/8 x 1 5/8 in



Henrik Olesen
Untitled, 2017
Wood, acrylic, screws
199 x 5.5 x 4 cm
78 3/8 x 2 1/8 x 1 5/8 in



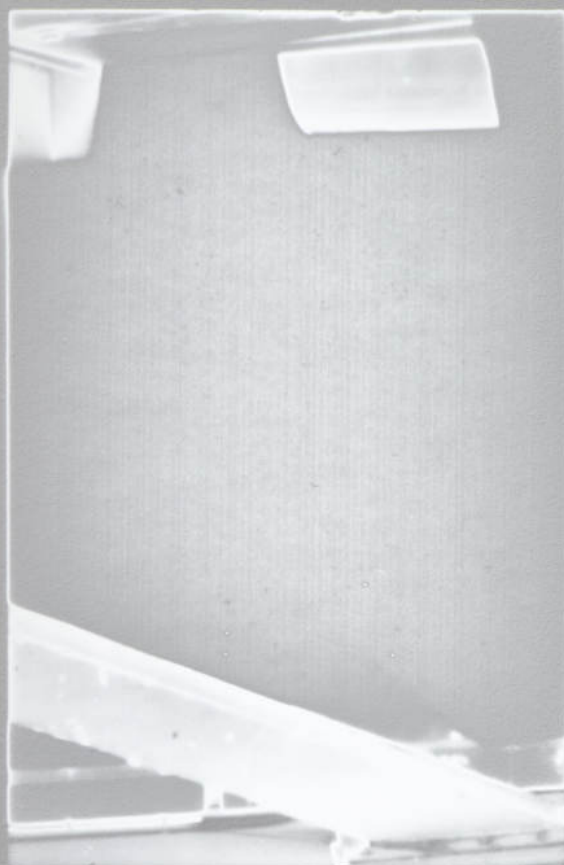
Audrey Barker
A Box for Nicholas Roberts, 1967
Mixed media
53.3 x 45.7 cm
21 x 18 in



Audrey Barker
A Box for Nicholas Roberts, 1967
Mixed media
53.3 x 45.7 cm
21 x 18 in



Dan Graham
Model for Triangular Pavilion with Shoji Screen, 1990
Aluminium, glass and maple wood
87 x 87.5 x 76 cm
34 2/8 x 34 4/8 x 29 7/8 in



Trisha Donnelly
Astoria 36, 2014
Projection of digital images
Dimensions variable



B. Wurtz
Untitled (Brackets and shelf #1), 1986
Wood, metal brackets, wire
45.7 x 24.8 x 27.9 cm
18 x 9 3/4 x 11 in



B. Wurtz
Untitled (Brackets and shelf #1), 1986
Wood, metal brackets, wire
45.7 x 24.8 x 27.9 cm
18 x 9 3/4 x 11 in



Pati Hill
Untitled (paving stone, Versailles), c. 1981
Black and white photocopier print
29.9 x 21 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches

Pati Hill
Untitled (sleeve, from the series Photocopied Garments), c. 1976
Black and white photocopier print
35.6 x 21.6 cm
14 x 8 1/2 in

Pati Hill
Untitled (fragment of Grand Trianon, Versailles), c. 1981
Black and white photocopier print
21.6 x 35.6 cm
8 1/2 x 14 in



Pati Hill
Untitled (paving stone, Versailles), c. 1981
Black and white photocopier print
29.9 x 21 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 inches



Pati Hill
Untitled (sleeve, from the series Photocopied Garments), c.1976
Black and white photocopier print
35.6 x 21.6 cm
14 x 8 1/2 in



Pati Hill
Untitled (fragment of Grand Trianon, Versailles), c. 1981
Black and white photocopier print
21.6 x 35.6 cm
8 1/2 x 14 in



Cameron Rowland
Loot, 2013
Cut and dented copper tube, cardboard box
35.6 x 50.8 x 30.5 cm
14 x 20 x 12 in

At some point basic utilities like electricity and water were services controlled by the state, because they relied so heavily of public infrastructure. More and more these flows are valved by private corporations. Abandoned buildings and sometimes those still used, are broken into and stripped of their copper piping. This is then sold to scrap yards where it is cut down and smaller rods are inserted into thicker ones to make the densest bulk. Rowland bought Loot as is. All of these transactions are extra-legal activities. Copper has a function, its base material has an inherent use value, just as gold and diamonds also carry utilitarian properties.

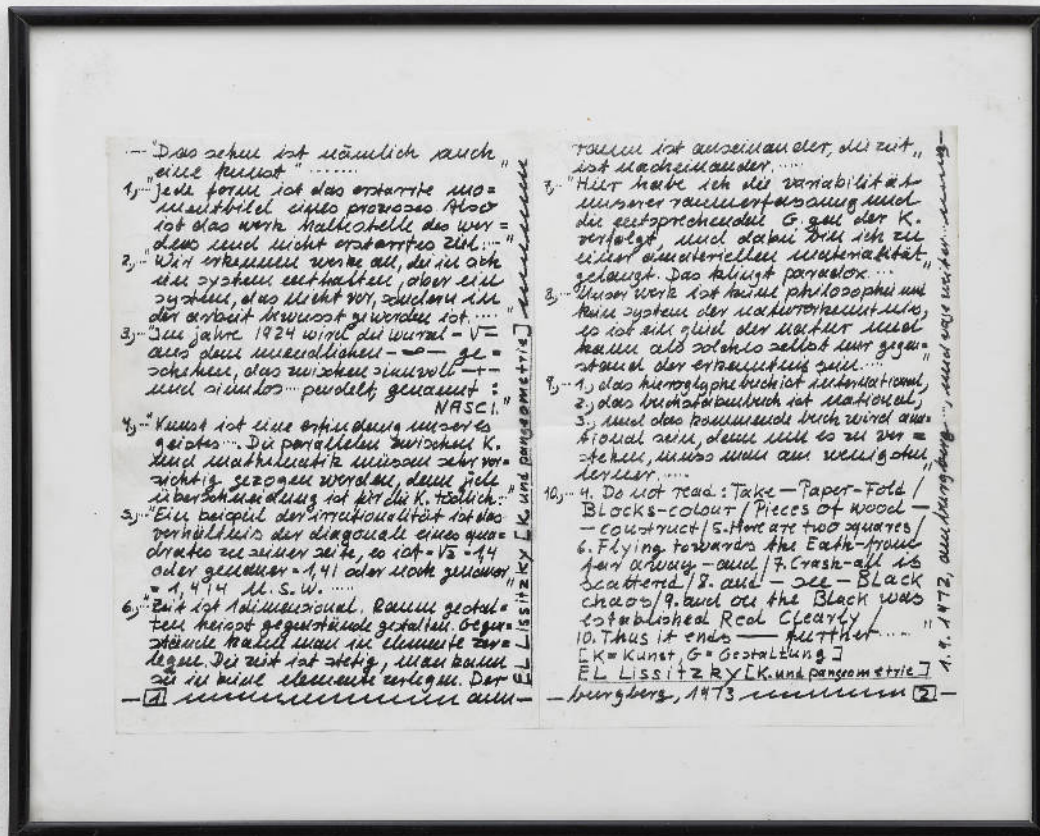


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Maud Sulter
The Alabama Branch of My Family Tree, 1988
Folded card and burnt paper
23 x 2.1 cm
9 x 7/8 in

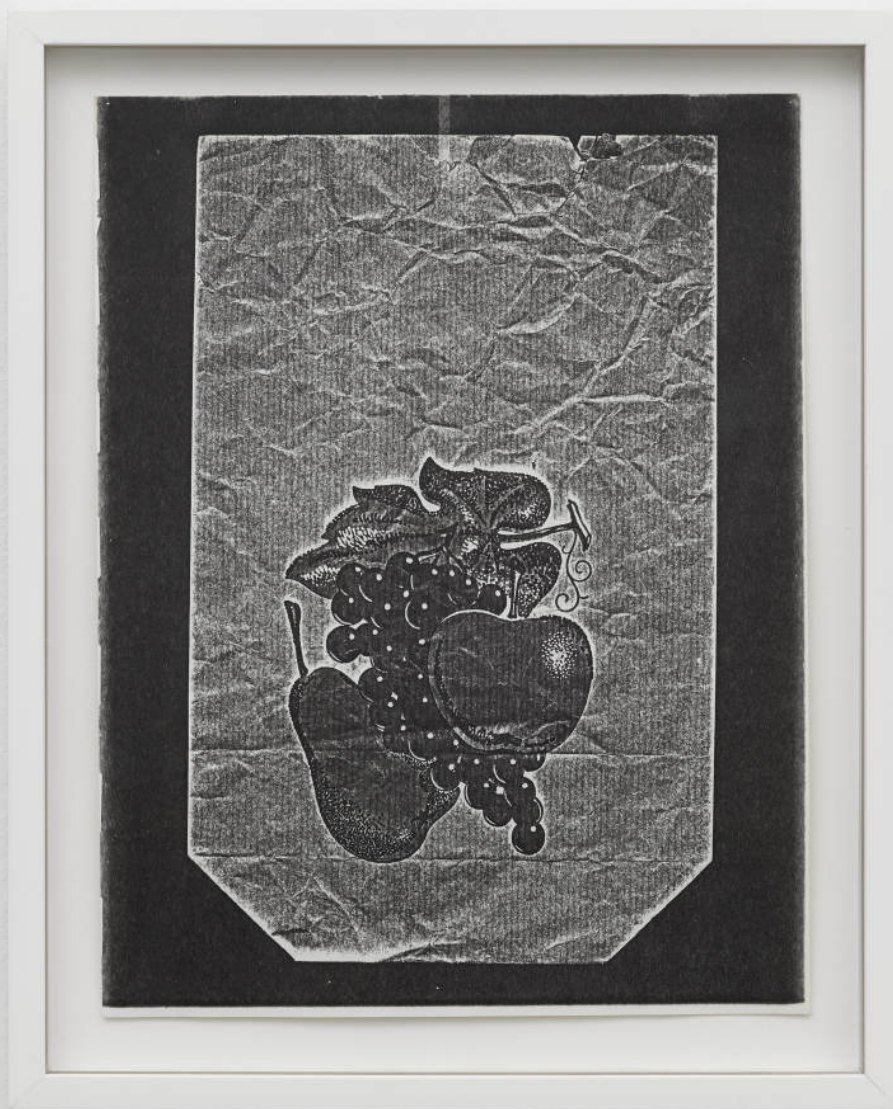


Hanne Darboven
Ohne Titel, c. 1985
Xerox and pen on paper
22 x 28 cm
8 5/8 x 11 in



Pati Hill
Untitled (paper bag), c. 1977-1979
Black and white photocopier print
27.9 x 21.6 cm
11 x 8 1/2 inches

Pati Hill
Untitled (paper bag printed with fruit image), c. 1977-1979
Black and white photocopier print
27.9 x 21.6 cm
11 x 8 1/2 inches



Pati Hill
Untitled (paper bag), c. 1977-1979
Black and white photocopier print
27.9 x 21.6 cm
11 x 8 1/2 inches



Pati Hill
Untitled (paper bag printed with fruit image), c. 1977-1979
Black and white photocopier print
27.9 x 21.6 cm
11 x 8 1/2 inches



Henrik Olesen
Untitled, 2017
Wood, acrylic, screws
56 x 167 x 3.5 cm
22 x 65 3/4 x 1 3/8 in



Jef Geys
Snake Camouflage, 1986
Cardboard box, faux snake skin wrapping paper
60 x 40 x 28 cm
23 5/8 x 15 3/4 x 11 in



Jef Geys
Snake Camouflage, 1986
Cardboard box, faux snake skin wrapping paper
60 x 40 x 28 cm
23 5/8 x 15 3/4 x 11 in



Audrey Barker
Untitled, 1964
Newspaper, ribbon, paint on wood and galvanised steel
31.3 x 27 cm
12 3/8 x 10 5/8 in



Pati Hill
Untitled (white gloves, from the series Photocopied
Garments), c. 1976
Black and white photocopier print
21 x 34.9 cm
8 1/4 x 13 3/4 in



B. Wurtz
Untitled (Shelf), 1986
Wood, metal, screws
22.9 x 22.2 x 10.2 cm
9 x 8 3/4 x 4 in

Flash Art

A Still Life by Chardin *Lisson Gallery / London*



Laurie Parsons, "Box of Photos" (1991). Courtesy the Artist and Lisson Gallery, London.

Marcel Proust praised the eighteenth-century painter Jean-Siméon Chardin for charging still life painting with the vibrancy of intimate secrets, revealed in mundane and humble subjects. The exhibition "A still life by Chardin," curated by Essex Street director Maxwell Graham, proposes a selection of works that similarly display a disarming modesty and economy of material.

A set of postcard-size photographs line up the wall at reception. Documentation from Lisson's early history shows the gallery in 1973 when Michael Asher proposed to cut an architectural reveal into the gallery walls at floor level. At the time, the intervention was so discreet that it left visitors confounded about walking in an empty room, yet today it has become a signifier of the white cube. Another black-and-white image shows an assemblage box by Audrey Barker, exhibited at Lisson in 1967. A compartment from that same exhibition is included in this show. Reminiscent of works by Joseph Cornell, a friend of Barker, the assemblage exudes a delicate beauty in its essential composition.

Barker, who suffered debilitating bone damage as a result of childhood illness, became an advocate for people with disabilities. Like her, other artists in the exhibition saw art as a vehicle for social engagement. Jef Geys worked as a public school teacher as well as being the editor and publisher of his local newspaper since the 1960s. After attracting attention for her conceptual interventions in the 1980s, Laurie Parsons dropped out of the art world to devote herself to social work and campaigning for the rights of the mentally ill.

Time spent with objects seems to charge them with a heightened presence. An archival cardboard box of ephemera and personal photographs by Parsons becomes a touching memento of intimate moments. Pati Hill, also a model and accomplished novelist, produced poetic images by photocopying common objects such as gloves, paving stones or garments. These images emerge like ghostly presences from intensely saturated blacks, created using her own IBM copier. Moyra Davey's photographs of her own studio, calibrated compositions interrupted by postmarks, folds and bits of tape, become vehicles between the intimate and the public space of the gallery.

In its understated reflection on capturing the essence of things, "A still life by Chardin" offers a poignant alternative to today's prevailing modes of operating in the art world. The exhibition reveals personal stories of integrity, told by artists for whom an ethical engagement with the world is inescapable.

by Silvia Sgualdini
August 11, 2017

ARTWORKS LONDON



Exhibition Review

A still life by Chardin

By Philomena Epps

Lisson Gallery, Lisson Street, London

Fri 7 July – Sat 26 August 2017

Lisson Gallery's summer group show has been organised by Maxwell Graham, founder of New York's Essex Street Gallery. Titled *A still life by Chardin*, the premise of the exhibition is to explore the influence of the 18th century French court painter, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, on contemporary artists. In the 18th century, the hierarchy of the painting genre heralded history and portraits. Chardin's artistic pursuit - the still life - ranked the lowest. In addition to this, Chardin sought to record the mundane and the quotidian, prioritising crockery, wicker baskets, tablecloths, over the quintessential, sumptuous bowl of fruit. Cited as 'irrefutable witness', this unconventional, modest, and subtle approach meant Proust, and later Malraux, posthumously lauded him as one of the greatest artists. 'In France, nothing can rival his work, from the death of Watteau to the Revolution'. This impression of modesty also feels crucial to the show. The pace is slow and gentle - often a rare experience in the contemporary gallery. There is an evocative stillness, and a generosity of space that allows for the viewer to pause and think. In fact, Graham himself references Chardin 'as his yoga' - akin to an out of body experience.

Dan Graham's *Model of Triangular Pavilion with Shoji Screen*, 1990, an emblem of Zen meditation, is a reminder that patience and reflection is key. The following works linger in the mind long after leaving Lisson Street. The exhibition at large seems to be a successful embodiment of a Chardin still life. The artist's humble spirit is revived through a careful selection of artists who have focused on the minutiae of everyday objects or commonplace materials - wood, cardboard, postcards, paper. True to conceptual form, these are not materials free of critical associations. Engaged with the ethics of recycle and re-use, B. Wurtz puts the discarded on a pedestal. Metal from a stereo system, or old shelf brackets, become beautiful - familiar and strange. Cameron Rowland's *Loot*, 2013, is a cardboard box filled with broken copper pipes, however, Rowland is engaging in a furious critique of the material, in relation to sociological and economic arguments concerned with the selling of public art services to private corporations.

A series of A6 archival photographs are tacked to the wall by reception. Excluding a photograph by Jef Geys, the rest are archival documents from two exhibitions in Lisson Gallery history. An assemblage box from Audrey Barker's 1967 exhibition, and an intervention in 1973, when Michael Asher cut an architectural reveal into the gallery wall. *A Box for Nicholas Roberts*, 1967, from Barker's same exhibition appears further into the exhibition - a pared back, mixed media exploration of assemblage. Concepts of physicality, disability, access, and the anti-institutional run through the show. Barker took a ten-year break from making art in the 1970s due to a severe illness; in the 1980s she began working on installations that explored both

physical and intellectual accessibility, famously rejecting a show at the ICA due to their lack of disabled access.

The artist as activist, social practitioner, or teacher is another nexus of the exhibition. To return to the idea of the modest artist, these are individuals who are engaged with life outside the art world bubble. Much of Geys' work is invested in a critique surrounding the conditions of the art trade. Standing outside from his role as 'artist', Geys worked as a public school teacher in Balen from 1960–1989, and since the 1960s he has been the editor and publisher of his local newspaper, the Kempens Informatieblad. Laurie Parsons only made art for a short period between the late 1980s and early 1990s before choosing to dedicate her life to advocacy and social work: working with the homeless, and children and adults with mental health problems. *Box of Photos*, 1991, is akin to something one might find under anyone's bed, a cardboard shoebox filled with personal letters, photos, and notes. In its initial showing, exhibited in tandem with a work by Félix González-Torres, the spectator was invited to rifle through, and take something away with them. The idea of the personal continues to filter through the exhibition. Maud Sulter was a Ghanian and Scottish artist, poet, curator, and active feminist. Her folded card work, *The Alabama Branch of My Family Tree*, 1986, was one of several which used burnt paper, and produced during the critical decade that she lived in London and was engaged with the seminal Black Arts Movement.

Other artists engage with their own private vocabularies or creative significations. Hanne Darboven's two works from 1985 are emblematic of her practice, which engaged with seriality and minimalism, often creating deeply complex hand-drawn numerical or visual systems. The notion of the index, or categorisation, is crucial to Pati Hill's *Untitled* series, 1977-1979, in which she used an IBM photocopier to create a visual record of objects - from the commonplace; paper bags and shirt sleeves, to paving stones, and even a fragment of dust from the Grand Trianon in Versailles. An image of fruit is printed onto one of these paper bags. Here, we find the most opaque reference to Chardin - an unconventional, unostentatious still life - but conceived through the technology of the twentieth century. Zooming in and framing the unnoticed details of everyday life is also unveiled in the photographs of Moyra Davey. *Hoboken*, 1999-2017, is an intimate portrait of her studio. Profiling old tubes, this is another realisation of Chardin's messy kitchen table. When Davey sends her photographs to be exhibited; she folds them up and mails them. They are affixed to the wall like that, complete with the fold creases, handwritten address, stamps, and ad hoc bits of tape. Our perspective, what we expect to encounter, what we deem art, and who we deem 'Artists', is challenged.