

EVENTS

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09 Oct, 4–6pm **PERFORMANCE**
UNFOLDING

Presenting artists working across multiple diasporas, from Hong Kong to Angola, India and Istanbul, *Unfolding* will bring together performances by Istanbul Queer Art Collective, Januario Jano, Jasleen Kaur and ShumGhost John.

Folded up in envelopes and sent across the world, Dittborn's *Airmail Paintings* were invented in order to escape the pressures of Chile's military dictatorship. Just as his practice was a vehicle to confront violent histories, for these artists performance becomes a means to deal with political oppression, cultural dissonance and grief. Through intimate conversations, radical drag and living sculpture, they process traumas, queer national borders and tackle injustice.

To book tickets and find out more about our events programme visit www.goldsmithscca.art/events

CCA CHANNEL

A pre-recorded interview between Eugenio Dittborn, Felipe Cooper (Dittborn's Studio Manger), Ana Maria Risco (Professor of Philosophy, Aesthetics and Art Theory, University of Chile) and Natasha Hoare (Curator, Goldsmiths CCA) will be available on the Channel section of the website from 8 October.

To view visit www.goldsmiths.art/cca-channel

EXHIBITION GUIDE

EUGENIO DITTBORN

Airmail Paintings
17 Sep – 12 Dec 2021

'I invented these folded paintings to get out from this place, to be in the world'
- Eugenio Dittborn

Airmail Paintings is the first exhibition of Chilean artist Eugenio Dittborn's work in the UK since 1993. It features historical and recent works sent to the gallery using couriers, honouring his renowned use of airmail. Since the 1980s, Dittborn's large-scale works have been folded and dispatched in envelopes to galleries worldwide, surmounting restrictions of movement created by national borders, oppressive governments, geographical distance, and more recently imposed travel restrictions under Covid.

Each painting is folded into an airmail envelope, providing the works with their distinctive 16-part grid. The moment of their opening and display produces a large-scale effect via the slightest of means – a guerrilla claim for space by an artist knowingly outside of the 'centre', and not without humour.

Traversing international networks of mail distribution, his works powerfully transcend the spatial barriers between the Global South and Western world, tracing the lines of colonial histories of subjugation and exploitation in reverse. The journey the works make is an intrinsic part of them and their global routes have been described as being like 'a giant scale writing...hanging in the sky.'¹

Works in the exhibition have been selected to span different media employed across Dittborn's oeuvre, as well as film works that are less often exhibited. Originally using brown Kraft paper, Dittborn later moved to fabric, across whose surface he reproduces found images, texts and drawings. Fabric allows for the artist to stain the surface with pigments, moving his work gradually from monochrome to colour, and counterpointing the automatism of the pour with the controlled composition of the photographic or drawn images. The twinned techniques of staining and folding allow the work a double condition between the status of letter and painting.

Gleaned from an array of sources, including newspapers, anthropological magazines and how-to-draw manuals, Dittborn selects each image because they "amazed, disturbed, frightened, and sometimes tickled" him. Unfolded now across the decades, each combines different moments in both Dittborn's personal history and Chilean national history –coming into direct contact across the pictorial plane. Through collaged use of reproduced images, printed and circulated through

various media, Dittborn points to the impossibility of origins in the age of endless mechanical reproduction. This is a charged statement given the context of colonial history in South America, nation building in the wake of genocides of indigenous people (photographs of whom feature directly in the work), and the caesura the dictatorship caused in Chilean national life. As Chilean art critic Adriana Valdes observes "perhaps the distinction that is drawn between collective and individual memory is not wholly tenable. Perhaps the subconscious seizes on them and condenses them both, as in dreams, in works of art."

Dittborn's works are forever in transit and are altered by their passage through different contexts with different possible readings; each is accompanied by an envelope that details its evolving exhibition record. Never fully arriving, they are also never fully complete, remaining open-ended artworks that truly inhabit our globalised culture. Dittborn also includes diagrams and drawing manuals that foreground the contingency of our perception of images as truths; for example, the white rabbit figure in *Pieta (6+3+206+14)*, *Airmail Painting No. 139* will cast a black rabbit afterimage on any surface you look at afterwards.

Particular figures and motifs appear across multiple works, brought into jarring juxtapositions that cut through time, source material, and purpose. For example, a figure from a drawing manual sits next to a photo of a displaced indigenous person. Many of these reoccur and investigate ideas of disappearance, appearance, travel and being frozen in time. One such reoccurring character is Jemmy Button (in *Viajar, sin Embargo Airmail Painting No. 78*); an indigenous man who, in 1830, was traded to the captain of HMS Beagle (the same ship that Darwin sailed on) and brought back to England where he learned the English language and customs, and was a subject of fascination. He received his name as he was allegedly purchased for a button. He eventually returned to Chile and soon shed his learned clothes and customs. As a figure who has left and returned, he relates to the key concerns of Dittborn's practice; the impossibility of return when the original context has changed, and the

¹ Cubitt, Sean. "Retrato Hablado, The Airmail Paintings of Eugenio Dittborn". Third Text (London) (Winter 1990)

FLOORPLAN

transformation of a body or object as it moves to a new place.

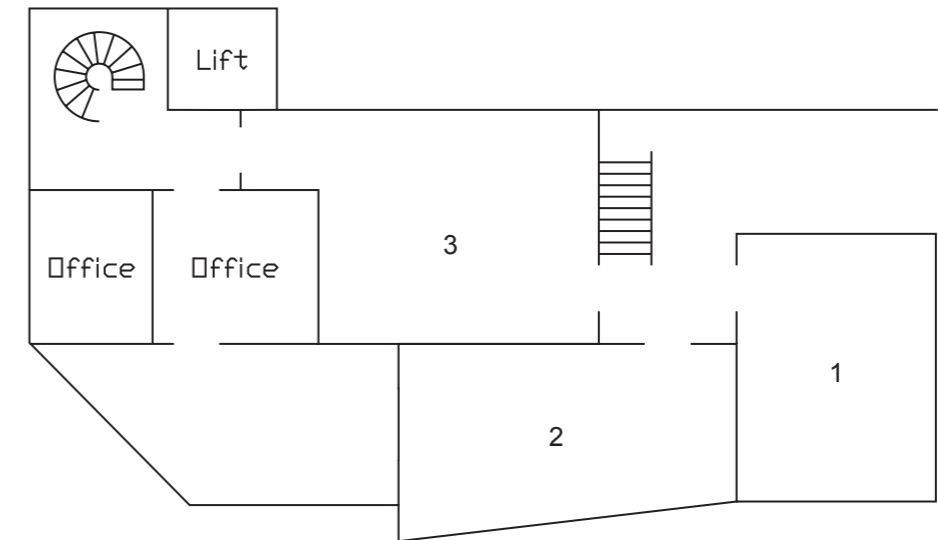
The body in extremis and cadavers are also important and reoccur. For instance, the prostrate figure of the Cuban boxer Benny "Kid" Paret, who died after a defending his title, appears in the work *Pieta (6+3+206+14)*, *Airmail Painting No. 139*; an image that is seared in Dittborn's mind. Or the image of the mummified body of John Torrington, seen in the work *To Return (YVR)*, *Airmail Painting No. 102*, who was a sailor on the ship HMS Terror and perished early in the doomed British expedition to discover the Northern Passage. Perfectly preserved, Torrington never returned to his point of origin, and his petrified body stubbornly refuses to return to the earth.

The force of image making as a tool of colonial control is also present in Dittborn's work. The works *Where Everything is Twice* *Airmail Painting No. 173*, *Corche*, *Airmail Painting No. 163*, and *Heráldica* *Airmail Painting No. 156* all contain sections of engravings by Theodore de Bry from his 'Collected travels in the east Indies and west Indies' (1590-1634) which includes over 600 plates depicting South America as described by explorers of the time. De Bry himself never visited the continent, and the illustrations selected by Dittborn are from Vol. 2, which radically sensationalised cannibalistic practices and was responsible for building a perception of indigenous Brazilians as being primitive and depraved, thereby justifying European domination.

Included in the exhibition are works from the series *Historia del rostro (History of the Human Face)*, which bear faces drawn by the artists' daughter in stark juxtaposition with ID images made by police, portraits of indigenous people of South America, and self-portraits made by inmates of a psychiatric hospital in Santiago at Dittborn's invitation. Sat side by side, these images point to the problem of how we define identity, the presumptions we bring to images and people, and more broadly, the limitations in our ability to visualise a globalised world.

The 27th History of the Human Face (Lejía) *Airmail Painting No. 158* and *The 18th History of the Human Face (Eyes of Glory)* *Airmail Painting No. 109* include images of the Selk'nam people of Tierra del Fuego, who were largely exterminated by colonial forces. Confronting the viewer with a direct gaze, these photographs are vivid moments in which the power of the state upon a subject is fixed and inscribed, and uncomfortable examples of the ethnographic gaze through which indigenous populations were 'possessed' by their colonizers. The strangeness of different flows of time are palpable in these photographic images; the indigenous time of tribal land use is measured against the imposition of the time of modernity.

First Floor



LIST OF WORKS

1 CANDIDA & ZAK GERTLER GALLERY

The 18th History of the Human Face (Eyes of Glory) *Airmail Painting No. 109* (1993)
Paint, stitching and photosilkscreen on 4 sections of non-woven fabric

Heráldica, *Airmail Painting No. 156* (2003-04)
Tincture, photosilkscreen, polygal, and stitching on 2 sections of duck fabric

Coudre Provisoirement à Longs Points *Airmail Painting No. 183* (2011-12)
Tincture, photosilkscreen, cotton tissue and stitching on 6 sections of cotton fabric

2 DASKALOPOULOS TANK GALLERY

Pieta (6+3+206+14), *Airmail Painting No. 139* (2001)
Photosilkscreen, poplin and stitching on 1 section of duck fabric

Corche, *Airmail Painting No. 163*, (2004)
Tincture, polygal, sateen, stitching and photosilkscreen on 1 section of duck fabric

Where Everything is Twice, *Airmail Painting No. 173*, (2007)
Tincture, stitching, texido and photosilkscreen on 4 sections of duck fabric

For Details, The Bristles of The Brushes, *Airmail Painting No. 176*, (2007)

Tincture, stitching, embroidery, texido and photosilkscreen on 2 sections of duck fabric

FILMS (shown on a loop)
La Historia de la Fisica / The Hlstory of Physics (1986 / 2008), 13mins 07 secs

5 Bocetos Preparatorios Para La Historia de la Música / 5 Preparatory Sketches for the History of Music (1981 / 2008), 11 mins 41 secs

El Crusoe (1990 / 2008)
16 mins 24 secs
All SD Video, 4:3, color & b/w, sound

3 BRIDGET RILEY GALLERY

The 27th History of the Human Face (Lejía) *Airmail Painting No. 158*, (2004)
Tincture, photosilkscreen, polygal and stitching

Viajar, sin Embargo, *Airmail Painting No. 78*, (1986-2007)
Tincture, buttons, ink and photosilkscreen on 2 sections of kraft paper

To Return (YVR), *Airmail Painting No. 102*, (1993)
Paint, stitching, charcoal, and photosilkscreen on 6 sections of non-woven fabric