

## Susan Hiller

13 November 2015 – 9 January 2016  
27 & 52 Bell Street, London

In her debut exhibition at Lisson Gallery, Susan Hiller will present a number of recently discovered early pieces as well as celebrated classics and new works made this year. This is the artist's first solo exhibition in London since her Tate retrospective of 2011.

A widely influential artist, Hiller has spent the past six decades questioning belief systems and the production of meaning. Her strategies and methodologies involve the examination of real and imagined phenomena, probing the unseen and the unheard in order to create art that evokes absences, memories and ghosts. Hiller has described her work as "a kind of archaeological investigation, uncovering something to make a different kind of sense of it" and "concentrating on what is unspoken, unacknowledged, unexplained and overlooked." Her art has repeatedly been groundbreaking in its diversity of materials and forms, combining an astonishing range of media in works that join sight with sound, primitive desires with sophisticated technology and art with popular culture.

Occupying both gallery locations on Bell Street, the exhibition loosely groups Hiller's practice into four interwoven and on-going themes: transformation, the unconscious, belief systems and the role of the artist as collector and curator. Rare pieces from the '70s and '80s articulate the role of transformation in art: *Painting Blocks* (1970–84), made by cutting and re-assembling her paintings to form sculptural objects labelled with the dates and dimensions of their original, and *Another* (1986), a small glass 'relic' filled with the ashes of the artist's burnt paintings.

Hiller investigates the unconscious and the paranormal in works that hold belief and disbelief in equal tension. Works employing automatic writings, such as *Mary Essene* (1975–81), *Alphabet* (1985) and *Facing the Real* (2015), explore telepathy and the unconscious transmission of ideas and images, blurring the delineation between rational and irrational behaviours. Photomat works – dating from the early '70s and not shown since that decade – explore the ghost in the machine, combining portraiture with the automatic workings of photo booth machines. Their grid formats are echoed in *Lucid Dreams II* (1983) and other pieces Hiller made in the early '80s which vividly evoke the subconscious in their assemblage of imagery as though seen through window panes, each hauntingly mysterious and bearing a legend of indecipherable writing.

Three major installations exploring ideas of the unconscious and/or paranormal will also be on view: *Belshazzar's Feast* (1983–84) – the first video installation work bought by Tate and one of the first artist video programmes to be broadcast in its entirety on UK and USA television – brings together notions of belief and the unconscious. The campfire version of this work (shown here for the first time) consists of a stack of television sets whose screens show a flickering fire accompanied by a soundtrack of Hiller's improvised singing, whispered newspaper reports of

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people seeing ghostly images on their television sets, her young son's recollections of the Biblical story and Rembrandt's painting of the same title all combining to create a vehicle for reverie. *Wild Talents*, a vast installation from 1997, incorporates two wall-sized projections, a small TV set and a ring of votive lights. The large screens mine the horror film genre to explore fantasies of occult powers in young children, while the small screen simultaneously shows documentary material from a pilgrimage to visit children who have had authenticated religious visions, thus suggesting a cultural continuity in different registers of this belief in miraculous powers. *Resounding (Infrared)* (2013) locates first-hand reports from people who have seen or claim to have seen unidentified flying objects, mysterious lights in the sky and other unexplained phenomena within a mesmerising backdrop of sound frequencies and visual patterns translated from the Big Bang and other cosmic phenomena, linking cosmology, dreams and contemporary visionary experiences.

Hiller's investigation into belief and the unconscious is continued in works that celebrate other artists. *Emergency Case: Homage to Joseph Beuys* (1969–2011) presents first-aid cabinets containing miniature phials filled with water taken from holy wells and streams, referencing both Beuys's ability to endow ordinary materials with sacred values and persistent popular myths. *Homage to Marcel Duchamp: Auras Triptych* (2011) takes shape as an altar illuminated by photographic 'aura' portraits of three ordinary people, replacing the traditional icons of saints with halos. *In Homage to Gertrude Stein* (2011), Hiller stuffs an Art Deco writing desk with books on automatic writing and related subjects, displaying the celebrated author's rejected interest in automatism and related subjects.

The transformation of materials, auratic visions and the homages to works by others come together in Hiller's most recent multi-panelled work *On the Edge* (2015). Taking as its starting point her seminal work *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972-1976), *On the Edge* presents 482 views of 219 locations on the edges of Britain, where the rough sea meets the land, as represented by anonymous photographers and artists in postcards collected and appreciated by Hiller over many years. These images are tiny echoes of the grand tradition of the sublime, collected on holidays; they are cracks in the polite surface of everyday life, hints of desires for wildness and fantasy, aspects which Hiller emphasizes in her large re-imaginings of these postcard images in works such as *Towards an Autobiography of Night* (1983) and *Rough Dawns* (2015).

## About the artist

With a multimedia practice extending over 40 years, Susan Hiller is one of the most influential artists of her generation. Since first making innovative use of audio and visual technology in the early 1980s, her ground-breaking installations, multi-screen videos and audio works have achieved international recognition. Each of Hiller's works is based on specific cultural artefacts from our society, which she uses as basic materials. Many pieces explore the liminality of certain phenomena including the practice of automatic writing (*Sisters of Menon*, 1972/79), near death experiences (*Channels*, 2013), collective experiences of unconscious, subconscious and paranormal activity (*Belshazzar's Feast*, 1983-4; *Psi Girls*, 1999; *Witness*, 2000). Hiller's powerful and resonant films range from the *J Street Project* (2002-05), a chillingly extensive search for every street sign in Germany bearing the word Juden (Jew), to *The Last Silent Movie* (2007), which also documents disappearance and absence, although this time through speech recordings of dying or extinct languages. Her psychologically charged and thematically varied practice has been called 'an investigation into the unconscious of our culture.'

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Susan Hiller was born in 1940 in the USA and has been based mainly in London since the early 1960s. After receiving a B.A. at Smith College and later studying film and photography at The Cooper Union and archaeology and linguistics at Hunter College in New York, Hiller went on to a National Science Foundation fellowship in Anthropology at Tulane University in New Orleans. After completing fieldwork in Mexico and Guatemala, she returned to her initial desire to be an artist. Her work features in numerous international private and public collections including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Ludwig Museum, Cologne; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Gallery, London and the Centro de Arte Contemporanea Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil. Her career has been recognised by survey exhibitions at the ICA, London (1986); ICA, Philadelphia (1998); Museu Serralves, Porto (2004); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2006); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2007); and most recently by a major retrospective exhibition at Tate Britain (2011).

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## Event

Susan will be in conversation with Darian Leader, psychoanalyst and author, on Saturday 12 December 2015 from 10.30am-12.30pm. Limited availability. Please email [rsvp@lissongallery.com](mailto:rsvp@lissongallery.com) to reserve your place.

## About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Richard Long, as well as those of significant British sculptors from Anish Kapoor and Tony Cragg to a younger generation led by Ryan Gander and Haroon Mirza. With two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth to open under the High Line in New York, Lisson Gallery supports and develops artists globally, including Marina Abramovic, Allora and Calzadilla, Ai Weiwei, Gerard Byrne, Liu Xiaodong, Tatsuo Miyajima, Rashid Rana, Pedro Reyes and Santiago Sierra.

## Opening Hours

Monday-Friday, 10am-6pm

Saturday, 11am-5pm

## Press enquiries

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