

**Michael Wilkinson**  
**The Modern Institute Aird's Lane**  
**10 November 2018 – 19 January 2019**  
**Preview Friday 09 November, 7 - 9pm**

'Those who build walls are their own prisoners'.

- Ursula K. Le Guin, 'The Dispossessed' (Harper & Row, USA, 1974)

Throughout his practice, Michael Wilkinson seeks to examine the structures of power and governance that control political and social expression. Inspired by pop culture, art history, radicalism and anarchy, Wilkinson consistently revisits moments of resistance, protest and upheaval. The recurrence of such references in Wilkinson's work can be seen as a personal attempt to reconcile these moments of historical significance or - perhaps more poignantly - as an effort to understand how they *have* been reconciled within our collective history.

Viewed in this context, Wilkinson's repeated use of the motif of a wall seeks to re-imagine and re-define notions of remembrance - notions that are all too often constrained by institutionalised barriers. In his meditative, meticulous approach to making, Wilkinson creates constructions that seek to undermine and 'unbuild' a reading of history that adheres to a prescribed, linear narrative.

In many respects, Wilkinson is building walls as an enactment of his own opposition to the stratification of society. For an artist whose practice has been aligned with questioning and dismantling systems of power and capital, the contradictory act of building walls becomes radical, anarchistic and disruptive. Indeed, it is Wilkinson's ability to intelligently repurpose actions and materials that enables him to create paintings, sculptures and assemblages that mine the plethora of political, cultural and personal references informing his practice.

In this exhibition Wilkinson has included several iterations of his ongoing series of Lego works. Sleek walls of stylised toy bricks constructed in monochromatic palettes at first appear calculated, impenetrable - oppressive even - yet, upon closer inspection, the stark surfaces are littered with strata of irregular, stained and worn second-hand bricks. Bearing an inherited patina of age, circumstance and the handling of generations of children, Wilkinson thus discovers in his materials moments of human recognition that disrupt a one-dimensional reading of the series.

The use of bricks continues in the exhibition's central sculpture; yet - unlike Lego that can be held between finger and thumb - the squat cobbles are palm sized and heavy - a potential weapon, asking to be hurled, their stacked hierarchical form reimagined as an anarchical arsenal, an invitation to dismantle, pickup, shot-put and destroy.

With its origins in antiquity, the fasces symbol has been frequently adopted by the pervasive ideologies of individualism, discipline, cruelty and - ultimately - fascist structures of persecution. A single cane is easily broken, yet, bundled together as fasces they become strong and hard to break. Puncturing the space, Wilkinson's fasces functions as a reminder of how easily symbols of unity, togetherness and collective strength can morph into those of division.

Carrying the burden of colour, Wilkinson's latest series of large striped paintings dominate the main walls of the gallery. The thirteen gradated stripes that stain each linen surface not only physically separate space but offer oblique references to the stigmatising separation of incarceration and echo the increasingly divisive symbol of the American flag.

Utilised throughout the exhibition, Wilkinson's considered placement of found photography showcases the practical and conceptual rigour of his image making. Drawn from disparate sources, Wilkinson recalls images of flowers - colour drained, form cropped and context reimagined - their constancy intended not to commemorate or celebrate specifically, more to offer a general reflection on the cyclical nature of social and political crises. Indeed, the consistently asymmetrical placement of these images in Wilkinson's work, offer a clear contrast to the voids of colour and form found elsewhere in his surfaces. A powerful illustration of the asymmetry found in the domineering power structures Wilkinson strives to interrogate.

Upon entering the gallery, one finds the view of the exhibition beyond physically blocked by a wall that alters the existing entrance to the space. Upon this construction Wilkinson has placed two record sleeves - printed eyes - proportioned in a way that transforms the flat expanse into the recognisable features of a face - a face whose constant and unavoidable gaze reads as though the work within was looking out, challenging as you enter and watching as you leave.

Within the Bricks Space, Wilkinson presents a series of smaller works on paper that repurpose pages removed from 'L'Imagination au Pouvoir' (Eric Losfeld Editeur / Le Terrain Vague, Paris 1968) in which Walter Lewino's text and Jo Schnapp's images of political graffiti offer a rare and vivid testimony of the situationist, anarchist events that overtook Parisian streets during the student-led protests and strikes of May 1968. In an act of reverse iconoclasm, Wilkinson counters the responsive and spontaneous act of graffiti with a painstaking process of analogue editing, using gouache and pencil to physically erase slogans from the printed surface.

If the original graffiti documented in 'L'Imagination' can be seen as a monument to this key moment in history and therefore its removal over time as an act of vandalism, Wilkinson's restaging of this process emphasises how easily history can be lost. As the past recedes, Wilkinson time and again finds ways to hold onto and excavate that which lies unseen, beneath the cobbles, beneath the beach.

Michael Wilkinson (b. Merseyside, UK in 1965, lives and works in Glasgow) studied BA (Hons) Environmental Art and MFA at The Glasgow School of Art.

Recent solo exhibitions include: 'SORRY HAD TO BE DONE', The Modern Institute, Osborne Street, Glasgow (2015); 'CITADEL: The fortress commanding a city, which it serves both to protect and to dominate', Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York (2014); 'En Attendant', Pearl Lam, Shanghai (2013); 'Dresden', The Modern Institute, Aird's Lane, Glasgow (2012); 'No History', Blum & Poe, LA (2012); and 'Never Works', Le Temple, Paris (2011).

Wilkinson's works were presented within 'The Curves of the Needle', BALTIC 39, Newcastle upon Tyne (2015) and 'Art under Attack: Histories of British Iconoclasm', Tate Britain, London (2013-2014); His work has also been exhibited at Gemeentemuseum Den Haag; FRAC des Pays de la Loire, Carquefour; Studio Voltaire, London; New Wight Gallery at University of California, Los Angeles; Dundee Contemporary Arts; Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; and NAK Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen, among other institutions worldwide.