



Royal Academy of Arts Press Release

John Hejduk: London Masque
Ronald and Rita McAulay Gallery
22 Mar 2022 — 21 May 2023

Supported by CDUK
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The Royal Academy is delighted to announce the opening of **John Hejduk: London Masque**, the first free installation in its new space for architecture. The large-scale installation features Hejduk's design for the *Widow's House*, one of 68 'objects' in his seminal artwork *Lancaster / Hanover Masque*. The late American architect John Hejduk (1929 – 2000) believed that ideas were as important as buildings and that architecture had the power to make alternative worlds.

Vicky Richardson, Head of Architecture and Drue Heinz Curator at the Royal Academy, said: "London Masque has involved a huge cast of players including 100 students, tutors, designers and historians. It feels appropriate to bring John Hejduk's practice and philosophy to the Royal Academy, which is just the sort of space for free expression that he thought the university should be. We hope visitors will enjoy discovering meaning, joy and poignancy in the Widow's House."

Hejduk used the format of masques, popular royal entertainments of the 16th and 17th centuries featuring fantastical costumes and moving sets, to transform the way architecture is taught and imagined. The *Lancaster/Hanover Masque* draws inspiration from an eclectic range of sources including the novels of Thomas Hardy, English fairground attractions and American agricultural buildings. Hejduk used allegorical stories and a large cast of characters to deal with themes of life, death, love and virtue. The Widow is one such character in the masque.

Hejduk described the *Widow's House* as a 'wailing room', with the funnels on the roof made by 'the Trombone-Maker, a craftsman of refined detail'. It refers to the Widow's Walk, a feature of traditional New England houses thought to be built for the wives of whaling ships' captains who would go up to these cupolas and watch the ships come in from sea. Often they did not come back. The Widow's Walk was a form of surveillance and waiting, a place of reflection and anticipation.

This dark and mysterious tale contrasts with the comical, zoomorphic form of the structure with its four legs, head and tail. Hejduk saw that in life tragedy often sits alongside comedy, and that art and architecture give us a way of reconciling mixed emotions and conflicting ideas.

Hejduk dedicated his life to teaching which he saw as a 'social contract'. As Professor and Dean of the Cooper Union's Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture in New York from 1975 until his death in 2000, he created extraordinary drawings and propositions to provoke and inspire his students. Mystery, poetry and paradox were intrinsic: he wanted students to work hard to interpret ideas in order to develop their own point of view. Hejduk said: 'I believe that the University is one of the last places that protects and preserves freedom, therefore teaching is also a socio/political act, among other things.'

In the 1980s and 90s Hejduk encouraged students around the world to interpret the meaning in his drawings and to build his structures as a way of learning practical skills and working collaboratively. 'London Masque' was developed in collaboration with students from the Royal College of Art MA Interior Design programme led by tutor Steve Jensen.

During the display, a series of presentations by students and young people will explore Hejduk's *Lancaster / Hanover Masque* and the resulting models, with the theme 'Building Worlds' will be shown alongside the *Widow's House*:

22 March – 10 July 2022

Students from the MA Interior Design, Royal College of Art

12 July – 9 October 2022

Families taking part in the RA's programme for children with special educational needs and disabilities

11 October 2022 – 5 February 2023

Students aged 15–21 who take part in the RA's Young People's programme

7 February – 21 May 2023

Students from Diploma Unit 11 of the Architectural Association

About John Hejduk (1929-2000)

Hejduk was a key figure in late 20th century architecture. One of the New York Five and Professor and Dean of the Cooper Union's Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture in New York, he challenged the boundaries of the discipline by experimenting with poetry, painting, literature and drawing. He devoted his career to teaching and used the masque structures to prompt questions by his students and encourage them to work together collectively to make buildings. The *Widow's House* was built with permission granted by the Estate of John Hejduk

Notes to Editors

John Hejduk: London Masque

Dates and Opening Hours

Open to public: Tuesday 22 Mar 2022 — Sunday 21 May 2023

10am – 6pm Tuesday to Sunday (last admission 5.30pm)

Admission

Admission to *John Hejduk: London Masque* is free, no booking required.

Images

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Social Media

Join the discussion about the exhibition online at:

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#JohnHejduk #LondonMasque

Safety measures

The health and safety of visitors and staff is paramount. Safety measures for visitors can be found on the RA website: royalacademy.org.uk/visiting-and-safety-during-coronavirus.

About the Royal Academy of Arts

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy is an independent charity. It does not receive revenue funding from the government so is reliant upon the support of its visitors, donors, sponsors, patrons and loyal Friends.

For public information, please print: 020 7300 8090 or www.royalacademy.org.uk

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22.03.22