



Large
Print

Jasper Johns:

‘Something Resembling Truth’

1

(Wohl Central Hall)

Do not remove from gallery

Audio tour



Main commentary



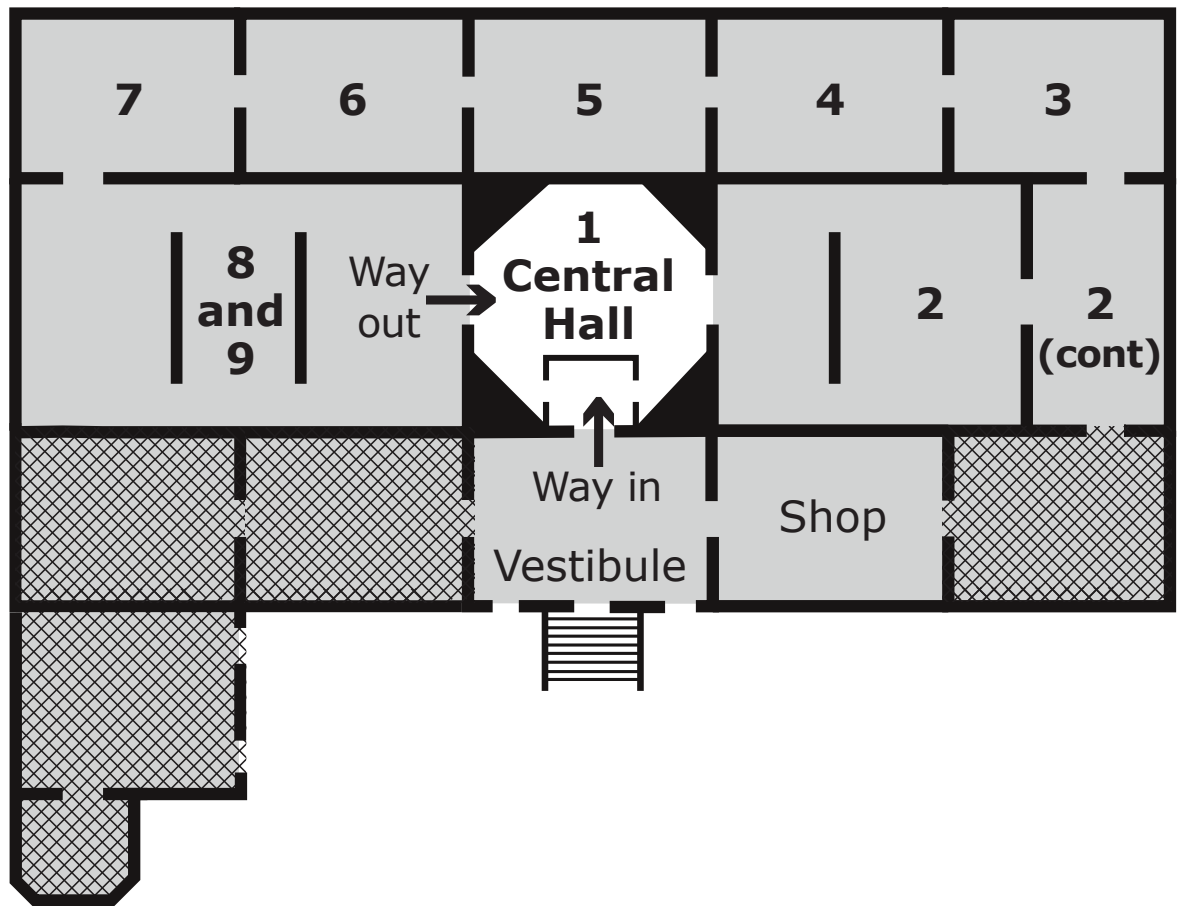
Descriptive commentary



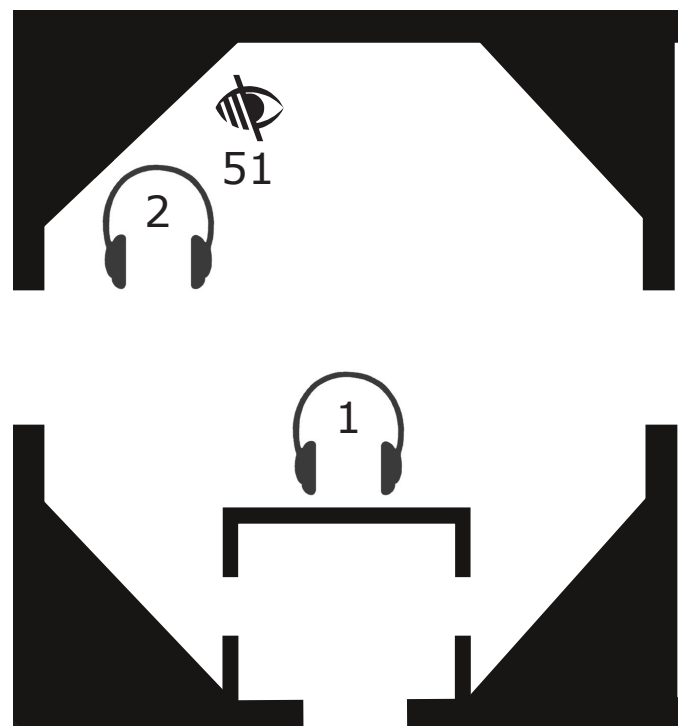
Introduction to the exhibition



51 Racing Thoughts



You are in Wohl
Central Hall



Jasper Johns

“Something Resembling Truth”

Main Galleries

23 September – 10 December 2017

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List of works

Sponsors:

TERRA **ART MENTOR** FOUNDATION LUCERNE

FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN ART



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Introduction

Over more than six decades, Jasper Johns has pursued an intense investigation of the visual world and the human response to it.

Through his work, he has sought to challenge the notion of “truth”, suggesting that it is not a given, but rather something that can exist beneath layered and shifting meanings.

Routine ways of seeing, feeling and thinking render truth elusive, but when the senses are awakened, a flicker of grace occurs and new ways of experiencing the world allow us to glimpse it.

Johns was born in Augusta, Georgia in 1930 and raised in South Carolina.

He settled in New York City in 1953 and became part of an influential circle of artists, performers and writers that included the artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008), the composer John Cage (1912–1992), and the choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009).

Rauschenberg was particularly important to Johns's art and thought during their seven-year relationship, when they traded ideas and saw each other daily.

Johns's first solo exhibition, which was held at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958, marked the beginning of his recognition as an innovator whose work established a decisive new direction in contemporary art.

Leading on from Abstract Expressionism, he paved the way for Pop, Minimal, and Conceptual art.

Since then, Johns has continued to be regarded as one of the most significant artists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Johns's best-known works were made during the first decade of his career.

Simulating familiar things such as American flags, targets, numerals, lightbulbs and ale cans, they raise questions about the nature of the art object and how perception shapes meaning.

Since then, he has continued to alter and expand his imagery and formal strategies, and has become increasingly engaged with a wide range of human experiences, among them memory, creativity, doubt, childhood, ageing, and mortality.

Organised thematically, this exhibition demonstrates how Johns has revisited and re-contextualised images and concepts over time. The highlighted themes offer distinct pathways through which to approach his work and, at the same time, reveal relationships between them.

While these sections follow a loosely chronological thread, works from different stages of his career are frequently hung side by side.

Exhibited in this opening section of the exhibition are three paintings from distinct chapters of Johns's career which exemplify its changes and continuities.

While facing these, the visitor is able to glimpse the artist's early works in the gallery to the right, as well as his most recent works in the gallery to the left – an arrangement that emphasises the consistency and integrity of Johns's output over more than sixty years.

The instantly recognisable flags and targets of the former and the complex, abstract patterns of the latter share a common aim: they both examine how the act of seeing is shaped by, and shapes, thought and feeling.

Challenging our senses, and encouraging new ways of thinking about and experiencing the world, all of his works – in the artist's words – strive to achieve "something resembling truth".

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)



51



2

Racing Thoughts

1983

Encaustic and collage on canvas

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from the Burroughs Wellcome Purchase fund; Leo Castelli; the Wilfred P. and Rose J. Cohen Purchase Fund; the Julia B. Engel Purchase Fund; The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States Purchase Fund; The Sondra and Charles Gilman, Jr. Foundation, Inc.; S. Sidney Kahn; The Lauder Foundation, Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Fund; the Sara Roby Foundation; and the Painting and Sculpture Committee

Within

1983 and 2005

Oil on canvas with objects

Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

Target

1961

Encaustic and collage on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Edlis Neeson
Collection

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Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Room Introduction: Things The Mind
Already Knows



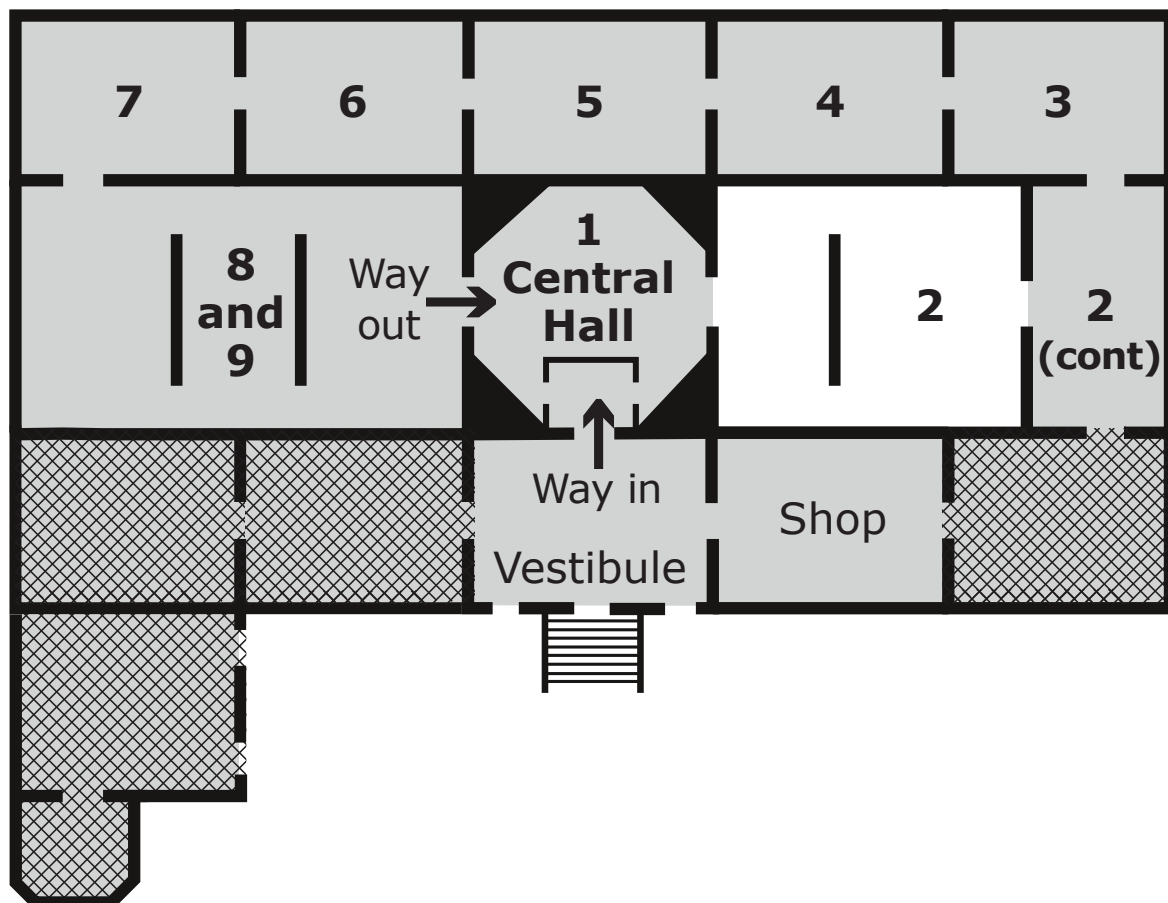
Flag, 1958



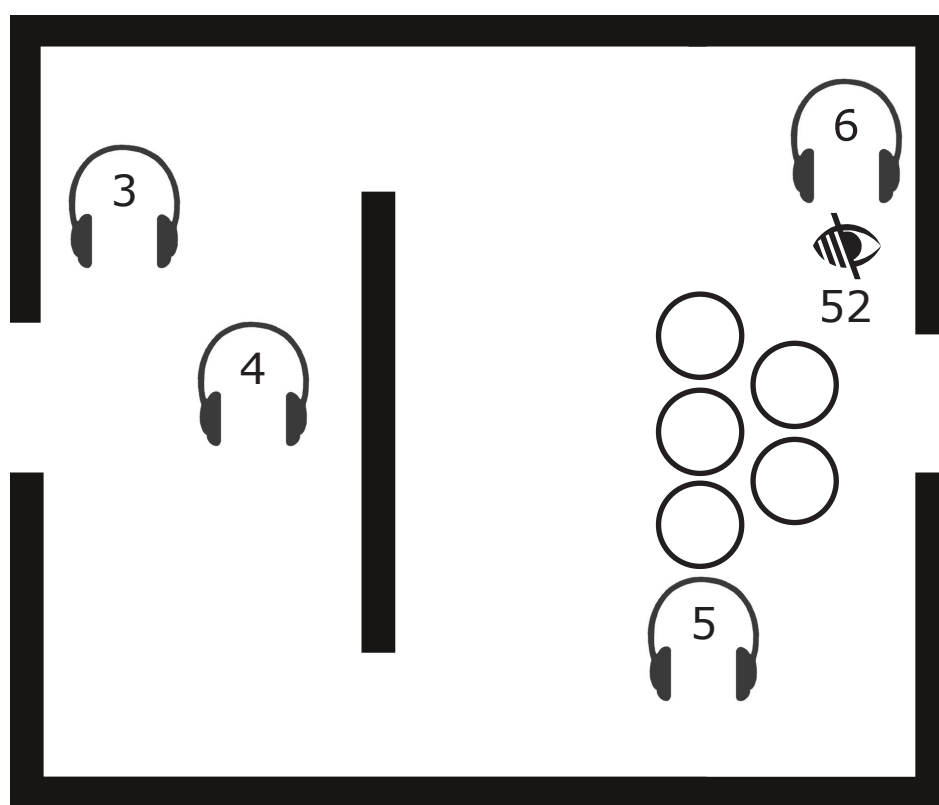
Flashlight, 1960



52 0 Through 9, 1961



You are in 2



○ Free-standing sculpture

Jasper Johns

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“Things the Mind Already Knows”

When they were first exhibited in the late 1950s, Johns’s renditions of flags, targets, numbers and alphabets established a new artistic vocabulary. Each was an instantly recognisable design that could be reproduced on a flat surface while simultaneously retaining its symbolic or practical function.

His paintings of flags can be saluted; his targets aimed at; states can be located on his maps; and numbers can be used to count and measure.

By appropriating widely recognisable signs and symbols, Johns sought to make the familiar unfamiliar, challenging viewers to look more closely at “things the mind already knows”.

Johns's early motifs are generic forms associated with basic values and skills which, through repetition, are often "seen but not looked at, not examined". Their meanings alter from viewer to viewer and shift in relation to historical context.

The most striking example is the American flag, a charged symbol whose strongly held personal and cultural values have taken on different interpretations since Johns first painted it in 1954–1955 at the height of the Cold War.

Johns has returned to these motifs throughout his career, engaging with and developing them across a breadth of media. He often made use of the ancient medium of encaustic – a fast-drying wax-based medium which provides many of his paintings with their subtly layered surfaces.

The selection of works in this room demonstrates the depth of his practical skill, showcasing him as a highly accomplished painter, sculptor, draughtsman and printmaker.

In whichever form they are presented, Johns's renderings of familiar signs and symbols stimulate the eye and mind in new ways and provoke the viewer to break fixed habits of perception.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Central display

Flag

1958

Encaustic on canvas

Private collection



Numbers

2007 (cast 2008)

Aluminium

This aluminium relief is a full-scale adaptation of Johns's 1964 commission for the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center.

The work references the site of the earlier sculpture through its allusions to the performing arts. Both include casts of house keys (punning on musical “keys”) and an imprint of choreographer Merce Cunningham’s foot near the upper right-hand corner.

Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

Target with Plaster Casts

1955

Graphite pencil on paper

Collection of Jean Christophe Castelli, New York

Target with Four Faces

1955

Graphite pencil and pastel on paper

Collection of the artist

Target

1960

Lithograph on paper

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988

Flag

1967

Encaustic and collage on canvas (three panels)

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

Two Flags

1959

Acrylic on canvas (two panels)

mumok – Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien.

On loan from the Collection Ludwig, Aachen, since 1978

Target

1992

Encaustic and collage on canvas

Collection of Larry Gagosian

English Light Bulb

1970

Ink on plastic

This drawing depicts four designs for a sculpture of an English light bulb.

Johns found the bulb washed up on a beach in South Carolina and was struck by its distinctive bayonet tip, which differentiated it from the American screw-in fitting.

The bulb sits in a cradle which allows it to be placed horizontally or vertically, unlike the artist's earlier sculptures of American bulbs such as 'Bronze' (1960–1961), displayed nearby.

Ryobi Foundation

The Critic Sees

1962

Pencil and collage on paper

Private collection, Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York

0 through 9



1961

Charcoal and pastel on paper

Private collection

0 through 9

1961

Oil on canvas

Tate: Presented by the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1961

Ocean

1996

Lithograph on paper

Apart from the USA, the only other map that Johns depicted was the architect Buckminster Fuller's (1895–1983) 'Dymaxion Air-Ocean World Map' – an unfolded icosahedron (a form with 20 faces) of a projection of the world – which was the subject of a large painting that Johns completed in 1971.

In this lithograph, the map is accompanied by depictions of a galaxy, and photographs of Merce Cunningham, whose dance 'Ocean' premiered in 1994.

Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions

Map

1961–1962

Oil on paper mounted on fibreboard

Collection of Jean Christophe Castelli, New York

Map

1962–1963

Encaustic and collage on canvas

Johns painted his first map in 1960, over a small printed map of the USA given to him by Robert Rauschenberg.

Here, in one of his largest versions of the motif, the 48 states are painted with gestural brushstrokes in near grisaille tones. Although their boundaries are blurred, each state is labelled and its unique shape retained.

Like Johns's flags, targets, and numbers, 'Map' is both a painting and an object that preserves its functional value.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Gift of Marcia Simon Weisman

Two Maps

1989

Graphite pencil and carborundum wash on paper
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz

Two Flags on Orange

1986–1987

Acrylic, ink and crayon on plastic

This late revisiting of the flag motif is similar to Johns's 1958 'Flag on Orange Field II', displayed nearby. Here, the positioning of the double flag reveals an 'I' formation, suggesting a subtle autobiographical tone.

It was painted during the same period as the 'Seasons' series, displayed later in the exhibition, the first painting of which also reprises the double flag, but with 48 stars rather than the 50 seen here.

Private collection

Flag on Orange Field II

1958

Encaustic on canvas

Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland

Flag

1955

Graphite pencil and graphite wash on prepared paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Edgar Kaufmann, Jr. (by exchange) and Committee on Drawings Funds, 2004

Sketch for Flags

1964

Watercolour and graphite pencil on paper

Rita Donagh

White Flag

1960

Oil and newspaper collage over lithograph

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

Free standing sculptures

Flashlight

1960

Bronze and glass

Thomas H. Lee and Ann Tenenbaum, New York



Flashlight III

1958 (cast 1987)

Bronze, glass and aluminium paint

Collection of Agnes Gund

The Critic Sees

1961

Sculp-metal on plaster with glass

Private collection

Bronze

1960–1961 (cast 1979)

Bronze

Collection of the artist

Bread

2012

Painted paper, lead, copper, wood and epoxy

Collection Bill Katz, New York

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(continued)

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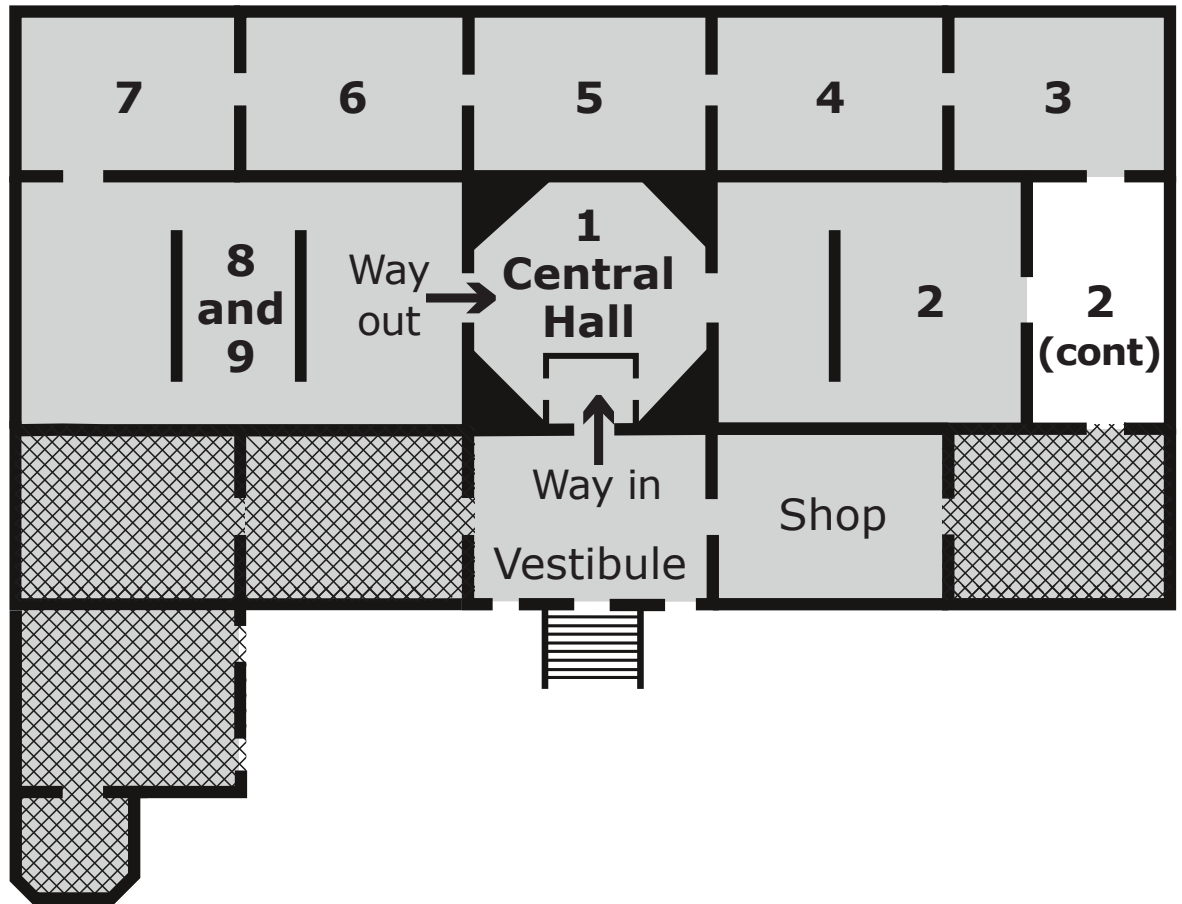
Audio tour



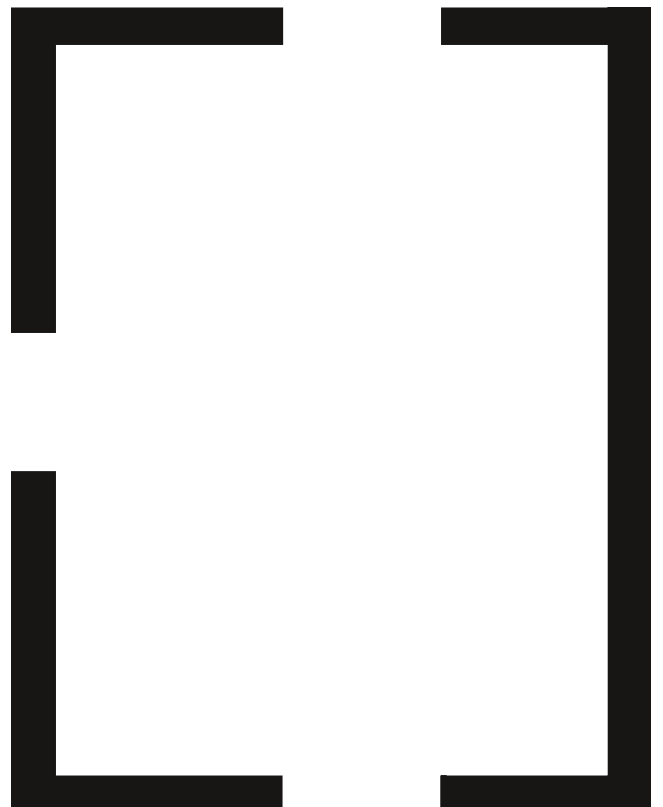
Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



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List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Numbers

1960–1971

Ten lithographs reworked with acrylic and oil paint, felt pen, fabric and newspaper collage on paper

Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d'art moderne/
Centre de création industrielle

Figure 0

1959

Encaustic and collage on canvas

Ludwig Museum, Koblenz

0–9

1958

Encaustic and collage on canvas

This is the first of Johns's '0–9' works where the ten numerals are arranged in two rows of five.

This painting is also one of Johns's earliest white monochromatic works and one of the finest examples of his use of encaustic and collage, which here accentuates the unique properties of each number.

Private collection

Numbers (0–9)

2011

Bronze

Collection of the artist

0 through 9

1960

Charcoal on paper

Collection of the artist

0 through 9

1961 (cast 1966)

Aluminium

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Sidney and Harriet Janis Collection, 1967

0 through 9

1979

Ink on plastic

Collection of Margo Leavin

Small Numbers in Color

1959

Encaustic on wood

Collection of the artist

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Large
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Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



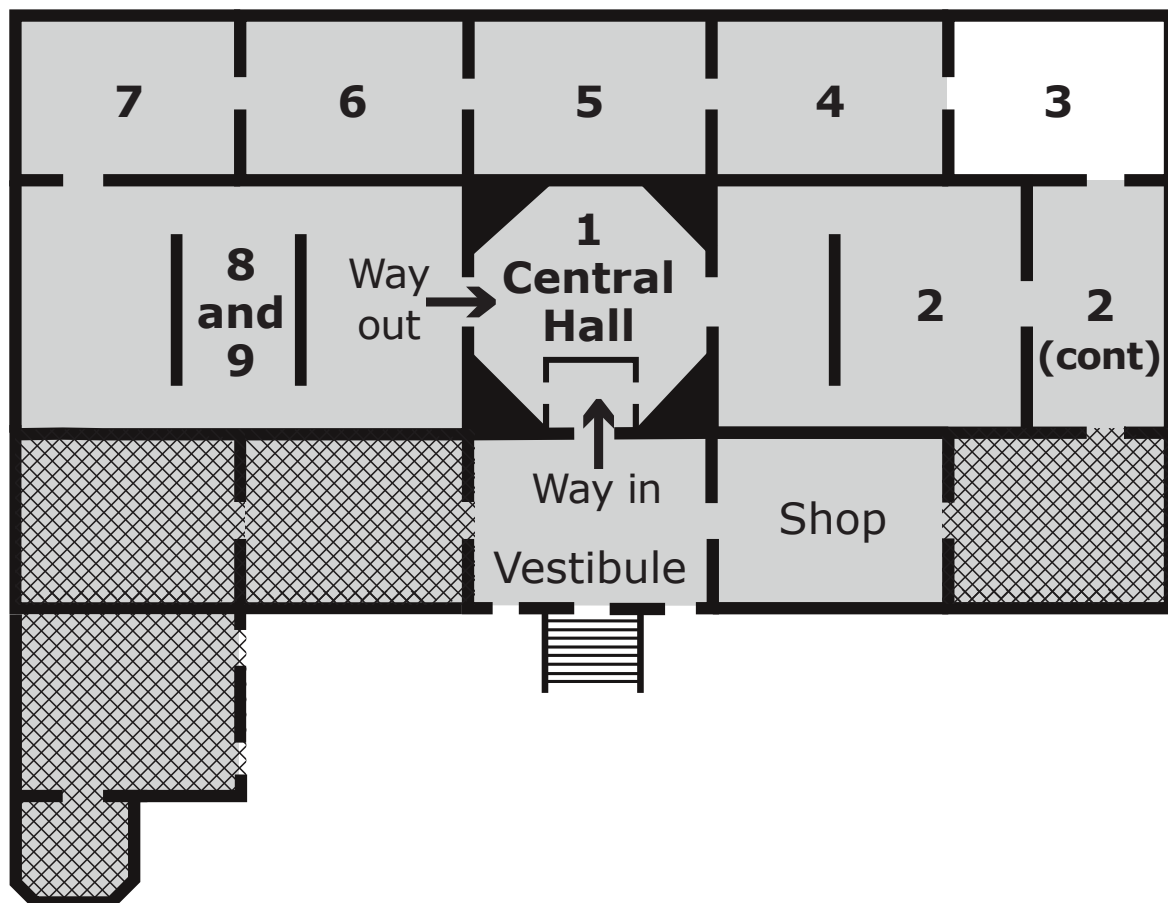
Room introduction: Painting as Object



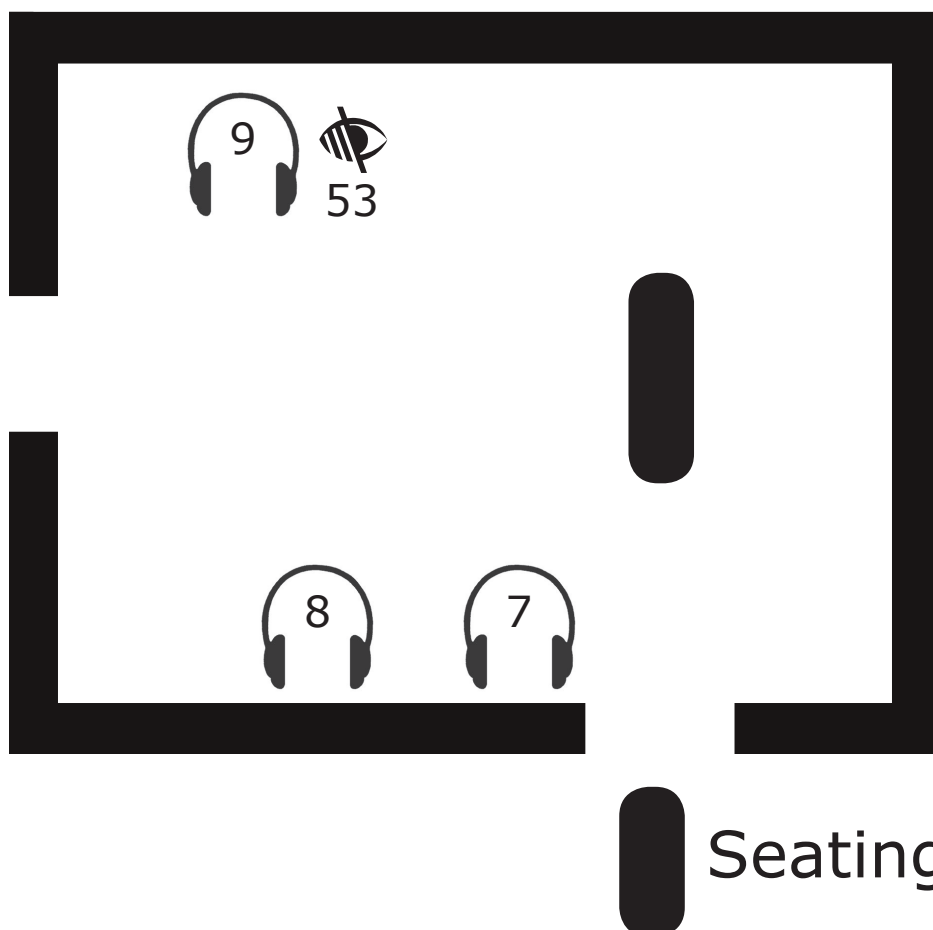
Canvas, 1956



53 Painting with Two Balls, 1960



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Painting as Object

From early on in his career, Johns was fascinated by the possibility for paintings to be viewed as literal objects.

His interest in Dada, and in the work of its major exponent Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), informed his use of pre-existing objects, and his interest in creating works that contained paradoxes or ironies.

Many of Johns's paintings draw attention to their material components (stretcher, canvas, paint, frame) or their formal properties (colour, composition, scale).

'Star', the earliest work in the exhibition, is both an object and a symbol, constructed from triangles made of canvas, wood, glass and paint, while 'Canvas' purposely displays the painting's canvas-on-stretcher construction.

As well as presenting the painting as an object, Johns regularly attached familiar things such as rulers, cutlery, coat hangers, wooden balls and hinged slats to his paintings. In doing so, he alters the space and dimensions in which the works operate.

In 'Painting with Two Balls', the objects prise apart the brightly painted canvas to reveal the wall behind, reinforcing the fact that the painting is a two-dimensional object, rather than a window onto another world. In 'Nines' hinged slats frame the canvas, suggesting doors that could be opened.

Johns's drawings also simulate paintings, flattening or diagramming their three-dimensional presence.

Often, Johns's titles acknowledge the works' objecthood or process of creation, while simultaneously suggesting expressive content. The title of 'Painting Bitten by a Man' directs attention both to the materiality of the painted surface and to the ambiguous intention of the action that marked it.

'Disappearance I', with its folded canvas on canvas, provides an insight into the ways in which a painting is constructed and provokes curiosity about what the folded sections might conceal.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Star

1954

Encaustic and collage on canvas with glass and painted wood

The Menil Collection, Houston

Canvas

1956

Encaustic and collage on canvas

Collection of the artist



Painting with Ruler and 'Gray'

1960

Oil and collage on canvas with objects

This painting was the first of Johns's works to include a ruler. It signalled the importance of measurement and ushered in a new approach to depicting and describing space.

Here, the ruler, used to measure the canvas, can also pivot to mark out an imaginary circle within the painting's square format.

In other works, including 'Passage' (1962), displayed nearby, the ruler has been used as a device to mark the surface.

Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles

Painting Bitten by a Man

1961

Encaustic on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jasper Johns in memory of Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, 1989–2001, 2007

Study for 'Painting with Two Balls'

1957

Encaustic, pastel, graphite pencil, and collage on paper mounted on fibreboard

Collection of Jean Christophe Castelli, New York

Painting with Two Balls

1971

Pastel and crayon over screenprint on paper

Private collection, New York



Painting with Two Balls

1960

Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects (three panels)

Collection of the artist

False Start

1959

Oil on canvas

This painting marks a point in Johns's career when his style shifted from the restrained brushwork of the early years to a more open, gestural mode, and the names of colours became central to his art.

(continued over)

Here, these names are stencilled mainly in hues different from those they describe, providing an early example of the way in which Johns used language to highlight the complex relationship between seeing and thinking, naming and perceiving.

Private collection

Nines

2006

Encaustic and oil on canvas with objects (two panels)
Philadelphia Museum of Art. Promised Gift of Keith
L. and Katherine Sachs

Passage

1962

Encaustic, charcoal and collage on canvas with objects
(three panels)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Peter & Irene Ludwig
Collection, Donation 1976

Study for a Painting

2002

Encaustic on canvas with objects

This work belongs to Johns's recent 'Catenary' series. A 'catenary' is the curve assumed by the weight of gravity on a cord which, held at either end, hangs freely at the centre.

Each of the works in this series includes a string attached to hinged slats which project from the painting's surface, creating a play between the depicted space of the painting and the real space in front of it.

Private collection, Courtesy Acquavella Galleries

Disappearance I

1960

Encaustic and collage on canvas

Courtesy of Michael Altman, Michael Altman Fine Art and Advisory Services, LLC

Disappearance II

1962

Ink on plastic

Collection of Kate Ganz

Hook

1958

Crayon, charcoal and chalk on paper

The Sonnabend Collection Foundation and Antonio
Homem

Coat Hanger

1958

Conté crayon on paper

Private collection

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Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



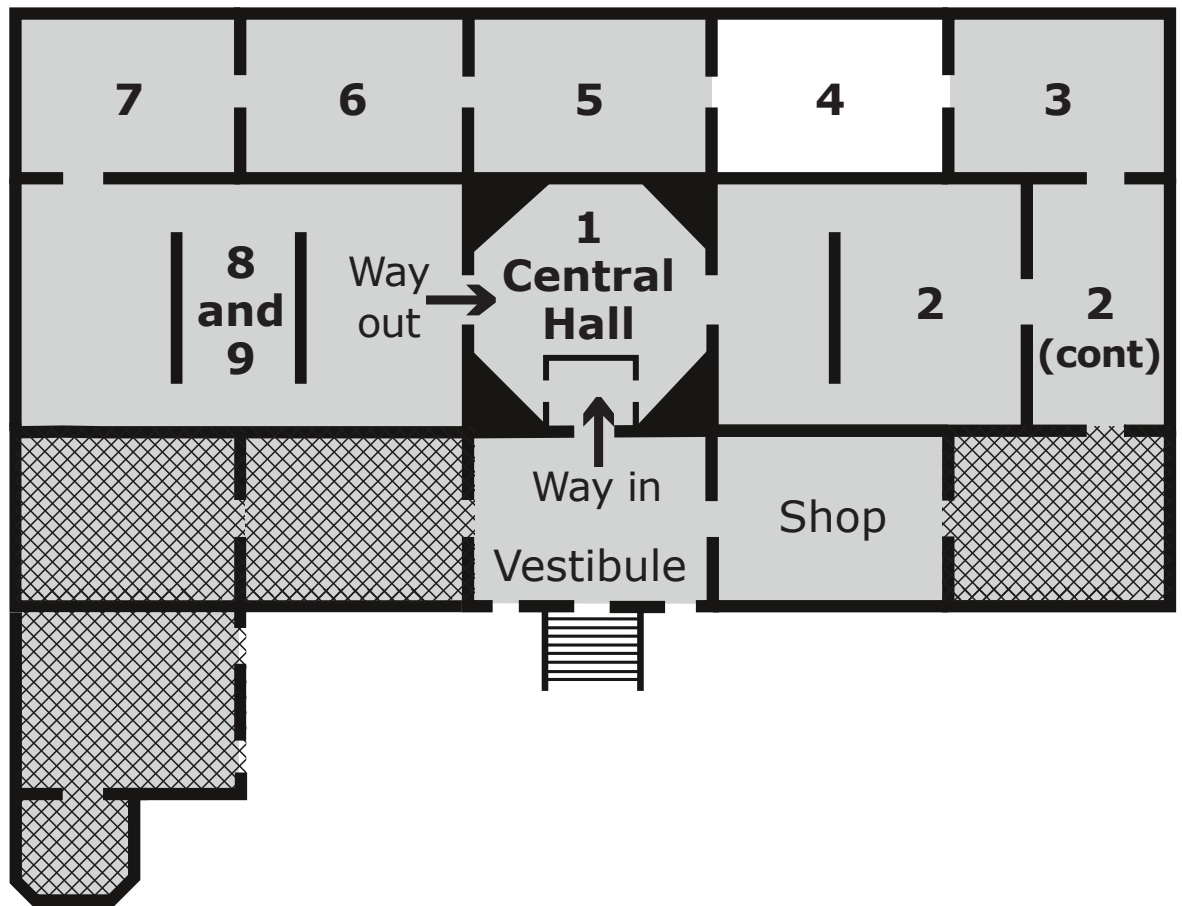
Room introduction: Words and Voices



Periscope (Hart Crane), 1963



Voice 2, 1982



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Words and Voices

From the late 1950s, Johns became increasingly interested in language and its relationship to visual perception. He began to include text in his paintings, incorporating familiar words which doubled as the works' titles, such as 'The', 'No', 'Liar' and 'Voice'.

Johns considered the building blocks of language – the alphabet, and words – to be symbols capable of carrying ambiguous meanings.

Detached from context, words, letters or phrases draw attention to the possibility for misinterpretation, and turn ordinary expressions into something strange and unfamiliar. The common but charged word "no" for example, could be read as a simple answer to a question, or a bitter rejection.

Around this time, literature also assumed a particular importance in Johns's work, and he began to use the voices of writers as "ventriloquists" for expressing his own complex thoughts and ideas.

References to Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), Herman Melville (1819–1891), Louis-Ferdinand Céline (1894–1961), Hart Crane (1899–1932), Samuel Beckett (1906–1989) and Frank O'Hara (1926–1966) are found either in title or subject-matter, in some of Johns's most emotionally intense works.

The small 'Study for "In Memory of My Feelings"', which is part of a group of works made in response to a poem by O'Hara, is the first work by Johns in which the complexity of memory is acknowledged as a conscious theme.

'Alley Oop' – much lighter in tone to other works in this room – features a popular comic strip of the same name. Here, Johns calls attention to newspaper as collage material, as well as the comic's interplay of pictures and words.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Fragment of a Letter

2010

Intaglio on paper

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of the artist, 2011

Beckett

2005

Encaustic and oil on canvas with objects (two panels)

Kathy and Richard S. Fuld, Jr. Promised gift to The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Periscope (Hart Crane)

1963

Oil on canvas

Collection of the artist

Céline

1978

Oil on canvas (two panels)

Kunstmuseum Basel. Acquired with funds from the Max Geldner Collection 1979

Ventriloquist

1983

Encaustic on canvas

In this example from his “bathtub” series, Johns projects his thoughts onto the bathroom wall from the vantage point of his bath.

His signature image, the American flag, is surrounded by the “voices” of others: a print by the artist Barnett Newman (1905–1970), ceramics by the potter George Ohr (1857–1918), and a tracing of a whale from the novel *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville (1819–1891).

Perched on a basket, surrounded by these American sources, is Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee vase.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Museum purchase funded by the Agnes Cullen Arnold Endowment Fund

Voice 2



1982

Ink on plastic (three sheets)

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Promised Gift of Keith L. and Katherine Sachs

Voice

1969

Graphite wash and graphite pencil on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase, 1981

Study for 'In Memory of My Feelings'

1967

Ink and graphite pencil on plastic

Collection of the artist

Skin with O'Hara Poem

1963–1965

Lithograph

Ryobi Foundation

Screen Piece 3 (The Sonnets)

1968

Oil on canvas

The title of this painting refers to the silk-screening process by which Johns applied the imagery, which almost disappears into the sombre monochromatic surface.

(continued over)

Dividing the picture plane is a hanging spoon and fork with hand-written instructions: "fork should be 7 [inches] long". At the right is a twisted yardstick and, at the left, the title page of a book of sonnets by the American poet Ted Berrigan (1934–1983).

Nerman Family Collection, Leawood, Kansas

No

1961

Encaustic, Sculp-metal and collage on canvas with objects

Collection of the artist

Liar

1961

Encaustic, Sculp-metal and graphite pencil on paper

'Liar' is one of a series of works in which Johns interrogates the relationship between language and visual art.

(continued over)

As with many in this series, its title is deliberately ambiguous. Is “liar” an emotional accusation, or a comment on the nature of representation?

The word appears twice, once upside-down on the fictional hinged panel and once correctly oriented as if imprinted on the surface.

Collection of Gail and Tony Ganz

Tennyson

1959

Pastel on paper

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of Joseph H.

Hirshhorn, 1966

Alley Oop

1958

Oil and collage on cardboard mounted on fibreboard

Private collection

The

1957

Encaustic on canvas

Private collection

Gray Alphabets

1960

Graphite pencil and graphite wash on paper

Collection of Jean Christophe Castelli, New York

Central display

Fragment of a Letter

2008 (cast 2010)

Bronze

This double-sided sculpture features an extract from a letter from Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) to the painter and writer Emile Bernard (1868–1941).

(continued over)

On one side, the words have been spelt out by Johns in blocks of type, while on the other the same passage appears in American Sign Language.

By placing alternate versions of the same text side by side, Johns challenges the notion that communication occurs in a single, straightforward manner.

Private collection

Your feedback, please

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Large
Print

Jasper Johns:

‘Something Resembling Truth’

5

Do not remove from gallery

Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



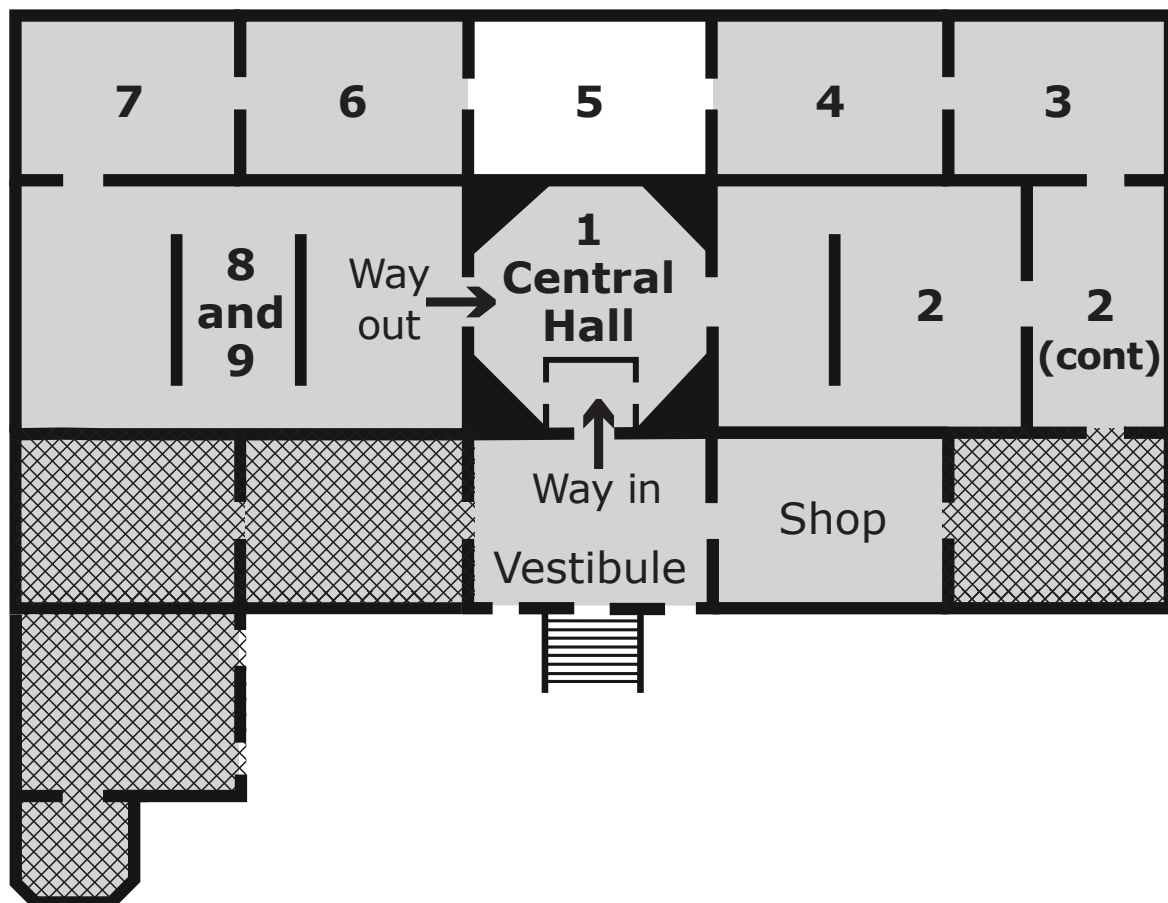
Room introduction: In the Studio



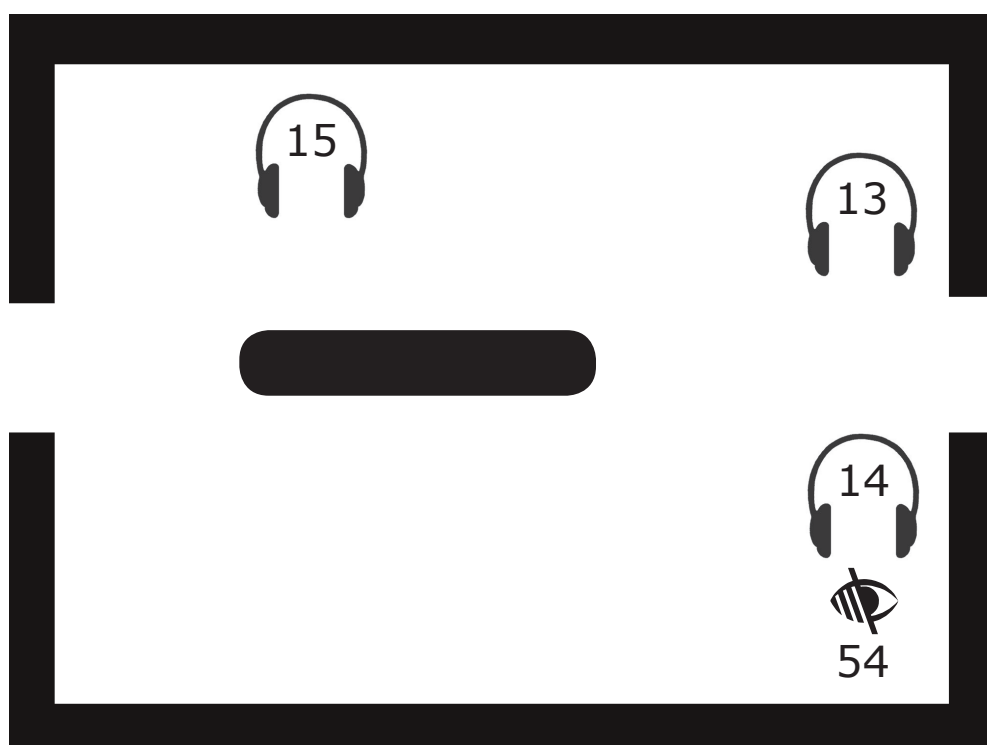
54 Painted Bronze & Painted
Bronze, both 1960



Untitled, 1964 - 1965



You are in 5



 Seating

Jasper Johns

“Something Resembling Truth”

Main Galleries

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In the Studio

In 1960, Johns began to incorporate objects and tools involved in the works' creation – among them paintbrushes, rulers, and colour charts – into the works themselves.

In doing so, he captures a sense of the industry of the studio, as well as the physical and psychological processes involved in the making of his artwork.

Some of the items depicted in or incorporated into these works appear to have travelled into the studio from the artist's home – cups, cans, brooms, and tableware. Within the studio, these items have been repurposed.

In 'Fool's House' and 'Untitled', a broom used to clean the floor becomes a brush used to spread paint. The tools incorporated into these works can also be seen as an extension of the artist himself, and an indirect mark of his presence, which is often indicated more directly through body imprints and casts.

In 1961 Johns read the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) 'Philosophical Investigations' (1953), and became interested in his theory that the meaning of language resides in the way it is used.

Wittgenstein's investigation into the relationship between language and reality inflected much of Johns's work, including the two sculptures entitled 'Painted Bronze', both painstaking reproductions of reclaimed domestic items.

The extreme verisimilitude of these sculptural objects, one simulating ale cans and the other a Savarin coffee can containing paintbrushes, raises questions about the nature of representation, and how we can determine what is true and what is false.

The imprinted skull in the bottom right-hand corner of 'Arrive/Depart' and the crosshatching in 'In the Studio' anticipate the group of works in the next gallery which explore the notion of transience.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Ale Cans II

1974

Ink on plastic

Private collection

Ale Cans

1964

Lithograph on paper

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988

Untitled

1977

Ink, watercolour and crayon on plastic

Collection of Margo Leavin

Savarin

1977

Graphite pencil and crayon on plastic

Collection of Agnes Gund

Field Painting

1963–1964

Oil on canvas with objects (two panels)

In the centre of this two-panelled canvas are the items that Johns used to make the work, including paintbrushes, cans for mixing paint, a spool of soldering wire, and a kitchen knife.

The names of the primary colours run down the middle, the three-dimensional letters mirroring their printed reflections. The R of “red” is a neon light, while the hinged wooden letters contain magnets that hold the objects.

Johns’s footprint indicates his presence in the studio space.

Collection of the artist

Arrive/Depart

1963–1964

Oil on canvas

Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich –
Pinakothek der Moderne

Device

1962

Ink on plastic

Collection of Barbara Bertozzi Castelli

Fool's House

1961–1962

Oil, Sculp-metal and charcoal on canvas with objects

In the “fool’s house”, which is also the artist’s studio, a broom becomes a brush, a coffee cup is a vessel for mixing paint, and a dishtowel a paint rag.

Hand-written labels identify the objects in an apparently redundant manner which is belied by the multiple roles they play.

Collection of Jean Christophe Castelli, New York

In the Studio

1982

Encaustic, crayon and collage on canvas with objects

This work, inspired by a blank canvas leaning against a wall in his studio, is the first in which Johns used trompe l'oeil devices to depict shallow spaces and the first to include a hinged wooden slat.

The cast of a disembodied arm hangs from a hook and is flanked by two drawings, one from the artist's recent crosshatchings period and the other a sketch of the cast.

Collection of the artist

Untitled

1964–1965

Oil and charcoal on canvas with objects (four panels)

Collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Harlem Light

1969

Graphite wash, pencil, pastel and gouache on three overlapping sheets of paper

This drawing is based on a 1967 painting of the same title which marks the first appearance of the flagstone wall that recurs in Johns's work.

The solidity of the wall to the left is contrasted by the window to the right, through which light shines into the artist's studio, where rulers and colour blocks hover ambiguously.

The flagstone pattern would later become the central motif in 'Within' (1983 and 2005), 'Beckett' (2005) and 'Nines' (2006), each displayed earlier in the exhibition.

Collection of Nancy Ganz Wright

Painted Bronze



54



1960

Bronze and oil paint

Kravis Collection, Promised Gift to The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Painted Bronze



54



1960

Bronze and oil paint

Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Ludwig Collection

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Large
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Jasper Johns:

‘Something Resembling Truth’

6

Do not remove from gallery

Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



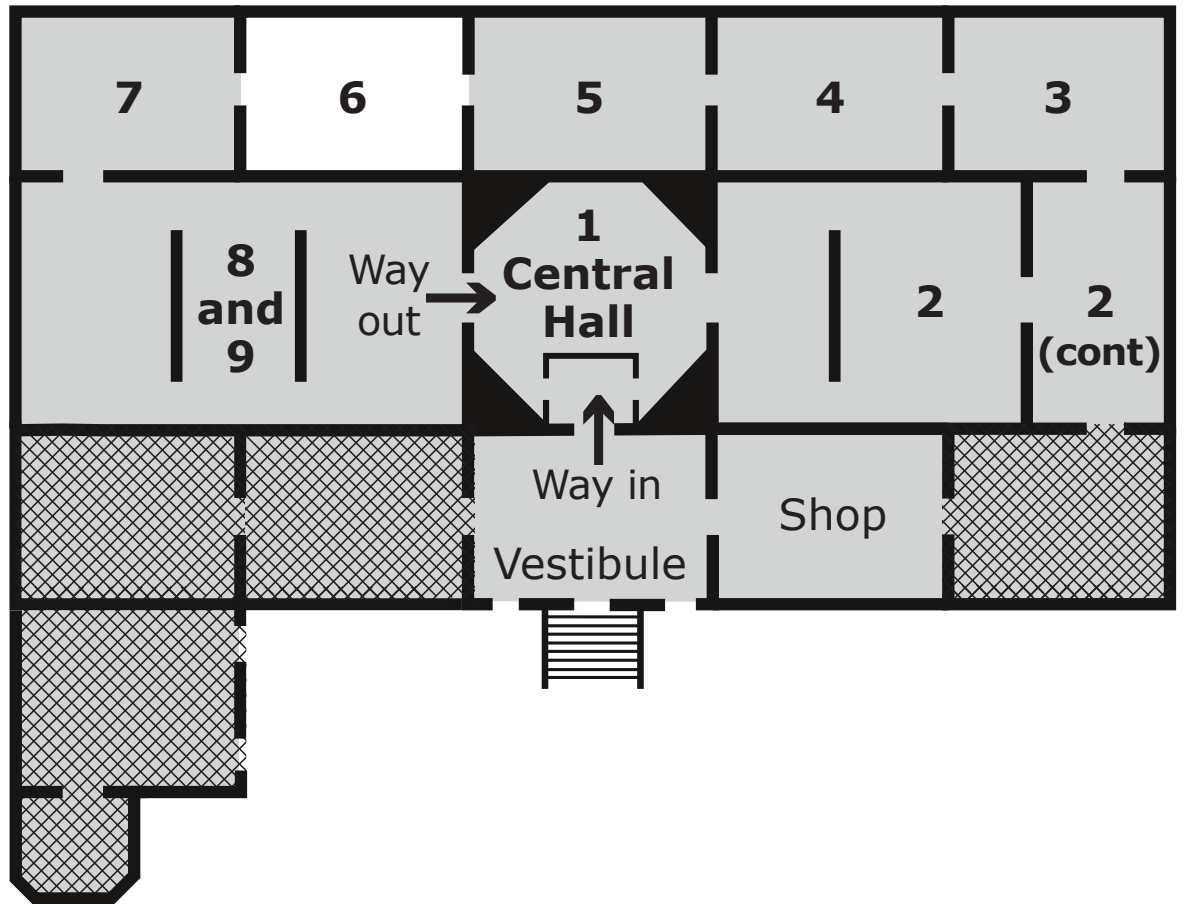
Room introduction: Time and Trascience



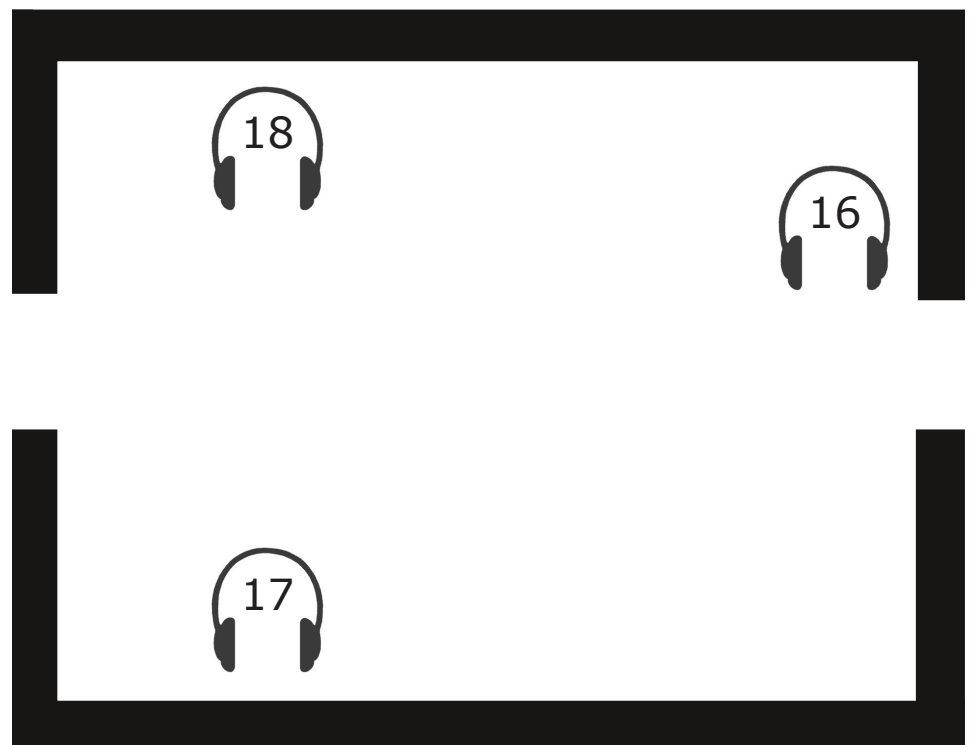
Dancers on a Plane, 1980



Between the Clock and the Bed, 1981



You are in 6



Jasper Johns

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Time and Transience

Moments of transition, the uncertainties of memory, and the inevitability of change are recurring themes in Johns's art.

The notion of time passing gains prominence in works from the 1970s, in which abstract, linear patterns known as "crosshatchings" are configured into intricate compositions using formal strategies such as repetition, mirroring, shifting and scrolling.

Johns first encountered the pattern on a car that passed him while he was driving on Long Island, New York. "I only saw it for a second", Johns comments, "but knew immediately that I was going to use it".

Recreated from memory, the crosshatchings provide a structure for sensuous surfaces that attract the eye, although intense mental concentration is required to decipher their intricate arrangements.

Johns titled many of these works with words or phrases that suggest transitory states and the fleeting nature of existence.

These include 'Corpse and Mirror', 'Between the Clock and the Bed', 'Usuyuki' (the Japanese word for a light layer of snow), and 'Cicada', an insect that lives for years underground in its larval stage and only a few short weeks as an adult.

Other works examine the Freudian concept of the conflicting drives of sexuality and death. Works titled 'Tantric Detail' and 'Dancers on a Plane' include skulls, lingams and other symbols from Nepalese art. 'Catenary (I Call to the Grave)' takes its parenthetical title from a passage in the Book of Job.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Cicada II

1979–1981

Screenprint on paper

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988

The Dutch Wives

1977

Screenprint on paper

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988

Skin

1975

Charcoal and oil on paper

‘Skin’ captures a direct impression of Johns’s body from head to upper thighs.

To create the work, Johns coated his body with baby oil and pressed it against the paper; the oil-coated areas absorbed the charcoal, revealing the image.

Odd distortions resulting from the imprinting process, where only certain parts touched the surface, convey the effect of a decaying corpse or death shroud.

Richard Serra

Catenary (I Call to the Grave)

1998

Encaustic on canvas with objects

Philadelphia Museum of Art, 125th Anniversary

Acquisition. Purchased with funds contributed by Gisela and Dennis Alter, Keith L. and Katherine Sachs, Frances and Bayard Storey, The Dietrich Foundation, Marguerite and Gerry Lenfest, Mr. and Mrs. Brook Lenfest, Marsha and Jeffrey Perelman, Jane and Leonard Korman, Mr. and Mrs. Berton E. Korman, Mr. and Mrs. William T. Vogt, Dr. and Mrs. Paul Richardson, Mr. and Mrs. George M. Ross, Ella B. Schaap, Eileen and Stephen Matchett, and other donors

Dancers on a Plane

1980

Oil on canvas with painted bronze frame

Tate: Purchased 1981



Tantric Detail

1980

Charcoal and graphite pencil on paper

Collection of the artist

Corpse and Mirror II

1974–1975

Oil and sand on canvas (four panels)

Collection of the artist

Usuyuki

1977–1978

Encaustic and collage on canvas (three panels)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna,
Jr. Fund

Between the Clock and the Bed

1981

Oil on canvas (three panels)

Collection of the artist

Between the Clock and the Bed

1982–1983

Encaustic on canvas (three panels)

Johns's tripartite canvas is one of three large paintings of the same title, this one in grisaille, the other two in colour (one of which is hanging nearby). In each version, the crosshatched patterns on the right and left panels mirror one another.

The evocative title alludes to a late self-portrait by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863–1944) in which he contemplates mortality and the passing of time.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Gift of Sydney and Frances Lewis and the Sydney and Frances Lewis Foundation

Between the Clock and the Bed

1988

Watercolour and graphite pencil on paper

Ryobi Foundation

Water Freezes

1961

Encaustic and collage on canvas and wood with objects
(two panels)

The words “water freezes”, stencilled in grey on grey, are aligned with the 32°F (0°C) point on the thermometer that bisects the surface of this work.

This moment, when water turns to ice, liquid to solid, acts as a metaphor for the transition from an open emotional state to a closed one.

As with Johns’s other word paintings from this period such as ‘No’ (1961) and ‘Liar’ (1961), seen earlier in the exhibition, possible interpretations range from the factual to the psychological.

Collection of Marguerite and Robert Hoffman

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Large
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Jasper Johns:

‘Something Resembling Truth’

7

Do not remove from gallery

Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



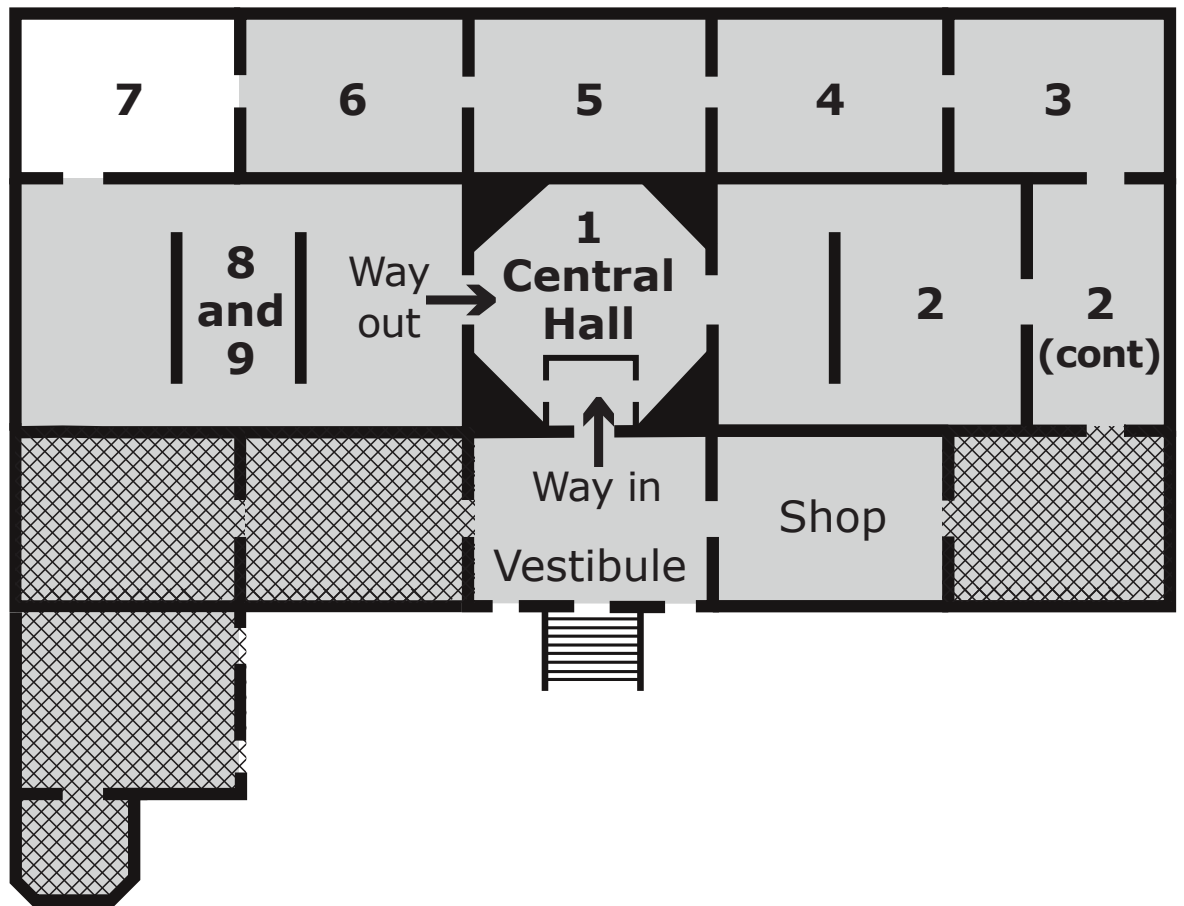
Introduction: Fragments and Faces



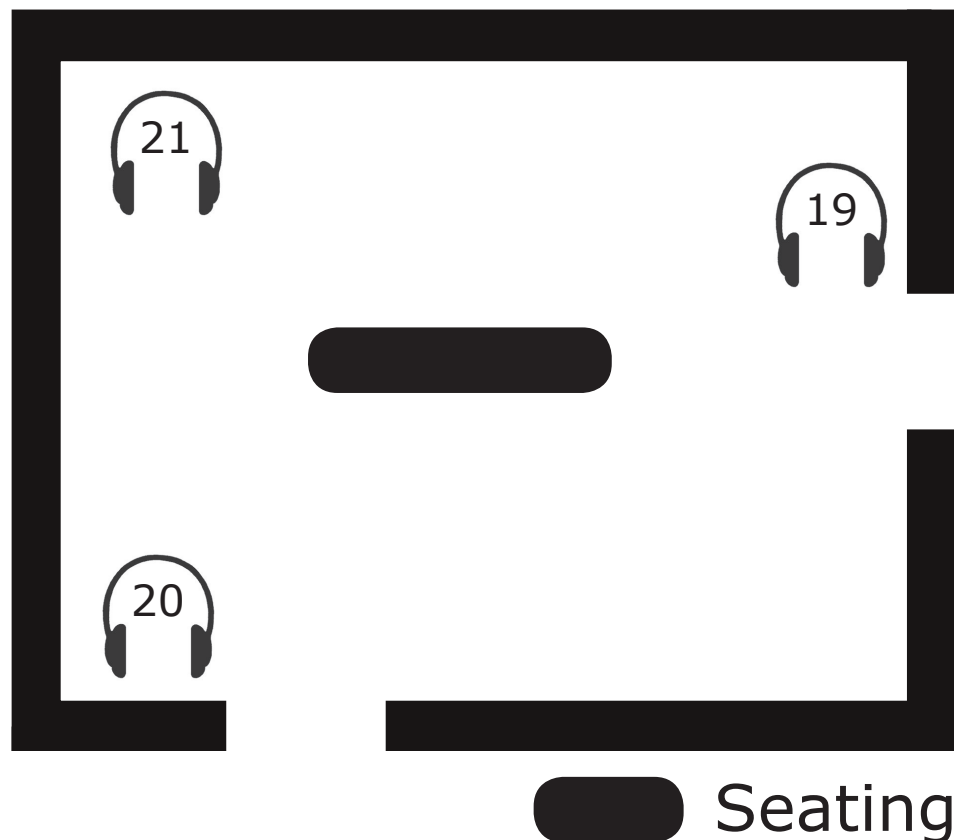
Souvenir, 1964



Perilous Night, 1982



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Fragments and Faces

When the human figure is depicted in Johns's work it is nearly always in fragmentary form, either as casts or imprints of parts of the body or, later, as tracings or reinventions of figurative images taken from the work of other artists.

Impressions of the artist's hands, arms, face, feet, and torso record his presence as his "skin" marks the canvas or paper surface with paint or charcoal.

The imprint of an outstretched arm and hand recurs in many works and may be interpreted as the artist's arm wielding a brush, or a sinking figure signalling desperately for help.

Johns's earliest target paintings included brightly tinted plaster casts of anatomical parts arranged in niches. A decade later, he introduced realistically coloured wax casts into his work.

The most vivid and disturbing of these are the casts in an untitled painting from 1972 (Museum Ludwig, Cologne), which became the basis for the intaglios Johns made for the book 'Foirades/Fizzles', a collaboration with the Irish writer Samuel Beckett.

The dangling casts of arms in 'Perilous Night' coincide with the introduction of tracings of details from the Isenheim Altarpiece (c. 1512–1516) by Matthias Grünewald (c. 1470–1528), which include a startled soldier from the Resurrection panel and a diseased creature from The Temptation of St. Anthony.

Among these anatomical fragments, faces reoccur most consistently.

A black and white photograph of Johns appears on a plate in 'Souvenir'; the 'Mona Lisa' is framed by cartoon-like features in a 1996 drawing; a portrait by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) is bisected and cropped in an untitled painting from 1988, and the shifting profiles of an old and young woman are depicted in an untitled drawing from 1986.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Foirades/Fizzles

1976

Artist's book with 33 intaglios by Jasper Johns and five texts by Samuel Beckett in printed letterpress, boxed in linen, with an internal lining of lithographs by Jasper Johns

Johns met Samuel Beckett in 1973, and together they collaborated on a book containing five text "fragments" by Beckett, each in French and English, and 33 intaglios by Johns. The individual pages are also on display in this room.

Johns's imagery included crosshatchings, flagstones, and wax casts of the body which, along with the text, addressed his and Beckett's shared interests in language and the nature of existence.

Collection of the artist

Foirades/Fizzles

1976–2017

Portfolio with 33 intaglios by Jasper Johns and five texts by Samuel Beckett in French and English printed letterpress

Collection Petersburg Fine Art

Land's End

1977

Ink and watercolour on plastic

Collection of Kate Ganz

Souvenir

1964

Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects

Collection of the artist



Untitled

1996

Graphite wash on paper

Thomas H. Lee and Ann Tenenbaum, New York

Untitled

1988

Encaustic on canvas

In this painting from Johns's "bathtub" series, the eccentric profile of 'Woman in a Straw Hat' (1936) by Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) is bisected and seems to be in the process of melting.

Hidden in the night sky, which is dotted with stars and galaxies, is the abstracted form of a figure traced from the Isenheim Altarpiece.

Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz

Untitled

1986

Watercolour and graphite pencil on paper

Collection of the artist

Perilous Night

1982

Encaustic on canvas with objects

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Collection



Watchman

1964

Oil on canvas with objects (two panels)

The fragment of an upside-down seated figure is the first cast to appear in Johns's work since 1955, when they featured in some of his first target works. The cast and painting were made during a three month stay in Tokyo.

(continued over)

The adjacent painting 'Decoy' (1971) reproduces a fragment of the "watchman" using a photo-silkscreen derived from the lithograph 'Passage I' (1966), also in this room.

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

Decoy

1971

Oil on canvas with object

Private collection

Passage I

1966

Lithograph on handmade paper

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Judy and Kenneth Dayton, 1988

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Large
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Jasper Johns:

‘Something Resembling Truth’

8 and 9

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Audio tour



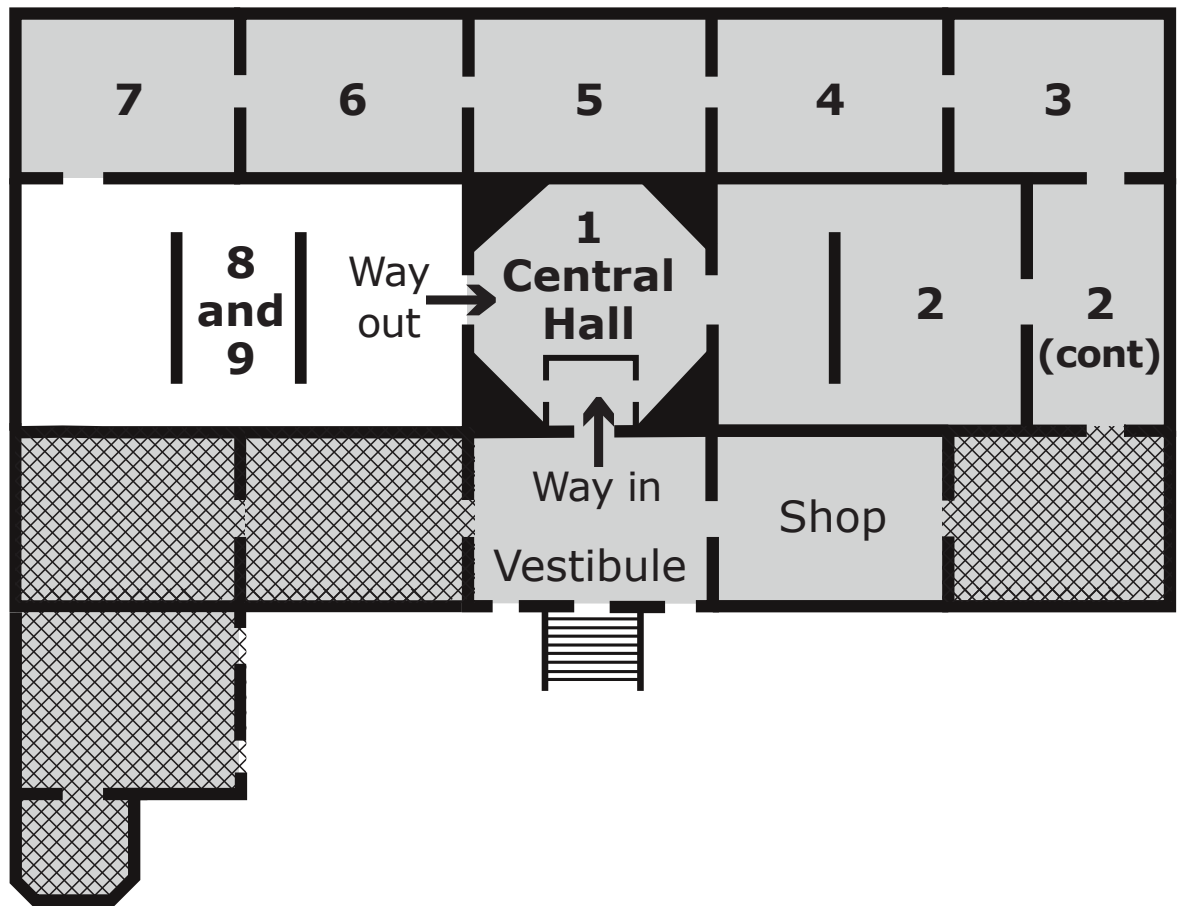
Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



56 Spring, Winter, Fall, Summer;
1985 and 1986



You are in 8



Jasper Johns

“Something Resembling Truth”

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8

Seasons and Cycles

Between 1985 and 1986 Johns completed a suite of paintings collectively known as the 'Seasons'. This self-reflective series of paintings and related graphics presents an allegory of the four seasons and the corresponding stages of human life.

The silhouette of a figure – traced from Johns's shadow – reappears in different positions within each composition.

The series also features imagery from Johns's earlier works, such as an outstretched arm tracing a circle.

The rope, ladder and star-filled sky are adapted from Picasso's autobiographical painting 'The Minotaur Moving his House' (1936), which shows the artist – half man, half bull – pulling a cart full of his possessions across a landscape.

'Summer', which features a seahorse and a hummingbird in its nest, alludes to Johns's studio in the Caribbean.

In 'Fall' things begin to disintegrate; a canvas falls to reveal another that depicts a self-portrait by Marcel Duchamp and a skull and crossbones.

A picture of a snowman appears in 'Winter' and a duck-rabbit figure along with a boy's shadow in 'Spring'.

The way that the paintings are installed – with 'Spring' following 'Winter' – emphasises the cyclical nature of time. In a 1990 intaglio, Johns arranged the seasons in a cruciform design, which presented the opportunity to read the works in a circular rather than linear fashion, without a fixed beginning or end.

Twenty-five years later, Johns returned to the imagery in the 'Seasons' in drawings, prints and the multi-panelled painting 'Five Postcards'. In this sequence, the shadow of a boy dominates each panel, while the shadow of a man gradually recedes from view.

List of works

(**Anti**-clockwise in order of hang)

Untitled

2010

Ink and watercolour on paper

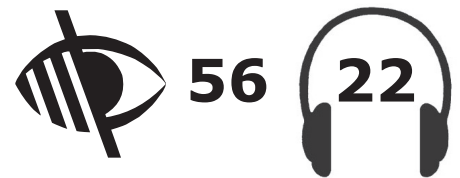
Collection of the artist

Spring

1986

Encaustic on canvas

Robert and Jane Meyerhoff Collection

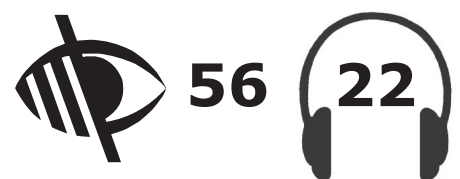


Winter

1986

Encaustic on canvas

Private collection

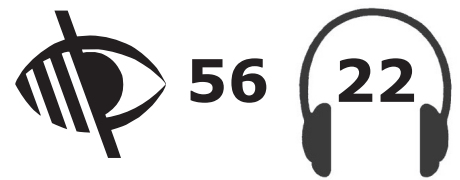


Fall

1986

Encaustic on canvas

Collection of the artist



Summer

1985

Encaustic on canvas

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson, 1998



The Seasons

1990

Intaglio on paper

Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions

Untitled

1998

Ink on paper glued to backing sheet

Collection of the artist

5 Postcards

2011

Encaustic on canvas

Oil on canvas

Oil on canvas

Oil on canvas

Encaustic on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Promised Gift of Keith
L. and Katherine Sachs

Untitled

2012

Monotype on paper

Collection of the artist

Audio tour



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Memory Tracings



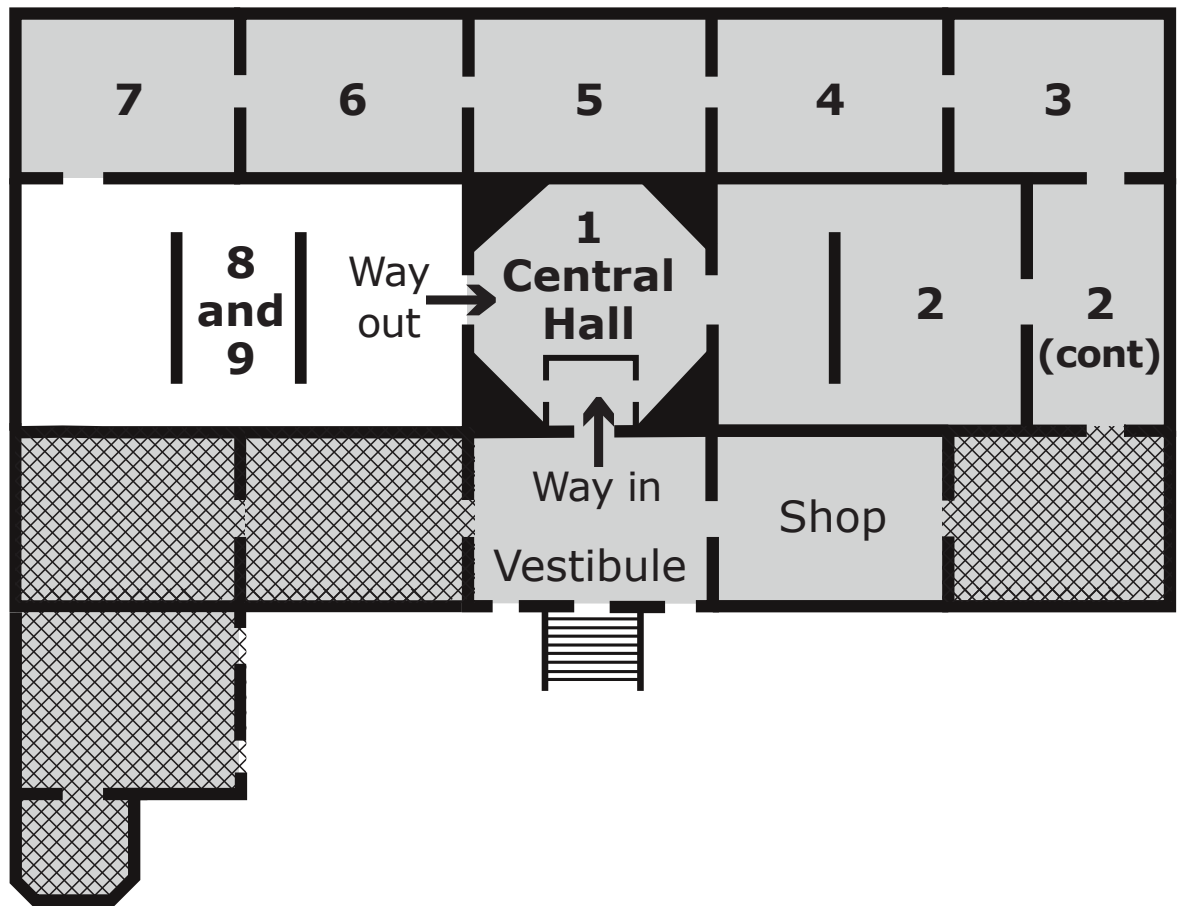
Untitled, 1992 - 1994



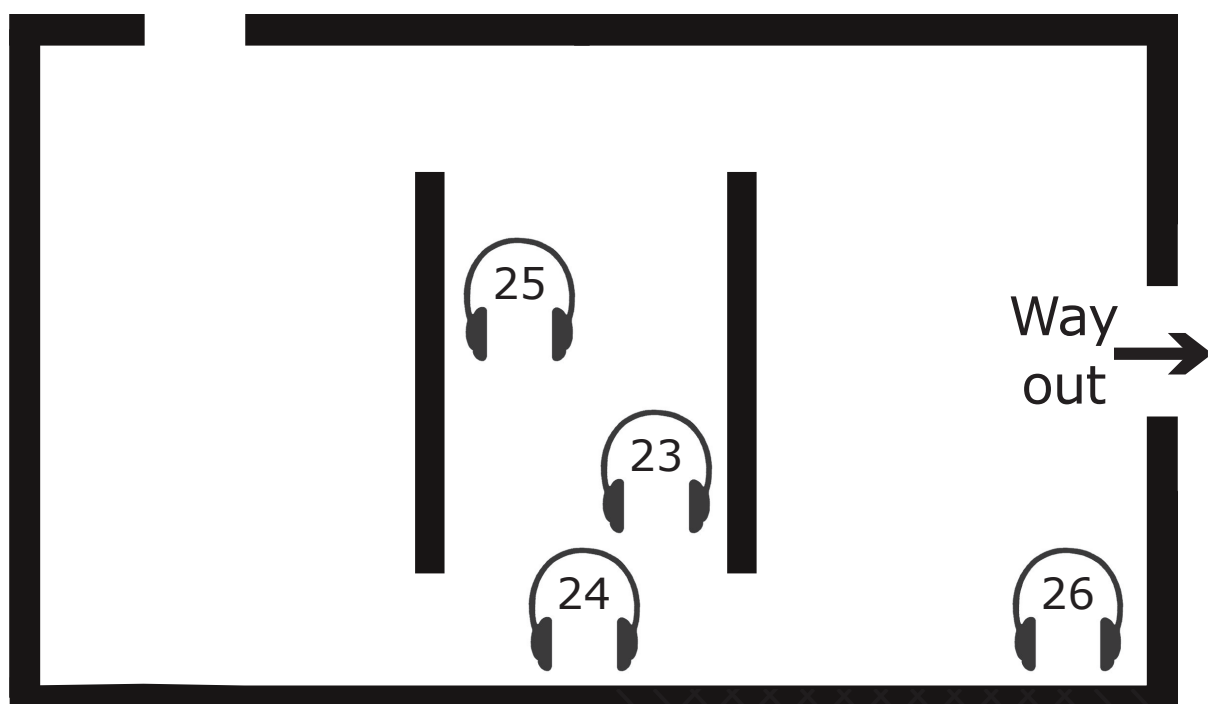
Regrets, states I–XV, 2013



Farley Breaks Down, 2014



You are in 9



Memory Tracings

In this last group of works – completed between 1989 and 2016 – Johns continues to explore memory, identity and mortality, while expanding his ongoing enquiry into the relationship between perception and meaning.

Many of the works in this section relate explicitly to the artist's childhood. They feature images such as the floor plan of Johns's grandfather's house; a Halloween costume; and an early family photograph of his grandparents with their children, Johns's father and aunts and uncles.

Alongside these autobiographical motifs, Johns continues to use tracing to explore the underlying structure of images "free of the information that the images convey".

This approach is particularly striking in 'Green Angel', which contains a tracing whose source is unknown and which reappears, upside down, in an untitled painting from 1992–1994, as if depicted on a canvas leaning against his studio wall.

To its left is the floor plan of his grandfather's house overlaid by a tracing of the soldier from Grünewald's Resurrection and a cross adapted from his intaglio 'The Seasons'.

The complex layering that characterises Johns's work from the first half of the 1990s later gives way to the grey expanses of the 'Catenary' series, where looped pieces of string fall in 'catenary' curves from hinged slats, recalling the measuring devices that Johns attached to his works in the 1960s.

Johns has also recently begun to work from found photographs.

The 'Regrets' group is based on a tracing from a damaged photograph of the artist Lucian Freud (1922–2011).

Freud's despairing pose resembles that of the exhausted, grief-stricken marine taken by Larry Burrows during the Vietnam War – an image used by Johns as the source for 'Farley Breaks Down' and 'After Larry Burrows'.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)



Untitled

1992–1994

Encaustic on canvas

The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection

Untitled

1991–1994

Oil on canvas

Collection of the artist

Montez Singing

1989–1990

Oil on canvas

The title of this painting evokes Johns's memory of his step-grandmother Montez singing a popular tune, 'Red Sails in the Sunset'.

This and the paintings flanking it contain variations on the reoccurring face with disembodied features which was inspired both by Picasso's 'Woman in a Straw Hat' (1936; Musée Picasso, Paris) and by a drawing by a schizophrenic child that Johns saw in an article by the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim (1903–1990).

Collection of the artist

Untitled

2016

Oil on canvas

Completed at the end of 2016, this is the most recent work in the exhibition.

In this painting, Johns can be seen re-contextualising imagery from earlier work, including 'Bridge' (1997) and the 'Seasons' (1985–1986).

Most notable are the eyes from 'Montez Singing' (1989–1990), which reappear with pupils formed from stencilled noughts.

Collection of the artist

Bridge

1997

Oil on canvas with objects

'Bridge' is the first in a group of paintings which feature hinged slats and strings that hang in catenary curves.

The diamond pattern at the right of the painting references Harlequin the trickster, a figure from the *commedia dell'arte*, who stands for Johns's alter ego, while the string provides a metaphorical bridge between the past and the present.

Images of the Big Dipper and a distant galaxy add the dimension of cosmic space and time.

Promised gift of Helen and Charles Schwab to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Untitled

2008

Acrylic, pastel, oil crayon, graphite and collage with object over intaglio mounted on canvas

Private collection

Untitled (Family Photo in Black)

2001

Intaglio on paper

Courtesy Universal Limited Art Editions

Nothing at All Richard Dadd

1992

Graphite pencil on paper

The title of this drawing references the British painter Richard Dadd (1817–1886) who, after murdering his father at the age of 26, spent the rest of his life in an insane asylum, where he painted obsessively detailed pictures.

“Nothing at all” alludes to the last line of a poem by Dadd: “nothing from nothing nothing gains.”

Johns’s intensely worked surface combines the floor plan of the house he grew up in, imagery from the ‘Seasons’ and a spiral galaxy.

Kathy and Richard S. Fuld, Jr. Fractional and promised gift to The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Regrets, states I–XV

2013

Aquatint on paper

Collection of the artist

Untitled

2001

Watercolour and charcoal on paper

Collection of the artist

Catenary (Jacob's Ladder)

1999

Encaustic on canvas with objects

Collection of the artist

Catenary (Manet-Degas)

1999

Graphite pencil, watercolour, acrylic and brush and ink on paper

The rectangles of irregular proportions in this drawing follow the fragments of 'The Execution of Maximilian' (c.1867–1868) by Edouard Manet (1832–1883) in the National Gallery, London.

Damaged after the artist's death, the painting was cut into pieces and dispersed before being reassembled by Edgar Degas (1834–1917).

Here the bridge formed by the catenary curve signals the bond between Johns and these two influential predecessors.

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of The American Contemporary Art Foundation, Inc., Leonard A. Lauder, President

Regrets

2013

Oil on canvas

The basis for this painting is a tracing from a photograph of Lucian Freud (1922–2011), commissioned by Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and taken by the photographer John Deakin (1912–1972) in 1964.

Two “mirrored” tracings of Freud, seated on a bed with his head bent, morph into abstract forms due to the photograph’s irregular edges and damaged surface. The title refers both to Freud’s expressive pose and to a stamp Johns uses with the word “regrets” and his signature to turn down invitations.

Collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman

Regrets

2014

Aquatint on chine-collé

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Mary M. and Sash A. Spencer, 2014

Farley Breaks Down



2014

Ink and water-soluble encaustic on plastic
Collection of the artist

After Larry Burrows

2002

Ink on plastic
Collection of the artist

Green Angel

1990

Encaustic and sand on canvas

Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Anonymous gift in honor of Martin and Mildred Friedman, 1990

Tracing

1989

Ink on plastic

The tracing which provides the scaffold for this drawing was taken from a reproduction of a drawing by Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), 'Portrait of a Young Nobleman Holding a Lemur' (c. 1541).

Details of the boy's head, torso, hat, clothing and the small pet he holds in his arms are visible within the tracing's patterns and the sensuous flow of ink on plastic.

Private collection, London

Your feedback, please

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Thank you.

Molly Bretton, Access & Communities Manager



InTouch  **at the RA**

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