

# AND WHAT CAN WE SAY TO BE GOING ON NOW...?

# FT-Lo

1 October–20 November 2020

*“Are our conventional categories the best... or provisional, transient, redundant...?  
Is our marginalisation for public economy – or a function of admin convenience...?  
Who is really qualified, to reveal the ostensible cosmos – scientist, priest or who?...  
...Should the Queen be used for shutdowns and hushups – (and does she know her Charter is used in  
this way...?)  
Do the megaproblems of humans have a conceptual base...and isn't this artists' concern...?”*

– John Latham<sup>1</sup>

Flat Time House re-opens with a selection of works by John Latham that reflect on a period of action, political critique and protest undertaken by the artist in the mid to late 1980s. Using archival material and artworks from the John Latham Archive and the John Latham Foundation collection we can consider his sometimes audacious intent, with the knowledge of outcomes, at times ineffectual or unnoticed.

In the present moment of political turmoil, Latham's axiom *And what can we say to be to be going on now...?* can be read with a note of exasperation, frustration but also close analysis. The phrase acts as a bridge to a previous political moment in the mid 1980's, when Latham had just moved to 210 Bellenden Road, now 'Flat Time I-lo', and throughout which he was engaged in correspondence with the Arts Council of England (sometimes expressed by Latham as an arm of 'United Kingdom Corporation') over their lack of recognition and refusal to seriously consider his Time-Based ideas. Alongside this correspondence the exhibition presents documentation of Latham's work *Distress over Parliament*. A direct response to his personal frustrations with the Arts Council, this action was a largely overlooked public performance in which Latham shot two maritime flares over the House of Parliament on Mayday 1983. The event coincided with the aftermath of the UK's involvement in the Falklands War, particularly Margaret Thatcher's defence of the controversial sinking of the Argentine cruiser the *Belgrano* to significant loss of life. Latham intended the work as a deliberately controversial action that ultimately went largely unseen.

Latham's video work *The Gulf* is also presented, one of a series of six that he entitled *Targets*. Latham was amongst a number of artists invited by the producer Anna Ridley to create original works using the context and medium of broadcast television where each artist could choose to make a single work or a series and determine the duration, an innovative concept at the time. These Artists' Works for Television are known as the *Dadarama* series although each work was broadcast under its own title. Latham's *Targets* series was broadcast over six successive evenings in 1985, one per evening, on Channel 4 Television commissioner of the *Dadarama* series. *The Gulf* was described by artist Richard Hamilton, as “the most haunting of the many hours I have watched TV over the years. It was a poetic illustration of the most alarming political issue facing us all – the Middle East confrontation phrased in a superimposition of abstract and figurative elements and in total conformity with Latham's time-based philosophy”<sup>2</sup>

During this period Latham was also a regular contributor to the radical publication, *AND: Journal of Art and Art Education*, demonstrating his continued deployment of language as intellectual provocation. These text works are counterbalanced by the presentation of several 'intercourses', sculptural studies by Latham where the interlacing of pages renders books unreadable but suggests a new dialogue of ideas that goes beyond received knowledge.

Curated by Flat Time House archivist Sarah Millet

<sup>1</sup> John Latham *And What Can We Say To Be Going On Now...?* published in *AND: Journal of Art and Art Education* No. 11/12 1987

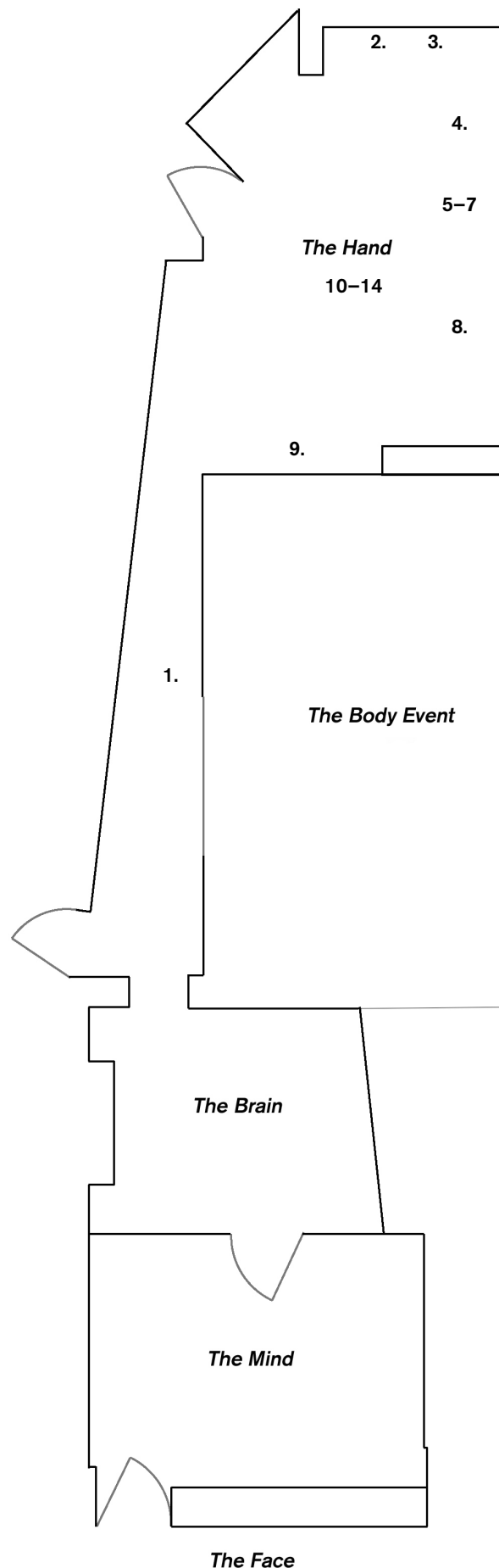
<sup>2</sup> Richard Hamilton, *John Latham: 1954–72 Early Works* published by Lisson Gallery 1987

1. (In the corridor and throughout the exhibition) John Latham, *Distress Over Parliament*, documentation, 1983
2. John Latham, *And What Can We Say to be Going On Now*, published in *AND Journal* No. 11/12 1987
3. John Latham letter to Margaret Thatcher, 21 April 1988
4. John Latham, letter to Sir Monty Finniston, FRS, Chancellor of Stirling University, December 1982, referencing his past history with the Arts Council alongside a column published in *Art Monthly* November 1982 No. 16 – Latham writes in *Art Monthly* in regard to funding bodies that “some 12 months ago it became very clear that any artist is outside the law if the Art Council decides to eliminate the inconvenience one may cause in the course of work.”
5. Letter from the *Sunday Times*, 20 March 1981
6. John Latham letter to the *Sunday Times*, 8 December 1987
7. Letter from the *Guardian*, response, 24 January 1984
8. John Latham, *Censorship of Artists in Britain Reaches a New Level of Sophistication But Truth Must Out*, published in *AND Journal* No.5 1985
9. John Latham, *The Gulf*, video, 1984. From the series *Targets*, commissioned by Anna Ridley's *Annalogue Productions* for Channel 4 in as part of *Dadarama*. Courtesy Anna Ridley and the artist

(On the table)

10. *The Twilight of Capitalism married to Pilgrimage to People*, 1987, book intercourse
11. *Decline of the West*, 1994, book and glass sculpture
12. *Triumph of the West*, 1987, book and glass sculpture
13. *A Guilty Silence*, 1987, book sculpture
14. *The Pack of Lies*, 1987, books coupled

All documents and works courtesy John Latham Foundation



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