

# **Audio Guide Transcript**

**Rachel Whiteread**

March 17–June 9, 2019  
Main Exhibition Galleries

**SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM**

## **Gallery 241: Introduction to *Rachel Whiteread***

Speaker: Brent Benjamin  
Barbara B. Taylor Director  
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Brent Benjamin, The Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum. Welcome to this exhibition featuring the work of celebrated British sculptor Rachel Whiteread. This audio guide offers expert commentary on 10 works of art throughout the galleries whose wall labels include an audio icon. I also encourage you to visit and learn about an additional work by Whiteread in our collection that was recently installed on the southwest lawn of the Museum's campus. Each of these featured objects is highlighted on a floorplan, which can be accessed on this webpage.

This audio guide is narrated by curator Simon Kelly, assistant curator Hannah Klemm, and research assistant Molly Moog in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Their interpretations and Whiteread's innovative sculptures may guide you to think differently about your interactions with everyday objects. I hope you enjoy this tour and your visit to *Rachel Whiteread*.

**STOP 1**  
**Gallery 241: *Closet***

Speaker: Simon Kelly  
Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hi, my name is Simon Kelly, and I'm the curator of modern and contemporary art at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Rachel Whiteread has here produced a large plaster sculpture that gives solid form to the empty space within a cupboard. The artist covered her Minimalist sculpture in black felt, a soft surface, to offset the hardness of the plaster. Whiteread's use of felt suggests the darkness of the inside of a closet, a space often used by children as a hiding place. The artist has said that the choice of the wardrobe was "somehow rooted in my childhood." Born in 1963, Whiteread often draws on her memories of her upbringing in post-World War II London.

*Closet* is an early example of Rachel Whiteread's signature process of making sculpture out of negative space. Her geometrical visual language, as in this work, has always been international in scope and related particularly to the work of the American Minimalists who emerged in the 1960s, such as Donald Judd and Richard Serra. Whiteread, however, has set her output apart by her distinctive process and the layered resonances of personal memory in her art.

*Closet* was one of four sculptures shown in an exhibition at the Carlisle Gallery in East London in 1988, Whiteread's first solo exhibition after graduating from the Slade School of Fine Art. All four of these sculptures are reunited in this introductory space to the Saint Louis Art Museum exhibition. To your left is *Shallow Breath*, a cast of the

underside of a bed. Made when her father was dying, this work reflects Whiteread's preoccupation with issues of mortality at that time. *Mantle* shows the inside of a dressing table, while *Torso* is an early example of a sculpture of the inside of a hot-water bottle. These sculptures all reflect Whiteread's fascination with the fabric of a humble bedroom space.

## **STOP 2**

### **Gallery 242: *Untitled (Twenty-five Spaces)***

Speaker: Hannah Klemm  
Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

My name is Hannah Klemm, and I'm the assistant curator of modern and contemporary art at the Saint Louis Art Museum. This work, *Untitled (Twenty-five Spaces)*, is made of 25 individual sculptural units that are all casts of the undersides of different chairs.

Rachel Whiteread's work is wide-ranging in scale and material, as you can see with these objects and throughout the rest of the exhibition. Yet there are consistencies in her practice, in particular, her use of this traditional sculptural form of casting to transfigure the objects in spaces of everyday life.

One of the things that she's been very interested in throughout her career is repeated forms and seriality. This seriality and serial repetition within individual works first made its appearance when she embarked on the group of multiple casts of the spaces of the undersides of chairs, which this object, *Untitled (Twenty-five Spaces)*, is a part of. She began with a smaller group, which was called *Untitled (Six Spaces)*, made in 1994. It was followed by a group of 16, then this iteration of 25, and then, finally, in 1995, she made a group of 100 spaces, the largest of the grids. These objects are laid out in this grid formation, so that you can really see that repetition of the objects as they kind of unfold across the space as you look in the gallery. It's important to walk around this set of objects, so you can view through the individual objects, through the rows of the

objects, and really get that grouping and that grid, as well as looking closely at these individual sculpted objects.

As I said earlier, it's the cast of the space of an underside of a chair. That seems kind of easy to understand as you look at these objects—you can see there's a lot of variety there, and you have to look closely to see how she created this cast and this space. So, you can see the individual chair legs; you can see the way that the chair sat on top of the structure she made to cast that space. You can start to look at the nuance and ways that she responds to these individual forms and how they're abstracted, yet they are also always referencing the objects that they come from. The imperfections, the wear and tear from the chair, the different kind of wood grains—aspects of these objects are literally imprinted in the resin.

## STOP 3

### Gallery 242: *Untitled (Pink Torso)*

Speaker: Simon Kelly  
Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

This sculpture represents the interior of a hot-water bottle that Whiteread produced by pouring plaster into the empty space within the bottle and then peeling away the bottle itself. It was made in dental plaster, a variant form of plaster that Whiteread often uses and that has a finish, particularly reminiscent for her, of the surface of stone. *Untitled (Pink Torso)* is one of a series of sculptures Whiteread has made on the theme of the hot-water bottle. It highlights her interest in the idea of seriality, that is to say, taking a particular motif and transforming it through treatment in different materials and slight variations. Eight of these related sculptures, dating from 1988 to 1999, are grouped together in a single case. As these sculptures are relatively easy to make, this form has become a focus for Whiteread's experiments with different kinds of materials. The materials used here include concrete, plaster, resin, and wax. The colors also vary widely, from the flesh-like tones of *Untitled (Pink Torso)* to bright yellows and silver.

Whiteread's choice of the subject of a hot-water bottle has resonances of domesticity and warmth and gives form to a household object that was very common in Britain during her upbringing. Her choice of title, *Torso*, is important since this sculpture, and its variants, is the most anthropomorphic of all her sculptures, with evident connections to the human body. Whiteread has even described her *Torso* sculptures as her "limbless,

headless babies.” This description suggests a surreal, uncanny element to these works that differentiates them from earlier traditions of Minimalism.

**STOP 4**  
**Gallery 242: *Untitled (Amber Mattress)***

Speaker: Simon Kelly  
Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

*Untitled (Amber Mattress)* again relates to Whiteread's fascination with the creation of sculpture from domestic objects. Over the years, she has been especially focused on beds and mattresses as a subject. *Untitled (Amber Mattress)* shows the cast of one side of a mattress, created by the artist from a mold that she had made. Whiteread's sculpture, made of rubber and foam, gives detailed form to the individual threads of the mattress. It suggests the residue of human use and the trace of human presence. Whiteread has always thought very carefully about the ways in which her works are installed. She prefers not to use platforms, generally siting her larger sculptures directly on the ground. In the case of *Untitled (Amber Mattress)*, she chose to place the mattress against the wall, rather than flat on the ground, as in other related works. In so doing, she allows the mattress to take on an anthropomorphic quality, suggesting a slumped body.

*Untitled (Amber Mattress)* has an additional resonance in terms of the wider social context in which it was created. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, abandoned mattresses were often visible on the streets of London as a sign of homelessness and social displacement. Whiteread's parents were Labor Party activists, and her work can be seen as having a political dimension, referencing the social tensions within Britain at that time, particularly during the period in power of the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

## **STOP 5**

### **Gallery 243: *Maquette for Holocaust Memorial***

Speaker: Hannah Klemm  
Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

This is a maquette, or model, for the Holocaust Memorial that Rachel Whiteread designed for the city of Vienna. It was unveiled in 2000. It was a memorial to the 65,000 Austrian Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust. The memorial sits in Vienna's Judenplatz, the town square that had been the center of the city's thriving Jewish community. This project began with an international competition, where individuals and teams of artists and architects from Austria, Israel, Great Britain, and the United States were invited to compete. Whiteread's design was chosen unanimously by an international jury. The submissions had to take into account the design constraints of the site at the Judenplatz, and it had to include text—a memorial inscription listing all the concentration camps in which Austrian Jews were killed.

The memorial that Whiteread designed is a closed, windowless, single-story building. It sits on a low plinth. The walls are covered from top to bottom with rows of books, but they've all been turned to face the wall. These books represent all the lost ideas, lost cultural history, and lost moments due to the murder of 65,000 Austrian Jews. The architectural features of the building—which you can see in the doors, cornice, and the ceiling rose—all came from features that she appropriated from the buildings surrounding the Judenplatz, bringing the exterior architectural elements into the monument, mirroring them, really, to describe that loss of human life in this building. These books can't be read, the building can't be opened, and it echoes the horrors of the

past and loss that were brought into the future. Public art is an incredibly important part of Whiteread's practice, and this is just one of many public monuments and memorials that she has created over the years.

## **STOP 6**

### **Gallery 244: *Untitled (Yellow Bath)***

Speaker: Hannah Klemm  
Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

In *Untitled (Yellow Bath)* from 1996, Rachel Whiteread created a positive form from negative space. In this instance, Whiteread built a frame around an inverted cast-iron bathtub and, using a rubber-polystyrene mix, cast the space surrounding the bathtub rather than the space inside of it. The resulting form is a minimal, rectangular object with a deep concavity, indicating the interior space of the bathtub. The rubber-polystyrene mix comes out to this translucent yellow color, which also references the bathtub itself and the iron and rust that would've come from it.

Unlike traditional cast sculptures, which are intended to replicate objects exactly, Whiteread's works instead cast the space inside or around everyday forms—such as furniture, boxes, architectural structures, or, in this case, an object from a domestic space—recording their surfaces and allowing their shapes to determine the forms of her sculpture. In this way, she explores the human imprint on our everyday environment and the physical signs left by everyday living that indicate the passage of time. In some ways, this can be seen as an exploration of the space surrounding the body.

Unlike the original bathtub though, it would not be easy for a person to step into *Untitled (Yellow Bath)*. The cast bathtub exists at an elevated level. There are wider spaces on all sides, so it would take quite a step to get into it. Whiteread has explained that she cast the bathtub in this way with the specific intent of freeing the object from

the notion of its original practical use and trying to give it new meaning. By casting it at this unfamiliar height and width, she in some ways removed the object from its original domestic sphere. Instead, it appears almost at a ritualistic height, much like a coffin or a funerary monument.

## **STOP 7**

### **Gallery 244: Works on Paper**

Speaker: Hannah Klemm  
Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

Works on paper have long been a significant, though seldom seen, aspect of Whiteread's practice. Here we have a wall, hung salon style, of her drawings and works on paper, meaning the individual works are stacked on top of each other. Drawing for Whiteread is seen as an independent medium that exists alongside her sculpture as well as a method of illustrating designs for her three-dimensional pieces. The artist has referred to her sketches and drawings as a way to enable her to work through ideas, but it is important to note that they are often also unique and separate pieces.

The works on paper vary greatly in scale and method of production. Whiteread uses a range of paper stocks, from commercial graph paper to cartridge paper. She also uses a range of drawing media, from pencil and ink to gouache and even correction fluid, such as Wite-Out, all the way to collages and photographic images of houses or boxes or staircases. These images are often isolated on the background of paper, and they appear to float in space. The texture and volume of the objects depicted are central to the works, many of which relate to sculptures that you will see in this exhibition.

As you peruse the wall, these specific examples of works are evident, yet you will also see drawings that you think reference individual works that are actually reflections of an already completed sculpture. These objects are not always sketches or preparatory

drawings; sometimes they are images that she has created, referencing back to work she has already made. She is very interested in how her drawings record shapes and surfaces, from the herringbone patterns of a floor to the Wite-Out outlines of a set of stairs. While you're looking at this arrangement, you might also find the 3-D works on paper she started in the 2010s. These collages representing found boxes and packaging include flattened objects adhered to paper. These small, flat boxes are painted silver, and then she adds transparent colored acrylic. These works, and her drawings in general, blur the processes of drawing, collage, and sculpture. As a group, her drawings and works on paper give a complete picture of Whiteread's studio as a site of experimentation.

## **STOP 8**

### **Gallery 246: *Line Up***

Speaker: Molly Moog  
Research Assistant in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, my name is Molly Moog. I'm a research assistant in the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum. In the mid-2000s Rachel Whiteread completed several challenging, large-scale projects that required the help of many studio assistants. Afterward, she began making smaller sculptures that she could produce on her own in her studio. One of these sculptures, *Line Up*, is a row of cylinders cast in plaster and resin from the inside of toilet paper roll tubes. The casts vary in color, texture, and transparency or opaqueness. Up until this point, Whiteread had used color sparingly and deliberately, mostly relying on the inherent colors of her materials. With this work, however, she added pigments to her materials that mimic the bright colors of the toys and art supplies she and her two young children used to play together.

Whiteread made a number of different casts from the toilet paper rolls and returned later, once they had dried, to experiment with arranging them into groupings. The title of this work, *Line Up*, refers to the seam in the cardboard toilet paper roll tube, which has left the imprint of a thin line winding around the outside of each cast, almost like a drawing or a decoration.

**STOP 9**  
**Gallery 246: *Lean***

Speaker: Hannah Klemm  
Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

You're looking at *Lean* from 2005, a work that Rachel Whiteread made by casting, with plaster of paris, the interior of cardboard boxes. Whiteread's practice is incredibly articulate at fusing vernacular forms with personal as well as universal human experiences and memories. In this case, the impetus for these sculptures of boxes came from a very personal moment in Rachel Whiteread's life, when her mother died suddenly from a routine exploratory operation. It took Rachel and her sisters a whole year before they could bring themselves to examine the contents of her mother's home. When they were there, they found that they were surrounded by boxes. In particular, there was a box that Rachel found, a cardboard box, that stored objects from her childhood. She started to pay attention to this box, and the container held memories, but also held many objects in people's lives, that it actually was a vehicle for transportation for objects, for shipping, for many aspects of daily and contemporary life. And she became interested in how to make sculptures that related both that incredibly minimal form of a box as well as the fact that a box could hold infinite possibilities.

She took the most standard casting material, plaster of paris, and created these boxes by basically layering the plaster material inside the cardboard boxes, so that it got every little groove of that corrugated cardboard—you know that feeling when you get a box and you can feel those grooves? She also was incredibly interested in the way boxes were

both uniform and not uniform, because of how cardboard is malleable. As you look very closely at this constellation of shipping boxes that look like they held maybe art or maybe a shelf—who knows?—you can see how they all form these kind of irregular shapes and how they have the appearance of a very minimal and abstracted form, but they also have a lot of detail and a lot of experience of the box itself—where it was broken, where it was bent, where it was shaped. And she was interested in the idea that boxes represent this sort of happenstance feel, both in the composition of the work and in terms of how they're handled and how they're moved around. It's a declaration of the process of their construction, both the box itself, but also her casting process.

**STOP 10**  
**Gallery 247: *Due Porte***

Speaker: Simon Kelly  
Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

*Due Porte*, or Two Doors, is a cast in pale green resin of the surface of a pair of large doors. It is one of the most recent works in the exhibition and represents a culminating moment in Rachel Whiteread's engagement with the theme of doors, a subject that she has treated from at least 2004. Initially, she cast doors in opaque plaster, and examples of these works are on view earlier in this exhibition, but in *Due Porte*, she cast her doors in translucent resin. In so doing, she invites us to question the very meanings around doors themselves, since we tend to think of these objects as creating distance and barriers. In Whiteread's sculpture, however, the door allows openness and complete transparency.

*Due Porte* is installed in this final gallery, close by other examples of Whiteread's resin doors. The artist's titles reference the use of doors from particular historical dates. In the case of *Due Porte*, however, the title is more general. These doors and their panels are rectangular, abstract shapes—often shapes within shapes—and they engage very much with the history of the Modernist grid. They can be related to the abstract work of the Russian artist Kazimir Malevich or the American Agnes Martin, whose gridded paintings, like Whiteread's works, were also rendered in subtle color shades.

*Due Porte*, like the artist's later resin works in general, shows that Whiteread is very much an artist of light. Her works often reference different light effects and times of day and show her fascination with the play of light across and through her forms.

## **STOP 11**

### **Southwest Lawn: *Detached III***

Speaker: Simon Kelly  
Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art  
Saint Louis Art Museum

*Detached III* gives permanent concrete form to the empty space within a humble, prefabricated garden shed of a type available in any home improvement store.

Whiteread has spoken about her aim “to mummify the air” within architectural structures. When seen from a distance, the sculpture is very minimalist in design. Yet, close up, one can clearly see the imprint of the shed’s wood grain, lending the work a greater sense of intimacy. The imprints of door handles and windows also suggest a latent human presence. Whiteread’s choice of title, *Detached III*, in fact, relates to her interest in the idea of the shed as a space where artists and writers have gone to find solitary retreat.

*Detached III* is an example of what Rachel Whiteread has called her “shy sculptures,” because she has generally sited them remotely and inconspicuously, often requiring a journey to visit. This sculpture is located alone on the southwest side of the building to reflect this intention. In order to make her sculpture, Whiteread and her team lifted up the shed on all sides on supports and then sprayed its interior from below with liquid concrete. The sculpture is therefore hollow, although with a steel framework, it still weighs the significant amount of 12,125 pounds, or 5,500 kilograms. It is a unique piece, and relates to a small series of sculptures by the artist that represent other prefabricated sheds.

*Detached III* was purchased by the Museum in 2017 and complements the Museum's existing collection of sculpture by prominent British artists such as Henry Moore, Antony Caro, and Andy Goldsworthy.