## Large Print Labels

#### **Rachel Whiteread**

March 17, 2018—June 9, 2019 Main Exhibition Galleries, East Building

## Rachel Whiteread

The work of British artist Rachel Whiteread (born 1963) is wide-ranging in scale and material yet consistent in its use of casting to transfigure the objects and spaces of everyday life. Beginning in the late 1980s, Whiteread has cast familiar places (rooms, staircases, a house), furniture (chairs, tables), and containers (bookcases, cardboard boxes), while incorporating references to social, personal, architectural, and art history. Her work captures the human imprint on abandoned, worn, and often overlooked objects and spaces that one might encounter in the modest London neighborhoods where she has lived. Austere and quietly powerful, the works present a paradox: because they are casts of the spaces within, under, and around things, rather than the things themselves, they appear at once solid and ephemeral, recognizable and strange — in a word, uncanny.

Described as "a geographer of hidden space," Whiteread has charted new sculptural territory by infusing the reductive aesthetics of 1960s minimalism with layers of historical and social meaning. Since winning the coveted Turner Prize in 1993, awarded annually to a British artist, she has received countless honors both at home and abroad, among them commissions for monumental works in England, elsewhere in Europe, and in the United States. This exhibition presents the full range of Whiteread's art from the past thirty years that has earned her acclaim, including sculpture, drawings, and photographs.

Rachel Whiteread is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Tate Britain, London, in association with the Saint Louis Art Museum.

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## Gallery 242

## Carlisle Gallery Exhibition London, 1988

Following her graduation with a master's degree in sculpture from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, Whiteread had her first exhibition at the Carlisle Gallery in London, where she showed four works that are reunited here. Together they suggest the simple furnishings of a humble London bedroom: Closet, a cast of the inside of a wardrobe, covered in black felt to suggest the darkness of a child's hiding place; Mantle, a cast of the interior space of a dressing table; Whiteread's first Torso, cast from the interior of a hot water bottle; and Shallow Breath, cast from the underside of a bed. Made shortly after the death of the artist's father, Shallow Breath was the first of Whiteread's works to suggest a memorial, a persistent theme throughout her career. As the sculptor has remarked, "I somehow managed to make memories solid."

#### Mantle

1988
plaster and glass
Courtesy of the artist
[DEX 3]

#### **Shallow Breath**

1988
plaster and polystyrene
Courtesy of the artist
[DEX 4]

## Closet 1988

plaster, wood, and felt Courtesy of the artist [DEX 2]

#### Torso

1988
plaster
Courtesy of the artist
[DEX 5]

# Untitled (Twenty-Five Spaces) 1995 resin (twenty-five units)

This work is made of twenty-five units arranged in a grid. Each object is cast from the underside of a chair. Tinted in a range of hues, the casts are made of translucent resin, a material Whiteread began to use early in her career. The sculpture oscillates between serial abstraction and a reference to the chair-as-subject. Traces of imperfections and wear from the original chairs were retained through the casting process. In her use of repeated forms, Whiteread explores tensions between individuality and commonality that emerge as the work shifts from a unique object to a grouping of related forms.

### **Torsos**

These eight sculptures, made over a period of more than a decade, are casts of the interiors of hot water bottles. Whiteread turns pliable rubber vessels of comfort and home remedy into hardened sculptural forms that, as their titles suggest, resemble small bodies. Torsos also refer to the headless, limbless fragments of ancient figural sculpture. The group serves as a model for Whiteread's entire practice, in that she returns repeatedly to a type of object or space, exploring similarities and differences through color, translucency, shape, and medium to reveal vital transformations.

#### left to right:

#### **Untitled (Enema)**

1998
concrete
Courtesy of the artist
[DEX 103]

#### **Untitled (Torso)**

1992 plaster Iwona Blazwick Collection [DEX 134]

#### **Untitled (Pink Torso)**

1991 dental plaster Courtesy of the artist [DEX 94]

#### **Untitled (Yellow Torso)**

1991 dental plaster (unwaxed) Courtesy of the artist [DEX 94]

#### **Untitled (Wax Torso)**

1992

wax

Courtesy of the artist [DEX 98]

#### **Untitled (Clear Torso—Up)**

1995
polyurethane resin
Courtesy of the artist
{DEX 101]

#### **Untitled (Silver Torso)**

1999
plaster and silver leaf
Courtesy of the artist
[DEX 104]

### **Untitled (Torso)**

1993 rubber Private collection [DEX 100]

## **Casting Process**

Considering Rachel Whiteread's process within the context of traditional casting offers a means of appreciating her enigmatic work. To make a conventional bronze sculpture, for example, a positive model made of plaster, clay, or wax is completed to an artist's desired degree of finish. Over that form, plaster is poured to create a mold from which the bronze is eventually cast.

Whiteread, however, at times uses existing objects as her models, directly casting the spaces beneath, around, or within them. The final sculpture may simply be a cast of that space, a solidification of that void. Or it may be something more complicated, for Whiteread often plays with the language of sculpture and changes her technique.

Gallery 243

### House

While Whiteread was making her first cast of the interior of a room, she decided to do the same with an entire home. With the assistance of Artangel, a London-based arts organization, Whiteread was eventually granted permission to make a cast of a Victorian house in East London that had been slated for demolition. Working with a structural engineer and professional concrete laborers, Whiteread painstakingly cast the interior. The exterior walls and roof of the house itself were then removed to reveal the sculpture.

House became a lightning rod for public housing and public art debates in London during the 1980s and early 1990s. Advocates declared the work a masterpiece, worthy of standing in perpetuity (notwithstanding the artist's intent that it be temporary); detractors demanded its immediate destruction. After taking two years to realize, House stood for just eighty days from October 1993 to January 1994. An appeal was made to extend the permits, but the local council denied the request, delivering their verdict on the same day Whiteread won the prestigious Turner Prize for the making of House. This series of photographs documents the making and dismantling of the sculpture. There is also a corresponding video in gallery 245.

Maquette for
Holocaust Memorial
1996
mixed media
Courtesy of the artist
[DEX 42]

John Davies British (b.1946)

House 1993–1994 twelve gelatin silver prints Courtesy of Rachel Whiteread [DEX 106]

Untitled (Bath) 1990 plaster and glass Collection of Gail and Tony Ganz [DEX 6] Flap 1989 plaster and wood Collection of Gail and Tony Ganz [DEX 74]

### **Untitled (Amber Mattress)**

Made from rubber and foam, this object is cast from a mattress, and its position (slumped against the wall) suggests an item that has been discarded. Through casting everyday objects in a variety of materials, Whiteread draws out notions of memory and traces of human presence. She has created a series of "mattresses" that create familiar associations, such as the comfort derived from humble objects of intimate daily ritual to references of bodily absence. While her mattress sculptures often evoke personal encounters, they can also be viewed in a specific social context; for example, the issues of displacement and the rise in homelessness that accompanied the housing schemes in London in the 1980s and 1990s.

## Gallery 244

### Table and Chair (Green)

Whiteread's *Table and Chair* represents a key moment in the artist's overall practice. Cast from the undersides of furniture, the nested table and chair exist in relation to one another, like bodies. As Whiteread has said, "I use furniture as a metaphor for human beings." *Table and Chair* has a precedent in conceptual artist Bruce Nauman's *A cast of the space under my chair* (1965–1968), a concrete sculpture that, though abstract, corresponds to the void beneath a chair. Whiteread's work references Nauman's, giving it an afterlife.

#### **Untitled (Rubber Plinth)**

1996 rubber and polystyrene Courtesy of the artist [DEX 20]

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1996 rubber and polystyrene Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; The Henry L. Hillman Fund, 1996 [DEX 76]

#### Table and Chair (Green)

1994 rubber and polystyrene Collection of Gail and Tony Ganz [DEX 8]

#### Untitled (Black Bed)

1991 urethane Courtesy of the artist, Luhring Augustine, New York, and Gagosian Gallery [DEX 15]

## **Untitled Floor (Thirty-Six)**

A grid of metal squares placed directly on the ground, Whiteread's *Untitled Floor* maintains the imprint of a real space and of human use, complete with traces of broken tiles that are not meant to be walked on. The knob protruding upwards is a hole in the original floor, and provides insight into the way the artist cast the work. In 1999, Whiteread purchased a 1950s building in London's East End which, over the years, had been the site of a Baptist church, a Jewish synagogue, and a textile factory. After renovation, the building became Whiteread's home and studio, but first she cast its various surfaces, including the tile floor. "It's almost like taking photographs or making prints of the space," she remarked. "If those parts of the building don't exist later, I'll still have... this archive of the space.... I'm interested in the layering in buildings, and the traces that are left behind."

#### Untitled (White Slab)

1994 /2017 rubber Courtesy of the artist [DEX 18]

#### Untitled

(Trafalgar Square Plinth) 1999

plaster and resin (two units) Michael and Ilene Salcman [DEX 73]

#### Untitled

2000 plaster, polystyrene and steel Private collection 2019.11

#### **Untitled Floor (Thirty-Six)**

2002

cast aluminum (thirty-six units) Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York [DEX 43]

### **Doors**

Given that much of Whiteread's work considers the relationship between the interior and exterior of structures in which we live, she has consistently returned to the subject of doors and windows—transitional elements that function as thresholds between outside and inside, public and private, open and closed, transparent and opaque. In these motifs, which at first seem to be repetitive, Whiteread finds subtleties of composition, material, proportion, color, and architectural history. Early plaster casts of modern paneled doors give way to translucent resin iterations of rustic and antique doors, contemporary and Victorian windows.

#### DOORWAY I

2010
resin
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery,
Buffalo, New York;
Bequest of Arthur B. Michael,
by exchange, and Gift of Mrs. Georgia
M. G. Forman, by exchange, 2011
[DEX 90]

#### IN OUT-VI

2004 plasticized plaster with interior aluminum framework Beth Rudin DeWoody [DEX 23]

#### IN OUT—II

2004 plasticized plaster with interior aluminum framework Private collection, Boston [DEX 21]

#### IN OUT—X

2004 plasticized plaster with interior aluminum framework Private collection [DEX 25]

## Gallery 246

### **Boxes and Colored Objects**

After her mother's death in 2003, while sorting through countless cardboard boxes of her belongings, Whiteread realized how generic containers carry the imprint of personal experiences and memories. Starting in 2005 Whiteread created works, such as *Lean*, in which she cast the interiors of different cardboard boxes, arranging the individual components in varying combinations. In addition to these larger works, Whiteread also cast smaller boxes holding such prosaic items as are often found in ordinary medicine cabinets. The small casts sit in metal cases or on shelves, as in *Cabinet V* and *Fossils*, mimicking the sites of their originals.

#### YELLOW STAND UP

2007-2008

plaster, pigment, resin, wood, and steel (nine units, one shelf) Courtesy of the artist [DEX 81]

#### TRIVIA

2008

plaster, pigment, resin, mild steel, wood, and metal (six units, one shelf) Courtesy of the artist [DEX 87]

#### ∩ LINE UP

2007-2008 plaster, pigment, resin, wood, and metal (eighteen units, one shelf) Private collection, New York [DEX 82]

#### **PINK**

2008

plaster, pigment, resin, wood, and metal (three units, one shelf) Collection of Bridgitt and Bruce Evans [DEX 132]

#### **SCATTER**

2008

plaster, pigment, resin, mild steel, wood, and metal (sixteen units, one shelf) Collection of Bridgitt and Bruce Evans [DEX 88]

#### **CANII**

2010 plaster with iron oxide, bronze, wood, and metal (two units, one shelf)

Courtesy of the artist [DEX 89]

#### BLUE

2007-2008

plaster, pigment, resin, wood, and metal (two units, one shelf) Courtesy of the artist

[DEX 80]

#### **FOSSILS**

2005

plaster, wood, and aluminum (seven units, one shelf) Private collection, England

[DEX 77]

#### DRILL

2008

plaster, pigment, steel, and rubber (thirteen units, one chair) Helga de Alvear Foundation, Cáceres, Spain

[DEX 86]

#### Untitled (Hive) II

2007-2008 resin (two parts) Collection of Marguerite Steed Hoffman [DEX 133]

#### GREY, PINK, YELLOW, GREY

2010

resin (six units) N. Hackerman [DEX 32]

#### ∩ LEAN

2005 plaster (seven units) Courtesy Gagosian [DEX 28]

#### **CABINET V**

2006 metal and plaster (one cabinet, forty-eight units) Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, NY, Courtesv The FLAG Art Foundation

[DEX 14]

#### Untitled (Mix)

2007-2008

plaster, pigment, and resin (thirty-nine units)

Ronnen Family Collection

[DEX 83]

As a respite from the logistical complexities of her large sculptures, Whiteread also created intimately sized colored objects, whose execution did not require permits, contracts, engineers, or other professionals. This gallery also features casts of unassuming household objects, including toilet paper rolls, cardboard packaging, poster tubes, drink cans, and take-out containers. The artist transforms these everyday items by coloring their casts in saturated hues and arranging them on shelves and pedestals. These works elevate the commonplace to a level of respect and contemplation, as in a still life, in an homage to life at home with Whiteread's young family.

## Gallery 247

### **Doors and Windows**

Given that much of Whiteread's work considers the relationship between the interior and exterior of structures in which we live, she has consistently returned to the subject of doors and windows—transitional elements that function as thresholds between outside and inside, public and private, open and closed, transparent and opaque. In these motifs, which at first seem to be repetitive, Whiteread finds subtleties of composition, material, proportion, color, and architectural history. Early plaster casts of modern paneled doors give way to translucent resin iterations of rustic and antique doors, contemporary and Victorian windows.

House 1990 video duration: 28 minutes, looped

Commissioned and produced by Artangel Courtesy of the artist and Artangel [DEX 105]

#### LOOK, LOOK, LOOK

2012

resin (three panels) Private collection

[DEX 40]

circa 1610 (I)

2012 resin

Private collection

[DEX 36]

Spy 2011 resin Private collection [DEX 35]

A.M. circa 1665 (I)

2011 resin 2012

Collection Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman,

NY, Courtesy The FLAG Art Foundation

[DEX 34]

Private collection

[DEX 37]

Night Glass

2011 painted fiberglass Collezione Ernesto Esposito [DEX 128]

circa 1858 (I)

2012 resin

Private collection

[DEX 38]

Oue Porte 2016

resin (two panels) Galleria Lorcan O'Neill

[DEX 92]

**Shack I** (Mojave Desert, CA) 2014

**Shack II** (Mojave Desert, CA) 2016

Shack I and Shack II, which look like storage buildings, were cast from the interiors of two abandoned shacks in the Mojave Desert near Joshua Tree National Park. The production of the works in such a harsh and remote location was particularly challenging, taking nearly five years.

Courtesy of the artist Photos: Iwan Baan

## **Boathouse** (Gran, Norway) 2010

"shy sculptures"—outdoor works that are placed inconspicuously and remotely, usually requiring a journey to reach. From a distance they might be mistaken for the buildings from which they are cast. This sculpture, located on the shoreline of a Norwegian fjord, is a concrete cast of the interior of a boathouse. As she explained, "I wanted to make a shy sculpture, a sculpture that would stand there peaceful and noble."

Courtesy of the artist and Røykenvik Gran Kommune, Norway

## Cabin (Governors Island, NY) 2016

This concrete cast of the interior of a wood cabin is located on Governors Island in the New York Harbor, with views of the city's skyline. It is only accessible by ferry from Manhattan during the summer months. Whiteread littered the area around the cabin with bronze casts of bottles, cans, and other trash, creating a sculptural environment and heightening our sense of its isolation and abandonment. The impenetrable retreat is both tranquil and uninviting, recalling a range of associations of the remote cabin in American history, from that of transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau to that of the so-called Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski. The location of Whiteread's *Cabin*, in clear view of the Statue of Liberty (and the former site of the Twin Towers destroyed on September 11, 2001), resonates with both the dislocation and promise the statue represents.

Courtesy of the artist and the Trust for Governors Island © Rachel Whiteread. Photo: Timothy Schenck

### **Houghton Hut**

(Houghton Hall, Norfolk, England) 2012

This concrete cast of a modest shed is sited on the grounds of the stately Houghton Hall. Located 120 miles north of London, Houghton Hall was built in the early eighteenth century for Great Britain's first prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, and is now open to the public.

Courtesy Galleria Lorcan O'Neill

Holocaust Memorial (Vienna, Austria) 2000

Courtesy of the artist Commissioned by the City of Vienna for the Judenplatz Photo: Werner Kaligofsky

## **Embankment** (Tate Modern, London) 2005

This project was commissioned for the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern (located alongside the Thames River in London) and was inspired by a well-worn cardboard box that the artist had found among her mother's belongings shortly after she died. For Whiteread, the humble carton was not merely a container for Christmas ornaments and toys but a trove of personal memories. *Embankment* comprised 14,000 polyethylene interior casts of ten different cardboard boxes, which were stacked in piles of various dimensions to create a labyrinth. The immersive installation transformed the vast space of the Turbine Hall into a sort of warehouse—a reference to the industrial history of the museum, which had once operated as a power station. After the installation, the polyethylene boxes were shredded on site and recycled.

## **Monument** (Trafalgar Square, London) 2001

In 1998 Whiteread was commissioned to create a temporary work to adorn an empty pedestal – the so-called fourth plinth – in London's famed Trafalgar Square. Originally envisioned to hold a bronze statue of King William IV (reigned 1830–1837), the plinth remained empty for more than 150 years due to lack of funding by the namesake monarch. Whiteread took this emptiness as her subject: she cast the granite plinth in clear resin, then inverted the cast and placed it on the plinth in what she described as a "monument to the plinth." Weighing in at eleven tons, *Monument* was then the largest resin object ever made, yet its translucence made it seem weightless and, at times, almost absent.

## US Embassy (Flat pack house) (London) 2013–2015, installed 2017

Whiteread's monumental sculptural frieze of a prefabricated house kit occupies most of the entrance wall of the new United States embassy in South London. *Flat pack house* takes its inspiration from the affordable housing kits that were popular in the United States and Great Britain in the early to middle twentieth century, offering shelter after two world wars. The project hints at the artist's social concerns and her sustained interest in housing policies: "I'm interested in homes, in the politics of housing. . . . I simply think it's everyone's fundamental right to have a roof over their head." For her contribution to international cultural exchange, the U.S. Department of State awarded Whiteread the International Medal of Arts in 2017, the year the work was installed in London.

Courtesy of the artist, Gagosian, and Art in Embassies, U.S. Department of State

### Tree of Life (Whitechapel Gallery, London) 2012

On the occasion of the London Summer Olympics in 2012, Whiteread was commissioned to create a permanent artwork for the façade of the Whitechapel Gallery in East London, where a mosaic originally conceived for the space had never been realized. Working with the building's existing terracotta "Tree of Life" motif, the artist added an array of bronze leaf casts covered in gold that seem to be growing across the upper façade. Four terracotta casts of windows echo those original to the building.

Whitechapel Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery Archive Photo: Guy Montagu-Pollock

#### Water Tower (Lower Manhattan, NY) 1998

Commissioned by New York City's Public Art Fund, *Water Tower* was initially installed on a rooftop at 60 Grand Street in the Soho neighborhood in Lower Manhattan. The ubiquity of water towers across the city's skyline appealed to Whiteread, who wanted to give visibility to what she called "the furniture of the city...that no one really took much notice of." She selected a translucent resin for its icy appearance and its ability to reflect the weather, saying, "I want it to seem like a peaceful moment in the sky, to echo the atmosphere of the city." *Water Tower* is now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where it is installed on the roof, overlooking the sculpture garden.

The Museum of Modern Art, Gift of the Freedman Family in memory of Doris C. and Alan J. Freedman © 2018 Rachel Whiteread

Wall (Apex) 2017 papier-mâché

While studying art at Brighton Polytechnic south of London in the 1980s, Whiteread made her earliest cast from papier-mâché, a material chosen for its affordability and malleable qualities. A studio move in 2015 prompted her to return to this humble medium, as she decided to recycle old domestic and studio paperwork—letters, invitations, bills—and use the shredded material as the pulp for papier-mâché. Creating a series of wall reliefs that isolate sections of small structures, like the shed seen in *Apex*, Whiteread infused the sculptures with a surprising personal quality, revealing traces of these documents not immediately apparent in the bold geometric forms—"sort of a remembrance of things past," according to the artist.