

KW

Ian Wilson

20 January – 14 May 17

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Opening: 19 January, 7 pm

KW Institute for Contemporary Art is delighted to announce a solo exhibition by South-African artist **Ian Wilson** (born 1940 in Durban, ZA). The exhibition inaugurates the first season of the new artistic program, which examines Wilson's work through three corresponding solo presentations by **Hanne Lippard**, **Paul Elliman**, and **Adam Pendleton**. Wilson's work will be physically embedded within each exhibition, serving as a framework for exploring roles of language and communication, and the broader significance of interaction between human beings.

The aim of the inaugural exhibition season is to create a multifaceted program that understands dialogue and conversation as profoundly political acts that are the necessary basis for all creative activities and therefore inherently a part of exhibition making. The open-endedness and collaborative nature of dialogue renders an intrinsically inclusionary strategy, allowing for a plurality of voices and narratives to unfold. The notion of language will be continuously explored throughout the artistic program in order to emphasize upon the institution's goal to experiment with communication and exchange as a no longer stable common grounds of a traditional value system, but rather the common articulation of many possible parallel narratives. The emphasis of Wilson's work on dialogue, experimental uses of language, and the collectively experience of art through spoken exchange between artists and audiences in Berlin, and beyond will be a significant aspect of the future program.

Ian Wilson has been exploring the aesthetic potential of spoken language since the late 1960s. His ongoing body of work—beginning with “oral communication” and eventually including his signature *Discussions*—began in 1968 with the spoken word “time.” “If somebody asked me what I was doing, I'd answer: I'm interested in the idea of time. I would insert the word 'time' into every conversation with whomever and wherever. It wasn't about the word itself but about the verbal communication that it stimulated,” Wilson said in 2002. The artist, who began as a painter, soon transformed the act of discussion into his sole artistic medium. Over four decades, the focus of these exchanges has shifted from “time” to the nature of knowledge and non-knowledge, Platonic conceptions of form and awareness of “the Absolute”. His works are not recorded or photographed in any way, and exist only as long as the conversation itself.

Wilson's desire for abstraction first manifested as paintings that explored and tested the limits of perception. His early works show the influence of late-1950s and early-1960s Minimalism, a movement that distilled painting to its most non-representational,



Ian Wilson, *Circle on the floor*, 1968
Installation view, Galerie Mot & Van den Boogaard, Brussels, 1998

self-reflective essence and sculpture to its fundamental physicality, most famously in the form of industrially-produced, geometric shapes. Although Wilson's early paintings and sculptures are clearly physical objects, they also signal an inclination to take reduction and abstraction one step further, to the point of ridding art of physical properties altogether. *Untitled* (1966, reconstructed in 2008) is an acrylic painting consisting of two L-shaped, pitch-black canvases hung in such a way that they form a rectangle, “framing” an empty space in the middle. The painting's matte-black surface appears alternately as either a dark parallelogram floating in front of the wall or a black hole framing a white space, depending on where the viewer is standing. Another untitled, also monochrome work from 1967 appears as a vaguely convex-curved form mounted on a circular surface, made entirely of fiberglass and white pigment. Its effect, like the black rectangle, lies in its visual ambiguity and uneasy relationship to typical, physical properties of a solid, such as casting a shadow. Hung on the wall at eye level, the physical relief of this “disc” is so faint that it is, in fact, shadow-less. By the time Wilson created his last material objects in 1968, the physical dissolution of his work was nearly complete. *Circle on the Floor* and *Circle on the Wall* are almost entirely drained of matter, consisting solely of chalk and pencil outlines on the floor and wall, respectively. Wilson wrote painstaking instructions for reproducing these works in any exhibition situation, further differentiating them from the traditionally “original” art object and all but nullifying their actual material properties. The *Circles* are idea- and language-driven, contingent on communication, and virtually devoid of physical presence—it seems

only logical that the next works Wilson created dispensed with the physical object altogether.

In 1968, Wilson's visual abstraction shifted to the vocal, evolving from the physical tangibility of complex artworks to intangible, infinitely complex language. The spoken works began informally, with Wilson simply slipping words into conversations at various exhibition openings, in the street or in private residences (*Time*, 1968), and became more formalized over the course of the 1970s. *Discussion* groups were organized in institutional art settings such as galleries and museums, and a deeper discussion of time morphed into group discourse about "the known and unknown" (after Plato's *Parmenides* dialogues), and—from the 1990s onwards—"awareness of the Absolute."

Unlike traditional performance art, which implies both an active artist/creator and a passive audience/viewer, *Discussions* attendees play an operative role in realizing both the concept of "oral communication" and the reality it creates. Participants speak to their neighbor, initiate a dialogue, and engage in an act of sharing that goes beyond the artist's concept or the artist himself. Wilson is fascinated by thoughts and the moment that ideas are articulated in words, and the only thing "left" of an ended *Discussion* is whatever lingers in the participant's mind when all is said and done.

While the spoken word is crucial, Wilson's radical abstraction of meaning and text extends to the written word as well. Early *Discussions* were announced in the form of specially-designed invitation cards informing potential participants of Wilson's whereabouts at a particular time, and those who purchased a work would be given a signed, printed certificate acknowledging that a *Discussion* had been held on a particular date. These invitations and certificates of purchase are all that physically remains of those works.

In 1986, Wilson stopped holding *Discussions* to concentrate on the printed word. He began publishing a series of artist's books on topics relevant to the *Discussions*, such as *The Set of 25 Sections: 90-114, with Absolute Knowledge* (1993), before returning to the *Discussion* group format in 1999. *Discussions* since that time have focused on 'the Absolute'.

Ian Wilson is someone in whose work KW likes to see its mission reflected; to explore relationships between the viewed—or discussed—and the viewer and the topical urgency of such interaction.

The exhibition unfolds in various parts and is presented in dialogue with the other exhibitions. A *Discussion* will take place on the last day of the exhibition (May 14, 2017) between the artist and the previous directors and curators of KW.

THE PURE AWARENESS OF THE ABSOLUTE / A DISCUSSION IAN WILSON AT KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

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Opening Hours

Wednesday–Monday 11 am–7 pm
Thursday 11 am–9 pm
Closed on Tuesday

Admission

8 €, reduced 6 €
Annual Ticket – KW Lover* 50 €, reduced 35 €
Admission free on Thursday evening from 6–9 pm and
every first Sunday of the month

Guided Tours

KW offers free guided tours through the exhibitions
during regular opening hours. For further information
on tours for large groups (over 10 people),
please contact Katja Zeidler, kaz@kw-berlin.de
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