

JOHN ISAACS THE ARCHITECTURE OF EMPATHY

TRAVESIA CUATRO 19 September – 20 November 2013

Just as in the works of the exhibition, John Isaacs suggests that empathy is constructed from parallel stories of existence. An architecture which flows through time and space like gravity, binding all together with an invisible power. The architecture of empathy could be subterranean, built underneath our aspirational towers and sky scrapers, channelled through the very foundations of our utopias and constructed from the blood of millions of severed umbilical cords. Here there is no visible landscape other than the peaks of human kindness, and the dark valleys where evil deeds lurk. We, you and I, are fused in this way more profoundly than any other and though it is so, it is often forgotten. All too easily we become lost in a labyrinth constructed of paths burned deep like scorched brands mapping out our daily route to the waking reality of existence. A route which is shaped above ground, in history, by the murderous and the insane, yet that we follow blindly, or look upon with closed eyes.

In the works of the exhibition, the framed garment *are you like me full of hope and full of fear*, is a mirror, literally a 'reflection' of conscience. It's repaired and torn fabric an allegory of purity and charity. It is a mirror reflecting the self as an imaginary, and long departed soul. The ceramic sculpture, *Ngorongoro*, is in the form of a urinal, a long established icon from the history of conceptual art, the "readymade", here re-made by hand from clay, and graffitied by a child with a child's rainbow, it's blandly iconic form returned to a world of colour and joy, re-emotionalised. *Cast from light and dark your shadow is no different from mine*, is a bronze cast of a child's chair strung through the gallery on a rusty chain. The chair lies on its side, overturned as if rapidly vacated, it is an anchor. An anchor that offers an image of origin, it is empty and therefore open for every sitter, for every "once upon a time", so that the past becomes the present. *Blood and tears*, a circle of neon light, a cycle, a balance, a weighing scale, blood and tears the body and soul fused in existence, life, love. *Encyclopedia* a plaster cast of a child's foot, combined with an oven, becomes an allegory for absence, for the fragility of existence. It brings to mind the very warmth of a human body, of an embrace, there is an alchemical spell, a magical aura of light pulsing from within the emptiness of the steel drum, as if love were hiding there. *The architecture of empathy*, an unpopulated copy of William Blake's painting of Jacob's ladder, is the stairway to a destiny, to the most "famous" place on earth, yet itself not of this earth, a fiction, a future we none of us can avoid but can barely imagine. It is possible that the painted image offers us a view of the architecture of empathy, a reminder of the path to our chance in life.

John Isaacs has exhibited extensively on an international level. Exhibitions include *Young British Artists VI*, The Saatchi Gallery, London, 1996. *Spectacular Bodies*, The Hayward Gallery, London, 2000,

Disasters of War, KW, Berlin, 2000. *Minimal Maximal*, Museum of Modern Art Kyoto, 2001. *Melodrama*, Centro Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz & Palacio de los Condes de Gabia/Centro José Guerrero, Granada, 2002 and MARCO, Vigo, 2003, *Melodrama*, MARCO, Vigo, 2003. *Mike Kelly's The Uncanny*, Tate Liverpool, 2004, *Les Grande Spectacle*, Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, 2004. *In the darkest hour there maybe light*, The Serpentine Gallery, London, 2007, *Rockers Island The Olbricht Collection*, Museum Folkwang Essen, 2007, *Paul Thek in the context of contemporary art*, ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2007. *Dream Time*, Les Abattoirs, Museum of Modern Art, Toulouse 2009, *Gravity*, Artium, Centro Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain, 2009. *Melodrama*, MARCO, Vigo, 2010. *Zwei Sammler: Thomas Olbricht und Harald Falckenberg*, Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, Germany, 2011. *Works from Damien Hirst's Murderme Collection*, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin, Italy, 2012, *Alice im Wunderland der Kunst*, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany, 2012. John Isaacs is currently exhibiting in *Glasstress: White Light/White Heat*, Venice Biennale, Italy, *UndeREALisme*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Perpignan, France, and *Kaboom!*, Weserburg, Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen, Germany.