

W.G. Sebald: Far away – but from where?

11 May – 18 August 2019

To mark what would have been the 75th birthday of W.G. Sebald (1944–2001), one of the finest writers of his generation, this innovative, interdisciplinary exhibition combines rare and unseen archive material with work by leading contemporary artists. For the first time, the wealth of the University of East Anglia's archive collections and the Sebald Estate, will be used to explore Sebald's use of photography. *Far away – but from where?* will also showcase works by Tacita Dean, Tess Jaray and Julie Mehretu that relate or respond to his writing.

Born in Wertach, Germany in 1944, Sebald relocated to Norfolk to become Lecturer at the University of East Anglia in 1970. In the space of a decade, Sebald underwent a meteoric rise from unknown academic to internationally celebrated writer, winning numerous awards before his premature death in 2001. The singular writer is known for his four novels that he described as 'prose fiction', *Vertigo* (1990), *The Emigrants* (1992), *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) and *Austerlitz* (2001). His literature explores history, memory, loss, identity and what it meant to be German in the wake of the Second World War.

Far away – but from where? presents previously unseen photographs taken by Sebald during his journeys to research the novel *Austerlitz*. Sebald selected a group images for the novel which appeared as uncaptioned plates. The exhibition will also present images that Sebald sourced from books and newspapers for *Vertigo*, and how these were re-photographed for publication, a process that took place in the darkroom at the Sainsbury Centre. The exhibition will explore how Sebald blurred fact and fiction in his processes.

The exhibition will acknowledge Sebald's profound influence on the visual arts by including the work of three internationally renowned artists. Tess Jaray collaborated with Sebald on two projects from 2000. *Far away – but from where?* will present the first: a series of beautiful large-scale screenprints to accompany passages from Sebald's novels *The Rings of Saturn* and *Vertigo*. Their rhythmic patterns respond to Sebald's search for ways to structure the world.

Tacita Dean cites Sebald as an important influence on her work. This exhibition will present *Michael Hamburger* (2007), a film which acts more as a meditation on, rather than a portrait of the poet, who was Sebald's friend and translator. Dean has also made a film with Julie Mehretu, as part of her 'Portraits' series, showcased at the National Portrait Gallery in 2018.

Mehretu's large-scale work *Epigraph, Damascus* (2016) acknowledges the traces of war on the city. Although not directly influenced by Sebald's literature, Mehretu shares the writer's concern for memory and loss. Her works employ layers of mark making, with imagery sourced from architectural plans and fragments, distorting them to the point of abstraction. She explores memory and decay, particularly in

cities ravaged by war or marked by social unrest, paralleling Sebald's explorations in literature.

The exhibition is part of *The Sebald Season* in association with Norwich Castle Museum. A complimentary exhibition, *Lines of Sight: Sebald's East Anglia* will be held at Norwich Castle Museum from 10 May 2019 – 5 January 2020.

Biographies

W.G. Sebald

Winfried Georg Maximilian Sebald (1944, Wertach, Germany – 2001, Norfolk, England) studied German and English literature at the University of Freiburg in Germany, and then at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He taught at the University of Manchester in 1966 until 1969. In 1967, Sebald married his Austrian-born wife, Ute. They settled permanently in England in 1970 when he became a lecturer at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. In 1987 he was appointed Professor of European literature. In 1989 he became the founding director of the *British Centre for Literary Translation* at the University of East Anglia.

Sebald's first two books, *Vertigo* (1990) and *The Emigrants* (1992), are collections of short stories that combine literary, historical and autobiographical elements with enigmatic black and white photographs. *The Emigrants* was awarded the Berlin Literature Prize, the Literatur Nord Prize, and the Johannes Bobrowski Medal. In 1995, Sebald published *The Rings of Saturn*. Part travelogue, part biography, part philosophical meditation on the catastrophes of 20th century European history, it won, amongst other prizes, The Los Angeles Times Book Award for Fiction. In 2001, Sebald published what was to be his final work, *Austerlitz*. A fictional memoir of a Czechoslovakian infant refugee fleeing from Nazi-occupied Europe, *Austerlitz* received numerous awards including the Koret Jewish Book Award, the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, and the American National Book Critics Circle Award.

Tacita Dean

Tacita Dean (b.1965, England) predominantly works in 16mm and 35mm film, where time and film itself become the subject. She achieves painterly qualities in film and exploits its element of chance. She has campaigned for the continued production of chemical film, a medium that is being lost to digital technology.

Dean was elected to the Royal Academy of Arts in 2008 and appointed OBE in 2013 for services to British art overseas. She was the first ever artist to have three collaborative exhibitions between the Royal Academy of Arts, National Portrait Gallery and National Gallery with *Landscape, Portrait, Still Life* in 2018. She lives and works in Berlin and Los Angeles.

Tess Jaray

Tess Jaray (b.1937, Austria) is a London based artist who explores pattern, repetition and colour. Her artistic influences range from Kazimir Malevich, Lucio Fontana, Italian Renaissance art and architecture and Islamic art. She has completed many important public commissions including one for London Victoria train station, Wakefield Cathedral Precinct and the British Embassy in Moscow.

Jaray studied at St Martin's School of Art and the Slade School of Art, where she went on to teach from 1968 to 1999. She was made an Honorary Fellow of RIBA in 1995 and was elected to the Royal Academy of Arts in 2010. Jaray lives and works in London.

Julie Mehretu

Julie Mehretu (b.1970, Ethiopia) makes intensely layered paintings, drawings and prints based on architecture and cities. She selects highly populated urban environments or places affected by war to express memory, loss and decay. Mehretu overlays intricate line drawings of city plans and architectural features with gestural mark-making in pen, ink and paint, layering the images to the point of abstraction. Her many art historical references encompass the Italian Futurists, Kazimir Malevich and Abstract Expressionism.

Julie Mehretu Drawings and Monotypes is at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge until 24 March 2019. The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York will hold a major mid-career survey of Mehretu's work from June to September 2020. Mehretu lives and works in New York.

About the Sainsbury Centre

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is one of the most important public university art galleries in Britain. It was founded in 1973 at the University of East Anglia (UEA) with the support of one of the nation's great philanthropic families, Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury who donated their extraordinary art collection which includes works dating from prehistory to the late twentieth century from across the globe. A radical new building by Norman Foster was designed to house the collection and was his first public work.

The Sainsbury Centre holds one of the most impressive art collections outside of the national institutions. It includes a significant number of works by modern masters of European art such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Francis Bacon, Jacob Epstein, Jean Arp, Chaïm Soutine and Amedeo Modigliani. There are major holdings from Oceania, Africa, the Americas, Asia, the ancient Mediterranean cultures of Egypt, Greece and Rome, as well as Medieval Europe. Alongside the permanent collection, it hosts a range of exhibitions in the largest suite of temporary exhibitions galleries in Eastern England.

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