**The body. The ruin**

*The body. The ruin* brings together ten artists from across generations, geographies and disciplines. Working with performance, video, drawing and painting, the exhibiting artists address those fundamental workings of the body that express sensation and produce meaning through gesture and movement.

The idea of the human body being able to speak a language constructed through movement can be related to avant-garde dance, theatre and performance practices from the early twentieth century to the late 1960s and early 1970s. For example, in Joan Jonas’s *Songdelay* (1973) we see the artist and her friends using movement and gesture to trace patterns in the urban environment. These patterns relate and respond both to the physical terrain (a rugged slope) and the minutiae of events that occur within this terrain (a train passing).

*The body. The ruin* is motivated by a desire to unravel the precise workings of the body—the way in which we read, understand and play with the languages of the body. These ‘languages’ are addressed by artists using their own and others’ bodies to explore the possibility for the body to communicate through movement, and also as an image that conveys a powerful, almost physical sensation to the viewer. Joy Hester’s *Mother and child* (c. 1945) was made after she saw newsreel footage of the Ravensbruck concentration camp during World War II. It gives both a literal depiction of the horrors of the war and a sense of involvement expressed through the immediacy of the brushwork.

Underlying *The body. The ruin* is a sense of crisis and confusion around the humanness of the body. The body is a symbol of the human condition as well as our physical, corporeal interface with the world. In Spanish artist Santiago Sierra’s *POLYURETHANE SPRAYED ON THE BACKS OF 10 WORKERS* (2004), he covers ten immigrant Iraqi workers in liquid polyurethane. As the polyurethane sets and the workers depart, disappearing back into the infrastructures of their lives, we are left with a ghostly yet visceral presence—the shapes of their bodies remain in the gallery space. In this way, Sierra reminds us of the flesh-and-blood reality of the workers’ bodies.

*The body. The ruin* asks the viewer to re-engage with the human body as a real tangible thing, distinct from mediated images of the body as seen in the news and in film or video games, for example. There is therefore a strong aesthetic of action and participation within the exhibition that is both symbolic and actual. Ruth Maclellan’s *Calling all workers* (2004–05) was first realised as a participatory performance that combined movement taken from callisthenic exercises in Soviet and British factories in the 1930s with modern dance. Tom Nicholson’s *Flags for a Trades Hall Council* (2005), on the other hand, plays symbolically with a sense of the presence and absence of the human body. His flags have the effect of reminding us of the importance of the body within seemingly unpeopled sites—whether they be physical places or social spaces.

At a time in which images of the human body maimed by war are omnipresent in our lives, *The body. The ruin* invites us to re-examine our understanding and relationship with the body itself.

Bridget Crone
Guest curator