

Victoria Miro Gallery

Press Release

Stephen Willats **Through Your Symbolic World** 11 September – 8 October 2002

“Every cultural landscape requires its signposts, not just to get around in the present, to find out where and what things are, but to point to a vision of the future, to show a possible destiny. I see this as a consequence and a function of my practice as an artist to intervene in the status quo of the cultural infrastructure to implant signposts that will enable a perceptual transformation of existing reality”.

The Victoria Miro Gallery is delighted to present a major new body of work by the established British artist Stephen Willats. The exhibition will include five collaborative contextual photographic, film and text works, alongside recent drawings. As well as his London show Stephen Willats's exhibition *Cognition Control*, which represents his conceptual projects from the early 1960s to 1970, will open in October at the Institute of Visual Culture, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Stephen Willats is also participating in *Blast to Freeze, British Art in the Age of Extremes*, curated by Henry Meyric Hughes at Kunstmuseum, Wolfsburg from the 14 September 2002 to 18 January 2003.

Since the early 1960s, Stephen Willats has initiated many seminal multi-media art projects everywhere from tennis clubs and public galleries to inner city housing estates. Combining cybernetic and philosophical models, information theory, systems analysis, semiotics with an ideology of community, Willats has developed work which reacts against what he sees as the historical determinism of art. Rather than presenting visitors with icons of certainty he creates a random, complex environment which stimulates visitors to engage in their own creative process rather than just submitting to passive observation.

Through Your Symbolic World extends the territory in which art operates, encompassing the socio-urban environment, personal narratives and the everyday as sites in which art can be based. Each of the five new works represents an encoded world that has been made in a relationship between the artist and a group of participants who were invited to make a multichannel documentation including audio recording, film, personal writings, still photography etc - recording from as many as twelve different viewpoints – of a journey by an individual or individuals in familiar urban settings, through a motorway underpass, across a bridge and down a high street. What results is a *Symbolic World* that is presented as a vehicle through which viewers can relook and transform the way in which they perceive the fabric of the world and create a possible route through to a personal vision of the future.

Biographical Details

Born in London in 1943. Solo exhibitions include *Macro to Micro*, Gallery Laure Genillard, London, 2000; *Random Encounter*, Southampton City Art Gallery, 1999; *Changing Everything*, South London Art Gallery, 1998; *Multicult*, Berlin, Galerie Franck & Schulte, Berlin, 1998; *Museum Mosaic*, Tate Liverpool, 1994; *Meta Filter and Related Works*, Tate Gallery London, 1982; *4 Insein*, in Berlin, National Gallery, Berlin, 1980 and *Concerning our Present Way of Living*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1979 and Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1980. Group exhibitions include *The Gap Show*, Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund, 2002; *Protest and Survive*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London 2000 and *Sixties Art Scene in London*, Barbican Art Gallery. The artist has work in many public institutions including Tate Gallery, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Stephen Willats has taught and lectured widely both in this country and abroad. In the 1960s he founded and edited the magazine *Control* which was not only an outlet for his own work but gave a voice to a number of other artists, philosophers and scientists including Lawrence Weiner, John Latham, Dan Graham, Jeremy Deller, Anish Kapoor, Tony Cragg and Liam Gillick amongst others.

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