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21 April 2017

PRESS RELEASE

Ashley Bickerton exhibition opens at Newport Street Gallery today

Newport Street Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of work by American artist Ashley Bickerton (b.1959), which opens today (Friday 21st April) and runs until 20th August 2017. The survey spans more than three decades of Bickerton's career and features 51 works, including a significant display of new and previously unexhibited pieces. Titled *Ornamental Hysteria*, this is his first UK show since 2009.

Bickerton moved to New York in 1982 and after working as a painting assistant to Jack Goldstein, he emerged as a key figure on the newly exploding East Village art scene. Within the context of the culture of commodification sweeping America he rose to prominence as part of an amorphous movement that was branded 'Neo-Geometric Conceptualism'. Alongside artists such as Haim Steinbach and Jeff Koons, Bickerton endeavoured to reframe the practice of art production in response to the new, seductive mechanisms of desire at work in society.

Bickerton abandoned New York in 1993, eventually settling in Bali, where he still lives and works. Whilst a number of his themes prevailed, the materiality of his work shifted dramatically after this self-imposed exile from the urban environment.

Both in materiality and content, Bickerton's work resists categorisation. On the diversity of his mediums – photcollage, appropriated image, digital image, paint and sculpture – he states: "Painting is far too cartoony and lacks the backbone of factuality; photography is too clinical and incapable of loony launches into the ether; and sculpture can be just downright presumptuous. [...] Only in their combination do I find comfort."

Bickerton's conceptual commitment to intersectionality extends to his subject matter; his audacious and technically complex assemblages are predicated on themes of opposition and duality, for example representation and reality, creativity and commodity, nature and artifice, idyll and apocalypse. This is evident in his earlier work on display in gallery 1, which offers a sardonic critique of contemporary consumer culture and the commodification of the 'art object' via steel and aluminium wall-mounted 'Culturescapes' from the 'Logo' and 'Non-Word Word' series. Galleries 3 and 4 are dominated by Bickerton's 'Sea' and 'Landscapes' - overblown and incongruous, they contain ephemera from the anthroposphere in the simulated shells of transportation devices. In part, these "truly contemporary" landscapes might be read as a dystopian view of the devastating impact of man on the ecosphere.

Throughout his career, Bickerton has challenged the relevancy of traditional art-historical tropes. His 'self-portraits' similarly parody the mythological figure of 'the artist', who is represented in the guise of the brands he chooses to endorse in *Tormented Self-Portrait: Susie at Arles (25 Years)* (2014) and as a five-bodied, technicoloured serpent in the monumental *5 Snake Heads* (2009), on display in Newport Street's double-height gallery 2.

Bickerton's practice evolved in the late 90s to incorporate digital image and photography. In portraits such as *Smiling Woman* (2009), models (often family members and friends) are heavily made-up and photographed, then distorted in Photoshop before the image is printed on canvas and re-painted. These paintings are amongst Bickerton's most overtly satirical, presenting lurid, constructed visions of life on a generic Pacific / Caribbean island.

The last gallery features a display of Bickerton's new work, including *Double Manta II (White)* (2017), a more elegiac counterpart to the resin sharks, obfuscated by materials and accoutrements, on display in gallery 2. Unusually for an artist whose work shifted so dramatically after his move to Bali, Bickerton has revisited one of his most important early series – 'Wall-Wall' – for this exhibition. The 'Wall-Wall' paintings feature painted surfaces interrupted by irregular fibreglass protrusions, simulating rocks. Conceived in 1986, Bickerton cites their central importance to his understanding of both the act and object of painting: how it functions and creates meaning in a world oversaturated with imagery. In essence, he explains, they are: "something that fills a space on a wall with colour that affects meaning – a surrogate wall so you're not looking at the blankness."

Hirst met Bickerton in New York in the late 1980s and has been collecting his work in earnest for over a decade.

Notes to editors

About Ashley Bickerton

Bickerton's work has featured in exhibitions in museums around the world, including the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2012); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2012); Victoria & Albert Museum, London (2011); New Museum, New York (2010); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2010); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2006), among others. He has also been included in prominent international biennales, among them the 9th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (1992); the 44th Venice Biennale (1990); and the 1989 Whitney Biennial. His work is included in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; and the Tate, London among others.

The artist lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.

About Newport Street Gallery

Newport Street Gallery opened in Vauxhall, south London, in October 2015. Spanning five buildings, the gallery presents solo or group exhibitions of work drawn from Damien Hirst's extensive art collection, which he has been building since the late 1980s. Hirst's interest in curating dates back to the beginning of his artistic career and his organisation of the groundbreaking 'Freeze' exhibition in south London in 1988.

Newport Street Gallery is the realisation of Hirst's long-term ambition to share his extensive collection of art – which includes over 3,000 works – with the public. In October 2016, the gallery was awarded the respected RIBA Stirling Prize for the UK's best new building of the year.

On the opening of the gallery, Hirst said: *"I've always loved art and art deserves to be shown in great spaces, so I've always dreamed of having my own gallery where I can exhibit work by the artists I love. I believe art should be experienced by as many people as possible and I've felt guilty owning work that is stored away in boxes where no one can see it, so having a space where I can put on shows from the collection is a dream come true."*

Entry to all exhibitions is free.

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Newport Street Gallery

Newport Street, London, SE11 6AJ

www.newportstreetgallery.com

Opening times:

Tuesday – Sunday 10am – 6pm

Closed Mondays

Free entry

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Newport Street Gallery is open on bank holidays. Please see website for details.