



Large
Print

Michael Craig-Martin

Main Galleries

Do not remove from gallery

Michael Craig-Martin

Main Galleries

21 September – 10 December 2024

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This exhibition has been made possible as a result of the Government Indemnity Scheme. The Royal Academy of Arts would like to thank HM Government for providing indemnity and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Arts Council England for arranging the indemnity.

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Introduction

The Irish-born artist Michael Craig-Martin RA (b. 1941) is one of the key figures in British conceptual art. Since coming to prominence in the late 1960s he has moved between sculpture, installation, painting, drawing, printmaking and digital media, creating works that fuse elements of pop, minimalism and conceptual art.

Educated primarily in the United States, Craig-Martin moved to the UK on completion of his studies in 1966. He exhibited the now iconic work 'An Oak Tree' (displayed nearby) at the Rowan Gallery in 1973. From the mid-1970s Craig-Martin shifted his practice from using ready-made objects to representing them pictorially. Over the years he has developed a wide-ranging "vocabulary" of everyday items including safety pins, light bulbs, take-away coffee cups and laptops.

Craig-Martin's intention is to explore ordinary contemporary life through the things we make, including consumer goods and works of art. He has sought to create works that are straightforward and undidactic, giving the viewer scope to use their imagination. His concern lies in understanding not just how we think and feel about the world, but how we perceive and experience it daily through the language of images.

Craig-Martin was elected Royal Academician in 2006. This exhibition charts the artist's career from his early conceptual works and monumental wall drawings to the colourful representations of commonplace items in paintings, sculpture, prints and digital works for which he is best known today.

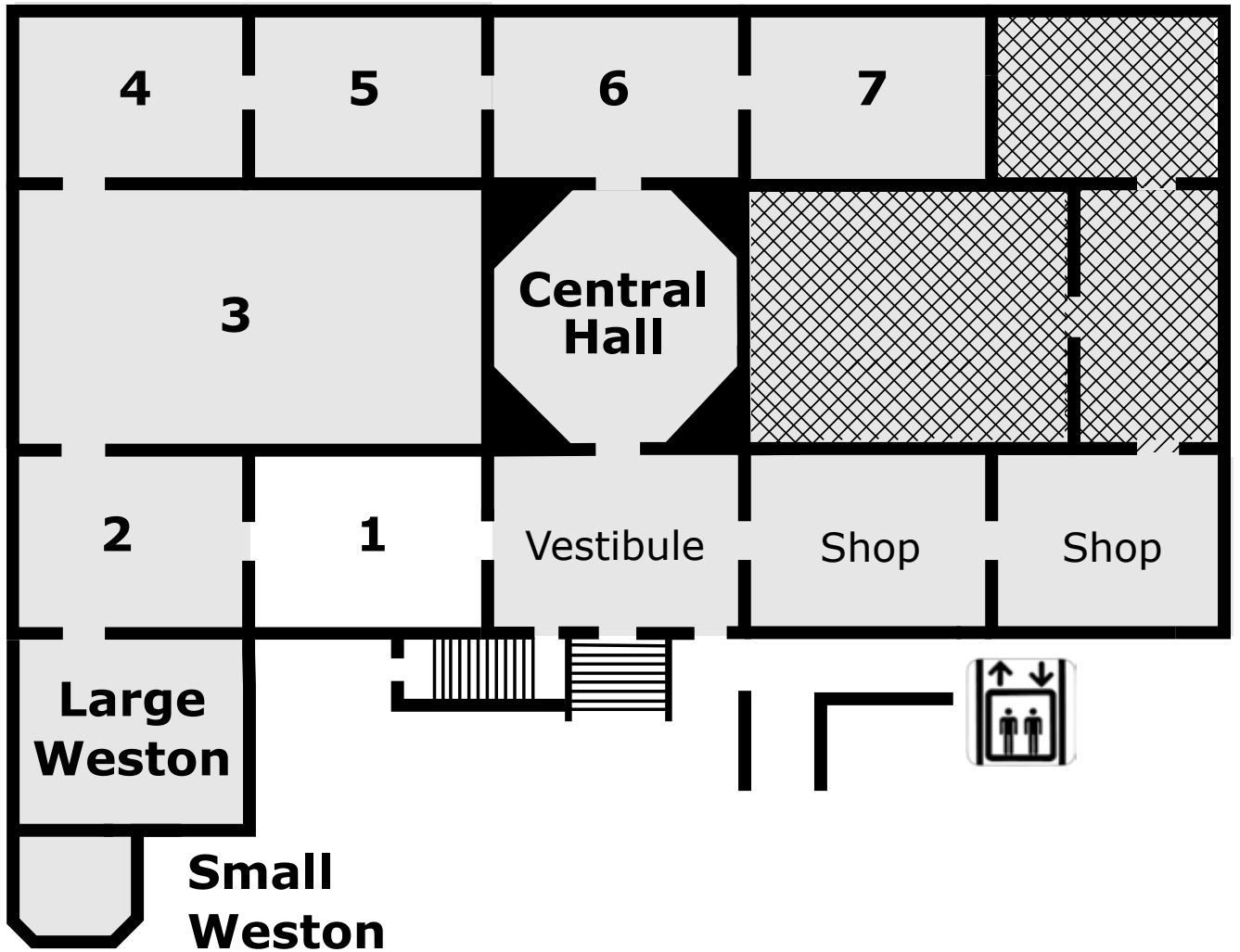
List of works in the Vestibule

Eye Test

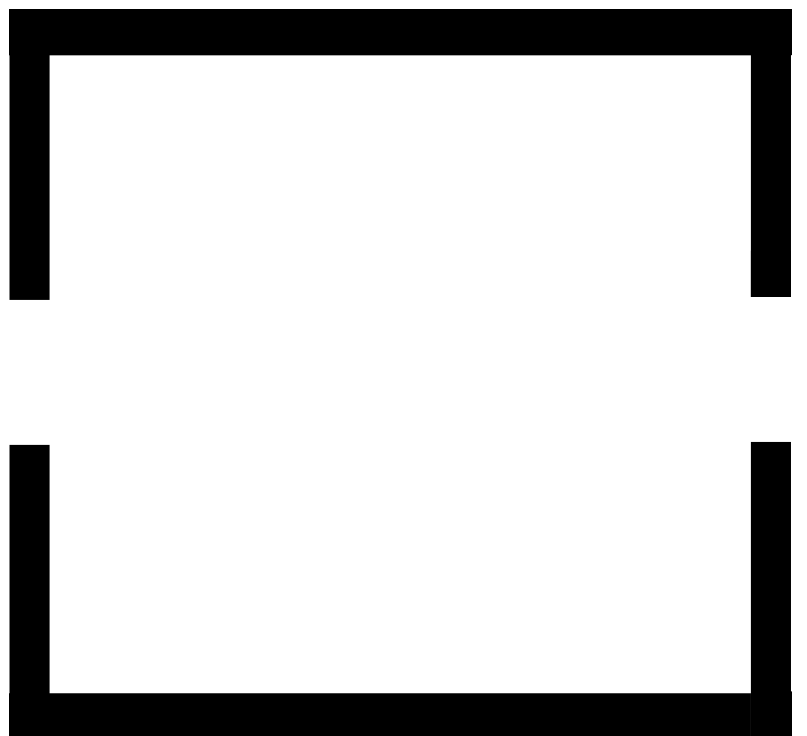
2018

LED Lightbox

Cristea Roberts Gallery, London



You are in Gallery 1



Early Works

Following his graduation from Yale School of Art in 1966, Michael Craig-Martin began to produce sculptural works based on the minimalist and conceptual movements of the time. One of his earliest is 'Black Book' (1967), which transforms two mundane items into a work of art. Other early projects include his box pieces, which brought geometric forms together with functionality and direct audience participation.

From the early 1970s, Craig-Martin began working with ready-made objects such as buckets, milk bottles and clipboards to produce a group of wall-based sculptures that explored the relationship between art and everyday items. In one radical work, 'An Oak Tree' (1973), a glass of water is accompanied by a text declaring that the artist had transformed the object into a tree.

With this uncompromising statement, Craig-Martin challenges the perceived roles of artist and audience in making a work of art. Following 'An Oak Tree', Craig-Martin felt that he had reached a conclusion to the conceptual path he had been following and returned to basics through drawing and image-making.

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Four Complete Clipboard Sets... Extended to Five Incomplete Sets

1971

Clipboards, paper, pencils, erasers and string

Courtesy the artist

Black Book

1967

Cardboard and tape

Courtesy the artist

Box that never closes (drawing)

1967

Hand-applied black crepe tape and pencil on isometric graph paper

On Loan from Museum & Art Swindon

Learning Label

Box That Never Closes, 1967

Boxes are usually used to pack, store, send, or file things, but you couldn't use Craig-Martin's box like that because it doesn't close. This box is always open, and the lid is tilted slightly, daring you to look inside. Why do you think he's chosen to make an artwork out of such an ordinary object?

Studies from an oak tree

1974

Pencil and red pen on paper

Private Collection

Proposal for a group of eight box sculptures

1967

Pencil and Fablon on isometric graph paper

The Trustees of the British Museum, 2011,7063.1.

Purchased with funds bequeathed by Mrs V J Playfair

Progression of five boxes with lids reversed

1969

Ink on isometric graph paper

Courtesy of the British Council Collection

Box That Never Closes

1967

Blockboard, polyurethane paint, varnish and brass hardware

Through the simple format of the box, Craig-Martin explores ideas around function, physical interaction and the nature of art.

Here, the lid and base do not fit together so the object cannot perform as an actual container, nor arrive at a neat geometric shape. Stripped of its standard use, 'Box That Never Closes' plays with the viewer's expectations and invites us to question what makes an object a work of art.

On Loan from Museum & Art Swindon

On the Shelf

1970

Fifteen milk bottles, water, metal shelf

'On the Shelf' and 'On the Table' (displayed nearby) play with notions of equilibrium and precariousness. In the former, although the milk bottles are tilted at an alarming angle, the different amounts of water in each bottle creates a continuous "horizon line". In the latter, buckets filled with water support the table they stand on, rather than the other way around. This suspended system relies on the weights of the water and the tabletop being equal.

Jeremy Brice

Four Complete Shelf Sets... Extended to Five Incomplete Sets

1971

Metal shelves, mirrors, paint pots, brushes and paint scrapers

Courtesy the artist

Conviction

1973

Mirror, tape, handwriting on wall

Tate: Purchased 1973

An Oak Tree



1973

Glass, water, metal and printed text on paper

Artist's proof, shown with permission of the National Gallery of Australia

Learning Label

An Oak Tree, 1973

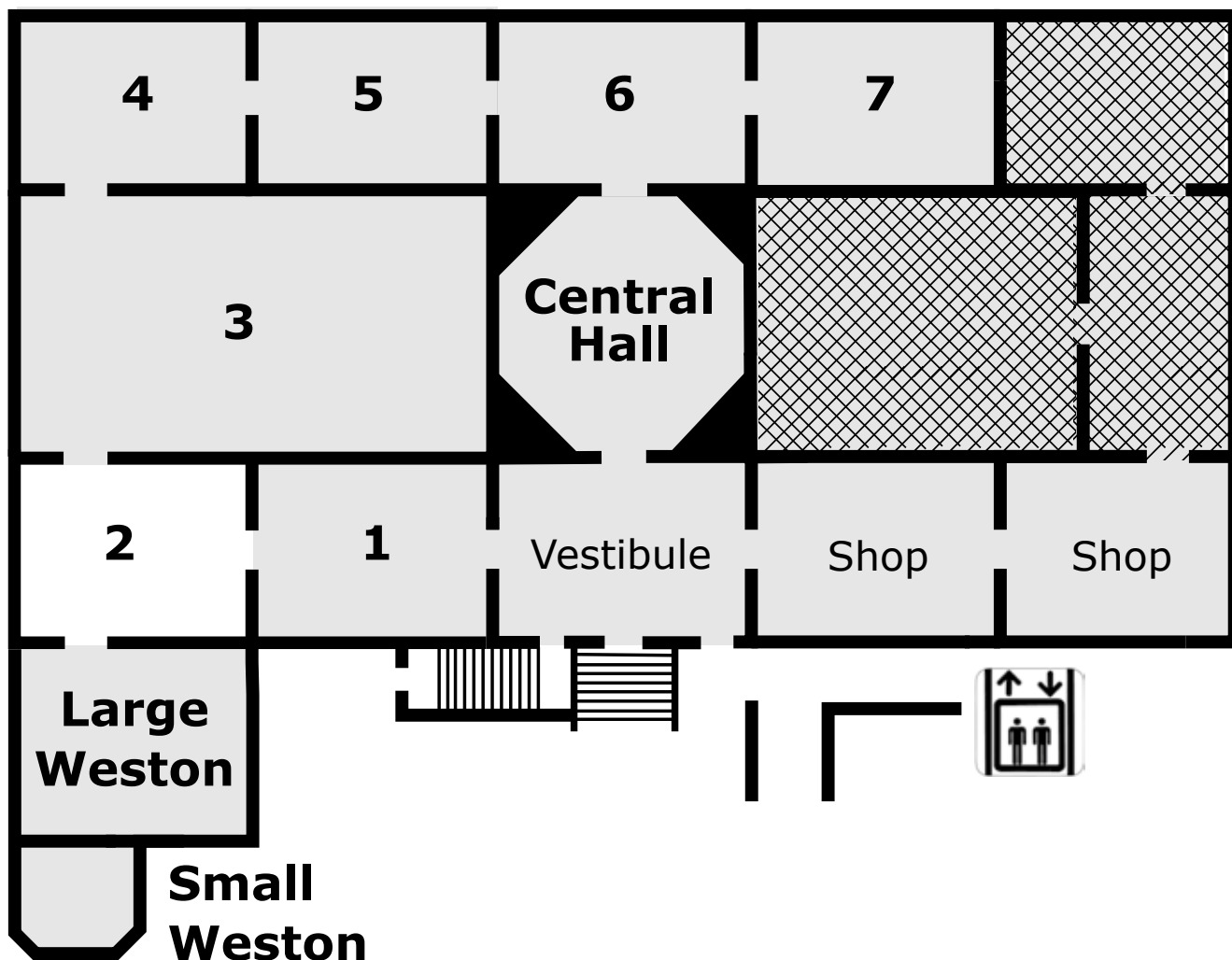
The artist says he's transformed this glass of water into an oak tree, but what does that mean? It doesn't look like an oak tree! This is an example of conceptual art, where artists use ideas and their imaginations to create something that makes us think differently about what art can be. Conceptual art is a lot like play, where a cardboard box becomes a castle or a chair becomes a rocket. What else could you transform with an idea?

On the Table

1970

Wood, metal, water and rope

Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Purchase, 2004



You are in Gallery 2

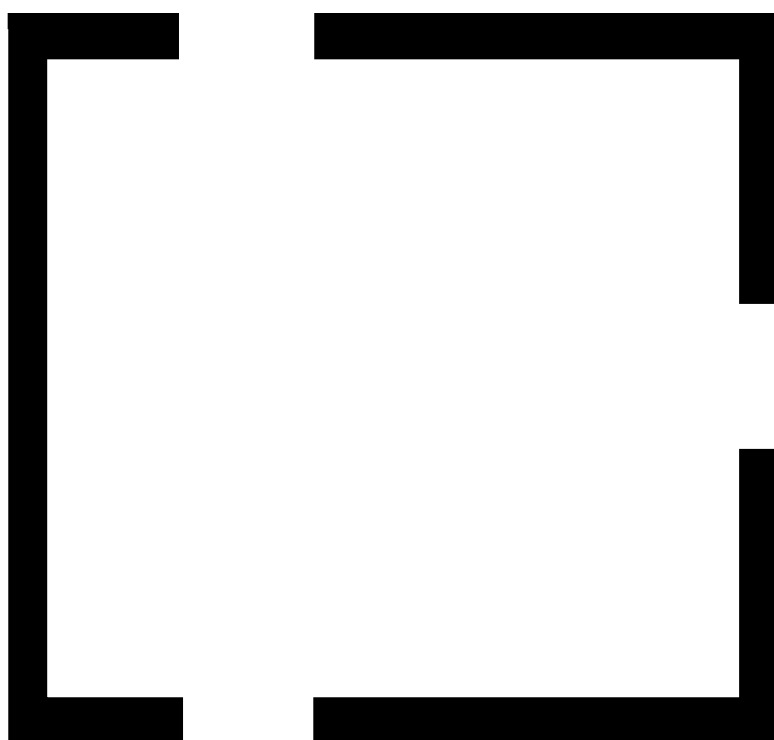


Image-Making and Readymades

In the second half of the 1970s Craig-Martin began working in pictorial representation and image-making, seeking a new way forward in his practice. His neon works were the first in which he drew rather than used real objects. As with his earliest pieces, the forms he used were primarily objects of daily use.

Craig-Martin's work with found objects continued with his series "Pictures within Pictures". By inserting paintings found in London flea markets into the top-left corner of blank canvases, he recontextualised the paintings in a way that "completely changed their meaning without changing them at all".

The following decade saw Craig-Martin return to 'readymades', prefabricated objects repurposed as art. He created a series of wall works using Venetian blinds, playfully questioning what we perceive as a painting.

Craig-Martin then began to paint similar abstract works dominated by solid colour and patterns of white dashes. These were the first instance of his emphatic use of colour.

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Reading Light

1975

Neon

Courtesy the artist

Learning Label

Reading Light, 1975

Neon signs above shops and venues try to catch your attention, but this piece doesn't advertise anything. You might already use a light like this at home or school. How does turning an everyday object into a work of art change the way you see or think about it?

Painting and Picturing



1978

Oil and hand-applied black crepe tape on canvas

Unlike the other examples on display nearby, here Craig-Martin retraces the outline of the readymade painting in tape on the surrounding canvas. Reducing each form to what would become Craig-Martin's signature simplified outline, this work interrogates the conventions of representation and imitation. It serves as a prelude to the large-scale wall drawings in tape that he began producing in the same year (on view in the next gallery).

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Untitled Painting No. 1

1976

Oil on canvas

Southampton City Art Gallery

Untitled Painting No. 3

1976

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Untitled (Red)

1988

Venetian blinds

As part of his exploration of the basic elements of painting, Craig-Martin returned to the use of readymades by using Venetian blinds for this series. The artist's use of these objects plays with considerations of colour, form, light and space, with their rectilinear shapes and solid colours suggesting a proximity to Abstract Expressionist colour-field painting.

They also offer a metaphor for painting itself,
framing a window onto the world.

Courtesy the artist

Untitled (White)

1989

Venetian blinds

Courtesy the artist

Untitled (Black)

1989

Venetian blinds

Courtesy the artist

Untitled Painting No. 4

1976

Oil on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Red Painting (small)

1991

Acrylic and gesso on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Cobalt Green Painting

1991

Acrylic and gesso on canvas

Breaking away from the representational drawn images that had by that time become critical to his practice, in the early 1990s Craig-Martin embarked on a series of monochromatic paintings with symmetrical patterns of white dashes. Recalling his Venetian blinds series and his everpresent preoccupation with line drawing, here Craig-Martin stripped painting back to its essence by focusing on the repetition of a single form.

Courtesy the artist

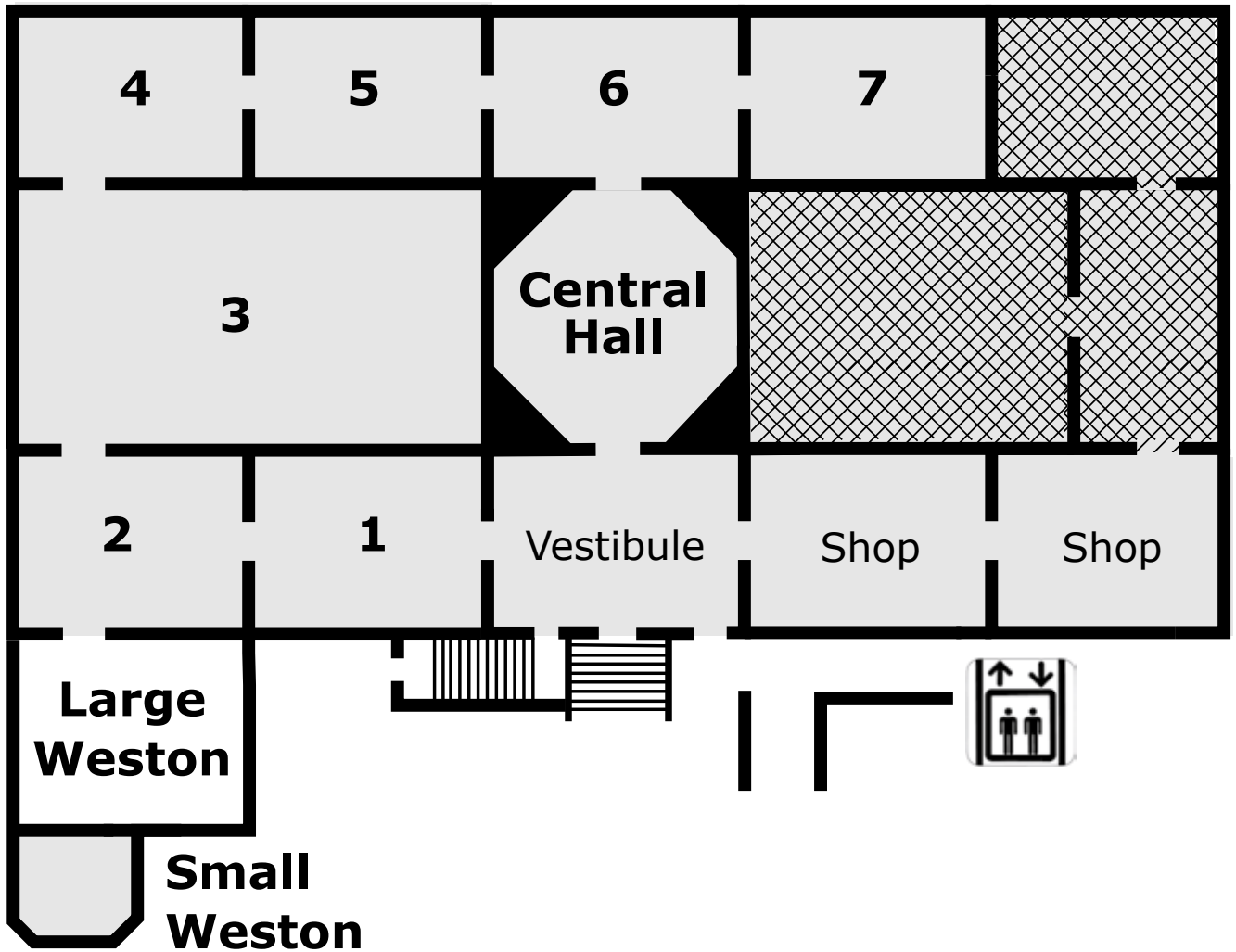
Pacing

1975

Neon

In 1975 Craig-Martin began a series of 'drawings' in white neon, including this work and 'Reading Light' (displayed nearby). In 'Pacing', different segments of the outline light up and go off again, giving the impression of walking past an open door and seeing through to another door beyond. The movement depicted is not of the door but of the viewer. This interest in images that constantly change returns later in Craig-Martin's digital works.

Courtesy the artist



You are in Large Weston



Wall Drawings and Sculptures

In a 1978 landmark exhibition held at the Rowan Gallery, London, Craig-Martin debuted his large-scale wall drawings. Influenced by Marcel Duchamp's use of prefabricated objects and Andy Warhol's focus on pop culture, Craig-Martin continued to incorporate recognisable manufactured items that were, in his words, "more famous than famous. So famous that you don't even notice them."

He began producing drawings of ubiquitous items, using crepe tape on transparent acetate or drafting film, which were then projected and traced on the wall, again using tape. Through his choice of media, Craig-Martin sought to remove the artist's "hand" so as to reflect the impersonal character of mass-produced objects. This method also enabled him to layer several drawings of objects, leading to complex compositions. Craig-Martin chose a three-quarter view, showing each object slightly from above to emphasise its three-dimensionality.

In the early 1980s Craig-Martin began turning his drawings into wall-mounted sculptures, using thin metal rods. The linear simplicity of these drawings and sculptures became his hallmark and the foundation of his work to this day.

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Sea Food

1984

Oil on aluminium and painted steel

Waddington Custot, London

Globe

1986

Oil on wood and painted steel

National Galleries of Scotland.

Donated by Eric and Jean Cass through the
Contemporary Art Society 2012

Learning Label

Globe, 1986

Globes often appear in Craig-Martin's work, but not like this. This solid, blue, wooden cube looks like it's trapped the world—it won't be able to spin like that. How does the cube change the way you normally interact with a globe?

Reading with Globe

1980

Tape on wall

Artist's proof, shown with permission of Tate

Four Identical Boxes with Lids Reversed

1969

Painted plywood

Tate: Purchased 1969

Pen and Ink

1985

Painted steel

Courtesy Hiscox Collection

Still Life with Interior

1987

This is a rare example of a work by Craig-Martin to include the human figure, shown alongside one of his more typical motifs, a ladder. All the motifs are shown as fragments, without beginning or end. Separated in sections on an aluminium structure, the combination of these indeterminate fragmented forms explores our notions of both containment and movement.

Aluminium, painted steel rods and Perspex light box

Private Collection

Interlocked

1990

Tape on wall

Courtesy the artist

Modern Dance



1981

Tape on wall

In this frieze-like composition, four objects drawn in red tape in the foreground seemingly “dance” in front of a curtain of images. The angle of each form establishes a three-dimensionality that gives the objects a sculptural quality. The viewer’s understanding of scale is disrupted, and spatial relationships are created by objects overlapping one another. In other wall drawings, such as ‘Interlocked’ (displayed nearby), forms invade each other’s space and become intertwined.

Artist’s proof, shown with permission of the Frac Grand Large

Dolly



1983 Oil on canvas and painted steel

In this work, there is an early combination of flat and simplified lines, with the bold colours that would become characteristic of Craig-Martin's later style. Merging two modes of artistic expression, the colour blocks refer to abstract art, while the sculptural drawing is figurative. In 'Globe' (displayed nearby) a realistic drawing of a globe is embedded within a three-dimensional solid-blue cube, asking the viewer to imagine the shape of the sphere inside.

National Galleries of Scotland.

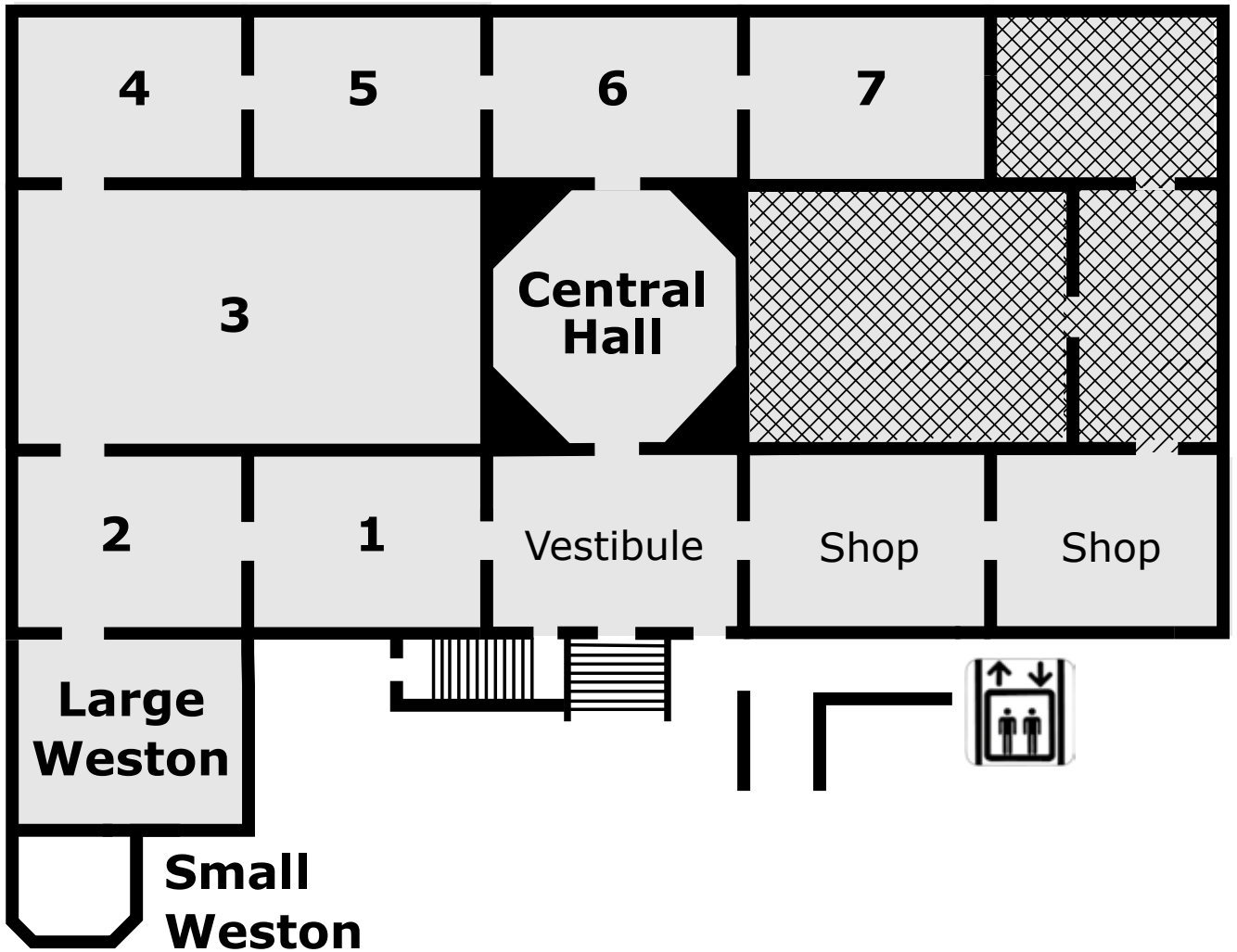
Donated by Eric and Jean Cass through the Contemporary Art Society 2012

Formica Box

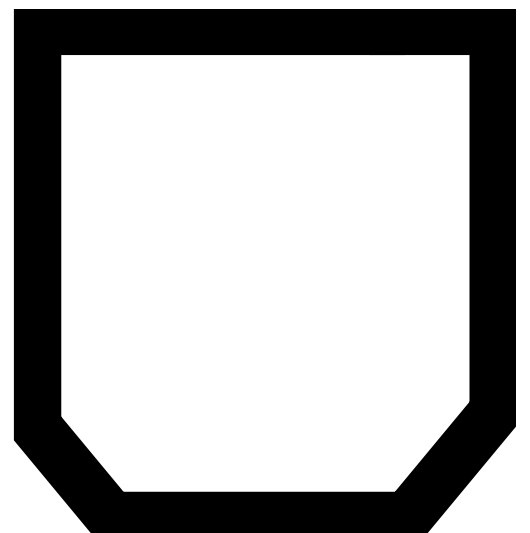
1968

Formica on plywood, brass hardware

Courtesy the artist



You are in Small Weston



Drawings and Prints

Drawing is central to Craig-Martin's practice. His graphic output includes independent works of art as well as studies for installations, sculptures and wall drawings. Among his earliest graphic works are those that relate to his conceptual projects of the 1960s and 1970s, including drawings of box constructions on graph paper.

Craig-Martin "draws" with a particular type of crepe tape invented in the 1960s for electronic circuitry. As with his wall drawings, it allows Craig-Martin to achieve his ideal of making the works "styleless", eliminating all trace of the artist's "hand". Ironically, in attempting to make his work style-free he has created a style that is immediately recognisable as his own.

In the early 1990s, Craig-Martin got his first computer, which allowed him easily to manipulate his images in terms of scale, line, colour and composition.

At around the same time he started to experiment with printmaking, which has now become a key aspect of his work. This medium allowed him to play with ideas surrounding specific sets and sequences of objects.

Learning Label

The whole room

Craig-Martin hasn't made these drawings with a pencil, pen or charcoal. He has drawn these boxes using crepe tape—a type of light weight, stretchy, sticky tape—instead. He makes these drawings on graph paper, which you might have used for science and maths but not for art. Which unconventional materials could you try to draw with?

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Box that doesn't close

1967

Pencil and Fablon on isometric graph paper

Courtesy of the British Council Collection

Study for box that opens in 4 directions

1967

Hand-applied black crepe tape on isometric graph paper

Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Purchase, 2011

Four identical boxes with lids reversed (drawings)

1969

Hand-applied black crepe tape on paper

Tate: Purchased 1969

Four identical boxes with lids revealed – in different colours – not executed

1969

Hand-applied orange, green, yellow and blue crepe tape
on isometric graph paper

Tate: Purchased 2011

Black – state 2

1988

Hand-applied black crepe tape on Schoellershammer G4 -
dick card

Untitled (Venetian blind study 7)

Ink on paper

Cristea Roberts Gallery, London

Black – state 4

Hand-applied black crepe tape on Schoellershammer G4 -
dick card

Untitled (Venetian blind study 10)

Ink on paper

Learning Label

Venetian blinds

Blinds stop you from seeing out and stop other people from looking in. Walking past a home with its blinds down might make you curious about what you can't see. These blinds are shown in unexpected ways and have strange gaps and holes in them. Do they make you want to peep through?

Proposal (bulb and watch)

1992

Hand-applied black and red crepe tape on drafting film

Victoria and Albert Museum

Study for Paris Night

1987

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film

Private Collection

Study for MOMA project

1990

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film

Courtesy David Cleaton-Roberts

Tropical Waters

1981

Hand-applied black and red crepe tape on drafting film

The Trustees of the British Museum, 2011,7063.2.

Purchased with funds bequeathed by Mrs V J Playfair

Study for Modern Dance

1980

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film, applied to both sides of the film

Jonathan & Natasha Bowers

Study for Inhale/ Exhale

2002

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film

Private Collection, London

Order of Appearance

1990

A series of four screenprints, printed with polyvinyl inks in four colours on drafting film

Collection of Julian Opie

Credit card

2017

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film with fuchsia backing sheet

Shirt

2017

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film with orange backing sheet

Coffin

2017

Hand-applied black crepe tape on drafting film with green backing sheet

Then and Now

2017

Filing Cabinet/Memory Stick

Wired/Wireless

Cassette/Spotify

Telephone/iPhone

Book/Kindle

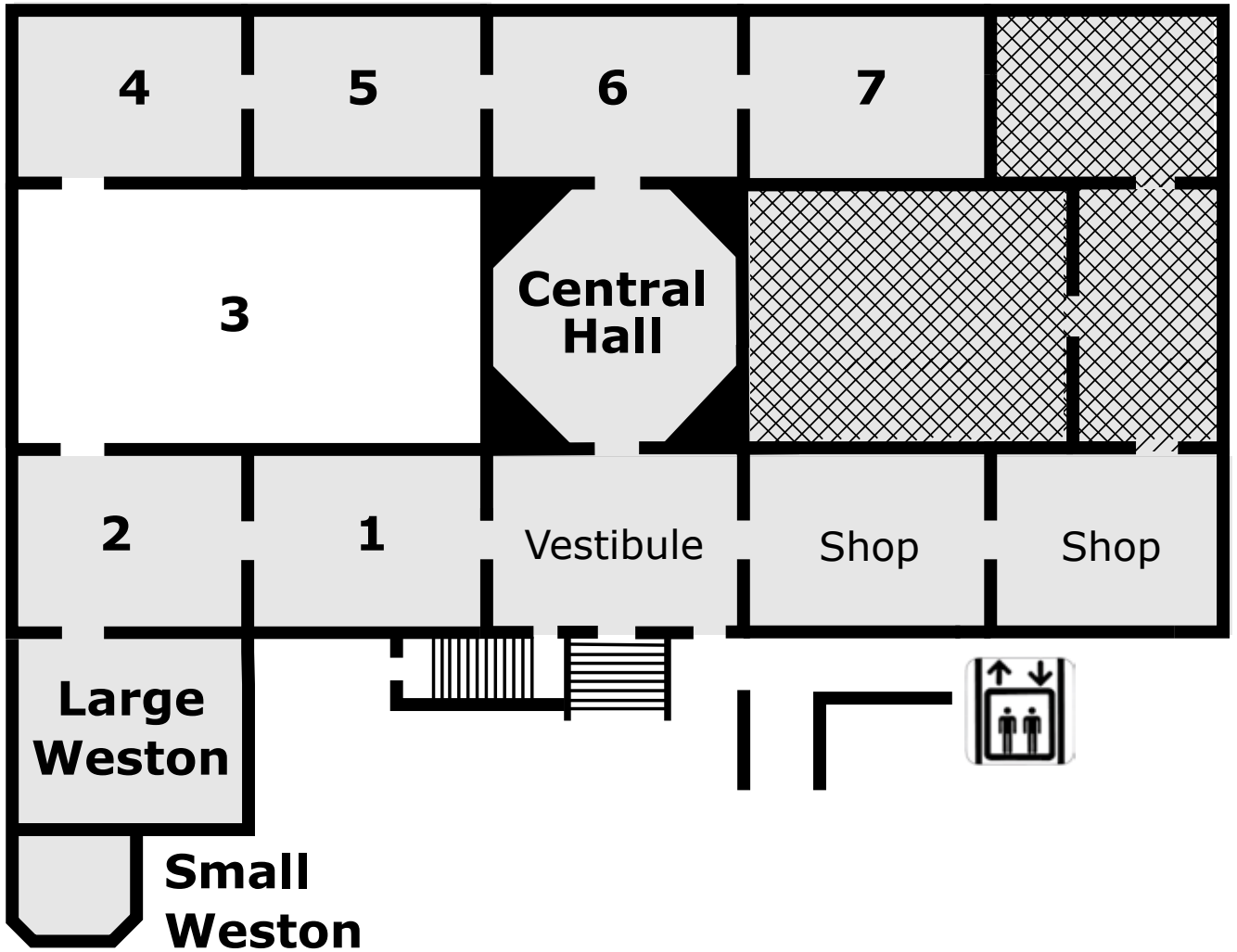
Light Bulb/Light Bulb

Television/Television

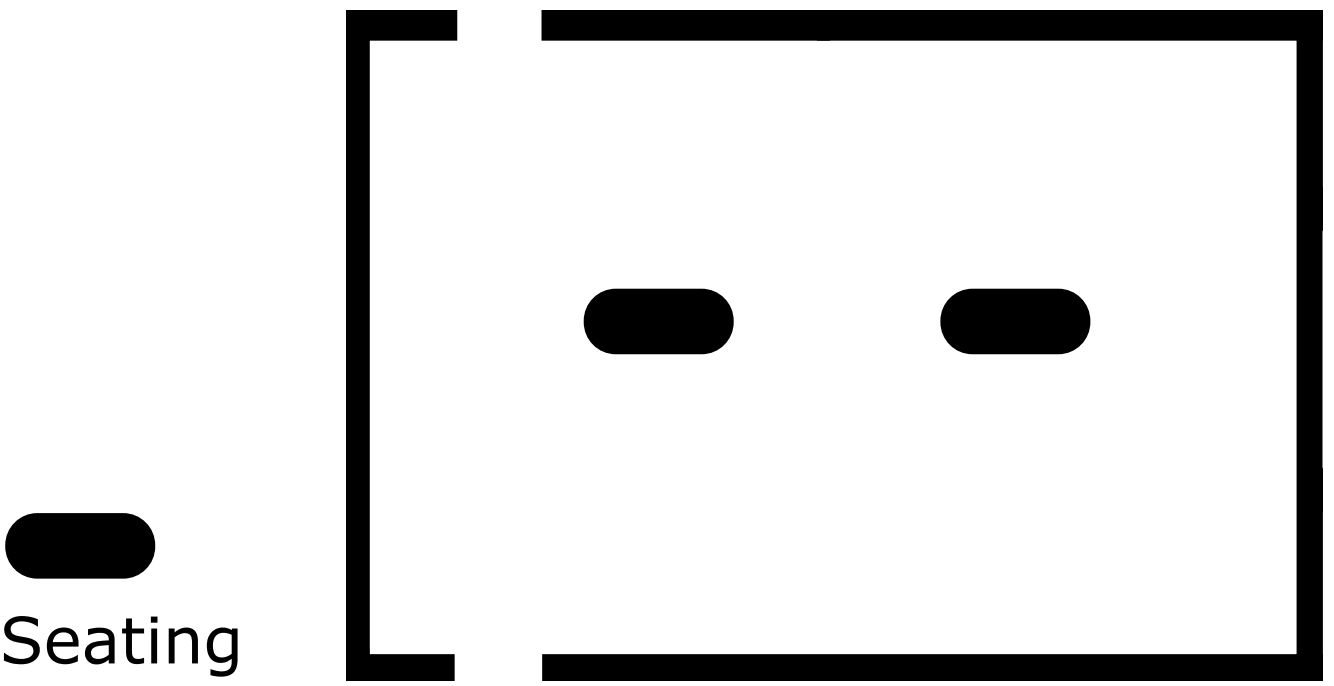
Fan/Fan

A series of eight letterpress prints from two blocks

Cristea Roberts Gallery, London and Hugh Nineham



You are in Gallery 3



Painting

Beginning with two vibrantly coloured installations in 1993 and 1994, Craig-Martin's output came to be dominated by site-specific painted installations (see one such work in the Central Hall). By the second half of the 1990s, he brought what these projects taught him to the more traditional medium of paint, which has remained at the heart of his practice ever since.

The artist's use of the computer from the early 1990s marked a creative turning point for him. It freed him to alter his drawings' size and scale dramatically and gave access to an infinite range of colours. By the mid-2000s, as the world shifted from analogue to digital, he introduced depictions of laptops, mobile phones and memory sticks into his images, showing them from the front rather than from an angle.

Around that time, Craig-Martin moved from painting on canvas to using aluminium panels, the smooth surface allowing him to create flatter drawings and more even areas of colour.



The artist's solo exhibition at Galerie Claudine Papillon, Paris, 1993. Collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

© Michael Craig-Martin. Image courtesy Gagosian

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Self-portrait (aqua)

2007

Acrylic on aluminium

Lent by the Royal Academy of Arts, London

Cassette

2002

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy Gagosian

Eye of the Storm

2003

Acrylic on canvas

In around 2000, Craig-Martin began painting crowded groups of objects, packed in ambiguous spaces. Here, objects are placed so close together that the background disappears.

The use of non-naturalistic colours and changes in scale disrupt our sense of familiarity with each object and invites the viewer, as Craig-Martin explains, “to pass that first stage of recognition to some kind of second step of actually looking, to consider how things exist in conjunction with each other”.

Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art

Purchase, 2005

Sharpener

2002

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy Gagosian

Pricks

2000

Acrylic on canvas

Courtesy the artist

Innocence and experience (pill bottle)

Acrylic on canvas

An early series of four paintings entitled “Innocence and Experience” is among Craig-Martin’s most ambiguous depictions of spatial relationships. Though each object exists alone in its own space without any overlaps, together they create the sense of a coherent, receding perspective plane.

Private Collection, Switzerland

Innocence and experience (fire extinguisher)

1996

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection

Common History: 5 53 Conference

1999

Acrylic on canvas

This is the largest painting of Craig-Martin's career to date. Virtually symmetrical, it was based on a wall drawing commissioned as the backdrop for an important international conference in London. Its symmetry alludes to the balanced nature of diplomatic discourse expected at such an event, while the choice of images reflects the formal characteristics of such a gathering: the globe, metal filing cabinets and desk lamps.

Courtesy Gagosian

History Painting

1995

Acrylic on aluminium

One of Craig-Martin's earliest colour paintings, this work brings together two forms of expression. The artist explains: "I've tried to reconcile certain aspects of abstraction and representation that are usually considered irreconcilable." The bucket and clipboard – both recurring motifs in Craig-Martin's early work – are assertively figurative, while the large blocks of colour-filled spaces hark back to Abstract Expressionism.

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

Las Meninas II

2001

Acrylic on canvas

Here, Craig-Martin pays homage to Diego Velázquez's 'Las Meninas' (1656), replacing the figures in the original painting with contemporary objects. Velázquez locates the viewer in the position of the King and Queen whose portrait we see him painting, so that the spectator becomes the artist's subject. This aligns with Craig-Martin's career-long interest in the viewer's active involvement in the making of the artwork.

Courtesy Gagosian



Diego Velázquez, 'Las Meninas', 1656.

Oil on canvas, 320.5 × 281.5 cm.

Museo Nacional del Prado.

Photo: © Photo MNP / Scala, Florence

Untitled (with suitcase)

2020

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Adam Goldberg

Untitled (bulb)

2014

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Learning Label

The whole room

You'll know lots of objects in this room, like buckets, pencil sharpeners and headphones. You might not recognise all of them, like the cassette tape, because they're less common now than they used to be. The artist sometimes groups these objects together, even though they don't seem to have much in common. He also plays with the scale and colour so that everything becomes a little less familiar and a little stranger. Can you think of links between any of these objects?

Space II

2016

Acrylic on aluminium

Over time, the type of items depicted by Craig- Martin has changed to reflect the contemporary world and includes identifiable brands, such as the Adidas trainers here. Developments in technology are also chronicled throughout his paintings. As well as the arrival of devices such as the iPhone (displayed nearby), other items have become obsolete and largely vanished, such as the cassette tape (also displayed nearby).

Courtesy Gagosian



Interior (with daybed)

2021

Acrylic on aluminium

While in many of his early paintings objects appear to respond naturally to the effects of gravity, in Craig-Martin's later work objects seem to float weightlessly in relation to one another. Here, the horizontal daybed establishes a sense of place and tends to determine one's sense of the scale and position of the other objects, while the combination of objects remains open to the viewer's interpretation.

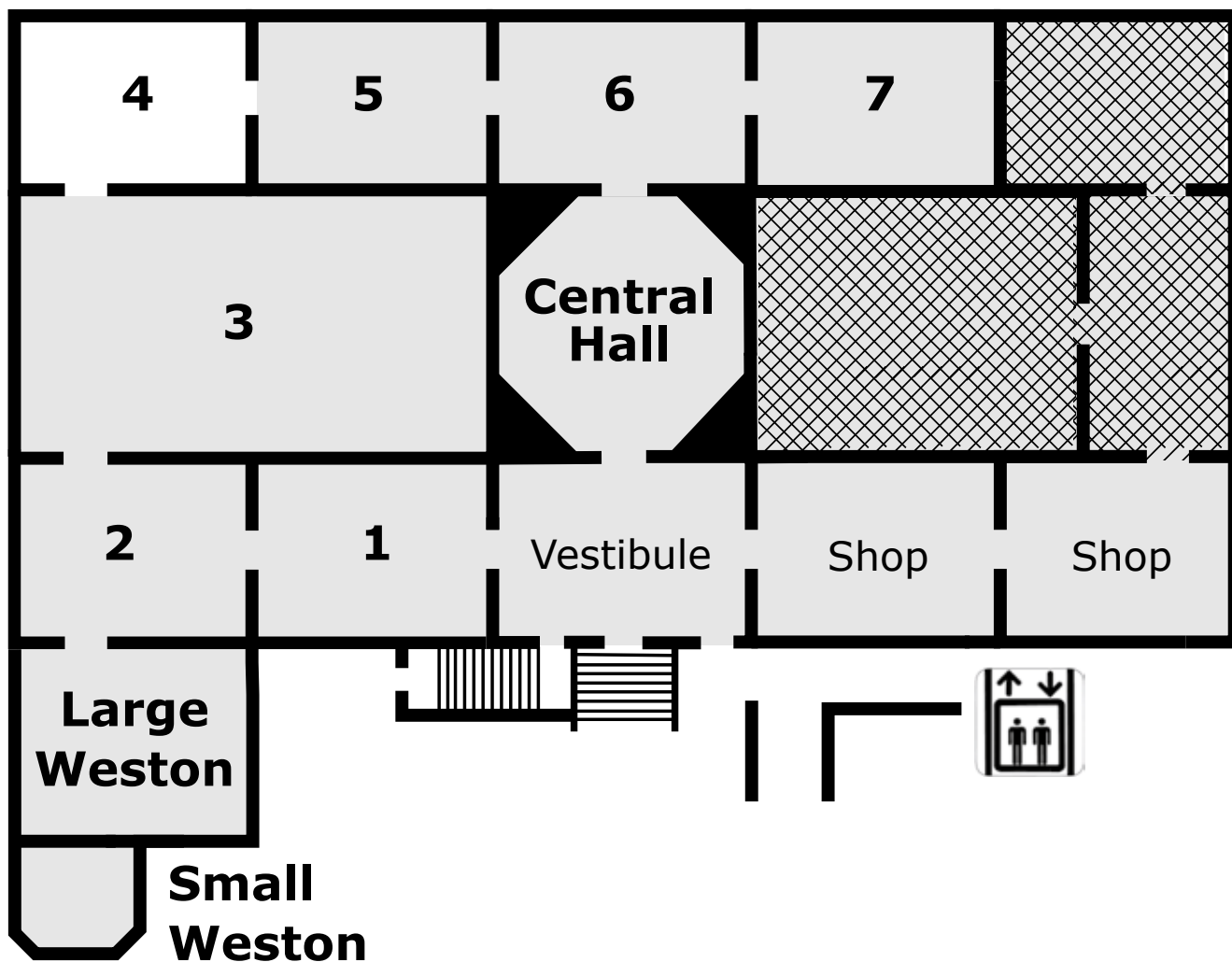
Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (iPhone X)

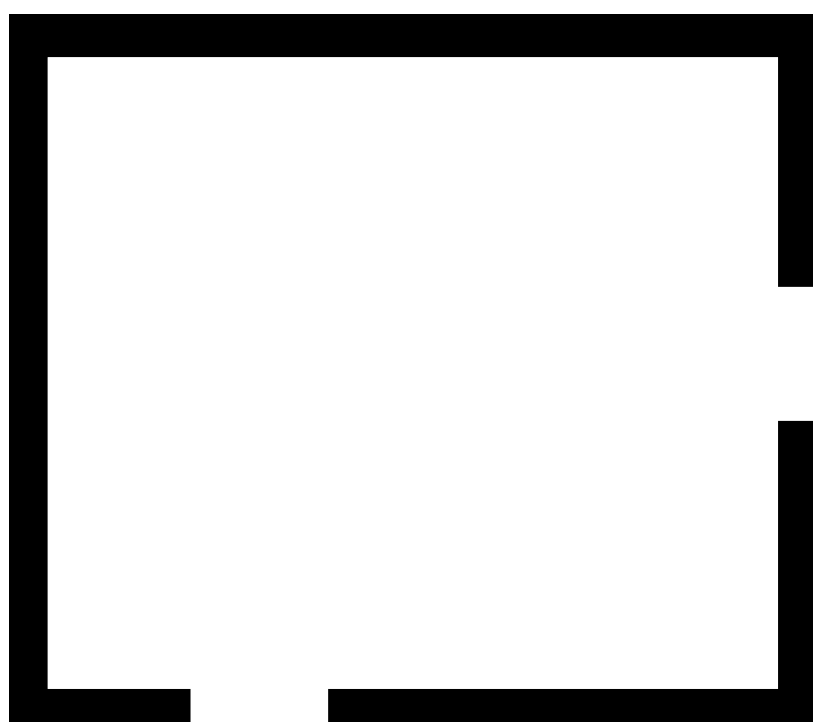
2019

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian



You are in Gallery 4



Word Paintings and Single Objects

In the early 2000s, Michael Craig-Martin embarked on a series of works in which he explored the relationship between text and image. He developed a “visual alphabet” in which every letter was linked to an object, albeit with no apparent connection. For example, an umbrella represented the letter A, while a wine glass represented B and so on. In the “Word Paintings” gigantic letters spell out abstract concepts, such as “art” or “death”. They are then overlaid with the drawings of the objects that correspond to each letter. In another type of painting, Craig-Martin creates playful visual puns by connecting a word and an object through rhyme. The so-called “Split Paintings” invite the viewer to imagine a connection between two different objects that have been cut in half and placed alongside one another.

Learning Label

Word paintings

When you see a word in a picture, you probably start thinking about how the word links to the image. In school, pictures help us learn to read: A = apple, B = bat, C = cat. In Craig-Martin's work the connection between the word and the object isn't obvious to everyone. Do his paintings change the way you think about the objects or the words?

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Untitled (liarspliers)

2011

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (loveglove)

2007

Acrylic on aluminium

Private Collection

Untitled (art/blue)

2024

Acrylic on aluminium

In contrast to the other “Word Paintings”, where the objects relate to the individual letters, here the word “Art” is overlayed with images of objects referencing painting, sculpture and the readymade: the back of a canvas, Jasper Johns’s ‘Painted Bronze’ sculpture and Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’.

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (death)

2008

Acrylic on aluminium

In his ‘Word Paintings’, Craig-Martin tackles universal abstract concepts such as sex and death. Each of the overlaid outline drawings is of an object that relates to a letter in the word to create an “alphabet” of everyday items that the artist created.

In these paintings, the letters are filled with solid colour while the objects are outlines. This juxtaposition invites us to contemplate the relationship between abstract concepts and tangible things in our lives.

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (sardine tin/ handcuff)

2007

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (watch/ sandal)

2007

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (sex)

2007

Oil on aluminium

Private Collection

Untitled (papercup)



2014

Acrylic on aluminium

In this group of works Craig-Martin expands his lexicon of everyday objects to include new ones that have entered our lives. With the advent of global café chains, disposable paper cups have become ubiquitous. The artist's depiction of one is a reference to the convenience of global consumer culture, the hectic nature of contemporary life and the by-products of our consumerism. This painting reminds us that even a seemingly valueless object can attain an unexpected dignity and iconic status through art.

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (corkscrew)

2014

Acrylic on aluminium

Valerie and Philip Marsden MBE

Untitled (Coke can)

2014

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (credit card)

2014

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (chips)

2019

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (laptop turquoise)

2014

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Wallpaper 2

2004

Large format print on coated and textured vinyl

In 2004 Craig-Martin created a wallpaper using ten of his line drawings of objects. These drawings touch each other at as many points as possible without overlapping. Craig-Martin describes it like a “skin” covering the wall’s surface. He then made small, brightly coloured paintings of each of the ten images, to coincide with their counterpart in the wallpaper. These were hung on the wallpaper anywhere that image appears.

Courtesy the artist

Bottle (wallpaper- orange)

2004

All Acrylic on aluminium

Private Collection

Bucket (wallpaper- pink)

Chair (wallpaper-aqua)

Light Bulb (wallpaper- violet)

Untitled (green/blue)

2009

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (blue/green)

2009

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

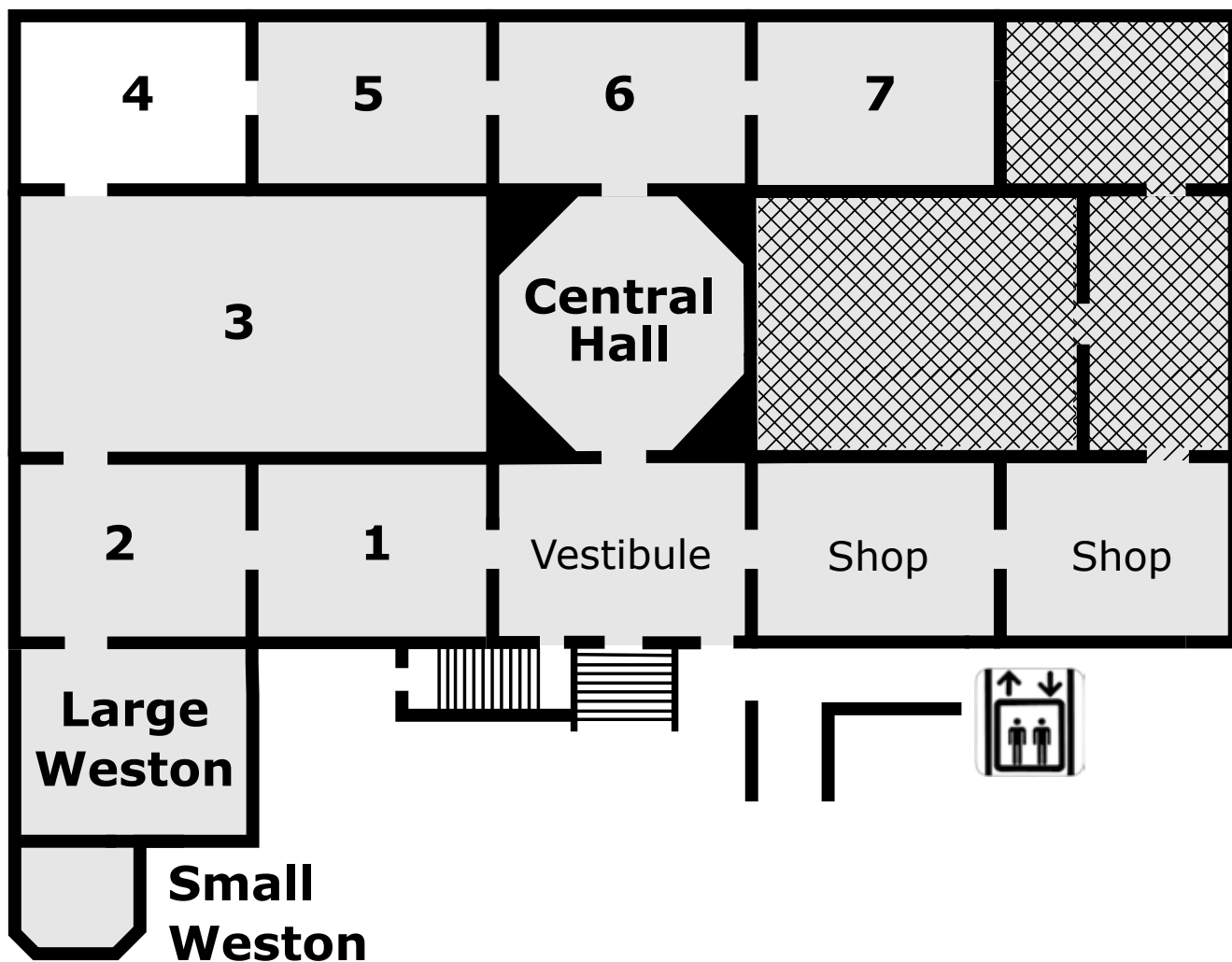
Untitled (painting)



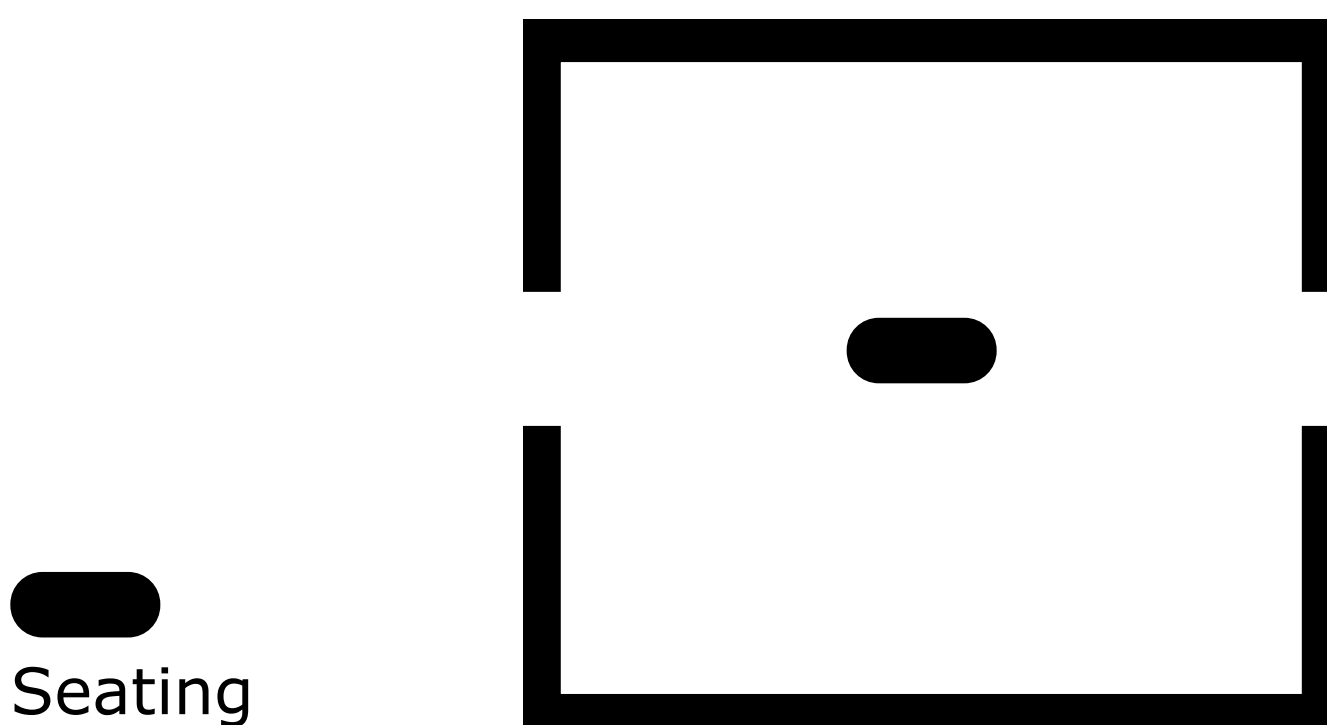
2010

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian



You are in Gallery 5



Older Masters and Modern Design

Michael Craig-Martin frequently cites artists and works of art that have inspired him. In this room, he pays tribute to celebrated works of art by reimagining them in his own visual language. One example is Diego Velázquez's 'Las Meninas' (1656). Artists have been intrigued by the way Velázquez placed the viewer in the position of the Spanish King and Queen sitting for their portrait. A much later work, Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' (1917), influenced Craig-Martin to pay homage to the Duchampian strategy of elevating everyday objects to fine art.

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Common History: Vanitas

1999

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, Northern Ireland

Untitled (Barcelona chair)

2013

Acrylic on aluminium

The Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth

Art and Design

2012

A set of ten screenprints on paper

Craig-Martin's interest in architecture and design led him to develop this series of prints where he pictures a variety of iconic chair designs juxtaposed with the depiction of important sculptures. Of all the objects the artist has drawn, Craig-Martin considers chairs to be the most varied in terms of design, material and execution, stating "the role of designers is to invent; the role of artists is to observe".

David & Jane Fletcher

Untitled (paintbrushes teal)

2022

Acrylic on aluminium

Private Collection

Duchamp's Large Glass

Acrylic on aluminium, in two parts

The actual title of Marcel Duchamp's landmark work is 'The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even'. It shows the erotic encounter between the bride (above) and nine bachelors, trapped in a mechanical apparatus (below).

Duchamp used a variety of materials on sheets of glass rather than canvas. In his painting, Craig-Martin plays on the tension of paying homage to Duchamp's masterpiece while the original work was a rejection of painting itself.

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian



Marcel Duchamp, 'The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)', 1915–1923. Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels, 277.5 × 177.8 × 8.6 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art; Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier, 1952.

© Association Marcel Duchamp / ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2024

Fountain

1999

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection, London

Manet's Folies-Bergère

2023

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe

2023

Acrylic on aluminium

Craig-Martin created re-interpretations of several of Edouard Manet's most important works.

The Impressionist artist's 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe' scandalised the public with its depiction of a nude woman looking directly at the viewer while seated with two men dressed in modern fashions. Craig-Martin simplifies the composition, painting the landscape in a drastically reduced palette. The figures and their possessions are highlighted by an array of bright colours.

Courtesy the artist and Gagosian



Edouard Manet, 'Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe', 1863.

Oil on canvas, 207 × 265 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

© GrandPalaisRmn (musée d'Orsay) / Benoît Touchard / Mathieu Rabeau

Reconstructing Seurat (purple)



54

2004

Acrylic on aluminium

One of Craig-Martin's favourite paintings is Georges Seurat's 'Bathers at Asnières' (1884). Here, he has reimagined this monumental composition using his own visual language of black outline drawing and vivid, flat colour fields. The artist uses colour to highlight elements of the painting, such as the factory smokestacks in the background of this scene of leisure.

Private Collection



Georges Seurat, Bathers at Asnières, 1884.

Oil on canvas,
201 × 300 cm. Bought, Courtauld Fund, 1924.

© National Gallery, London

Manet's Olympia

2023

Acrylic on aluminium

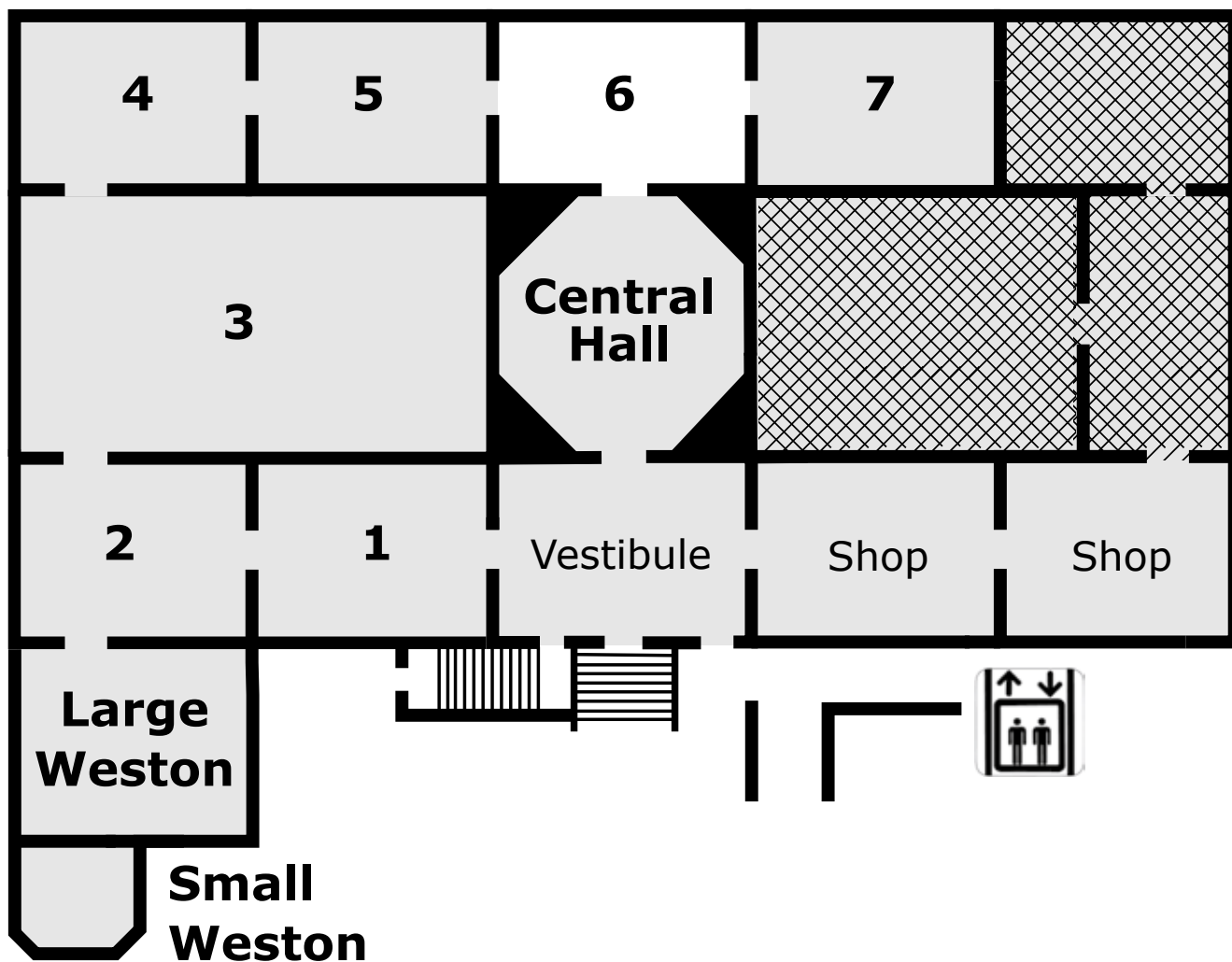
Courtesy the artist and Gagosian

Las Meninas

2018

Acrylic on aluminium

Stoutzker Collection



You are in Gallery 6



Recent Paintings

Michael Craig-Martin intends to make us aware of the ways in which we perceive the world. As the artist has stated, “works of art can be meaningful without containing readily definable meaning. They are stimulants for our imagination, intended to be experienced not interpreted and are most useful when they provoke an unfamiliar experience.” He demonstrates how we can recognise objects no matter how unnaturalistic their colour or scale. When his work reduces the subject to a detail, we still easily identify them by completing them using our memory and imagination.

Recently he has developed themes such as musical instruments, which are shown individually or in crowded compositions.

His fruit and vegetable paintings were a result of the Covid-19 lockdowns when the only shopping visits permitted were to acquire food. It occurred to Craig-Martin that these familiar “objects of nature” were as universally recognisable as the manufactured objects he had painted before.

List of works clockwise in order of hang

Untitled (fruit with blue lines)

2022

Acrylic on aluminium

Private Collection

Untitled (watch fragment)

2015

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Zoom 2

2024

Acrylic on aluminium

The motif of a laptop has made regular appearances in Craig-Martin's work for many years. Already an everyday feature of contemporary life, the arrival of Covid-19 and the resulting isolation of multiple lockdowns transformed the device into our lifeline to the outside world. It became one of the only ways to see friends and family or conduct business. Here, the title refers to one of the most prominent digital platforms that made these interactions possible.

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (percussion)

2022

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (strings)

2022

Acrylic on aluminium

This assembly of string instruments, and that of the percussion set displayed nearby, grew out of a commission to decorate a dinner service. Craig-Martin sought to find a large group of different but closely related objects: musical instruments seemed ideal. He also discovered that, unlike many of the other objects he depicts, some musical instruments look virtually the same today as they did hundreds of years ago.

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (French horn fragment)

2018

Acrylic on aluminium

Private Collection, Paris

Untitled (Barcelona chair fragment orange)

2018

Acrylic on aluminium

Carina Andres Thalmann, Zürich, Switzerland

Untitled (chips and headphones)

2023

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (with corkscrew)

2020

Acrylic on aluminium

Newton Aguiar & Renee Aguiar Lucander

Untitled (house)



2023

Acrylic on aluminium

In this work, when the artist wished to draw a representative modern house, he turned to the suburban split-level of his American childhood. This painting reflects a sense of domesticity, both exterior and interior, past and present. The tape measure that extends beyond the picture plane on one side and re-enters on the other may imply the inevitable cyclical nature of life.

Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (mask 2)

2020

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Adam Goldberg

Learning Label

Untitled (mask 2), 2020

Certain sounds, objects, smells, or tastes take us right back to a particular moment. For most of us, laptops and face masks make us think of online learning and lockdown. Before the pandemic, we may never have thought of wearing a face mask, and in years to come, these objects might have a different meaning to us. Which single object would you paint to remind the viewer of a specific time or place?

Interior (with chaise)

2021

Acrylic on aluminium

Craig-Martin believes that works of art should be experienced rather than interpreted. He rejects the notion that paintings hold a meaning we are challenged to uncover, and deliberately makes works that defy interpretation. While his compositions feel formally balanced, his choice of objects conjures diverse associations and references.

(continued over)

Here, the interaction of the seemingly unrelated images of an aeroplane window, a chaise longue and a hypodermic needle perhaps hint at our experience of Covid-19.

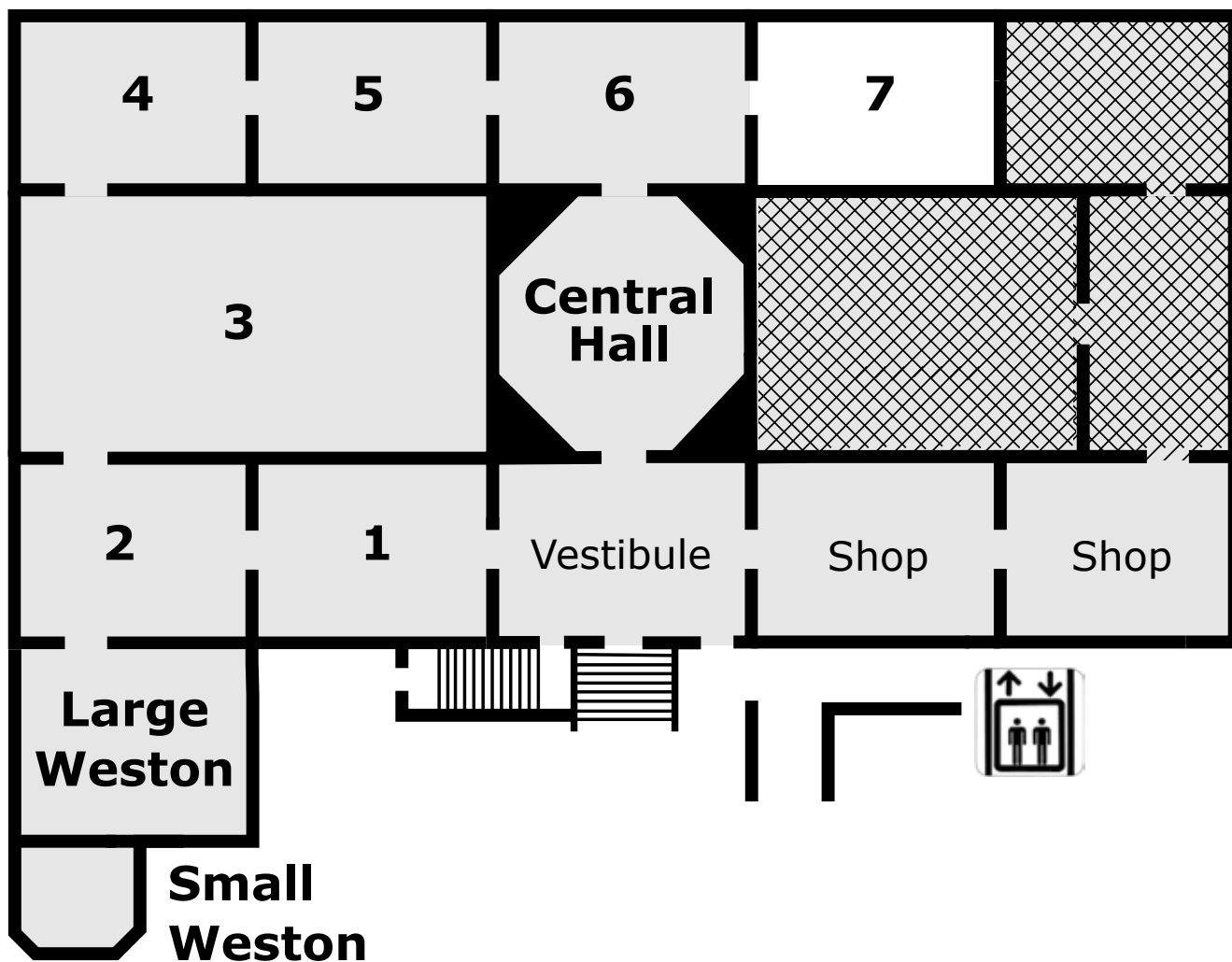
Courtesy Gagosian

Untitled (vegetables with blue lines)

2023

Acrylic on aluminium

Courtesy Gagosian



You are in Gallery 7



List of works clockwise in order of hang

The Planets

2017

Screenprint

Cristea Roberts Gallery, London

Cosmos

2024

Vector animation on four 4K projectors and sound via 12-channel surround speaker array

For this exhibition Craig-Martin has created his first fully immersive digital work of art. It uses more than 300 images of objects the artist has made over the past 45 years, making it a fitting work for a retrospective. The animated video has been developed with the assistance of Daniel Jackson and the accompanying soundscape with Benji Fox.

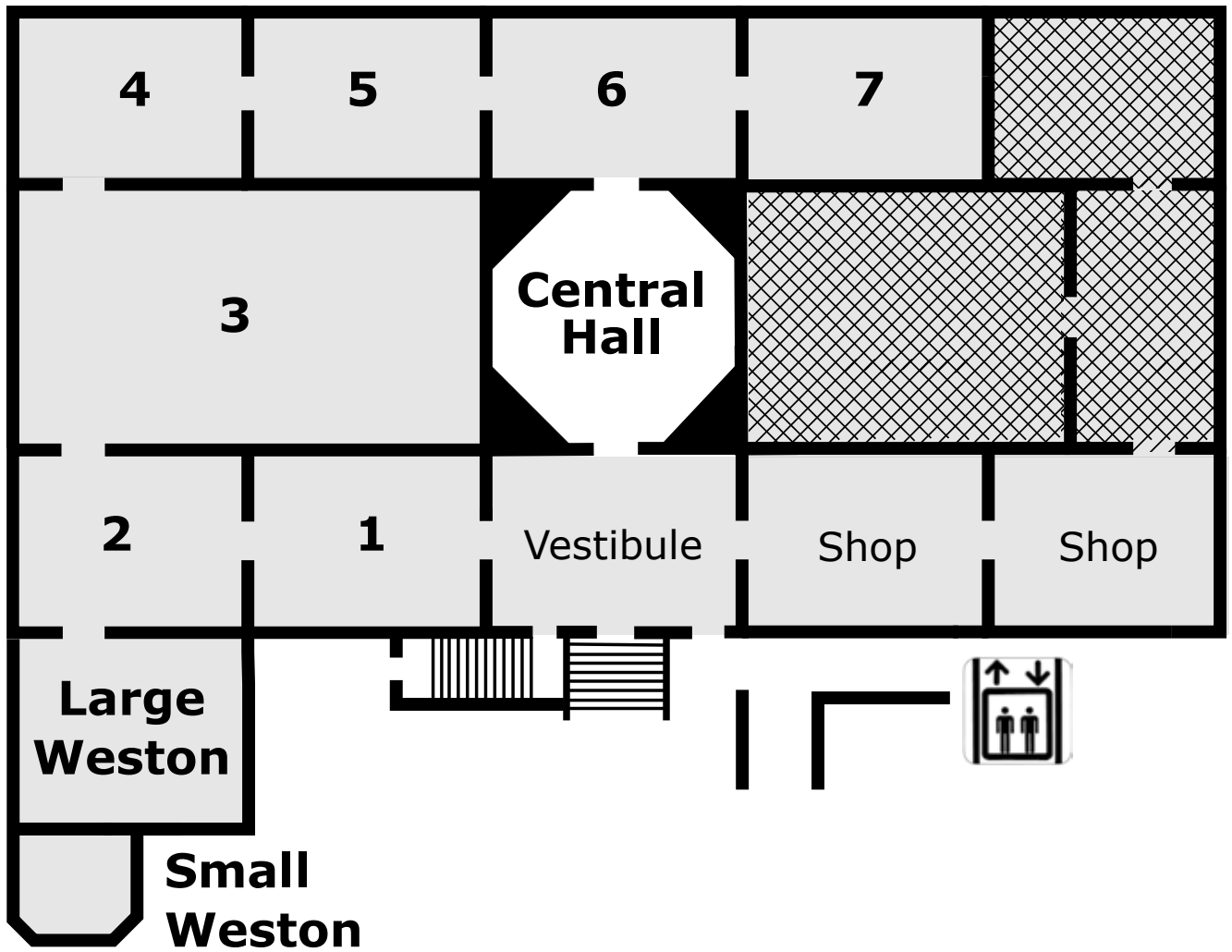
The computer has been an essential tool for Craig-Martin's drawing and preparatory work since 1994. He has also created digital works of art purely for the screen, utilising computers to make images with dynamic qualities such as colours that are constantly in flux (see the digital portraits in the Central Hall).

Technical design and installation: Keith Burden (Vis-AV)

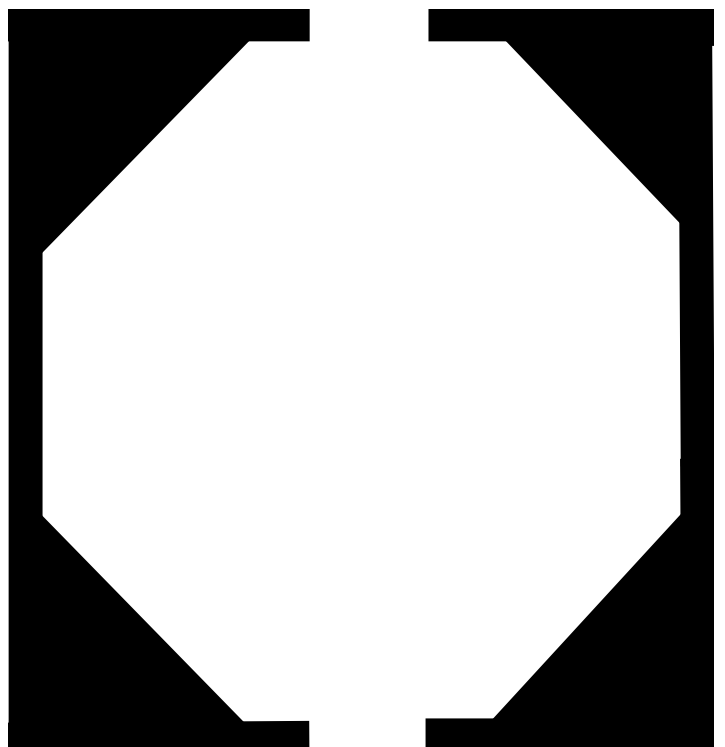
Spatial sound design and composition: Benji Fox

Immersive video design: Daniel Jackson (AVCO)

Courtesy the artist



You are in Central Hall



List of works clockwise in order of hang

Octagon



2024

Large format print on coated and textured vinyl

Craig-Martin started creating room installations in 1993. Here, the images of the headphones, the iPhone and the watch are gateways into other experiences. The glass of water framing the exit refers to Craig-Martin's seminal early work 'An Oak Tree', with which the exhibition began.

Courtesy the artist

George Michael

2007

Bespoke software and vector artwork

Artist's proof, shown with permission of Adam & Sally, Minto Family

Zaha Hadid

2008

Bespoke software and vector artwork

In the early 1990s, Craig-Martin started using computers to create digital artworks. When commissioned to make a portrait of the architect Dame Zaha Hadid RA by the National Portrait Gallery in 2007, Craig-Martin realised that a digital medium could create a “living” portrait. His digital portraits are generated by software that continually changes the colour configuration so each moment is unique.

Artist’s proof, shown with permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London

The Great Duke, after Lawrence

2014

Bespoke software and vector artwork

Artist's proof, shown with permission of the Wellington
Collection, Apsley House

Laura Burlington

2009

Bespoke software and vector artwork

Artist's proof, shown with permission of The Devonshire
Collections, Chatsworth

Works in the Courtyard

Safety Pin (turquoise)

2024

Powder-coated steel

Courtesy Gagosian

Umbrella (magenta)

2024

Powder-coated steel

Courtesy Gagosian

Headphones (blue)

2020

Powder-coated steel

Courtesy Gagosian

Screw (yellow)

2024

Powder-coated steel

Courtesy Gagosian

High Heel (red)

2021

Powder-coated steel

Courtesy Gagosian

Tulip (orange)

2024

Powder-coated steel

Courtesy Gagosian

Craig-Martin's monumental sculptures play with the tension between the three-dimensionality of this art form and the two-dimensionality of drawing. Craig-Martin views these works as sculptures of drawings.

From the front, the objects read as being two-dimensional and are easily identifiable, while from the side, the subjects collapse into a single line and the object depicted becomes strangely unreadable.

The scale and colours used to represent these familiar items lend them a presence that is simultaneously modest and heroic.

Courtesy Gagosian

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