

Jan Dibbets

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Alan Cristea Gallery

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Preface

In 1967 Jan Dibbets made a stack of blank, white canvases which he placed on the floor and with that statement gave up being a painter.

Following this declaration of intent and funded by a British Council scholarship, he travelled to London to study at St Martin's School of Art. His peer group there included Richard Long, George Passmore (later of Gilbert and George) and Barry Flanagan, all of whom were actively rebelling against what they saw as the redundant, anachronistic teaching of Anthony Caro and his more formal sculptural practice. This prevailing mood of radicalism was being driven by a new generation of artist tutors such as John Latham, who the previous year had been sacked from the school for borrowing their library copy of Clement Greenberg's book *Art and Culture*, and returning it as a phial of chewed and fermented pulp. He declared both the object and act as a collaborative sculpture made by him and his students.

Whilst attending St Martin's, Dibbets had lodgings overlooking Peckham Rye Park, a piece of common land in South East London whose existence he understood to be the result of deliberate human intervention in the landscape; his daily exposure to this, alongside his experiences at the college, were to prove the catalyst for a new body of work in which he actively used and subverted the land itself. He began making grass piles and rolls and worked directly onto fields and beaches, raking lines into their surface.

These projects, his own interventions into the landscape, were by their nature transient and would inevitably degrade and disappear over time. In an effort to record some of these, he looked through a camera lens and in doing so began a lifelong undertaking which has consistently challenged the very nature of photography and the photographic image, '*... in 1967 I picked up a camera and all these ideas about what is real / not real, abstract / not abstract came together in one machine. It became my thing*'.

Since then, his work has remained both unswerving and enigmatic. Whilst art historians and critics have sought to fit his practice into neat categories - photography, land art, conceptual art - he eludes all of these. At the heart of his work is the camera, but not in any traditional sense. He has never been interested in the camera simply as a tool for making images and is most certainly not a photographer. In his own words, '*Not all painters are artists and not all photographers are artists either. Photography is too often about "what" when "how" is the interesting question ... every photograph is a lie. It doesn't represent anything. Therefore it is both real and abstract. Photography is very easy and very complicated at the same time,*' and it is exactly this paradox which makes his work so complex.

On one level his work touches on themes which have preoccupied artists for centuries - perspective, light, time; similarly his choice of subject matter - land, sea, colour

and architecture. However, to understand Dibbets' work, one must first appreciate that these are not the 'subjects'. He has never photographed the sea or a window simply for their aesthetic qualities. They and the camera are the conduit for a far more complex set of ideas about the nature of representation itself.

The works in this catalogue all come from the artist's own collection and were personally selected by him. They trace the development of his practice from early *Structure* works, *Panorama* and *Film* pieces to the later *Window* and *Cupola* compositions. They show how, over 50 years and through a refined and distilled practice, he has consistently sought to challenge the way an image is constructed and viewed. From the earliest pieces, where he used the very mechanics of the camera - altering shutter speed or moving it around at prescribed angles on its axis - to the later works where he uses the photographically printed image, cut, collaged and in combination with drawing and watercolour, he has created images which appear both tangible and yet abstract.

In Dibbets' work there is certainly no reverence for the hegemony or purity of the 'photograph' as an art object. To subvert the well-known idiom, Dibbets has proven again and again that the camera, rather than being a purveyor of truth is in fact an inveterate liar, but in the right hands can be just as powerful a medium as paint on canvas.

David Cleaton-Roberts, 2017

Panorama Sea

1971

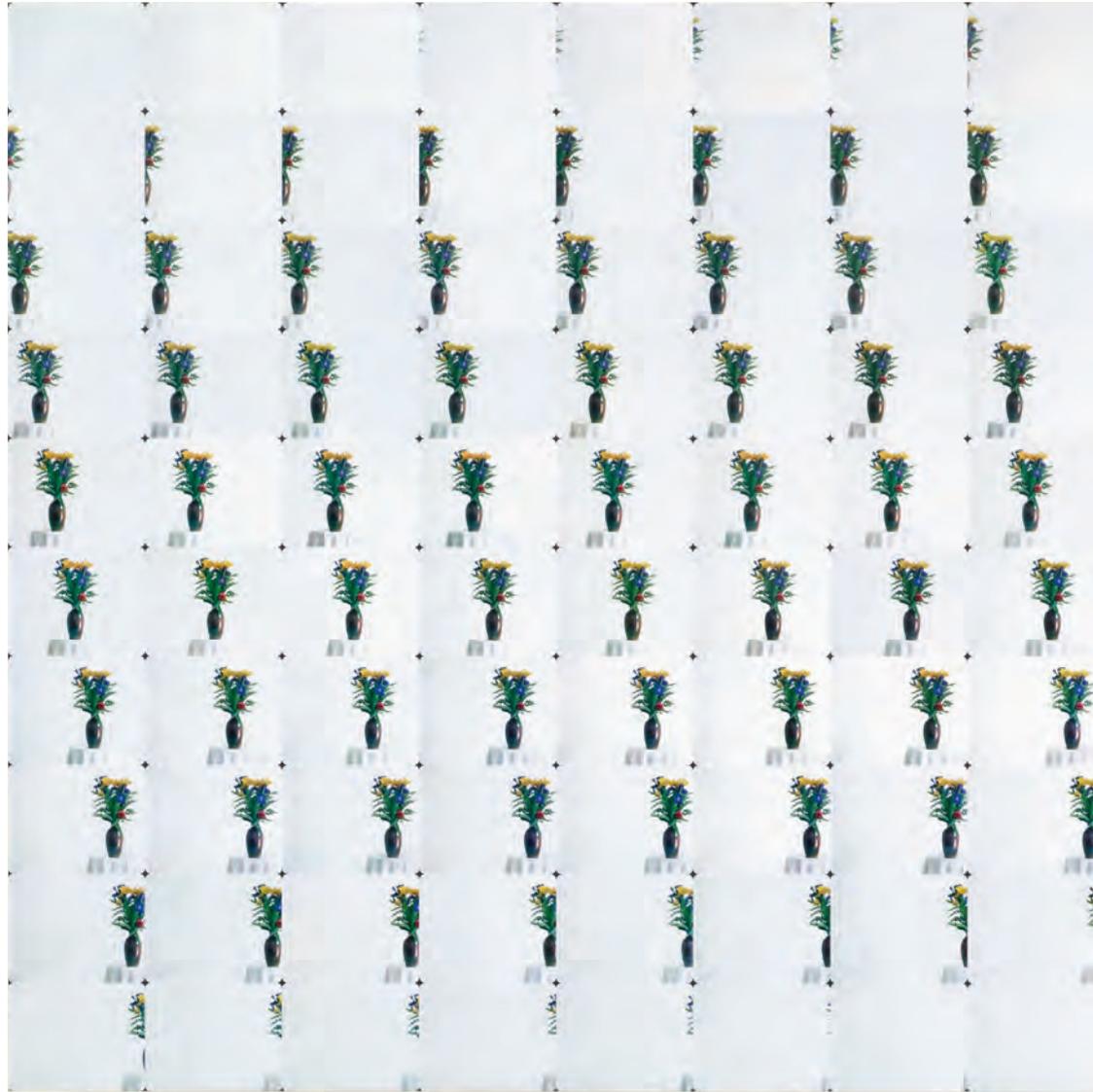
Colour photographs collaged onto board
Paper and image 45.3 x 119.5 cm
Signed and dated in pencil, recto



Film: Painting vase with flowers - horizontal

1972

Colour photographs collaged onto panel
Paper and image 96 x 95 cm
Signed and titled in ink, verso on the backboard



Structure piece, small leaves

1974

Colour photographs collaged onto board with pencil drawing
Paper and image 45.8 x 259.4 cm
Signed and dated in pencil, recto

Exhibited

Jan Dibbets : Walker Arts Centre, Minneapolis
(toured to Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York;
Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan;
Norton Gallery, West Palm Beach, Florida, USA and
Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands)
Illustrated in exhibition catalogue p. 103





Clifton Suspension Bridge

1977

Colour photographs collaged onto board with pencil drawing
Paper and image 83.0 x 151.0 cm
Signed and dated in pencil, recto

Ceiling Anthony D'Offay Gallery – Dering St., London

1981

Dptych of black and white photographs collaged onto board with pencil drawing

Paper and image 72.0 x 72.0 cm (each)

Each part signed and dated, recto



Study for Octagon II

1982

Colour photographs collaged onto board with pencil and wash

Paper and image 60.0 x 72.0 cm

Signed, dated and titled in pencil, recto



Dublin Arcade I

1983

Colour photographs collaged onto board with pencil drawing
Paper and image 71.5 x 105.0 cm
Signed and dated in pencil, recto



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L. A. J. S. P.

Guinness Hopstore

1984-6

Colour photographs with hand painting in watercolour mounted onto wooden board

Paper and image 140.0 x 160.0 cm

Titled, signed and dated in ink, verso

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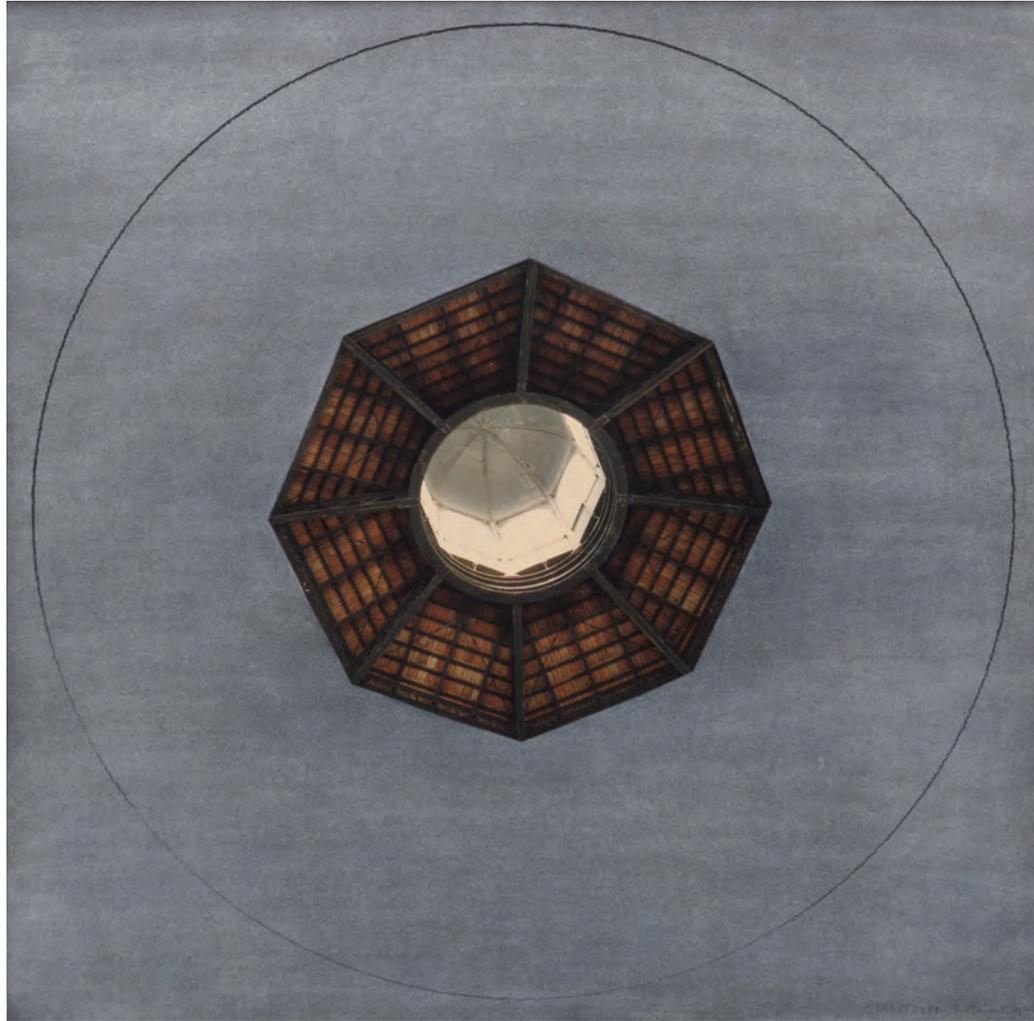
El Born, Barcelona

1989

Colour photograph, watercolour and pencil on paper mounted onto panel

Paper and image 72.0 x 72.0 cm

Signed, recto



Rosary Window, Montreal

1988

Colour photograph, watercolour and pencil on paper mounted onto panel

Paper and image 71.1 x 71.1 cm

Signed in ink, recto



Ten Windows

1997

A set of 10 photographs contained within a portfolio designed by the artist

Each photograph measures 60.0 x 60.0 cm

Portfolio measures 63.5 x 63.5 cm

Each signed and numbered in ink, recto

Edition of 40



Ten Cupolas

1999

A set of 10 photographs contained within a portfolio designed by the artist

Each photograph measures 60.0 x 60.0 cm

Portfolio measures 64.0 x 64.0 cm

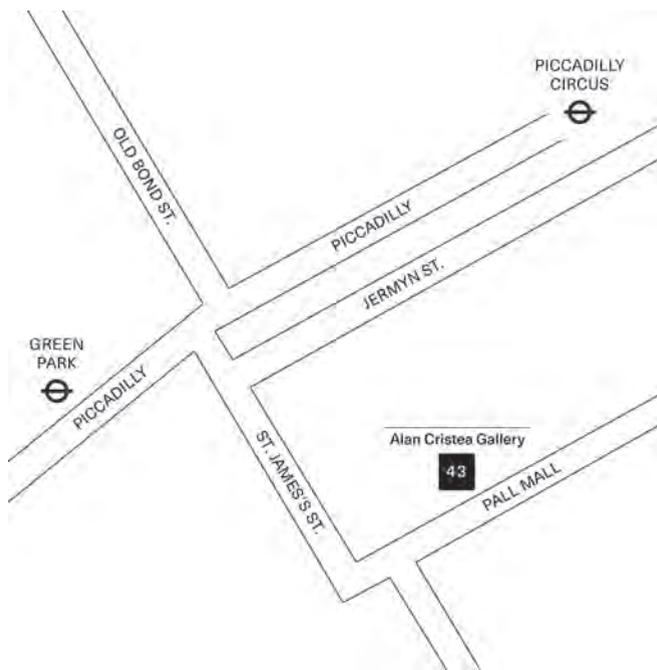
Each signed and numbered in ink, recto

Edition of 60



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