

**John Hansard Gallery**  
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#### About us

**John Hansard Gallery** is a world-leading centre for contemporary art. Launched in 1980, the Gallery showcases innovative work by UK and international artists through exhibitions, off-site projects, research, publications, education and outreach programmes. Bringing artists and communities together, the Gallery makes a vital contribution to the cultural life of the city and region and encourages new practice by today's best artists and curators.

In 2016, the John Hansard Gallery will move to a new city centre location as part of Southampton's new arts complex, a VIP Project for the city supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, led by Southampton City Council in partnership with Grosvenor Developments Ltd.

**John Hansard Gallery** is part of the **University of Southampton** and supported by **Arts Council England**.

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## PRESS RELEASE

# Barthes/Burgin

13 February 2015 – 16 April 2016

This exhibition places side by side the little known drawings of Roland Barthes, with new projection works by Victor Burgin. The influence of Barthes on Burgin's work is well documented, not least by Burgin himself. Equally, Burgin's prominence as an artist and theorist concerned with text and image during the 1970s onwards offers a challenging dialogue with Barthes' work.

Roland Barthes' writings continue to resonate with literary and arts scholarship today, yet the fact that Barthes sustained a practice of drawing and painting throughout the 1970s is little known. Only a handful of other public displays have occurred outside of France, but they have never been previously shown in the UK, despite sustained interest in his writings.

Since the 1960s, Victor Burgin has been one of the leading Conceptual artists and theorists from the UK working internationally. Often concerned with architecture, space, the built environment, memory and the means by which memory is physically and technologically constructed, Burgin's recent digital projection installations can be considered as 'photographs that move'. These works are not video as such, nor photography, but deliberate, painstaking digital constructions using current technologies.

A publication accompanies the exhibition, produced by both John Hansard Gallery and Edinburgh University Press. The title, Barthes/Burgin, makes use of the slash or 'dividing bar' iconic of the structuralist account of cultural signs much associated with Barthes' work, and echoed in the title of one of his key texts, *S/Z* from 1974, which itself marked an important shift to post-structural writing. The slash is also reflected in the exhibition, which has Barthes' drawings running through the middle of the exhibition as a constant reminder of the significance of Barthes' thinking to Burgin's own. While there is no immediate relationship between Barthes' drawings and Burgin's works, this curatorial device serves to remind of a relationship based on the pair's theoretical positions, at the root of which is the consideration of structures of signification and forms of 'writing' that allow for alternative readings of place, subjectivity and history.

Both book and exhibition seek to prompt a new critical consideration of Barthes/Burgin, theory/practice, writing/making and criticality/visuality. An important tenet has been to consider Barthes and Burgin as being both artists *and* writers; as being, inextricably, as much makers as they are theorists.

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In Barthes' case he moved from various theoretical positions into increasingly creative forms of critical writing. The fact that this latter period in Barthes' life was accompanied by a routine practice of making desk-based drawings is brought into significance through the staging of this exhibition. Burgin, on the other hand, originally engaged in the openly political use of photographic-with text based, works towards an increasingly poetic interpretation of his subjects that has emphasised the lack of importance of the artist in terms of meaning in the work of art, and particularly its interpretation among the audience.

Barthes/Burgin is the final exhibition to be held in the building that John Hansard Gallery has occupied for the last thirty-five years on the University of Southampton's Highfield campus, before moving to a new city centre location opening in October 2016. The Gallery has been driven by an exploration of the development of early conceptual art and the theoretical ideas that helped to shape it. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the final exhibition in this iteration of the Gallery's history should include one of the key figures to have had such an influence on art, and particularly photography, history and theory. The exhibition features three new works by Victor Burgin never previously displayed in the UK, all of which deal with a disappeared building, with one commissioned specifically by the John Hansard Gallery relating to its own history.

The first, *A Place to Read*, features a disappeared coffee shop in Istanbul. The second, *Prairie*, is about the demolition of the Mecca in Chicago, which was replaced by Crown Hall, the home of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, built by Mies van der Rohe. The third, *Belledonne*, commissioned especially for the exhibition, is about the imminent disappearance of the building that the John Hansard Gallery has occupied since its founding in 1979. Again, this piece allows for the overlaying of histories, or imbricated time, typical of Burgin's work. In this case, he moves between the history of the Gallery and a panoramic postcard view of Belledonne in South-East France, which was the location for a sanatorium where Roland Barthes was a patient between 1942-5. *Belledonne* will be re-shown in the new John Hansard Gallery, the purpose-built gallery in the centre of the city of Southampton. By then the piece will have become a commemoration of a disappeared building, which in turn will help to create a sense of continuity between the old building and the new.

With special thanks to Professor Ryan Bishop and Dr Sunil Manghani, Winchester School of Art, co-curators of the exhibition and authors of the publication.

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