

Supporting Artists: Acme's First Decade 1972-1982

7 September 2013 – 23 February 2014
Pat Matthews Gallery (Gallery 4)
Whitechapel Gallery

Acme Studios is a London-based housing charity dedicated to supporting artists in economic need through the provision of studios, accommodation and professional support.

Acme manages 16 buildings providing affordable, long-term and high-quality studios (620 units) and work/live space (20 units). Through this resource it helps over 700 artists each year.

Acme's Residency & Awards Programme adds to this core service of studio provision by awarding selected UK-based artists with studio residencies, bursaries, professional mentoring and exhibiting opportunities at the Acme Project Space, working with a range of partners. At any one time over 20 artists benefit from this support.

Acme's International Residencies Programme currently manages 23 annual London residencies on behalf of eight agencies together with an Associate Artist Residencies programme for international artists applying directly to the organisation.

Acme shares its research and knowledge through a national strategic advocacy, advisory and consultancy service.

Supporting Artists: Acme's First Decade 1972-1982

Introduction

The invitation to work with the Whitechapel Gallery on an archive exhibition of material from our first decade has presented a most welcome opportunity. Through the process of reviewing the material we hold, and with the benefit of the support and critical eye of the Gallery's archive curator, we have become convinced of the importance of maintaining and developing our own archive. We will now explore how this can be implemented to create a publicly-accessible resource.

The exhibition is being presented as part of our 40th anniversary celebrations. It is only this year that, through a process which began almost 20 years ago, we have secured a permanent property portfolio that will allow the organisation to become self-sustaining. We know that providing affordable space and other support for artists in London will always be challenging, but we can now plan with some certainty. This of course has not always been the case as the archive exhibition will make clear.

Registered as an artist-led charitable housing association in November 1972, Acme's first decade began with the pioneering use of short-life houses in the heart of east London to create affordable working and living space for artists. This was followed by the unfolding of The Acme Gallery's programme in Covent Garden (1976-1981) and the beginnings of non-residential studio provision in converted ex-industrial buildings.

There are two main strands to the story: firstly, the use of short-life houses and commercial buildings to provide affordable space and, secondly, the use of a building (again short-life) to provide a space in which artists could present their work. The two

strands are bound together both by the organisation's commitment to supporting artists at the most fundamental level – with a place to live, to work and to exhibit – and by the ways that artists themselves would use and interpret the resource at their disposal.

The use of short-life property is at the heart of this narrative and has come to define the nature of the archive material that has been accumulated. When each day, as it then seemed, was spent moving from one temporary space to another, there was neither the time nor the motivation diligently to record the process. The houses and studios were not 'self-consciously' documented and therefore this material is more limited in its quantity and range compared to that of The Acme Gallery. At the gallery, what happened there represented the summation of each artist's endeavour, therefore almost everything, including the ephemeral, was carefully documented and archived.

So what material exists?

The organisation has experienced considerable continuity of governance and management and it is not surprising therefore that Acme holds comprehensive company records: committee minutes and papers, annual reports, correspondence, legal and financial documents etc. These include lists of houses and studio buildings and the artist tenants who lived and worked in them. There are also copies of all published material.

Hitherto we held limited photographic documentation of the houses and studios from the period covered by this exhibition. However our archive is now being enriched not only by the new material which artists are contributing but also by the anecdotes that

accompany them. Much of this material has a social and/or personal dimension which indirectly communicates what these spaces were about – what condition they were in, the work the artists carried out and how they used them as studios as well as their homes. When artists took photographs at the studio buildings, these were usually of their work rather than of the context in which the work was made.

The Acme Gallery archive is very comprehensive. This material was painstakingly collected at the time and subsequently catalogued. It contains visual documentation (black and white or colour transparencies) of the majority of exhibitions, all printed material (cards, catalogues, posters) and most press reviews and listings, of which there were a considerable number. A file for each exhibition includes correspondence and other material relating

to the preparation and presentation of each. There is moving image material – on both film and video – and an ‘Acme Documentary’ which was made on video by the co-founders in 1979 and provides an overview of the organisation’s work.

It has become clear while working on this project that this archive exhibition is not, and should not be, a presentation of the organisation’s history illustrated by a careful selection of archive material, but rather a display where the material itself supports multiple stories. This material does not necessarily exist in some neat proportional relationship to the significance of the events; however we hope, and believe, that it will communicate a history and something of the spirit of that time.

**Jonathan Harvey, CEO
Acme Studios**

Chronology 1972-1982

1972 – 9 November, Acme Housing Association Ltd, led by **Jonathan Harvey** and **David Panton**, registers with sole aim of providing founder group of recent graduate artists with cheap studio and living accommodation.



David Panton and Jonathan Harvey outside 117 Devons Road, E3, one of the first two houses and first office, Claire Smith (1974).

1973 – Acme approaches **Greater London Council** for empty properties in **East London**. GLC transfers two derelict shops in Bow, pending demolition, for 21 months. Artists required to carry out extensive repairs in exchange for very low rents (£3 per week) and agreement to hand properties back when required for demolition. The properties are put back into working order and, encouraged by this success, the GLC transfers more property, taking Acme beyond the needs of its original members. **Acme** becomes a **voluntary service** for other **artists** in similar need.

1974 – Acme achieves charitable status. Jonathan Harvey and David Panton become part-time officers with 'seeding' funding from the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation**. The GLC transfers longer-life properties and



Boarded-up houses on Campbell Road, E3, awaiting repairs, Acme Studios (1974).

gives grants for their repair. Artists do most of the work themselves, and develop building skills. **Arts Council** gives conversion grants for studios in houses. **December: Acme manages 76 houses, providing living and studio space for 90 artists. Over 130 people housed.**

1975 – March: 13 properties successfully returned to GLC. Acme's efficiency as a short-life housing organisation, rather than as an artists' group per se, produces further transfers of housing stock. Acme becomes the largest single manager of short-life housing in London. Newly-transferred properties now have lives of at least five years, with grants from the GLC of up to £1,500. Acme publishes **Help Yourself to Studio Space** to help artists in other cities. Advisory visits follow. Responding to high demand, Acme seeks new sources of properties from other London boroughs. Working with Hammersmith and Fulham, Acme takes on an old school at **Hetley Road** and a school kitchen at **Faroe Road** as studio space only, creating 19 studios for local artists.



Bobby Baker's Edible Family in a Mobile Home at her prefab Acme house in Conder Street, E1. Andrew Whittuck (1976).

1976 – Acme obtains planning consent to convert a banana warehouse into a non-commercial gallery in Covent Garden. **May: The Acme Gallery opens**, catering principally for emerging artists, or for those whose work in installation and performance is difficult to accommodate elsewhere. Acme encourages artists to adapt the space to their own needs. Capital assistance received from Arts Council, GLC and Gulbenkian Foundation. Arts Council and Greater London Arts give revenue funding. Acme office, previously in Bow, moves to Covent Garden. Jonathan Harvey becomes Gallery Director, and David Panton Housing Director, both with part-time assistants.

Following initial negotiations by Richard Deacon and other sculptors, Acme leases former meat-processing factory from the GLC in **Acre Lane, Brixton**, for conversion to 28 artists' studios. Arts Council provides conversion funds. In other areas, including South East London, GLC transfers more houses in good condition and gives grants sufficient to use contractors for specialist work. **Department of Transport** becomes new source of stock with transfer of houses in Archway, N6, due to be demolished for A1 road widening. Acme funds initial repairs, recovering the outlay through rents.

1977 – Acme develops **International Visual Artist Studio Exchange Programme**, a five-country network of organisations funded by the Arts Council, British Council and the National Endowment for the Arts (USA). Acme publishes **Artists Guide to London** by Heather Waddell, to provide visiting artists with information and advice. **Acme becomes a**

revenue client of the Arts Council. December: 142 short-life houses managed, and three studio blocks in Hammersmith and Brixton.

1978 – Some GLC short-life houses no longer required for development schemes and thus become permanent. Acme negotiates tenants' rights for the licensees, qualifying them for GLC's tenant purchase scheme. Acme loses property management, but has helped artists to buy their houses with substantial discounts. **December: 204 properties managed, helping over 350 artists.**



Richard Deacon in his studio at Acre Lane, SW2. John Riddy (1989).

Artists and their families living on Beck Road, E8. Edward Woodman (1988).



1979 – Growth slows as GLC acquires very little stock for development. Demand from artists remains high.

1980 - Some Acme-managed GLC properties transferred to local authorities, leading to new working relationships for Acme. In **Leytonstone, E11, Department of Transport** transfers short-life houses that ultimately will be demolished to make way for M11/Hackney link road. Acme finances repairs.



Anthony Whishaw in his studio at Robinson Road, E2. Acme Studios (1984).

1981 – March: Acme manages 180 GLC-owned houses. October: The Acme Gallery closes and is returned to GLC for demolition. Major shows by artists over five and a half years include Stuart Brisley, Helen Chadwick, Shelagh Cluett, Stephen Cripps, Rose Garrard, Ron Haselden, Albert Irvin, Jock McFadyen, Simon Read, Kerry Trengove, Darrell Viner and Anthony Whishaw.

Acme office moves to Bethnal Green, E2. 28,000 sq ft of ex-industrial space at **Robinson Road**, Bethnal Green negotiated from Crown Estate Commissioners, provides 46 studios. Arts Council funds major conversion. Eight short-life houses transferred by **Royal London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea**. Department of Transport transfers more houses in Leyton, becoming major new source of housing stock.

1982 – Against background of rising demand, Acme increasingly seeks more studio premises. **December: Acme manages 250 housing units and four studio buildings.**

The Acme Gallery 1976-1981

'Obituaries' – Reviews of the final show: Stuart Brisley and
Iain Robertson, *Touching Class*. 5 – 17 October 1981

It wasn't always easy to understand what the Acme Gallery was trying to say but it was usually worth trying to find out. The Acme was very much a gallery of the 'seventies, a gallery devoted to extremes, a rallying point for the avante garde. And now that the last Acme exhibition has begun we can confidently say that the 'seventies are officially over.

Touching Class, Guardian,
Waldemar Januszczak, 8 October 1981

It is always sad when galleries which have made a positive and memorable contribution to our understanding of art finally close down. But my great regret over the imminent demolition of the Acme Gallery, which has done so much for the boldest and most experimental of our artists in recent years, is tempered by admiration for its last exhibition ... The Acme Gallery always excelled at allowing artists to take unparalleled liberties with the space at their disposal but none of its previous exhibitions could have prepared you for the dramatic impact of this terminal spectacle.

Terminal Acme, The Evening Standard,
Richard Cork, 8 October 1981

The Acme ... offered artists like Ron Haselden the opportunity to construct huge installations that meant major building operations and serious interference with the gallery space ... they could show work that was not intended for sale, which challenged the whole concept of artworks as discreet objects for living rooms walls ... The Acme Gallery was extremely important in offering artists like Brisley an outlet and a platform. We shall miss the gallery, mourn the spirit of rebellion they represented ...

RIP Acme Gallery, Sarah Kent mourns the passing of an 'alternative' space.
Time Out, Sarah Kent, 23 – 29 October 1981

The Acme Gallery Programme

The following list of exhibitions does not include some one-off events and other activities which were organised under the auspices of others e.g. London Video Arts. The unique catalogue reference is the number of the exhibition and the year in which it took place. Most exhibitions used both floors of the gallery; where there is a (U) or (L) after the catalogue reference this indicates an exhibition was limited to the Upper or Lower gallery. The illustrations of the exhibitions below are identified by the references that follow.

1/1976 - Robert Janz, *Six Lines on Two Floors.*
Pre-Opening Drawing. 14 March.



2/1976 - Mike Porter, *Paintings.*
Opening Exhibition. 4 – 22 May.

3/1976 - New Contemporaries, *Live Work.*
31 May – 5 June.

4/1976 - Claire Smith, *Paintings & Drawings.*
11 June – 2 July.

5/1976 - Edmund Tillotson, *Sculpture and works on paper.* 22 July – 11 August.

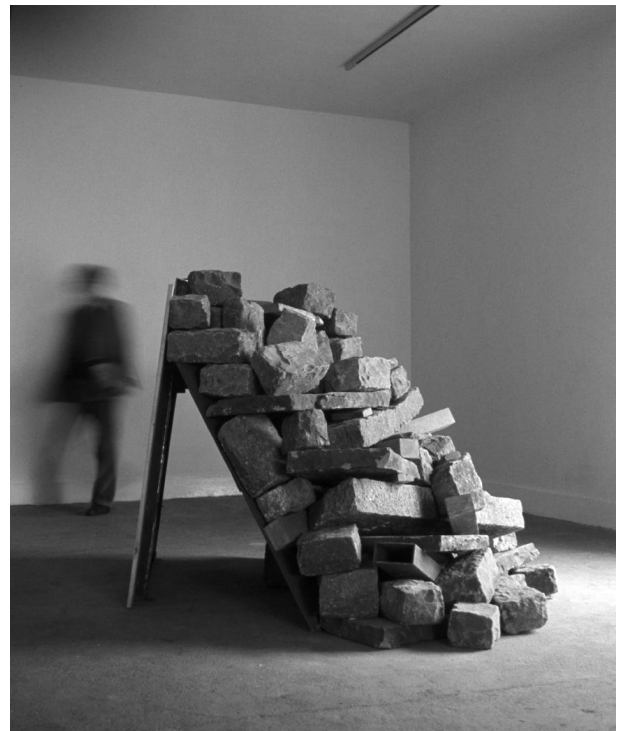
6/1976 - Simon Read, *Twelve Stern Presences and other photographic work.*
17 August – 4 September.

7/1976 - Oleg Kudryashov, *Drypoints.*
9 – 25 September.

8/1976 - Week of Music. 13 – 18 September.

9/1976 - London Calling, *A Portfolio of the Performing Arts.* 20 – 27 September.

10/1976 - Richard James, *Paintings.*
30 September – 16 October.



11/1976 - Charles Hewlings, *Sculptures.*
22 October – 10 November.

12/1976 (L) - Ron Haselden, *Sticks for the Dog.*
15 – 20 November.

13/1976 (U) - Marc Camille Chaimowicz, *Fade.*
18 and 19 November.

14/1976 - Gary Wragg, *Paintings.*
27 November – 18 December.

1/1977 (U) - Laurie Rae Chamberlain, *State of Vector.* 6 – 22 January.

2/1977 (L) - Robert Janz, *Six Sticks and Chalk Shadows.* 8 – 22 January.

3/1977 - Philippa Beale, *Collected from Here.*
25 January – 12 February.

4/1977 - New Contemporaries, *The Live Show.*
14 – 26 February.



5/1977 - New Work by Martin Hearn, William Raban, Nina Sobel (above) and Chris Welsby.
2 – 12 March.

6/1977 - RILKO artists, *Earth Mysteries.*
22 March – 9 April.

7/1977 - Frank Bowling, *Selected Paintings 1967/77.* 15 April – 7 May.



8/1977 - Rose Garrard, *Incidents in a Garden.*
Exhibition / Installation / Performance of new work. 18 May – 8 June.

9/1977 - Richard Barr, *Paintings & Drawings.*
15 June – 6 July.

10/1977 - 5 Days in July. Over 30 performances and installations mostly involving film. 8 – 13 July.

11/1977 - Richard Layzell, *Breaking Down – Finding New Paths.* 29 July – 17 August.

12/1977 - John Crampton, *Bow Ties.*
27 August – 16 September 1977.

13/1977 - Roger Kite, *Paintings & Drawings.*
23 September – 15 October.



14/1977 - Kerry Trengove, *An Eight Day Passage.* 25 October – 1 November.

15/1977 - John Bellany, *Paintings.*
9 December – 14 January.

1/1978 - London Calling, *Performance Plus.*
16 – 22 January.

2/1978 - An exhibition by Da Wu Tang.
3 – 23 February.

3/1978 - 5 Days at Acme. A programme of one-off events focusing on dance and performance art. 28 February – 4 March.

4/1978 - Eight Artists. *Out of the blue...*
17 March – 4 April.

5/1978 - John McKeon, *Kelly.* 8 April.

6/1978 - Stephen Cripps, *Cripps at the Acme, Machines & Performances.* 22 April – 4 May.

7/1978 (U) - Jock McFadyen, *Paintings.*
13 May – 2 June.

8/1978 (L) - Peter Smith, *Paintings*.
13 May – 2 June.

9/1978 - Jackson Mac Low, *Poetry / Performance*. 17 June 1978.

10/1978 (U) - Tony Sinden, *Garden Site, Etc. Etc.* 12 – 24 June.

11/1978 (L) - David E Hilton, *From a here and now...and...then...at Acme*. Film installation and performance. 12 – 24 June.

12/1978 (L) - Nigel Rolfe. *Red Wedge*.
3 – 15 July.

13/1978 (U) - Hesitate & Demonstrate, *Frozen Moments*. 3 – 8 July.

14/1978 - 8 in 4 Days. Eight artists - Installation and performance.
27 July – 2 August.

15/1978 - Acme week of Music / Sound.
Installation and music. 7 – 13 August.



16/1978 - Ron Haselden, *Working 12 days at the Acme Gallery*. 18 – 29 August.

17/1978 - Stuart Brisley, *180 hours*.
4 – 12 September.

18/1978 - Bruce Lacey and Jill Bruce, *Ancient Forces*. 22 September – 12 October.

19/1978 - Anthony Whishaw, *Recent Paintings*.
27 October – 18 November.

20/1978 - Harry Kipper, *Me and My Shadow*.
12 November.

21/1978 (U) - Helen Chadwick, *Train of Thought*. 28 November – 16 December.

22/1978 (L) - John Kaine, *Home Defence. A shop display*. 28 November – 16 December.



23/1978 - Stuart Brisley, *10 days. A ritualised de-construction of the ritual by Stuart Brisley in association with Manfred Blob*.
21 – 31 December.

1/1979 - Mark Camille Chaimowicz, Mick Hartney and Tony Sinden, *Video Tapes*.
19 and 20 January.



2/1979 - Gary Wragg, *Paintings 1977/1978.*
2 February – 9 March.

3/1979 (L) - John McKeon, *Report to Alice.*
26 – 31 March.

**4/1979 (U) - David Pearl, Clive Bell,
David Humpage, Colin Wood, Amber Hiscott.**
Improvisations evoked by drawings.
30 – 31 March.

**5/1979 - Charles Pollock, *Recent Paintings
1974/1978.*** 13 April – 18 May.

6/1979 - Kipper Kids in *Up Yer Bum.*
26 May – 3 June.

7/1979 - A Series of Banquets with cabaret
and performance. 5 – 9 June.

8/1979 - Min Tanaka, *Hyper-Dance 'Drive'.*
11 – 12 June.

9/1979 - Kerry Trengove, *Solo.* 17 – 30 June.

10/1979 - Alastair MacLennan, *7 Ways.*
8 – 14 July.

11/1979 - On the tenth anniversary of man's
first landing on the moon **Bruce Lacey**
celebrates the Apollo Missions. 21 July.

12/1979 (U) - Jane Rigby, *Ambient – Vision.*
13 – 25 August.

**13/1979 (L) - David Critchley, *Pieces I never
did.*** 13 – 25 August.

14/1979 (U) - Jock McFadyen, *New Work.*
31 August – 22 September.

**15/1979 (L) - Kevin Atkinson, *Paintings &
Works on Paper.*** 31 August – 22 September.

**16/1979 - Alison Winckle, *Why did the chicken
cross the road?*** Installation and performance.
24 – 29 September.



17/1979 - Bill Culbert, *Recent Light Works.*
10 October – 10 November.

18/1979 - John McKeon, *Quartet.*
19 – 24 November.

19/1979 (L) - Ron Haselden, *Turning Scrap.*
19 November – 8 December.

**20/1979 - Mary Fulkerson with Miranda
Tufnell, Dennis Greenwood and Libby
Dempster, *Magic Dances.***
30 November and 1 December.

**21/1979 - Julian Maynard Smith,
*Performances.*** 5 – 9 December.

22/1979 - Chana Dubinski, *Weighting.*
14 December – 6 January.

1/1980 - Michael Ginsborg, *Recent Paintings and Drawings*. 11 January – 9 February.

2/1980 - G F Fitzgerald, *Evening of 20th century music*. 25 January.

3/1980 - Mary Fulkerson, *The Little Theatre*. 10 and 11 February.

4/1980 (L) - Kate Westbrook, *Paintings*. 22 February – 19 March.

5/1980 (U) - Mike Davis, *Paintings*. 22 February – 19 March.

6/1980 - Keith Allen, Simon Brint, John McKeon & Co, *Baldness Eliminated – in a matter of hours!* 21 – 23 March.

7/1980 - Albert Irvin, *Paintings 1979/1980*. 4 April – 3 May.



8/1980 - Stephen Cripps, *Cripps at the Acme. Drawings & Performances*. 9 – 17 May.

9/1980 - Martin Ive, *Kamerakaze*. 23 and 24 May.

10/1980 - John Bellany, *Recent Paintings & Drawings*. 30 May – 28 June.

11/1980 - Terence Hayes, *10 Years / 20 Days*. 7 – 26 July.

12/1980 - John Crampton, *Windmill*. 28 – 30 July.

13/1980 - Zack Zaltzman, *Sculpture*. 8 – 30 August.

14/1980 - Keir Smith, *Like Nimrod's Tower...* 5 – 27 September.



15/1980 - Shelagh Cluett, Emma Park, Josefa Rogocki, Claire Smith. *Eight Artists: Women: 1980 Part 1. Painting and Sculpture*. 3 – 25 October.

16/1980 - Mikey Cuddihy, Sarah Greengrass, Margaret Organ, Alison Wilding. *Eight Artists: Women: 1980. Part 2. Painting and Sculpture*. 31 October – 22 November.

17/1980 (L) - Alastair Brotchie, *Paintings*. 28 November – 10 January.

18/1980 (U) - Malcolm Jones, *Paintings*. 28 November – 10 January.

1/1981 - Alastair MacLennan, *Days and Nights. 144 hours*. 11 – 17 January.

2/1981 - Dale Frank, *Tipoff*. 26 – 31 January.

3/1981 - *Natural Disasters, Station House Opera, Thought/Death, Fiona Templeton, The Ninth Method, Grande Grille*. A season of evening performance. 2 – 7 February.

4/1981 - **Clyde Hopkins**, *Paintings*. 13 February – 7 March.

5/1981 - **Colin Hall**, *Paintings*. 20 March – 11 April.

6/1981 (U) - **Kieran Lyons**, *Dream Ship Sinks*. Performances. 21 – 25 April 1981.

7/1981 (L) - **Chris Welsby**, *Estuary*. 21 April – 2 May.

8/1981 (U) - **Richard Layzell**, *Conversations*. 30 April – 2 May.

9/1981 - **Artists for Nuclear Disarmament (AND)**. Exhibition and Auction. 12 – 30 May.

10/1981 (L) - **Stephen Cripps**, *Cripps at the Acme, Performances*. 1 – 5 June.

11/1981 (U) - **Harry Kipper & Karen Finlay**, *'Poopoo & Peepee' in BABA! CACA!* Performances. 1 – 5 June.



12/1981 - **Darrell J Viner**, *Who Manipulates Who*. 12 June – 4 July.

13/1981 (U) - **Tony Sinden**, *Space Between / Space Beyond*. 20 July – 13 August.

14/1981 (L) - **Ron Haselden**, *Graving Dock*. 20 July – 13 August.

15/1981 - **Martin Ive**, *Morrie Minamoto's Only Zen Can One Hate Photography*. Installation. 18 – 22 August.

16/1981 - **Bruce Lacey and Jill Bruce**, *Towards the Real Reality*. 7 – 19 September.



17/1981 - **Stuart Brisley and Iain Robertson**, *Touching Class*. 5 – 17 October.

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Curated by

Nayia Yiakoumaki, Curator Archive Gallery,
Whitechapel Gallery
Jonathan Harvey, CEO, Acme Studios,
assisted by
Dr Arantxa Echarte

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