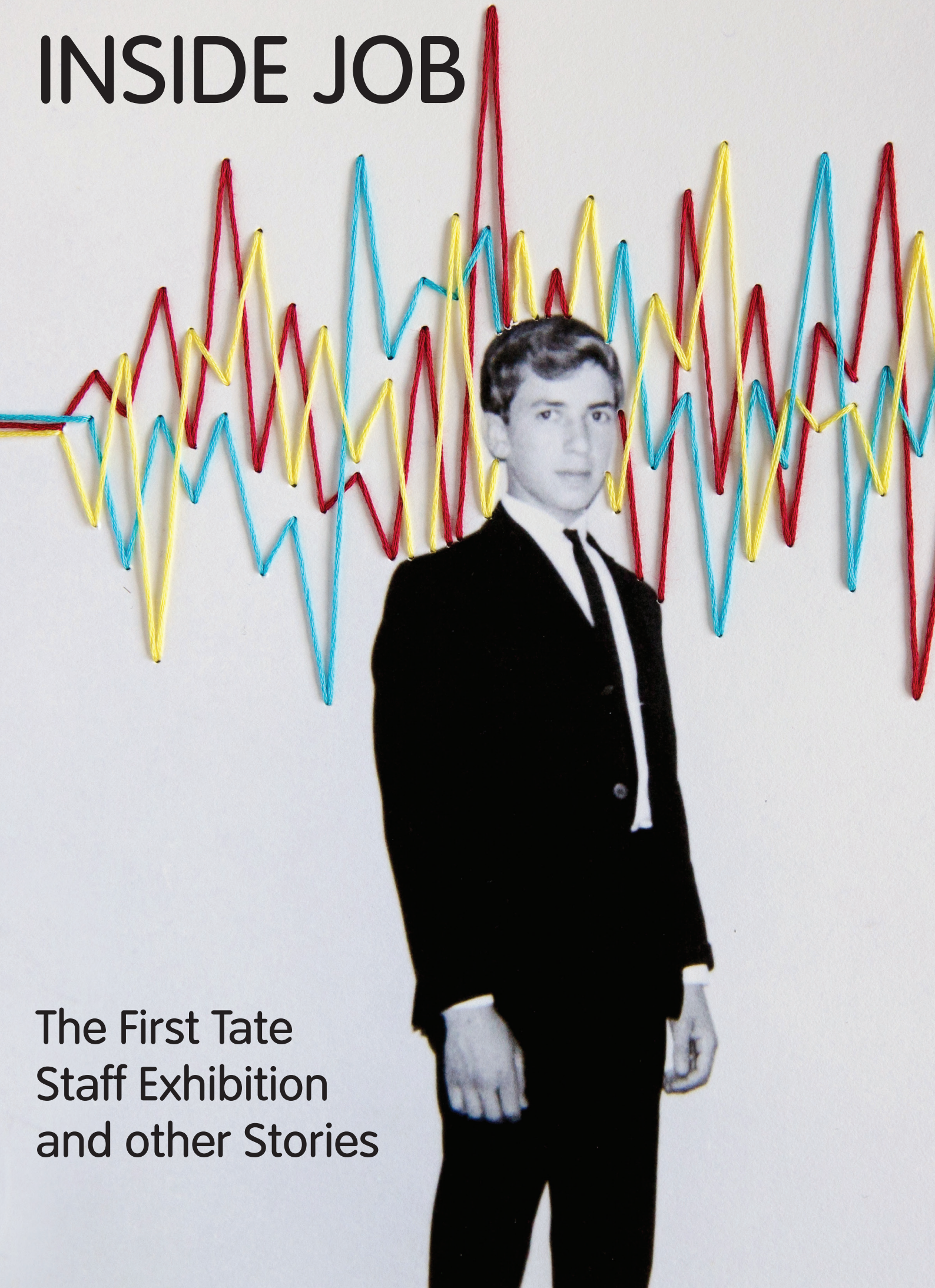


# INSIDE JOB



The First Tate  
Staff Exhibition  
and other Stories



# INSIDE JOB

The First Tate  
Staff Exhibition  
and other  
Stories...

# Inside Job Genesis

The idea for a staff exhibition has been around for many years at the Tate, but it was during a big staff meeting with the gallery directors when our colleague Chino asked Chris Dercon the then Director of Tate Modern why we couldn't have a show that it really began. The gist of his meandering answer was that we weren't good enough to be in the Tate as Artists. We decided then to do it!

The original team consisted of three contracted Visitor Assistants, Gosia Fricze, Max Reeves and Samanta Bellotta and Tate VA Andrew Wyatt. We met up in a pub in Borough High Street to brainstorm ideas and find a way to make this project possible. It was a daunting prospect. Especially as we were three outsiders and not considered a part of the Institution. Slowly and organically we began to get a team together and several months and pubs later the Inside Job Collective was born.

The group included staff from different departments: Aimee Murphy, Izna Bandey and Harry Pye from Retail; Tommy Douglas, Andrew Wyatt, Michael Freer, Max Reeves, Kenneth Price and Sam Bellotta from Visitor Experience; Chris Brown from Information and finally Demelza Watts and Jumpei Kitoshi from Art Handling.

Next the Tate. Our mission directives were threefold. To show to visitors the sheer breath and depth and diversity of talent that the staff who may attend them have, and to try to dissolve some of the myriad barriers between departments in an overly atomised institution. But more than anything we wanted the workers of Tate to state emphatically that this is our Tate, that we belong here as much as anyone.

A breakthrough happened at another public meeting where Nicholas Serota was telling us how hard it was for Artists to exist in London. No Shit! After we pointed out that Tate is full of these struggling Artists he suggested taking the Tate Staff exhibition project to the staff council which we did. Thanks to Kenneth who robustly represented us we got their approval.

We had a clear idea of what we wanted but what we did not have was an appropriate space. Obviously it had to be public accessible to full fill our requirements. An offer of the Staff canteen was politely declined. Every obscure nook and cranny of the Tate was considered until Frances Morris proposed level 6 of the Blavatnik Building. That was the best news ever, we just couldn't believe it.

The months ahead of the opening were intense, there was so much to plan and all the work was done in our free time. The biggest obstacle was getting walls. The amount of obstacles we faced you'd think there had never been an art exhibition at Tate before. Each task seemed to involve discovering a new department with which to negotiate. But meeting after meeting (pub after pub) we could see the show taking shape and that I guess was what fed our seemingly inexhaustible enthusiasm and motivation.

The Inside Job Exhibition was a collective effort with Jumpei, Aimee and Michael doing the lion's share of the curation and Tommy logistics but we couldn't have made it without help from a myriad of colleagues from many departments who got behind the project and gave us invaluable support and resources. Not to mention our fabulous art handlers who put up the show in one day! Not all heroes wear capes, how true is that?

When it finally happened, even we were quietly surprised at how good it looked. The Tate certainly. We received some media attention including a feature in the Guardian and Observer. The Inside Job exhibition displayed the work of 152 artists from all the Tate Galleries, including Tate Liverpool and St Ives. It was visited by nearly four thousand people in two days and we are happy to say that it was a massive success, not only for its popularity with visitors but as a moment of joy for so many working at Tate.

Who knew....

Following the success of the Inside Job Exhibition, we proposed to Tate that we establish Inside Job as a Biennale and they kindly said yes providing us with a budget of £13,078, although this doesn't cover many of the endless hours we put in. So this August will see the first ever Tate Staff Biennale, an 8-day celebration of Tate staff. It will be hosted by Tate Exchange and will have their current motif of 'Movement' as the underlying theme. This book is a hotchpotch of Inside Jobness with histories, stories, poems, photos, artist features and randomalia with no ambition to be anything else. A project in its own, this scrapbook hopes to capture the mood of Inside Job and the many talents of the good people of the Tate.

A special thank you goes to all the people who helped us during this amazing journey with special mentions to: Frances Morris, Maria Balshaw, Piers Warner, Tracy Ferguson, Joanna Bracey, Roger Miller, Karoline Engleheart, Sid Bouzer, Cara Courage, Rowan Freshwater-Turner, Richard Gray and all of our colleagues who partook and supported us to make this happen. And Mildred the Cat!







## Inside Job - Gerry King

Placed throughout the Tate Modern at Bankside in various galleries are a number of black and chrome high chairs. These chairs denote sitting positions for the gallery assistants who are there to help the visitors with art and comfort-related requests. The high chair experience is preferable to the lower conventional chair as it offers a far superior dangling opportunity - the elevated position enhances daydreaming capacity, erotic fantasies and possibly murderous revenge scenarios involving snub nose pliers. The high point of the low chair is perhaps the image of the raven-haired 1960s icon Christine Keeler posing naked on a snide Arne Jacobsen chair or maybe the Los Angeles warehouse ear lopping scene in Reservoir Dogs with Michael Madsen's malarkey involving a Steelers Wheel soundtrack, nifty dance moves and gaffer tape. As a low chair purist, I must go with the Ms Keeler photograph by an Australian whose first name is Lewis.

The high chair of my focus is located in the Boiler House on Level 4 West in the gallery displaying the work of the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz. Dwelling on this particular chair for a moment I do acknowledge there is some gunmetal grey gaffer tape around one of the bottom struts, compensating for the loss of a stabilising grommet. Viewed from this high chair the work of Abakanowicz covers an area of approximately half a tennis court. The work consists of varying forms of stitched burlap sacks from potato size to huge single wardrobe shapes. Scoping this scene you might get the impression of fusty mailbags of the swagman or Father Christmas. With this in mind I'd like you to consider a photograph taken by a visitor assistant who also happens to be called Lewis, of an old pre-plastic fiver someone had dropped under the gallery high chair. I saw this photo and for some reason it lodged in my cognizance.

"Jury we need a title for the exhibition..." My colleague Tommy Douglas is from Northern Ireland and when he says my name Gerry, it sounds like Jury. Late January early February 2018, we were walking over the bridge on Level 4 between the Blavatnik building and the Boiler House. Tommy was telling me about a proposed exhibition by Tate employees to be held in Tate Modern sometime in the coming April. It was Tommy's accent, the proximity of the Abakanowicz work, the image of the fiver, all of this washed up and rinsed through my esoterically oscillating mind. The Great Train Robbery of August 1963 was allegedly made possible by inside information supplied by the mysterious 'Ulsterman'. The robbers took numerous sacks containing old used banknotes from a mail train travelling between Glasgow and London. The money was going to the Bank of England to be incinerated and ironically these would have been prison-stitched mailbags. The title hit me like a speedball in a Bubble car: 'Inside Job'!

There is a story in my family about Uncle H. He was learning his craft as a publican in a south London boozer back in the mid 1960s. The local he worked in was near Wandsworth prison where the wardens drank, and Uncle H always told the story of how he remembered some chaps coming in over a particular lunchtime and generously buying drinks for the prison guards. When I describe 'chaps' in this context I am alluding to characters or 'sarf' London 'faces' such the bookmaker Johnny Shannon who starred in the 1969 film Performance, well-suited and booted wide boys. This was back in the days of 'lock ins' when afternoon opening times were 10.30am to 2.30pm. Ronald Biggs, a Great Train Robber, escaped over the wall at just after 3pm. Some of the best stories start in pubs.

The planning of Inside Job started in a pub at the leaving do of a Tate Britain long serving employee called Ron. The source of this information was Harry Pye, an old hand within the London art scene and long-time Tate employee and blogger. Harry put me right as to



who was the 'Daddy' of this breakout endeavour, a certain Max Reeves. Amongst others present were Samanta Bellotta, Andrew Wyatt, who was to design the Inside Job poster, Jumpei Kinoshita and Michael Freer.

The sheer logistics of putting on this two-day show was hugely impressive and the roll call of individuals a heartening demonstration of creative motivation. Staff members such as Aimee Murphy who has experience of curation and Izna Bandey who helped choose images that were used in promoting the work on social media and posters within the building. All the things that are taken for granted such as the choice of fonts used on the labels was covered by Chris Browne, art handlers like Demelza Watts who had experience around similar exhibitions and not forgetting the painting of the plinths by the thespian Kenneth Price.

The effective division of skills was essential to the success of Inside Job. Some individuals worked on the funding while others were good at dealing with senior Tate staff. No holes could be drilled into the walls of the exhibition space, therefore free standing panels had to be sourced and painted. The preparation and the very stylised environment of Level 5 the Blavatnik building, where the exhibition was held, put me in mind of Le Corbusier the French architect and painter and his phrase: *Une Maison est une machine – a – habiter*. The gallery space was a machine for art, for those two days it was living and extremely functional. Audio, performance, film, video, sculpture, paintings and conceptual art created by staff members; artists from all over the world. The exhibition was to be brilliantly captured succinctly and tastefully by the filmmaker Gordon Beswick with a beautiful Spanish guitar soundtrack by Miguel Zapata.

Artwork had been submitted by staff at Tate St Ives, Liverpool, Britain and Modern, but not all were successful in their applications. Just 24 hours before the show the work had come out of various homes and studios, travelling across London and from further afield. The unsuspecting members of the public brushing past carrier bags containing polar bears carved out of soap stone and bubble wrapped paintings deserving an outing. I thought of Magdalena Abakanowicz hiding her various sized burlap, sacking pieces – the Abakans – at different addresses in communist Poland because the authorities at that time would not permit her studio space let alone an exhibition.

Apparently, this idea – a staff exhibition – had been floating around for a considerable period of time. It is one of those things that are sometimes possible not because of ... but in spite of. Several years ago there had been a meeting, I believe in the Starr cinema, where the staff were given the opportunity to address the then Director of Tate Modern. A voice from the floor asked the Director if it were possible for a staff exhibition to be held within Tate Modern and the staff member was told that their work probably wasn't good enough. Now this might not be true but it makes a good story. However, over the years the idea gained traction and support. Perceptions and attitudes change, especially within world-class institutions like the Tate, which are constantly evolving, updating and staying ahead of the game.

On a recent visit to the Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin to see the Hello World exhibition, it was apparent to me the curatorial team of Inside Job had achieved what their German counterparts had set out to do and succeeded. Inside Job had contributed, in its unique fashion, to the acceleration of the deconstruction of the Western canon, something highlighted within the Hello World catalogue. It is about expanding pre-prescribed attitudes towards art and the individuals who make it. Inside Job achieved this quite organically due to the broad diversity, gender, ethnicity and socio/economic background of the Tate employees. While acknowledging what would have been an extremely difficult selection process,

Inside Job can be seen as a superb example of contemporary cultural egalitarianism. This attitude represents the present Director's passionate campaign of Art For All. Incidentally the phrase Art For All has always been a favourite of the east London based artists Gilbert and George who legend has it ran up the largest ever lunch time bar bill with a previous Director of the Tate Modern whilst ironing out the details of their hugely successful 2006 retrospective.

There are some members of Tate staff who through their mien, dress, attitude and knowledge represent all that is cultivated about the institution. During the closing hours of the exhibition when a number of visitor assistants were clustered around the entrance getting a little emotional, one such individual spoke in glowing terms of Inside Job. He applauded the high standard of the work, especially the excellent and sympathetic curation achieved in spite of tight time constraints ... it was just one of those magic moments.

But then it was never about the money.

2018 ©



