LISSON GALLERY LONDON LTD.

67 LISSON STREET, LONDON NW1 5DA

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PRESS RELEASE

JOHN LATHAM

The works in this exhibition are from the fourth decade of a memorable and controversial career that originated in the post war period at a time when Action Painting and Tachism were the emerging idioms of the international avant-garde.

In the late 50's Latham's work was discovered by Herbert Read and Roland Penrose, which coincided with his first use of books as a formal compositional device. His work received serious international attention from 1958 and throughout the 1960's both in New York and Europe. In this respect Latham was one of the first post-war British avant-garde artists to have had his work projected internationally at a time when the British Art World was painfully local and insular.

In the 1960's Latham became an extremely active figure, organising the DIAS (Destruction in Art Symposium) with John Sharkey and Gustav Metzger. At this time he was teaching at St Martins School of Art, where he became a significant influence on the emerging younger artists through his strong conceptual and theoretical ideas. In 1967 his teaching job at St Martins was discontinued following the 'Art and Culture' incident. From 1961 to 1962 John Latham spent a prolific working period in New York.

Throughout the 1970's Latham focused predominantly on developing the theoretical side of his work. The most significant physical result of this period was the time-base roller series. In 1976 an important mid-career exhibition of his work was held at the Tate Gallery.

It is only in the early 1980's that he has returned to making three-dimensional work, the period the present exhibition is concentrating on. Glass becomes a vital material in these later works, and is representative of a matrix or "score" - a symbolic plane in space through which books themselves are made to pass in a process of constraint and re-ordering, as if to reconstitute the language from which they were constructed.

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Similarities need not imply mirror images, but there are interesting parallels between Latham and the German artist Joseph Beuys. Both born in the same year, served and survived World War II. Their respective experiences were probably instrumental in influencing and initiating the construction of their individual cosmologies, which express an ethical and inclusive view. What differentiates the two is the contrast between the seemingly socio-political orientation of Beuys' work and Latham's focus on the complexities and limitations of language and physics.

Latham's work has been art with the Universe as subject matter. Several papers have been published, showing that a dimensional framework of "Event" is comprehensive whereas models in terms of mass, energy and space-time as defined by physics are partial, and that an intersection between Form as Art and Formulation as Science has given rise to a new and comprehensive reference frame. A unification of physical theory is the "Holy Grail" of physics and mathematical account of such a solution portending to be comprehensive has been tabled, for example by Stephen Hawking, but it is a feature of physics that the physicist self is not represented. In the dimensionality of "Event" the person participating in the phenomena belongs within the picture in fine detail.

A new and including paradigm of "Event Structure" re-phrases the categories of western convention, and may have, as Latham claims, the capacity to mediate the present "Divided State" of global affairs, by way of the artist as "Incidental Person".

Private View: Saturday 22 October 1988
Dates: 24 October to 19 November 1988
Opening hours: 10am - 6pm Monday to Friday
10am - 1pm Saturday

For further information and photographs please contact Caroline Mockett on 01 724 2739