



Morning exercises on the roof of the Itten School, Berlin 1931
(Johannes-Itten-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern)

Occasionals I

A Breathing Bulb
Ian Whittlesea

13.04.—04.05.2024

Tlön Projects is proud to announce the exhibition *A Breathing Bulb* by British artist Ian Whittlesea. This will be the first in a series of three Occasionals we will be organising this year in collaboration with Rongwong in Amsterdam. As part of our Satellite Programme this exhibition concept highlights a single work from Tlön Projects' *imaginary collection* in a specific location.

The Occasionals were inspired by a comment American artist Mark Rothko made in 1959 when he was staying in Cornwall (UK) and went to inspect a disused Methodist chapel with a view to purchasing it as an exhibition space for his paintings: *It would be good if little places could be set up all over the country, like a little chapel, where the traveller or wanderer, could come for an hour to meditate on a single painting....*

Inspired by a photograph of Johannes Itten, the former lecturer and founder of the Vorkurs at the Bauhaus in Weimar (1919 – 1923) teaching students breathing and physical exercises, Ian Whittlesea immersed himself in the history and practices of the esoteric Mazdaznan movement, that was founded in the late 19th century by Dr Otomon Zar-Adusht Ha'nish. Itten was a dedicated follower of this mystical belief system, a modernised version of the ancient Zoroastrianism.

Ahura Mazda, the highest deity in Zoroastrianism is associated with light and wisdom. Thomas Edison was aware of this and named the first lightbulb Mazda after this supreme being. Rumour has it that Edison was deeply influenced by Dr Otomon Zar-Adusht Ha'nish's teachings. Whittlesea has spent the past 15 years collecting these Mazda lightbulbs that were first produced in 1909 by Edison's company General Electric.

A single, iconic, Mazda lightbulb hangs in the space gradually becoming intensely bright, then slowly dimming back to complete darkness. The lightbulb's rhythm echoes that of calm, deep breathing. The bulb will be operating continuously for 22 days. During the day its presence is subtle, however in the dark it transforms the space into a beacon of light, visible from the street.

Ian Whittlesea's artistic practice examines the manner in which conceptual art can directly change the viewer's physiological and psychological state. *A Breathing Bulb* (2014) is not so much about the object or staring into the empty space as it is about transcending the

viewer's capacity to see, to observe in order to go beyond tangible reality and, as a result, experience an immaterial sensibility. The lightbulb speaks to us in a meditative language, inviting us to access a transcendent state. Becoming one with the light, we respond to its call and breathe along.

Ian Whittlesea (b. 1967, UK) lives in London. His work assumes many forms, from painstaking paintings to printed books, ephemeral posters and transient projections, and explores the relationships between language, light, image and diagram both on the page and in the world.

Over the last 25 years his publications and exhibitions have drawn on the parallels between what one experiences when making or perceiving art and first-hand reports of transcendental experiences. Working with the texts of esoteric groups that claim self-realisation comes through control of breath and body, he has attempted to elucidate Sol LeWitt's statement: *Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.*



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A Breathing Bulb
Ian Whittlesea
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Curated by:

Chris Bestebreurtje and Petra Kuipers

Venue:

Rongwrong – centre for art and theory
Binnen Bantammerstraat 2, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Opening Times:

Friday and Saturday 14:00—18:00

Public Programme:

13.04.2024
Opening, 16:00—19:00

04.05.2024
Finissage, 16:00—19:00

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