

PORTFOLIO // TRENDS // SNEAK PEEKS // NEWSMAKERS



Ian Whittlesea

ABOVE, FROM TOP:
Seven Clouds Gathering, 2013.
Acrylic on archival museum board, 66½ x 47 in.

Works-in-progress in Whittlesea's studio.

RIGHT:
Production still from *Becoming Invisible (Bettina)*, 2013.
HD video, 20 min.

Q&A

Ian Whittlesea
Exercising inner potential

Previously, Whittlesea's work has involved text paintings that elucidate the studio locations of famous artists or writers (Walden Pond, Giverny, Marfa, Texas); reproductions, or transimiles, as he terms them, of Yves Klein's business card; and a planned "rewrite" of John Updike's 1968 novel, Couples. Starting March 22 at London's Marlborough Contemporary, the always unpredictable artist presents "Becoming Invisible," an exhibition about attaining that titular goal through "transcendent exercise." We spoke with him about his enigmatic plans.

What appeals to you about the culture of "transcendent exercise"? Do you appreciate this body of literature from a slightly ironic standpoint, or are you sincere about the possibilities of transcendence?

My work is never ironic, it is always sincere. My interest in transcendent exercise began with my translation of Yves Klein's 1954 book on judo and then continued with a recent project to re-create the Mazdaznan exercises that Johannes Itten taught his students at the Bauhaus. The Mazdaznan work involved a lot of reading around more arcane types of exercise, and from this came the source material for "Becoming Invisible." The manual I've produced draws on the literature of esoteric yoga, alchemy, theosophy, and most importantly Rosicrucianism. This loops the work back to Klein, who in his youth was an ardent student of the California Rosicrucians. **As an artist, you'd think, one would want to become visible—known, if not famous. Why have you decided to focus on the absolute inverse: becoming invisible?** The obvious answer would be that it is, of course, the work, not the artist, that should become known. But in this case the project is intended to make the gallery staff invisible, rather than the artist.

A video in the exhibition shows them all, from director to interns, as they perform the necessary visualization and breathing exercises for the first time. It inevitably has the perverse effect of making visible that which is normally hidden, showing the human support structure that allows the objects in the gallery to appear. It also makes explicit the connections between the artist and the gallerist, dramatizing the element of faith inherent in that relationship.



Can you describe the paintings that will accompany the manual and video in the exhibition?

Some are made of paint sprayed directly onto archival museum board; they resemble aura photographs or cosmological manifestations. The clouds of pure color are simultaneously an aid to performing the visualization rites, representations of a mystical state, a ritual object, and a diagram. There is also a painted quotation from the writings of the alchemist and scientist Sir Isaac Newton; a painting of the number 7, a number that is of special significance for the invisibility ritual; and silhouettes of a figure demonstrating the correct posture for the exercises. All the paintings are generators of the illustrations in the instruction manual.

ALL IMAGES: IAN WHITTLESEA AND MARLBOROUGH CONTEMPORARY, LONDON