

**Institution: University of Sussex**

**Unit of Assessment: UoA 34 Art History**

**Title of case study:** Research leads the Tate to preserve Bruce Lacey's work

### 1. Summary of the impact

The primary impact of the research in the exhibition and the catalogue entitled *The Bruce Lacey Experience* is the Tate's commitment to acquiring additional pieces of Lacey's work (the gallery presently owns two works) and to purchase Lacey's archive. The exhibition that David Mellor curated at the Camden Arts Centre (CAC) jointly with Jeremy Deller also directly affected contemporary art curators and the public by influencing outputs on Lacey in film: both the film of the artist made by Deller, and Lacey's own films, released as a DVD set through the British Film Institute (BFI) in conjunction with the exhibition.

### 2. Underpinning research

From 1992, Mellor's research at Sussex has effected the restoration of Lacey's position in post-war British art, retrieving the artist from obscurity. Through the CAC exhibition and associated monograph, *The Bruce Lacey Experience* [see Section 3, R2], Mellor has created an art-historical context for Lacey. Mellor's first research on the artist was undertaken in 1993 [R1]. The influence of that work has built over the last 20 years and led directly to the impact of the recent research. Chris Stephens, Curator of Modern Art at Tate Britain, notes:

The exhibition *The Bruce Lacey Experience* in Camden and Penzance has had a significant impact on the reputation of a highly original, yet much-neglected, artist. It is the first occasion since the 1960s when this important, diverse and influential figure has been recognised at a major gallery other than as a small part of group exhibitions (notably David Mellor's *London Art Scene in the '60s* at the Barbican in 1993). For my generation, this was the first opportunity to see the extent of Lacey's achievement, arranged in a coherent way.

One of the deficiencies of the history of post-war British art has been its adoption of received and formalising templates of style and periodisation. Through a series of exhibitions in the 1980s and 1990s, Mellor addressed this problem, establishing milestones for an expanded reading of British modernist art. One conspicuous example of neglect in the received literature was Bruce Lacey. Mellor first conducted research visits to Lacey in Norfolk in 1992 and encouraged him to examine ways of refurbishing the now-dilapidated kinetic sculptures of the 1960s that he still owned. In organising the text of the book *The Sixties Art Scene in London* [R1] and selecting the works for the Barbican exhibition, Mellor began to analyse Lacey's work in relation to the shifting cultural contexts of the period. In the exhibition, Mellor showed Lacey within this context, demonstrating his connections to the major movements of the 1960s.

In 1999, spurred by Mellor's research, the art historian Gillian Whiteley conducted an extensive interview with Lacey for The British Library, documenting his life. In the same year, Tate began negotiations to purchase Lacey's *The Womaniser*. In 2004, when Chris Stephens at Tate Britain curated *Art and the Sixties: This Was Tomorrow*, it featured Lacey. Mellor contributed to conceptualising the exhibition and wrote for the catalogue. In 2009, Jenni Lomax, Director of CAC, commissioned Mellor and Jeremy Deller to curate a retrospective of Bruce Lacey, and then Mellor to write the accompanying monograph.

From 2009 to 2011, Mellor worked through Lacey's archive to establish a more comprehensive chronological framework than the sketch Lacey's wife had constructed for his first retrospective.

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

Mellor traced privately owned examples of his sculptures and paintings and conducted a new campaign of interviews with Lacey,. Most of the artist's drawings, paintings and sculptures were newly photographed and documented and, on this basis, Chris Stephens is now acting to acquire the Lacey Archive and works by Lacey from his private collection for Tate.

**3. References to the research**

**R1** Mellor, D.A. (1993) *The Sixties Art Scene in London*. London: Phaidon Press.

**R2** Mellor, D.A. (2012) *The Bruce Lacey Experience: Paintings, Sculptures, Installations and Performances*. London: Camden Arts Centre.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request

**4. Details of the impact**

Mellor's research and curatorial activity over the past 20 years has ensured the preservation and presentation of Lacey's artistic heritage for the public through its impact on the acquisition and curatorial policies of one of the country's most pre-eminent art institutions. As a result of the *The Bruce Lacey Experience* exhibition and monograph, curators at Tate Britain have decided to acquire several more examples of Lacey's works of art for the gallery and the archive of Bruce Lacey for the National Archive of British Art [see Section 5, C1]. Chris Stephens, the Curator of Modern Art at Tate Britain, testified in 2013:

The exhibition and book greatly encouraged our recognition of the need for Tate to extend its representation of Lacey's art, hopefully through the acquisition of a work from the 1980s, and most importantly by the acquisition of Lacey's archive as a record of all of his artistic production, including the transitory and ephemeral works. Though it will probably take years to achieve, I am confident Tate will secure Lacey's archive and there is no question that David's exhibition and accompanying book will have greatly enhanced our ability to do that by demonstrating Lacey's importance and the extent of his achievement. The projects have transformed the way Lacey is understood.

Such a large gallery purchase, involving, as this does, not only numerous works by Lacey but also his archive, commonly takes some time to complete because the negotiation for a large amount of material, often involving significant sums, is complicated.

The enthusiasm expressed by reviewers and by Tate Britain's curator was also found in the gallery-going public, who attended the exhibition in both venues in record numbers. The CAC exhibition attracted over 19,000 visitors – far in excess of the expectations of the staff and curators of the gallery for an exhibition of this kind, which would normally be 8,000–10,000. A similar large footfall for a gallery of its size (about 3,000), was experienced at The Newlyn Gallery, Penzance, where the exhibition toured in October 2012 [C2]. The exhibition had a long-term effect on some of these visitors [C3]. Some of this was expressed in the take-up of family and other outreach programmes, which had high attendance despite the summer dates of the show [C4].

The exhibition was widely reviewed in the national press. Adrian Searle's review of the exhibition (*The Guardian*, 6 July 2012), for example, applauds the curating and the monograph [C5]. National [C6] and international [C7] journals of contemporary art also reviewed the exhibition. Of the whimsy and dedication evident in its feats of retrieval and exhibition, Rob Young concluded in *Frieze* (October 2012):

... beneath the pizzazz of a ceiling-mounted wire-mesh penis spurting Sindy dolls, the most evocative object in the whole show was a small, battered handmade wooden fort, built by his father and used by Lacey as a boy to stage miniature siege re-enactments. It's a tatty ruin whose frayed battlements seem to contain a lifetime of imaginative play

## Impact case study (REF3b)

and, as with so many of the artefacts on display, you found yourself marveling that this resiliently fragile trinket could have survived its owner's nomadic and eventful life to catch up with him again, here [C5].

Unusual for art-historical projects, *The Bruce Lacey Experience* was multi-platformed. It consisted of the simultaneous publication of Mellor's monograph study, the opening of the co-curated exhibition (Mellor and Deller), and the release by the British Film Institute of both a documentary film by Jeremy Deller and a retrospective of films by Lacey himself. The film-making and film release were directly related to the CAC exhibition. Deller's work derived from the project and supported and augmented it. The BFI's release came about through discussions that Mellor and Deller held with Will Fowler of the BFI three years before the exhibition opened. These initiated the Institute's publication of a group of Lacey's experimental film-works from the period 1951 to 1987 in the form of a three-DVD set, *The Lacey Rituals* [C8].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1** Significant influence on Tate acquisition and curatorial policies in the decision of the Tate Britain to acquire works by Lacey for the Gallery's collection and Lacey's personal archive for the National Archives of British Art. In an email to David Mellor on 30 November 2012, Chris Stephens, Tate Britain, writes:

The accompanying book (*The Bruce Lacey Exhibition*) for the first time provides an account of Lacey's artistic and intellectual development and sets him within a variety of cultural contexts, so demonstrating Lacey's position in the culture more thoroughly than any past art-historical accounts. As such the exhibition and book greatly encouraged our recognition of the need for Tate to extend its representation of Lacey's art, hopefully through the acquisition of a work from the 1980s, and most importantly by the acquisition of Lacey's archive as a record of all of his artistic production, including the transitory and ephemeral works. Though it will probably take years to achieve, I am confident Tate will secure Lacey's archive and there is no question that [David's] exhibition and accompanying book will have greatly enhanced our ability to do that by demonstrating Lacey's importance and the extent of his achievement. The projects have transformed the way Lacey is understood and, most importantly, greatly extended the artist's reputation.

- C2** Footfall figures for the Camden Arts Centre and The Newlyn Gallery, Penzance, were provided by the galleries: Director of Camden Arts Centre recorded an audit of the visitor figures to the exhibition which:

...ran in excess of 19,000, which is far beyond expectation for an exhibition of this kind, at this time of year given the fall in attendance across many institutions in London during the Olympic Games (7 November 2012).

- C3** The Exhibitions Coordinator of CAC, noted in an email dated 12 March 2013:

The exhibition generated an incredible amount of interest in Bruce's work as well as that particular moment of London's cultural history and we have had continued contact from people who want to get in touch him about writing and projects. Glasgow Museum of Modern Art are discussing the restoration of his large sculpture, *Metamorphosis*, originally commissioned for the opening of the Museum, with the aim of bringing it back into public view.

- C4** A lively Outreach programme run by the Education Department of Camden Arts attracted people interested in knowing more about the exhibition. The Make and Do sessions of the

## Impact case study (REF3b)

programme, which were focused on family attendance, attracted an audience of 210 people. The café-based programme of talks and related events was attended by 489 people. This is 3.6 per cent of the total attendance at the exhibition, which represents healthy public support of both outreach programmes, offered in a period that coincided with school vacation, a typically low season for outreach success.

- C5** Reviewed in the national press: Adrian Searle's review of the exhibition in *The Guardian* applauds the curating and the Lacey monograph (6 July 2012); comments on the website underline public response to the show:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/jul/06/bruce-lacey-experience-review?INTCMP=SRCH>
- C6** Review in October 2012 by Rob Young in *Frieze*, a key national journal and the leading British journal of contemporary art: <http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/bruce-lacey/>
- C7** Review on 7 August 2012 by Jo Applin in *Artforum*, a key international journal and the premier US journal of contemporary art: <http://www.artforum.com/archive/id=31597>
- C8** *The Bruce Lacey Rituals* DVD set was released by the BFI in 2012.