

MARTIN  
BOYCE  
BOYCE  
NO REFLECTIONS  
REFLECTIONS  
DUNDEE — REFLECTIONS  
VENICE  
2009

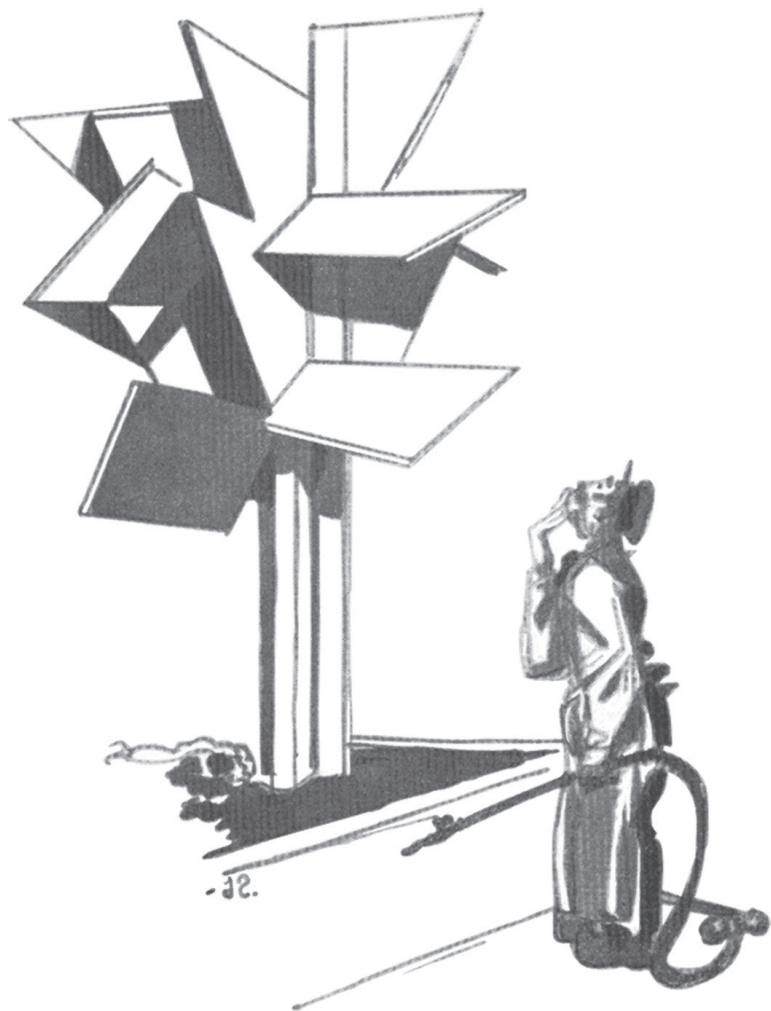
Martin Boyce, *No Reflections*

Dundee Contemporary Arts  
12 December — 14 February 2010

Exhibition Information

Scotland  
+ Venice

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JUND  
VENICE  
2009



## **Introduction**

*'I have found it helpful to think of a garden as a sculpture. Not sculpture in the sense of an ordinary object to be viewed. But sculpture that is large enough and perforated enough to walk through. And open enough to present no barrier to movement, and broken enough to guide the experience which is essentially a communion with the sky.'*

James Rose, *Creative Gardens*  
New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation  
1958

Curated by Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA), *No Reflections* was commissioned by Scotland and Venice, a partnership between the Scottish Arts Council, National Galleries of Scotland and the British Council Scotland, and builds on the critical success of previous projects which have promoted artists including Turner Prize winner Simon Starling and Turner Prize nominees, Cathy Wilkes and Jim Lambie. The Venice Biennale is the world's largest and most prestigious international showcase for contemporary visual arts.

Martin Boyce's lyrical installation of newly commissioned work for seven interconnected rooms in a 15th century Venetian Palazzo imagined the space as an abandoned garden, introducing into the fading grandeur of the palace groupings of works – suspended aluminium trees, scattered wax paper leaves, raised stepping stones, a wooden bird box, tables and benches. Setting out to 'delve into the city's interior landscape', Boyce conflated the internal and external, creating a heightened sense of displacement and abandonment. On its return to Dundee the work has been configured to work within DCA's more modern, purpose-built galleries.

The concept for *No Reflections* makes reference to a starting point in Boyce's work – a photograph of four concrete trees created by Joël and Jan Martel for the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. These trees, Boyce says, 'represent a perfect collapse of architecture and nature', visualising oppositional elements of urban existence: the natural versus the constructed, the populated versus the uninhabited, old versus new.







## Martin Boyce

Born in Hamilton, Scotland, in 1967, Martin Boyce is one of Scotland's most prominent artists and is well-known for his sculptural installations that recall and make reference to conventional public spaces – the playground, a pedestrian subway, deserted or abandoned sites – to form a cohesive and immersive environment, one that the writer Will Bradley calls, 'both a proposition about social space and a dreamscape in itself.' Drawing on the iconography and subsequent production of modernist design, these objects take on an alternative life by being displaced from their original context and purpose.

Martin Boyce lives and works in Glasgow. His most recent solo exhibitions and public projects include: *We Are Shipwrecked and Landlocked*, Kaldor Art Projects, Melbourne (2008); Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2008); Münster Sculpture Project, Münster (2008); *We Burn, We Shiver* (with Ugo Rondinone), Sculpture Center, New York (2008).

Martin Boyce is currently exhibiting at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh until 28 February 2010.

Boyce is represented by Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; Johnen Galerie, Berlin; Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich; The Modern Institute/Toby Webster Ltd, Glasgow.

## In Conversation

The following text has developed from a series of conversations between the curators and Martin Boyce in 2009.

### ***How did you make the decision about the site in Venice?***

On the plane journey back from Venice, on our last site visit, I began to imagine certain forms and elements appearing in the rooms of the Palazzo; there was something in the atmosphere and the journey through the different rooms that stayed with me. It had a sense of abandonment that the other space didn't and that somehow opened up a whole set of possibilities for the work. For some reason I kept imagining the Palazzo as an abandoned garden and this and those initial ideas formed on the plane became the core of the exhibition. We also began tracing the architect Carlo Scarpa's work throughout the city and even considered Scarpa's Querini Stampalia in Santa Maria Formosa as a possible venue.

### ***Why did you decide against that location?***

Scarpa's work introduced an amazing convergence of the ancient and the modern in a way that I had previously never experienced but rather than add to that I felt that it pointed towards a new possibility, where my reaction to the Palazzo could generate a similar condition.

### ***The experience of Venice 'out of Biennale season' and the idea of the abandoned Island Torcello were also important in our conversations...***

Once the decision of the site had been made and the place became fixed in my mind, it seemed as if the Palazzo was reflected

in so many of our experiences of Venice. The aftermath and residue of the previous Biennale was still present. It had this ghostly Mary Celeste-like quality, like waking up the morning after the party. Weathered posters and signage for 2007; the park itself unkempt and overgrown; the pavilions boarded up; it could have been two years or ten since a light had been switched on or a door unlocked.

***Where does the title of the exhibition come from?***

Around the time I had been working on the Münster sculpture project I had been thinking about the idea of a deserted zoo. I had written a short text that tried to conjure up this image and in it there was this idea of dried up pools and how their former reflections had now evaporated and belonged to the air. Walking around the Giardini this came up and the title *No Reflections* stuck.

***Can you say more about the form of the exhibition?***

I felt that one way to introduce a number of materials, sounds or textures was through their absence. How do I introduce a pool into the second floor of a Venetian Palazzo or a contemporary art gallery? How does a series of rooms become a walk through a hidden garden? How can the simultaneity of this and the acknowledgement of the site's true condition co-exist, where in a moment an interior can become a frozen garden untethered from time; one landscape blown through another?

When I construct my installations or groupings of sculptural works, they often have a frozen quality, a sense of stillness, like a place viewed at speed, caught only in a retinal after-burn. Consigned to memory they become further abstracted or simplified, they

somehow sit out with a linear relationship with time. I think of these places and objects in a state of pause, neither disappearing nor being renewed. Fragile and determined they somehow stand their ground as if caught in some entropic loop. This becomes their natural, perpetual state and it is possible to spend time inside that moment, to see a place when no one is looking.

***Did the idea of knowing that you are making an exhibition for two locations - Venice and for the galleries at DCA - play a significant part in your thinking?***

Of course a major part of the developments in finding the site, discovering Venice and producing the work, is the exhibition being reconfigured and shown in DCA. It was difficult for both shows to remain simultaneously in my mind and in a way I think of them as a chain of events. The Palazzo itself and my research into the work of Carlo Scarpa all fed into the show that could be seen in Venice and the process of installing the show, seeing the work in the space and understanding how it functions fed into the show in DCA. It was an accumulative process.

***It was interesting for us to find out that Carlo Scarpa had been a particular influence of the architect of DCA, Richard Murphy. He talks about making architecture 'equally of its place and of its time'. This collapse of time and place seems to be particularly relevant to both locations...***

The influence of Scarpa on Richard Murphy seems so clear now and I think it goes far deeper than stylistic concerns. Because Scarpa built so much in Venice a lot of what he was involved in was the insertion of the new into the old and this is also reflected in Richard Murphy's approach.



***You bring together the abandoned private dwelling with public space and transform the meaning of everyday artifacts and experiences. It is particularly interesting to know more about the way that your work triggers associations...***

In a recent interview I was asked, in relation to the name Boyce meaning 'lives by the woods', if I had ever lived near woods. It triggered a memory that I hadn't consciously thought about for years. I was brought up in a new housing estate surrounded by what we called 'the woods', as children we spent all our time playing in there. Across one of the wider parts of the stream that ran through these woods, someone had dumped five or six bags of cement still in their paper wrapper. The paper was worn away and the cement had hardened creating a series of stepping-stones. They were known locally as the golden steps. I was already working on the stepping-stones for the first room when I was reminded of this but it illustrated perfectly the possibility of something urban and everyday transforming into something special.

***You have produced several pieces that refer to images of concrete trees. Could you say more about the history of these works?***

Some years ago I came across a black and white photograph of four geometric, concrete trees made for a Robert Mallet Stevens garden in 1925 by the sculptors Joël and Jan Martel. The image was one of those things that just kept coming back to me, I came close to using the tree forms for the exhibition *Our Love is Like the Flowers...* in 2002 at Tramway in Glasgow but the fluorescent saplings became the preferred way to introduce the low light levels that the installation required. It wasn't until 2005 when I was living in Berlin that the tree image re-emerged.

I had quite a bit of studio time on my hands and so I decided to explore the Martel concrete trees once again. I began by making models of the trees in order to understand the system of construction, as objects they somehow represented this interesting collapse of architecture and nature and the desire for the two to be compatible. Unlike architecture however the geometric planes that make up the form of the trees do not articulate a flow of space and unlike nature these trees are frozen in the time that they were made. The original trees were made for the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and would have been destroyed at the exhibition's end. For me then I became interested in, not looking back at them but in allowing them to reappear now. The first piece I made in relation to the trees is the photograph, *Concrete Autumn (Phantom Tree)* and is a ghostly image of the Martel tree. In a sense it is the tree coming back, re-emerging from the past and all of the following pieces are the landscapes and objects touched by this returning ghost.

***How do you re-use this tree form?***

One of the early ideas was to remove the existing Murano glass chandeliers from the Palazzo and introduce my own sculptural replacements. The structure and shapes of the Martel trees had by now developed into a lexicon of forms; screens and fences, ventilation grills, architectural pillars, concrete floors, telephone booths, masks, tables... With each new work rather than search for new forms or play off of existing ones, I would go back to the trees and see what new transformation they could endure. For example, by simply inverting the tree an incredible, geometric chandelier was born.

***You sent the text you wrote in Münster immediately after we returned from Venice. It became important to the exhibition and other projects that you are developing...***

The short text I'd written with the abandoned zoo in mind was just a series of notes, some phrases that may have become something at a future time. Reading it again in relation to our discussions about Venice and DCA the possibilities became quite potent.

*Warm dry stone and palm leaves.*

*No elephants*

*No giraffes*

*No penguins*

*No brilliantly coloured birds*

*Just railings,*

*Window screens and straw.*

*The concrete enclosures have a stillness that transforms the imprint of wooden shuttering into petrified traces.*

*The pools are empty. All animated reflections have dried up and belong to the air.*

***Could you say more about the typography in your work? Specifically in the design and structure of the letters in 'Petrified Songs' and 'No Brilliantly Coloured Birds'...***

While working on the Martel tree models I began to develop a linear repeat pattern with the central structure of the trees as the main motif. Over time I then began to notice the possibility of letters hidden within the lines of the repeat. At first I found an R, an S and an M then slowly and with much trial and error I found a good representation of every letter of the alphabet. Some letters were found upside down, some on their side and my first impulse was to arrange the letters with what would be the correct orientation, with conventional spacing but something was lost. I then allowed the letters to appear as they were found within the pattern.

When a word or phrase was written the letters gave the impression of a falling or tumbling text. With texts such as *Concrete Leaves* and *Our Breath and This Breeze* the relationship with falling fragments, autumnal leaves and the air blowing through architecture and nature seemed to fit perfectly with these tumbling letters.

***The work will be formed and experienced in an entirely different way at DCA. How do you feel about re-presenting the work in such a completely different location?***

The interconnecting rooms of the Palazzo allowed for a linear sense of discovery whereas the vast spaces of DCA create a completely different relationship with objects and landscape.

***The idea of abandonment and displacement seems important to the exhibition in both locations?***

The gallery interior and imagined abandoned garden both embodied the same stillness that my idea of the zoo had. The stepping-stones left in the dried up pool, the autumn leaves replacing the shimmering surface of water. This idea of absence continued with the presence of a bird box sculpture that simultaneously takes the form of a head or mask, the text on the screen print reads *No Brilliantly Coloured Birds* over a detail image of the bird box's interior space. The brass wall text tumbling over the surface of the wall beneath an inverted tree chandelier spells out the phrase *Petrified Songs*.

***All of the works in the exhibition are laboriously crafted, often by hand and some have been deliberately distressed and others use reclaimed wood. This brings in an inherently personal element into work that could initially be perceived (superficially) as detached. Can you comment on this importance of presence within your work?***

The decision to distress the materials in many of the sculptures was a way to introduce time and a feeling of exposure to the work, to bring a reality to the sculptures.

***It is often commented that your installations radiate a strong sense of poetic, melancholic, unease. The work for 'No Reflections' definitely offers up an emotional intensity... It is work that stays with you...***

I am interested in whether an object or a room can be emotionally charged or reflect a psychological make up. In the context of a sculptural installation, can I make a table sad or heavy or exposed and lost? Is it possible to imbue these objects with a temporal presence that is somehow different to that of the viewer, even as they stand in the same room as the work? Are the objects in their natural place or are they marooned in an imaginative landscape that we have to construct?

***The Ventilation Grills, which relate closely to this body of work and to the Münster Sculpture work are an important addition to the DCA exhibition. Can you tell us about your decision to include them for here?***

In the first showing of *No Reflections* we were on the top floor of a 15th century Palazzo and as part of the conditions we created for the work we opened some of the windows and allowed the breeze to blow through the rooms. This amplified the sense of the outside passing through the interior.

With DCA the work finds itself in a markedly different situation. And so another, more subtle way to introduce the idea of the breeze was to include a set of five ventilation grills. To install these pieces it requires puncturing the wall to create a dark void behind the grills. So the grills, with their repeat pattern of the concrete trees presents a notional breeze blowing through a graphic forest into the space.

***Your choice of films to accompany the exhibition at DCA are all filled with modernist visions of the built environment - with 'La Notte', it is coupled with ennui; 'Playtime' with confusion and with 'L'inhumaine' excitement. What was it about these films?***

I had an exhibition in Cologne in 2000 and the gallery wrote a press release that talked about the spatial qualities of my work in relation to the films of Antonioni. At this time I had never seen any of his films but slowly over time I began to seek them out and I continue to be amazed at his use of architecture and space. Tati's *Playtime* is so dense with detail it is simultaneously unbearable and a joy to watch. It presents a critique of the modern built environment and the life affirming pleasures of negotiating the city. *L'inhumaine* I've never seen and that is why I included it. The sets were designed by the architect Robert Mallet Stevens who designed the garden that the four original concrete trees appeared in. As I understand from reading about the film the narrative is relatively conventional but visually the film is extraordinary.

## **Related Film Programme**

We enjoy asking the artists exhibiting in the gallery what films they would like to have screened in our cinema to coincide with their exhibition. The selections are sometimes surprising but also consistently illuminating of their practice. For *No Reflections*, Martin has chosen the following films:

### ***Playtime***

Saturday 9 January, 1.15pm

Sunday 10 January, 6pm

Jacques Tati/ 1967/ France/ 124 minutes/ U

Following on from our recent season of films by Jacques Tati as part of the French Film Festival, we present what is perhaps his masterpiece. Now feted for its use of outstanding choreography and for Jacques Lagrange's set designs, this nearly wordless film was a labour of love for the actor/director Tati which practically bankrupted him. The film both celebrates and criticises the sameness of modern architecture and design and modern life itself. Tati's famous character Monsieur Hulot struggles in the modernist maze.

### ***La Notte***

Tuesday 19 January, 6pm

Michelangelo Antonioni/ 1961/ Italy/

122 minutes/ 12

Following last year's DCA *Ellipsis* exhibition being named after Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse*, Martin Boyce reveals his earlier film as an influence. Featuring a central cast of Marcello Mastroianni, Jeanne Moreau and Monica Vitti, this Milan-set movie shows melancholy and ennui between a husband and a wife drifting apart as they visit a dying friend, attend a party and flirt with other guests.

### ***L'inhumaine***

Saturday 6 February, 1pm

Marcel l'Herbier/ 1924/ France/

135 minutes/ PG

DCA offers a very rare opportunity to experience Marcel l'Herbier's extraordinary film once dubbed 'a manifesto for French artistic modernity.' The director worked closely with artists Fernand Leger and René Lalique and with the architect Robert Mallet Stevens to create one of the most artistic movies ever made. The story concerns an opera singer and her male admirers – a maharajah and a scientist and blends melodrama with science fiction. The renowned Viennese architect Adolf Loos wrote at the time that 'the final images of *L'inhumaine* surpass the imagination. As you emerge from seeing it, you have the impression of having lived through the moment of birth of a new art.' The original soundtrack by Darius Milhaud is lost but we are delighted to have Raymond MacDonald arrange an alternative accompaniment.

### **Also showing**

#### ***Emblems Left***

5 December – 27 January 2010

Steven Anderson, Deborah Bower, Kent Chan, Stuart David Fallon, Mat Fleming, Sarah Gillett, Mairi Lafferty and Amy Pettifer  
Lower Foyer Gallery, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art & Design  
[www.exhibitions.dundee.ac.uk](http://www.exhibitions.dundee.ac.uk)

This exhibition features emerging artists who developed new work during their residencies in Venice and Hospitalfield House, Arbroath. A programme of films will also be curated by Mairi Lafferty and her guests from the Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle and screened at 6pm on 26 January at DCA.

## Talks, Tours and Education

### **Richard Murphy**

*From Adige to Tay:*

*Richard Murphy's Architectural Journey*

Tuesday 15 December, 7pm

Meeting Room, Level 5, DCA

To mark the culmination of DCA's 10th birthday year we are very pleased to welcome Richard Murphy, the DCA architect, back to the building to present a talk that, like the exhibition *No Reflections* in the DCA galleries, links the cities of Dundee and Venice. The Modernist Italian architect Carlo Scarpa is an acknowledged influence on both Murphy and Martin Boyce and Richard will talk about his extensive researches into Scarpa and on how a number of his projects, not just DCA, have been influenced by Scarpa. Limited capacity. Booking is essential.

### **Martin Boyce**

*Scotland and Venice Lecture*

Wednesday 3 February, 11am

DCA Cinema

A great opportunity to hear the artist talk about his experience of undertaking a solo exhibition for the Venice Biennale 09 and re-presenting this work for the different architecture and context of Dundee Contemporary Arts. The lecture is presented in association with Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design. A limited number of places will be available for non-students. Booking is essential.

## **Gallery Tours**

Saturday 12 December, 1pm

Tuesday 12 January, 5pm

Thursday 21 January, 6pm

Saturday 6 February, 1pm

Join a DCA Gallery Assistant and a member of the Scotland and Venice Investigation team for an insightful tour of Martin Boyce's exhibition at DCA and learn more about how the works were originally presented at the Venice Biennale – the world's biggest festival of visual art.

## **No Brilliantly Coloured Birds**

### **Public Workshops**

Saturday 12 December, 1.30 – 3.30pm

Saturday 16 January, 1.30 – 3.30pm

Saturday 23 January, 1.30 – 3.30pm

Saturday 13 February, 1.30 – 3.30pm

DCA Activity Room

Join us for our Bruno Munari and Martin Boyce inspired workshops.

Taking inspiration from works in the exhibition and the celebrated Italian artist and designer Bruno Munari, the workshops will focus on the creative ideas of Munari and his wonderful children's books that have inspired generations of young audiences, artists and designers. Expect lots of colour, imagination and fun!

Come along to all or just one of the workshops. Each will feature a different activity but please note that booking is advisable as places are limited. Workshops are for children aged 6 - 12 years old. Children under 8 are to be accompanied by an adult. Price: £3 per child.

Email [community.education@dca.org.uk](mailto:community.education@dca.org.uk) for more information.

## **DCA Editions and Publications**

DCA works directly with artists selected through the curatorial programme to develop limited edition artworks in collaboration with the DCA Print Studio team. All editions are available exclusively from DCA and offer an opportunity to acquire artwork by innovative contemporary artists, as well as supporting the venue's future programme.

Martin Boyce has produced two new limited edition prints in the Print Studio, released to coincide with *No Reflections*.

Martin Boyce

*No Brilliantly Coloured Birds*, 2009

Six colour screenprint on Heritage White (315gsm) paper. Varied edition of 40  
102 x 74cm (image size: 95 x 68cm)  
Signed, numbered and dated by artist  
Price: £450 plus VAT (unframed)

Martin Boyce

*No Brilliantly Coloured Birds*, 2009

Screenprint on Heritage White (315gsm) paper. Varied edition of 60  
34 x 25cm (image size: 27 x 19cm)  
Signed, numbered and dated by artist  
Presented together with *No Reflections* publication. Price: £100 plus VAT (unframed)

### **Also available:**

Martin Boyce

*Brushing Against Strange Weeds (Reflections and Vibrations)*, 2004

Four colour screenprint on Fabriano 4 Liscia paper. Edition of 25  
100 x 70cm (image size: 89 x 60cm)  
Signed, numbered and dated by artist on front  
Price: £450 plus VAT (unframed)

*Brushing Against Strange Weeds (Shapes and Noises)*, 2004

Four colour screenprint on Fabriano 4 Liscia paper. Edition of 25  
100 x 70cm (image size: 89 x 60cm)  
Signed, numbered and dated by artist on front  
Price: £450 plus VAT (unframed)

*We Are Resistant, We Dry Out in the Sun*, 2004

Four colour screenprint on Fabriano 4 Liscia paper. Edition of 30  
100 x 70cm (image size: 89 x 60cm)  
Signed, numbered and dated by artist on front  
Price: £450 plus VAT (unframed)

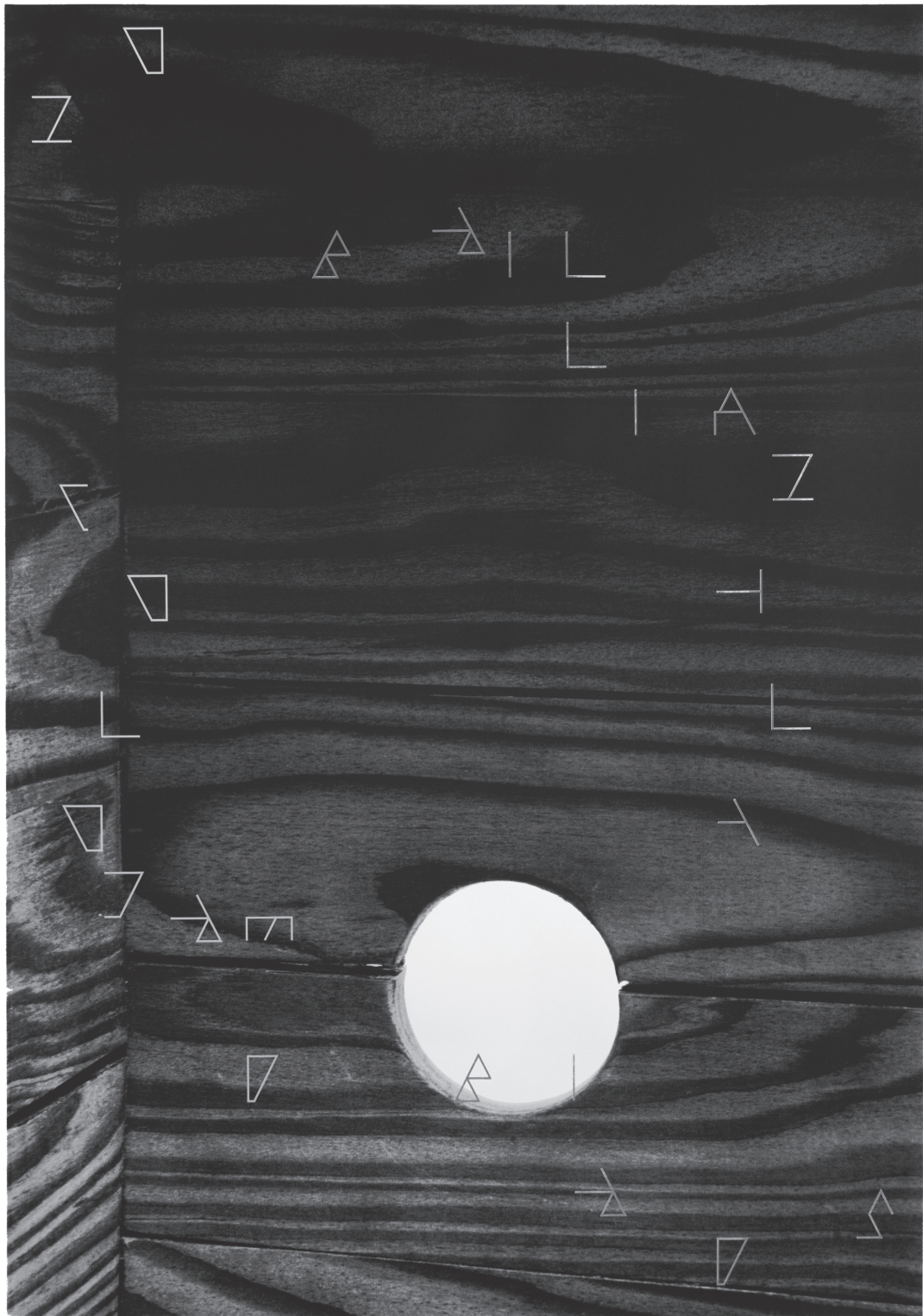
The Suite of 3 prints can be purchased for £1,200 plus VAT (unframed)

### **Martin Boyce – Artist Book**

This book work includes images of works created for the context of an abandoned 15th Century Palace in Venice and the DCA Galleries. The text by Will Bradley is adapted from the 1918 novel *The Ghost Garden* by Amélie Rives. The text has been transformed, leaving only the passages that describe the house and garden where the story takes place.

Magazine format, full colour  
Design: Skratz, Glasgow  
Size: 340 x 250mm, 32pp  
ISBN: 978-0-955-8769-2-9  
£10 available from the DCA Shop

For further details and to purchase editions and publications please contact Sandra De Rycker, DCA Editions.  
[sandra.derycker@dca.org.uk](mailto:sandra.derycker@dca.org.uk); 01382 909255



## **Further Information**

If you have any questions during your visit, please do not hesitate to ask the gallery assistants who will be happy to help.

Please visit the information space. This includes more detailed documentation on Martin Boyce. We have also asked the artist for suggested reading that relates to the exhibition and his practice.

*No Reflections* is curated by Judith Winter and Graham Domke, Dundee Contemporary Arts.

Scotland and Venice is a partnership project between the Scottish Arts Council, National Galleries of Scotland and British Council Scotland.

12 December 2009 – 14 February 2010

Tuesday – Saturday, 10.30am – 5.30pm

Sunday, 12 noon – 5.30pm

Open late Thursday until 8.30pm

Admission free

Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate

Dundee DD1 4DY

01382 909 900

For further information please visit

[www.scotlandandvenice.com](http://www.scotlandandvenice.com)

[www.dca.org.uk](http://www.dca.org.uk)

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