

Spike Island

NICHOLAS WRIGHT

A CHANCE TO LOOK AT CHICKEN

6 April – 16 June 2019

Animal motifs occupy an important place in artist Nicholas Wright's practice. This exhibition is the first time that more than a hundred of his works depicting a menagerie of species (mice, dogs, cats, horses, parrots, cows, chickens and other wild fowl) have been shown together in the UK. Ceramic wall pieces, made over the last 30 years, are displayed alongside more recent prints, drawings and preparatory sketches.

After moving to Bristol in the late 1980s, Wright rented a studio space at the McArthur's Warehouse on Gas Ferry Road, where he joined a thriving artist community called Artspace (which later became known as Spike Island). As a studio holder at McArthur's, Wright spent a lot of time observing and recording the instinctive behavioural habits of the resident mice. For *First attempt—the mice didn't like the quantity of writing paper*, he painted the words 'Mouse Space' onto a sheet of Artspace headed paper using soup and allowed the mice to eat away the soupy paper, so creating a stencil. He went on to collaborate on many other stencil works, including mouse portraits. For Wright, "the mice seem to have displayed a certain artistic skill in creating these delicate self-portraits."

Chicken on plinth is one of hundreds of chicken-like ceramic sculptures found in Wright's Bristol studio. This piece is similar to some of the larger sculptures that he made in Paris, just fired once and using French earthenware glaze. All of Wright's free-standing ceramics are made using a 'coiling' method used for thousands of years to make clay into vessels, whereby clay is built up slowly by hand as it dries, meaning that each piece is unique.

Wright's drawings are often repetitious in nature — a single composition copied over and over again. The subject is largely drawn from his imagination, with little regard to form and space. As Wright explains, they are "a visual exercise in filling paper". Over time, he has incorporated works such as *Chicken drawings* into his ceramic wall pieces.

Religious iconography, domestic animal motifs and intricate foliate designs appear in many of Wright's *Ceramic wall pieces*. Their pierced form is inspired by the visual language of ancient Scythian metalwork. The Scythians (c. 900–200 BC) were nomadic warriors, horsemen and skilled metal workers of the Eurasian Steppe, who manufactured portable tools, weapons and small personal ornaments. Wright made a rough ceramic copy of a 2500-year-old Scythian bronze belt buckle, based on a reproduction in a book. This representation of a horse suspended in an open weblike pattern became his first ceramic wall hanging.

The dome-like shape of other wall pieces mimic a boss, the decorative keystone used in the vaulting of medieval architecture to cover the complex of mitred joints. This ongoing series also includes versions and copies of a number of Romanesque sculptures such as *Daniel in the Lions' Den*, capital carving, Basilique Saint Eutrope de Saintes, France (early 12th century); *Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac*, capital carving, transept, Abbatiale Sainte-Foy, Conques, France (c. 12th century); and *Ark of Saint Cerbone*, door carving, Massa Marittima, Tuscany (c. 11th-13th century).

BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas Wright (b. 1956, Birmingham, UK) works between his two studios at Spike Island, Bristol and Muse-Atelier Adzak, Paris.

ARTIST'S BOOK

Nicholas Wright
A Chance to Look At Chicken
Limited edition
£1 per copy

INFORMATION

Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, located in Bristol's harbour area. Admission to the gallery is free.

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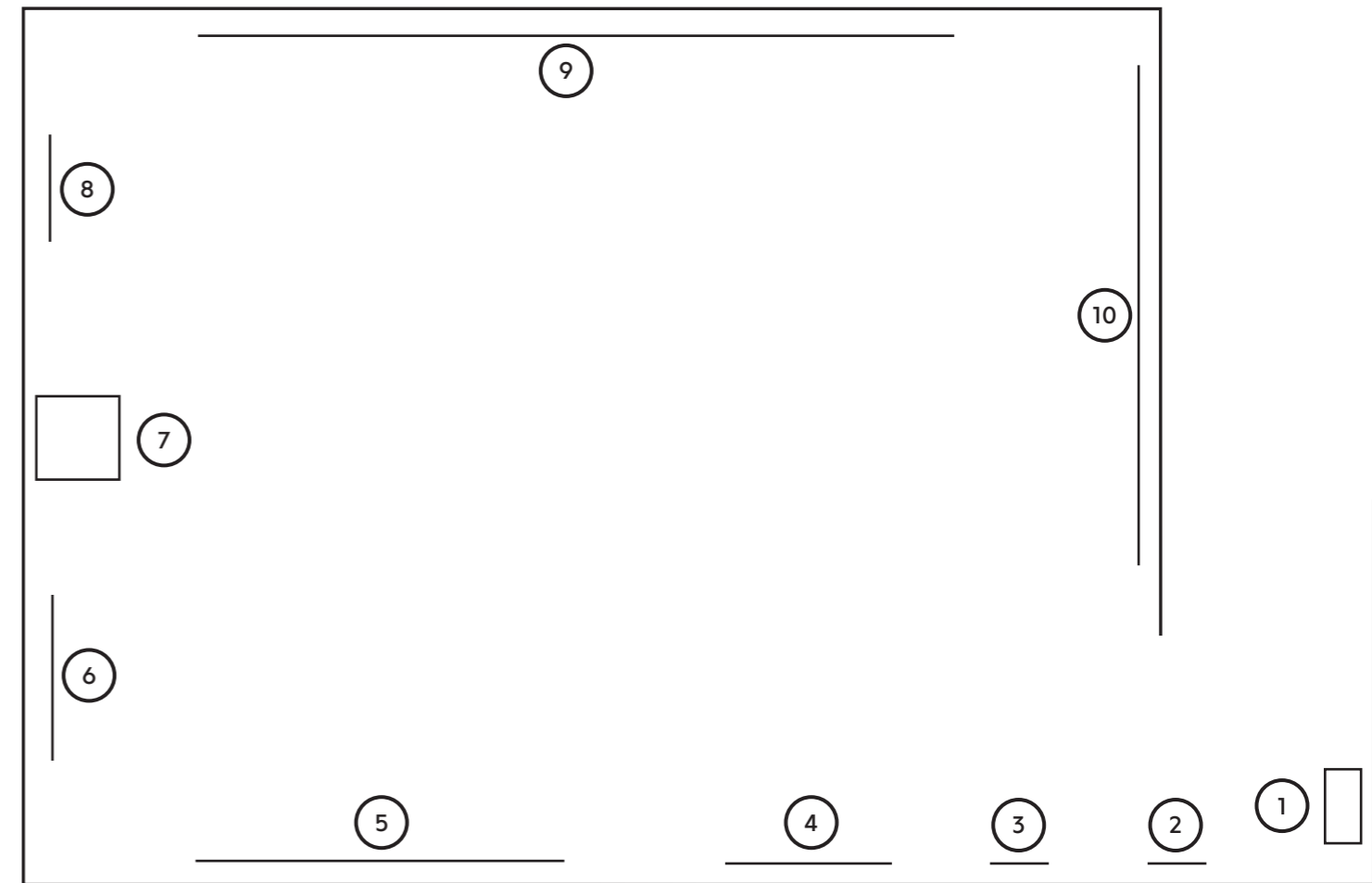
Gallery: Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
(during exhibitions)
Café: Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5pm
Saturday to Sunday, 10am–5pm



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FLOORPLAN



LIST OF WORKS

1 *Pigeon on plinth* (2018)
ceramic

2 *This drawing dates back to the early 1990's when the Gas Works over the water from Gas Ferry Road was more visually apparent* (early 1990s)
pencil on paper

3 *First attempt – the mice didn't like the quantity of writing paper* (early 1990s)
archival paper

4 *Mouse or mice works* (early 1990s)
nine paper stencils

5 *Mouse works* (early 1990s)
fifty-four photocopies

6 *Someone taught the mice table cloth design* (2019)
linen and ink

7 *Chicken on plinth* (2018)
ceramic and glaze

8 *Chicken drawings* (2018)
pencil on paper

9 *Ceramic wall pieces* (early 1990's to present)
ceramic and glaze

10 *My (Nicholas Wright's) workings* (early 1990's to present)
paper