

For immediate release

barbican

Francis Alÿs: Ricochets

Barbican Art Gallery

27 June – 1 September 2024

Press Preview: Wednesday 26 June, 10am – 1pm

#francisalys @barbicancentre

This exhibition has received generous support from the John S Cohen Foundation, the Delegation of Flanders (Embassy of Belgium) and the Company of Arts Scholars Charitable Trust.



L: Francis Alÿs, *Shariya Refugee Camp, Iraq*, 2016



R: Francis Alÿs, *Children's Game #38: Ellsakat, Azilal, Morocco*, 2023

The Barbican presents a major new exhibition by internationally renowned, Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs (b.1959, Antwerp, Belgium). The artist's largest institutional solo exhibition in the UK for almost 15 years will transform the brutalist architecture of the Barbican Art Gallery into a cinematic playground dedicated to play. *Francis Alÿs: Ricochets* includes his critically acclaimed series *Children's Games* (1999 - present) presented for the first time in the UK, alongside a significant new body of work.

For the past two decades Alÿs has travelled to over 15 countries around the world to film children's games – from 'musical chairs' in Mexico to 'leapfrog' in Iraq, 'jump rope' in Hong Kong and 'wolf and lamb' in Afghanistan. Recording the universality and ingenuity of play, *Children's Games* foregrounds social interactions which are in decline due to rapid urbanisation, the erosion of communities and the prevalence of digital entertainment.

Staged in dialogue with an expansive selection of paintings spanning the artist's 40-year career, an immersive multi-screen installation of the *Children's Games* features the largest survey of the games to date. Each film records lived experiences of play in different contexts and environments around the world, including Nepal, Belgium, Morocco, Canada, and Cuba.

Alÿs also debuts a new body of animation films depicting both traditional and lesser-known hand games played by children and adults alike, including 'thumb war' and 'hand-stack'. Each work is composed of hundreds of simple, black line illustrations of animated hand

movements. Contrasting with the brightly saturated *Children's Games* films, these silent animations focus on meditative gestures of play.

Designed as a welcoming space for all children to visit, *Francis Alÿs: Ricochets* integrates play as a central part of the experience of the exhibition. Two playrooms developed by the Barbican with Alÿs's long-time collaborator Rafael Ortega invite visitors to perform their own games. Visitors are encouraged to use their bodies to cast shadows and play with scale and are *prompted* to act out playful instructions conceived by children from three schools local to the Barbican.

This is one outcome in a year-long art and learning programme inspired by the *Children's Games* series, involving three classes of 60 primary school students aged between 6 and 11, from Prior Weston Primary School, Richard Cloudesley School and St Luke's Church of England Primary School. The games played by these children reflect a unique transhistorical legacy of play in and around the Barbican. Razed to the ground during the Second World War, this part of the city saw the earliest adventure playgrounds emerge from the rubble, activated by children through play. This site-specific history resonates with Alÿs, who frequently documents children's creative resilience in conflict zones, from Iraq to Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts at the Barbican, said: *"We are thrilled to be staging this major exhibition exploring the fascinating, interdisciplinary work of Francis Alÿs, and delighted that the artist is creating this presentation specifically for the Barbican. Celebrating the universal joy of children at play, we look forward to Alÿs' playful sensibility working its way through the wider Centre, reflecting the Barbican's own commitment to fostering a joyful and inclusive environment."*

With a career spanning four decades, Francis Alÿs has forged a unique and radical practice ranging from painting and drawing to film and animation. Trained as an architect and urbanist in Tournai, Belgium and Venice, Italy, Alÿs moved to Mexico City in 1986. The rapidly shifting urban context and the consequent changes to social dynamics in the late 1980s inspired him to become a visual artist, developing his early public interventions. Works like *Paradox of Praxis I (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)*, 1997, wherein Alÿs pushed a large block of melting ice through the streets of Mexico City for nine hours, quickly established him as a leading artist of his generation.

Working in collaboration with local communities around the world, his engagement with cross-cultural contexts from Latin America to North Africa and the Middle East operates beyond dominant, Western-centric narratives. What emerges is a lifelong exploration of art as a vehicle for witnessing social and political change.

Major solo exhibitions include (selection): WIELS, Brussels (2023); MUAC, Mexico City (2023); The Belgian Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2022); Fragmentos, Bogota (2020); Tai Kwun, Hong Kong (2020); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2018); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2017); Secession, Vienna (2016); Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2015); Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2013); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (2013); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2011); Tate Modern, London (2010) and Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (2003). Recent

major international group exhibitions include (selection): Shanghai Biennial (2018); Iraqi Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017); dOCUMENTA(13), Kassel (2012).

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Press Information

For further information, images, or to arrange interviews, please contact:

Mary Doherty, mary@sam-talbot.com / +44 7716 701 499

Isabel Davies, isabel@sam-talbot.com / +44 7511 700 240

Press images available online

The image sheet is available on the [press room](#). Please contact the Sam Talbot press team for high-res images.

Barbican Press Room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our [website](#).

Press Tickets

All press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Visual Arts Press team at visualartspress@barbican.org.uk. Our inbox is monitored Monday to Friday, 10am – 6pm. Please let us know if you have any access requirements.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Barbican Art Gallery, Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS

www.barbican.org.uk

Tickets

Tickets on sale [here](#).

Pay What You Can

Our Pay What You Can visits take place every Thursday from 5 – 8pm.

Select the price you can pay and enjoy the exhibition. If you're able to pay the standard ticket price, you'll be helping to support our Visual Arts programme.

Opening Hours

Saturday – Wednesday 10am - 6pm (last entry 5pm)

Thursday – Friday 10am - 8pm (last entry 7pm)

Bank holidays: Please check the website as opening times vary.

Exhibition

Francis Alÿs: Ricochets is at Barbican Art Gallery from 27 June to 1 September 2024. The exhibition then tours to the Serralves Foundation – Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal, from 24 October 2024 – 16 March 2025. The exhibition is curated by Florence Ostende, with Inês Geraudes Cardoso. Graphic design is by Mark El-khatib. This exhibition has received generous support from the John S Cohen Foundation, the Delegation of Flanders (Embassy of Belgium) and the Company of Arts Scholars Charitable Trust.

Book

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue edited by Florence Ostende, co-published with Prestel, and with graphic design by Mark El-khatib. The book explores Alÿs's influential works in dialogue with his critically acclaimed series *Children's Games* (1999-present). Revealing new perspectives on his prolific career, a series of essays by leading writers including Helena Chávez Mac Gregor, Carla Faesler and Cuauhtémoc Medina explores the artist's studio practice and influences across art history, philosophy and literature. Price: £30.

Events

The exhibition will be accompanied by an expansive public programme of events. The full schedule will be released on the [website](#) nearer the time.

[Tristan Garcia: Keynote Lecture](#)

Thu 27 Jun 2024, 7pm, Frobisher Auditorium 1

A keynote lecture by celebrated philosopher and writer Tristan Garcia marks the opening of the exhibition. The lecture will explore the multifaceted history of childhood in art, philosophy and cultural history through the prism of children's drawings. Tristan Garcia is widely recognised as one of the foremost philosophical voices in France today. After working with Alain Badiou, he was awarded his PhD for a thesis on the subject of representation in the arts. He is a prolific writer and has authored several novels alongside critical texts on themes ranging from contemporary art to animal suffering, political subjectivity, metaphysics and popular television series.

[Recreations: Three Films on Children's Play](#)

Thu 8 Aug 2024, 6.30pm, Cinema 2

This curated programme of films captures different glimpses of childhood, from distinct points in time and place: Tehran in 1970, Amsterdam in 1965 and Paris in 1998. Bringing together the directorial voices of Abbas Kiarostami, Johan van der Keuken and Claire Simon, these films come together in an expansive dialogue with Francis Alÿs's *Children's Games* at the heart of our new exhibition.

Barbican Art Gallery

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

Barbican Press Team

visualartspress@barbican.org.uk

Hannah Carr, Communications Manager, hannah.carr@barbican.org.uk

Lily Booth, Communications Officer, lily.booth@barbican.org.uk

Georgia Holmes, Communications Assistant, georgia.holmes@barbican.org.uk

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a

destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [Human Rights Watch Film Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Entertainment](#).

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