



Press kit

Communication
and digital department

centrepompidou.fr

James Coleman

9 June – 23 August 2021



James Coleman

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Gallery 3, Level 1

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#ExpoColeman

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James Coleman

9 June – 23 August 2021
Gallery 3, Level 1

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From 9 June to 23 August 2021, the Centre Pompidou presents a retrospective exhibition dedicated to Irish artist James Coleman whose major work since the early 1960s, operating at the limits of distinct traditions – those of painting, photography and film – has never ceased to deconstruct how images function.

The exhibition provides an account of the exemplary interdisciplinarity of an artistic practice that many contemporary artists – among them Douglas Gordon and Tino Sehgal – claim to have been considerably influenced by. Bringing together an unprecedented number of pieces, the exhibition is organised around "projected images" devices invented by Coleman that have become his main artistic tool.

Coleman, who was born in Ireland in 1941, has constructed his artistic practice in the wake of minimal, then conceptual art, while still tapping into the Irish literary tradition of orality and "holes" in language, between John M. Synge and Samuel Beckett. From the very beginning, Coleman's practice has operated simultaneously in two modes – one strictly centred on the mechanisms of visual perception, the other reconnecting with narration through figurative representation and sound.

Characterised by an extreme economy of means, certain works with an experimental simplicity test the spectator's own perceptive activity, underscoring the fundamental role of memory and language in the apprehension of images. Through them, Coleman radicalises the heritage of minimalism.

He particularly examines how images relate to time: his early films thus use elementary optical traps to question the deceptive verisimilitude of simulated movement, while his latest work to date – *Still Life* – confronts spectators with the ambiguity of a quasi-stillness.

Coleman's invention of the "projected images" device enables Coleman to invest the realm of narration. Shown by a visible projector, slides synchronised with a soundtrack are sequenced as in a film reduced to a few of its photograms. Prepared with meticulously elaborated scripts and adopting the clichés of commercial photography, the images present costumed characters in postures that, like the set, are carefully positioned.

Consisting largely of clichéd expressions or, on the contrary, quotations from poetry, the soundtrack is laconic and fragmentary. The narratives outlined in these sound projections are thus marked by conspicuous lacunae and absences, often with a touch of ironic humour. Mingling several levels of fiction, which themselves evoke different temporalities, James Coleman thus produces an implacable critique of entertainment.

Running counter to the modernist heritage, Coleman also reconnects with the literary dimension of classical painting. He intermingles the static character of paintings and the mobility of theatre in large "tableaux vivants", rendered ghostlike by the use of photography and the orchestration of the characters that haunt them like so many "living dead".

Curator

Nicolas Liucci-Goutnikov

Curator, Head of Department at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris
Assisted by **Thomas Bertail**, coordination and research manager, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris

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1 previous page: *Retake with Evidence*, 2007

Retake with Evidence was first presented at documenta 12. Featuring Harvey Keitel, the film examines questions of judgement and social justice by reviewing the development of the "western subject" in the thinking and philosophy of ancient Greece.

Video projection featuring Harvey Keitel, 35mm film in 4:3, digitised in HD video

Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman

2 above: *Slide Piece*, 1972-1973

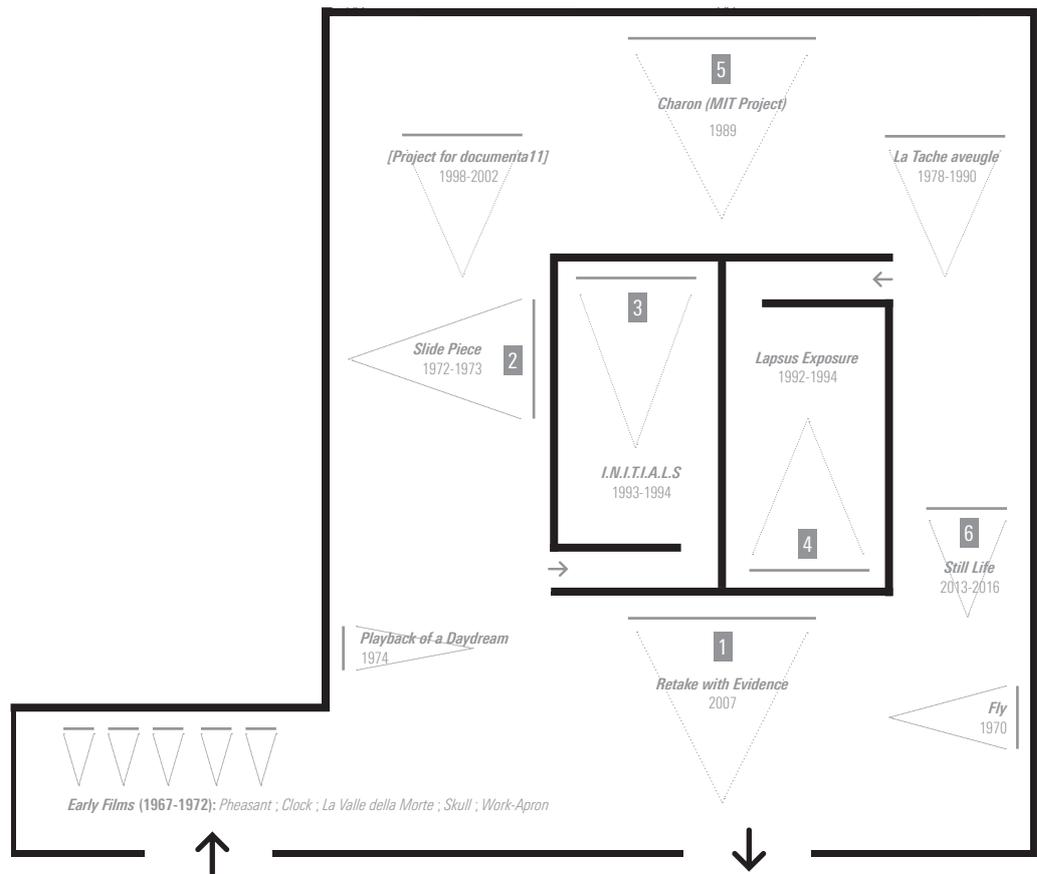
This "projected work" constitutes the first incidence of the sound projection device invented by James Coleman, which he has largely utilised ever since. Here the slides change but the image remains implacably the same: a grey and lifeless square in early 1970s Milan. Each new slide is accompanied by a new description of the image, spoken by a male voice, based on a particular detail. Written in three distinct languages by writers at Coleman's request, these commentaries are interpreted and read by their translators in accordance with the artist's instructions. Subjected to these multiple readings, the image seems to be renewed by the successive interpretations given of it. As stressed by art historian Benjamin Buchloh, *Slide Piece* highlights how "perceived objects are inconceivable independently of the spectator's linguistic activation and consciousness". Breaking with the minimalist heritage and attached to the autonomy of the visual as opposed to all forms of interpretation, Coleman integrates language into how the images function.

Projected 35mm slides, in colour, synchronised with audio narration
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman

The exhibition layout

Gallery 3



Highlight on six pieces

1 – *Retake with Evidence*
2007

2 – *Slide Piece*
1972-1973

3 – *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S*
1993-1994

4 – *Lapsus Exposure*
1992-1994

5 – *Charon (MIT Project)*
1989

6 – *Still Life*
2013-2016

Images in question

Some fundamental principles of James Coleman's work

James Coleman abandoned painting in the early 1970s to devote himself to exploring photomechanical mediums – photography, film and video – and electroacoustics. Working at the intersection between disciplines, he applies a radical deconstruction of how images function, bringing to bear a methodology that testifies to his interest in minimal and conceptual art. Rigorous and subtle, Coleman confronts spectators with slides capable of provoking a conscious awareness of the processes specific to cognition, particularly insofar as they relate to time, space and memory.



Projected Images

Projection is the reference medium in most of James Coleman's works. Although when he started – in *Early Films* (about 1970), *Fly* (1972), *Pump* (1972) and *Playback of a Daydream* (1974) – Coleman used film rolls, he quickly distinguished himself with the sound-synchronised "projected images" device that he developed and perfected over the course of different pieces – *Slide Piece* (1972-1973), *Background* (1991-1994), *Lapsus Exposure* (1992-1994), *Charon (MIT Project)* (1989) and *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S* (1994). Applying extreme simplicity, these installations openly integrate the projection device, which is rendered visible and audible. In *Still Life*, Coleman adopts digital technologies to bring to life imperceptibly a poppy plant whose biological life is evoked in a presentation in cinematographic format. But projection in the psychological sense also runs through Coleman's work: many of his pieces draw attention to the spectators' propensity to "see" in accordance with their own horizon of expectation.



3 I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S 1993-1994

I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S is emblematic of James Coleman's "projected image" presentations, depriving spectators of the illusion of the continuity of film and imposing a narration punctuated by the silence generated by the succession of slides. From image to image, the place and characters are transformed in unison: while the walls of the location are repainted, certain characters put on costumes and make-up, as if preparing to stage a play, while others remain in the grip of a primary level of fiction. The feeling of absence provoked by the piling up of old hospital beds is replaced by the ghostly presence of characters in search of substance. From the very beginning, William Butler Yeats' lines are recited with difficulty in the voiceover – "Dry bones that dream are bitter, / They dream and darken our sun." – referring to the impenetrability of the past in the present. The soundtrack then takes on the form of a collage of readymade expressions that seem to be borrowed from TV hospital series.

Images projected with a synchronised audio narration,
35mm slides, colour
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery
© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman



Narration and theatricality

Coleman uses the "projected images" device to present works where narrativity plays an essential role, breaking with the modernist rejection of the subject. Playing with arrested movement and a soundtrack that never correspond strictly to the images, he maintains a semantic complexity that forces spectators to refocus their attention. In many of his meticulously scripted installations – *Background*, *Lapsus Exposure* and *I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S* – the artist adopts theatrical representation processes, reminiscent in many respects of photographic novels, where the staging and lighting are attentively composed and the carefully costumed characters are frozen in elaborate but enigmatic poses. The soundtrack itself is designed in accordance with a meticulously established dramaturgy, with multiple silences, sighs, hesitations and stuttering. Transparent and cold, blending together several levels of fiction, these photographic compositions might remind us of 17th century English "conversation pieces", as Bernard Blistène, Director of the Musée national d'art moderne, stresses in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition.



4 *Lapsus Exposure* 1992-1994

At first sight *Lapsus Exposure*, which was exhibited at documenta 9 in 1992, presents a musical group gathered together to record a new album and to have their photographs taken in a recording and/or photographic studio, which immediately establishes itself as the main "subject" of the piece. The recording conditions and, more precisely, the disputed use of a voice in playback, lie at the heart of the discussions between the members of the group. The opposition between analog and digital is embodied in the intermittent appearance of a 1950s rock-and-roll band in the present of a representation where the characters have names derived from audio-visual terms (e.g. Vox, Midi, Seiko). As demonstrated by art historian Kaja Silverman, this ambiguous coexistence of disjointed temporalities seems to signal the ineluctable participation of the past in the present, precisely in the manner of a playback i.e. a copy.

Projected images accompanied by a synchronised audio narration,
35mm slides, colour

Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman





Where disciplines intersect

Playing with the porosities between film and photography, fixed images and moving images, James Coleman's works are distinguished by their unique pacing of time. His *Early Films*, particularly *Clock* and *Pheasant*, underscore the instability of the analog signifier while highlighting the paradoxes of moving images. The discontinuity of the projection in "projected images" presentations substitutes the "ghostlike" past of photography for the present of film. Photography lies at the heart of Coleman's preoccupations, as in *Charon (MIT Project)* which, over the course of several chapters, poses different enigmas concerning the role of the photographer as author and subject in the image.

5 *Charon (MIT Project)* 1989

Charon (MIT Project) is a synthetic work produced during a residency at the MIT List Visual Arts Center in Boston. It consists of fourteen short narratives in the course of which different voices interrogate, in the manner of an enigma or a paradox, the role of photographic images. Each episode begins with a description of an image and the circumstances surrounding its production. In the course of the chapters, various pertinent uses of photography are dealt with – reportage, investigation, fashion and advertising – with a precise and methodological appropriation of the clichés of the genre. For art historian Rosalind Krauss, *Charon* constitutes James Coleman's most "reflexive" work: it presents an "allegory of the paradoxical condition of the photographer's/author's simultaneous alienation from and absorption in their [own] medium".

Projected image accompanied by a synchronised audio narration,
35mm slides, colour
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery
© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman



The mechanisms of cognition

James Coleman's works put spectators' own cognitive activity to the test. *Connemara Landscape* tests their propensity to recognise forms in an abstract image that is nevertheless provided with an evocative title, while *Playback of a Daydream* replays the famous image of the rabbit-duck through the moving image. *Slide Piece* reveals how cognitive activity is linked to language by replaying the same image accompanied by different descriptions. Finally, *Still Life* leaves us in doubt concerning the motion that brings its only subject to life: a monumental and hypnotic poppy flower.

6 *Still Life* 2013-2016

Attentive to the effects of translation, here James Coleman explores the discrepancy between "still life" and "*nature morte*" (dead nature), its French equivalent. A far cry from the domestic format specific to this, one of the most traditional forms of western painting, he presents in dimensions worthy of an historical painting, a vertical poppy plant with almost-imperceptible movements represented in the manner of a botanical illustration. Coleman thus gives the lie to the expression "still life", or "*nature morte*". Photographed in the botanical gardens after the poppy was temporarily removed from the soil, the image was animated in post-production in the manner of an ultra-thin, leading spectators to wonder about the nature – real or imaginary – of the movements they think they discern. *Still Life* is Coleman's latest work in the exhibition. Nearly forty years after the "duck-rabbit" of *Playback of a Daydream*, it stands as a testimony to the ongoing nature of his exploration of the mechanisms of cognition.

Digital projection; colour, silent
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery
© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman

List of works exhibited

Early films (1967-1972)

***Pheasant*, 1960**
Super 8 film transferred to 16mm, colour, silent

***Clock*, 1970**
Super 8 film transferred to 16mm, colour, silent

***La Valle della Morte*, about 1970**
Super 8 film transferred to 16mm, black and white, silent

***Skull*, around 1970**
Super 8 film transferred to 16mm, colour, silent

***Work-Apron*, around 1970**
Super 8 film transferred to 16mm, colour, silent

***Fly*, 1970**
16mm silent film, 46'25», in black and white, projection loop

***Playback of a Daydream*, 1974**
Super 8 film transferred to 16mm, black and white, silent

***Connemara Landscape*, 1980**
Projected image, 35mm slide, black and white

***[Projet for documenta11]*, 1998-2002**
Continuous video installation, black and white, silent

***La Tache aveugle*, 1978-1990**
Digital projection, colour, silent

***Still Life*, 2013-2016**
Projection numérique, couleur, silencieuse

***Slide Piece*, 1972-1973**
35mm slides projected in colour, synchronised with audio narration

***Charon (MIT Project)*, 1989**
Projected image accompanied by a synchronised audio narration, 35mm slides, colour

***Lapsus Exposure*, 1992-1994**
Projected images accompanied by a synchronised audio narration, 35mm slides, colour

***I.N.I.T.I.A.L.S.*, 1993-1994**
Projected images accompanied by a synchronised audio narration, 35mm slides, colour

***Retake with Evidence*, 2007**
Video projection featuring: Harvey Keitel Film 35mm in 4:3, digitised in HD video

***So Different... and Yet*, 1978-1980**
Video installation, featuring: Olwen Fouéré and Roger Doyle

***So Different... and Yet*
1978-1980**

Donated by James Coleman,
Exhibited on level 4 of the Musée national d'art moderne,
chiming with the exhibition, room 31

Video installation, featuring: Olwen Fouéré and Roger Doyle
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery
© James Coleman / Photo © James Coleman



Biography

1941 Born in Ireland
Lives and works in Dublin and Paris.

Selected solo exhibitions

- | | | | |
|---------|---|------|--|
| 2019 | "James Coleman: Lapsus Exposure",
MUMOK Vienna | 1989 | List Visual Arts Center, Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts ;
ARC / Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris |
| 2017 | Marian Goodman Gallery, New York | 1986 | Institute of Contemporary Art, London, |
| 2016 | Marian Goodman Gallery, London | 1985 | Renaissance Society, University of Chicago, Chicago ;
Dunguaire Castle, Kinvara, Irelande |
| 2012 | "James Coleman", Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid | 1983 | Auditorio da Arquitectura, Esbal, Lisbon ;
Teatro Estudio Citac, Coimbra, Portugal |
| 2011 | "James Coleman", Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin | 1982 | Ulster Museum, Belfast, Northern Ireland
"Ignotium per Ignotius, (a work for theater)",
De Lantaren, Rotterdam ; Théâtre Shaffy, Amsterdam ;
Théâtre Concordia, Enschede ; De Toneelschuur,
Haarlem ; Théâtre Witte, Ijmuiden, The Netherlands |
| 2009 | "James Coleman", Irish Museum of Modern Art
(IMMA), Dublin ; Project Arts Center, Dublin, | 1981 | Franklin Furnace, New York
Project Arts Center, Dublin |
| 2008 | "James Coleman", Compton Verney House Trust,
Compton Verney, Warwickshire, United-Kingdom ;
"James Coleman: Background", 1991-94,
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin | | |
| 2007 | "James Coleman", Irish Museum of Modern Art
(IMMA), Dublin | | |
| 2006 | Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris ;
"James Coleman", Irish Museum of Modern Art
(IMMA), Dublin | | |
| 2004-05 | "James Coleman", Museu do Chiado, Lisbon | | |
| 2003 | "James Coleman: Project for pour <i>Léonard de Vinci :
dessins et manuscrit</i> ", Musée du Louvre, Paris | | |
| 2002 | "James Coleman", Kunstbau Lenbachhaus, Munich,
"James Coleman. Drei Filmarbeiten", Sprengel
Museum, Hanovre | | |
| 2001 | Neues Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne | | |
| 2000 | Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris ;
Marian Goodman Gallery, New York | | |
| 1999 | Fundació Antoni Tapies, Barcelona ;
Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels | | |
| 1997 | Wiener Secession, Vienna | | |
| 1996 | Centre Pompidou, Paris | | |
| 1995 | Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne | | |
| 1994-95 | Dia Center for the Arts, New York | | |
| 1991 | Marian Goodman Gallery, New York | | |
| 1990 | Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lyon ;
The Art Gallery of York University, Toronto | | |
| 1989-90 | Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven | | |



Publication

James Coleman



Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue in French consisting of original essays by Bernard Blistène, Benjamin Buchloch and Nicolas Liucci-Goutnikov, along with an anthology of texts by Raymond Bellour, Benjamin Buchloch, Lynn Cooke, Georges Didi-Huberman, Jean Fisher, Rosalind Krauss, Jacques Rancière and Kaja Silverman.

James Coleman

Under the supervision of Nicolas Liucci-Goutnikov
Les Éditions du Centre Pompidou

French

23 x 27 cm

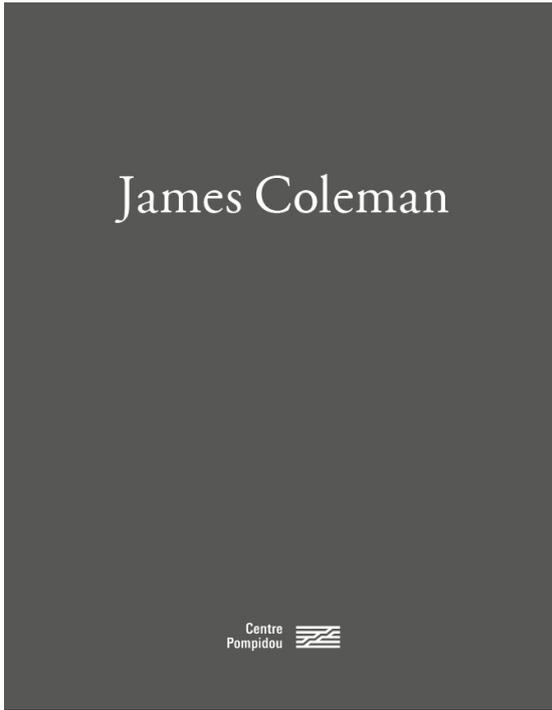
224 pages

Hardback

€35

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Practical information

The exhibition

James Coleman

9 June – 23 August 2021
Gallery 3, Level 1

Curator

Nicolas Liucci-Goutnikov

Curator, Head of Department at the Bibliothèque Kandinsky,
Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris
Assisted by **Thomas Bertail**, coordination and research manager,
Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Musée national d'art moderne,
Centre Pompidou, Paris

Press Images

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Press opening

Date to be confirmed

In the presence of the artist (to be confirmed)
Guided visit led by the curator

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Opening hours and ticketing

During the renovation works, the entrance is on rue Beaubourg,
Saint-Merri street side.

Open daily from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m., Thursday until 11 p.m.,
except Tuesday and May 1st.

The government's health recommendations (wearing a mask compulsory from
11 years old, physical distancing) apply in all areas of the Centre Pompidou.
They are subject to change.

The Centre Pompidou does everything in its power to ensure the safety
of both its audiences and its staff.

Reservations and ticket printable at home on:

www.billetterie.centrepompidou.fr

The reservation of a time slot applies to all visitors except those benefiting
from free admission.

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