

CHARLESTON

LANGLANDS & BELL AT CHARLESTON

2 April – 29 August 2022

Langlands & Bell present a season of art and ideas in three parts, opening at Charleston in April 2022.

Langlands & Bell: Ideas of Utopia is a solo exhibition spotlighting over 40 years of work by the BAFTA award-winning and Turner Prize-shortlisted artist duo.

Absent Artists, curated by Langlands & Bell, will consider the importance of artists' studios, the relationship between the artist and their studio, and the traces of creativity left once the artist has gone.

The artists are also creating a landmark moment for Charleston with a contemporary artwork titled, *Near Heaven*. This will be the first time a new commission has been installed in the house since it opened to the public.

Langlands & Bell: Ideas of Utopia (Wolfson Gallery)

Artists Ben Langlands and Nikki Bell's creative partnership began in 1978 while they were at Hornsey College of Art in London. Central to the artists' work is an interrogation of the role of architecture and design in imagining and shaping our lives.

Langlands & Bell: Ideas of Utopia presents 11 artworks from throughout Langlands & Bell's 40-year career. The works examine attempts – knowingly and unknowingly – to create utopias, whether domestic, religious, social or commercial. Langlands & Bell are interested by Charleston's history as a haven for counterculture, modernism and collaboration. The exhibition contextualises Charleston as an important place of early modernist social experimentation and a place where life could be lived differently.

Langlands & Bell say: *'We're looking at ideas of utopia through architecture, and of course Charleston has a history of criticizing the status quo, testing ideas for bringing a new world into being, offering new ways of working and living together and new ways of thinking about the world. Charleston's history is one of transforming life through art.'*

Using film, interactive digital media, sculpture, and installations, Langlands & Bell explore the complex web of relationships linking people through architecture and domestic spaces, as well as the systems of communication that connect us. Artworks in the exhibition are drawn from public and private collections across the UK, and the artists' own archive.

Langlands & Bell: Ideas of Utopia includes a film and remnants from the first work, now lost, that the artists made collaboratively, *The Kitchen* (1978), through to more recent work examining the iconic new headquarters of global tech giants – including *Apple, Sunny Vale* (2017), *Alibaba, Hangzhou* (2018) and *Facebook, Menlo Park* (2017).

Charleston, Firle, Lewes
East Sussex BN8 6LL
+44(0)1323 811 626

info@charleston.org.uk
charleston.org.uk
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Reflecting on architecture and built spaces, the works in *Langlands & Bell: Ideas of Utopia* consider why these spaces were initially conceived and envisaged, as well as how the finished buildings are used.

Langlands & Bell say: 'All of our work is really about human relationships, from the very intimate and personal, to wider social, political and cultural relationships. Architecture is so universal, so ubiquitous, so tangible, that it's a very good vehicle for exploring and discovering ourselves as people.'

Traces of Living (1986), is a sculptural installation featuring a white table and chairs incorporating museum-like glass cases. The cases display architectural models made by the artists, together with objects found in the streets of Whitechapel around their London home including a hand-carved Bengali rolling pin, a plate wrapped in Hebrew text, a baby bird, a shrivelled cauliflower, and a dead rat inside a loaf of bread.

Ivrea (1991), a wall hanging relief sculpture in 10 parts, is on loan from Tate. It references the town in northern Italy where the company Olivetti is based. Founded as a typewriter manufacturer in 1908, Olivetti was noted for the attention it paid to the design not only of its products but also of the factories, homes and other facilities used by its employees. The ten ground plans featured in *Ivrea* correspond to buildings, many now defunct and unused, commissioned by Olivetti from the 1930s onwards in its effort to provide an environment in which its workers could be happy and productive with all their needs provided for.

A similar idea is projected in the works *Apple, Sunny Vale* (2017); *Alibaba, Hangzhou* (2018) and *Facebook, Menlo Park* (2017) that form part of a series called *Internet Giants* (2018). The works are wall hanging relief sculptures. Langlands & Bell construct each model by hand, layering up card and foam-board to form two-and-a-half dimensional reliefs. From start-ups in garages to now employing thousands in huge iconic buildings and campuses designed by 'starchitects', the series puts the mega-architecture projects of these internet giants into focus and considers the psychological effect they have on us.

Absent Artists (South Gallery)

What do the rooms we inhabit say about us? Can they speak on our behalf after we've gone? And what happens when these private worlds are publicly displayed?

Curated by Langlands & Bell, *Absent Artists* at Charleston explores studios in which the artists themselves are conspicuously absent. The exhibition of nearly 60 artworks includes paintings, drawings, prints and photographs by leading artists, such as Annie Leibovitz, David Hockney, Jim Dine, Michael Craig-Martin, William Hogarth, Jasper Johns and James Ensor.

Absent Artists also draws parallels with Charleston itself, which was a private home and creative space for Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and their many artist and writer friends who formed part of the Bloomsbury group. Today it still brings people together to enjoy and engage with art and ideas and, in the absence of its modernist residents, also invites the public to imagine what life was like at Charleston 100 years ago.

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The works are predominantly drawn from the Katrin Bellinger Collection which focuses on the theme of ‘the artist at work.’ Visitors will be able to immerse themselves in the artistic process and the mystique surrounding it. From the cluttered to the ordered, David Hockney’s small desk strewn with coloured pencils (*Two Lemons and Four Limes*, 1971) to Georgia O’Keeffe’s colour-coded box of pastels, as photographed by Annie Leibovitz (2010), the works reveal intimate details of individual artists through their materials and the spaces in which they live and work.

The exhibition also gives a fascinating glimpse into artists’ uses of props. Érik Desmazières’ 2007 evocation of *Rembrandts Kunst Caemer* is filled with all manner of curious objects, from marble busts to a stuffed crocodile, arms and armour to a turtle shell. A 19th century photograph of a studio wall animated by a collection of plaster casts of arms and hands reminds us of the importance of such reference material to artists. Images of studios and workshops transport us into the private spaces in which great art is created and where their creators live and work simultaneously. A sense of the lived interior is conveyed, for example, by David Dawson’s 2002 photograph of Lucian Freud’s studio, where Dawson’s whippet Eli poses on a well-worn armchair, next to the unmade bed on which a model has been posing. Even when the artist himself is not to be seen, the studio is far from empty.

Absent Artists also features *The Artist’s Studio* (2002), an early interactive digital artwork by Langlands & Bell, which links J.M.W Turner’s studio at Petworth House in West Sussex, with the artists’ own studio in Whitechapel, London.

Langlands & Bell say: *Seeing the context, you begin to understand how they made what they did, what inspired them and how they transformed what they saw to make art.*

Collector Katrin Bellinger says: *I like to buy into the illusion that the artist could step in at any minute. You are in their space with the paint tubes and brushes left as if they were just about to be picked up again. It gets my imagination spinning, triggered by the clues the artist left behind.*

New Langlands & Bell commission: *Near Heaven*

A new work by artists Langlands & Bell will be installed in Vanessa Bell’s attic studio at Charleston, a space overlooking the garden, which is usually closed to visitors.

It’s 61 years since Vanessa Bell last stepped foot in her attic studio. The presence of stains on the windowsill left from paint pots and jars, marks on the walls, and colourful patterns painted on to the doors and doorframes are the only clues left behind by an artist at work. But it is a space where the Sussex sky and Charleston’s garden are still as alive and inspirational today as they were for Bell over half a century ago.

Visitors are invited to ascend the stairs to the attic and reflect on and contemplate the artist’s creative experience – a place separate from the rest of the house that Vanessa Bell could retreat to.

The title of Langlands & Bell’s commission is drawn from a quote by Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant’s daughter Angelica Garnett talking about the importance of

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this attic space to her mother. The free-to-visit installation will explore traces of the absent artist and consider the studio as a place of contemplation, creation, and as a personal haven.

Nathaniel Hepburn, Chief Executive of Charleston says: *We are delighted to be working with Langlands & Bell on a new commission and a series of important exhibitions. Although at first glance Langlands & Bell's work might seem aesthetically as far away from the painted interiors of Charleston as can be, the artists' intellectual engagement with Charleston reveals important stories within the DNA of the house. This programme of exhibitions and commissions reveals that ideas of utopia and modernist conversations made Charleston into a workshop for art and ideas. We are really grateful to Langlands & Bell for their thoughtful work, and are also excited to introduce visitors to Vanessa Bell's attic studio and Katrin Bellinger's phenomenal collection.*

These exhibitions will be accompanied by the publication of Charleston Press #6, containing interviews with the artists, collector Katrin Bellinger, curator Anita Sganzerla, and architect Annabelle Selldorf, with a text by architectural historian and curator, Jeremy Melvin.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

Charleston is a place that brings people together to engage with art and ideas. The modernist home and studio of the painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, Charleston was a gathering point for some of the 20th century's most radical artists, writers and thinkers known collectively as the Bloomsbury group. It is where they came together to imagine society differently and has always been a place where art and experimental thinking are at the centre of everyday life. Today, we present a dynamic year-round programme of exhibitions, events and festivals. We believe in the power of art, in all its forms, to provoke new ways of thinking and living.

[A SELECTION OF HIGH-RESOLUTION IMAGES FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES

Tracy Jones, Brera PR – tracy@brera-london.com / 01702 216658 / 07887 514984 / www.brera-london.com

Charleston, Firle, Lewes
East Sussex BN8 6LL
+44(0)1323 811 626

info@charleston.org.uk
charleston.org.uk
[@CharlestonTrust](https://www.instagram.com/CharlestonTrust)

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Charleston, Firle, Lewes, East Sussex BN8 6LL
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