

# RYAN GANDER

LONDON, UK



*Visiting a studio when the artist is not there means finding out how conceptualism and imaginative storytelling meet the ability to run a staff and manage an internationally acclaimed career—with the aid of a black panel, A4 sheets and pins.*

words by LUCA CERIZZA

There is a very simple reason why we call this series of studio visits “mapping the studio.” This regular feature does not set out to analyze an artist’s work, but rather to recount the modes of his or her production and the relationship between the work and the place in which it is conceived or produced. Obviously, we normally talk about a studio with an artist in it. This time, however, we have the studio without the artist.

After days of work at the Frieze art fair, Gander collapsed from exhaustion. One of three special projects commissioned by the fair for the Cartier Award, Gander’s contribution consisted in taking photographic portraits every day of visitors as they looked at work on display among the stands. To carry out this project, Gander had to set up a small office and shift part of his studio to the fair. Here, Alli (the studio manager), Joseph (the photographer) and other occasional collaborators worked under the careful supervision of Gander, who has an extraordinarily lively imagination but is also an excellent manager.

In short, the day after the end of the fair, I arrive at Stanway Street in the district of Hoxton, just north of the area in which several famous private galleries are located. A tall brick and concrete

## ARTIST'S BIO

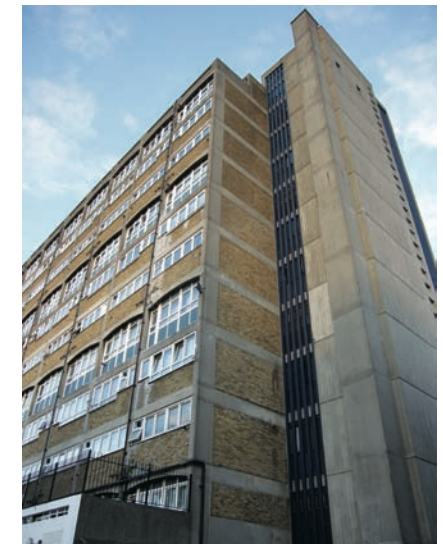
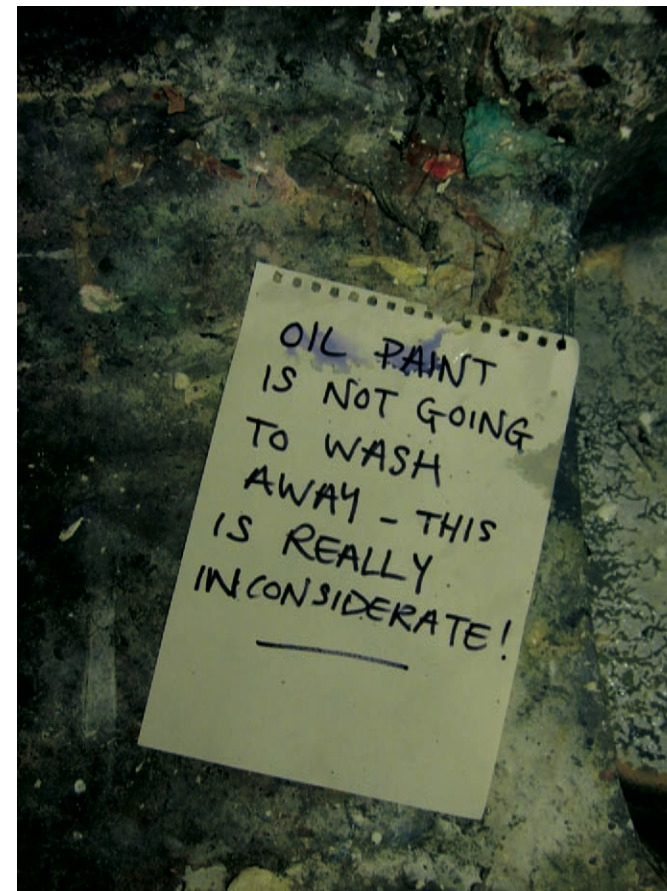
RYAN GANDER (b.1976) was born in Chester, UK, and lives and works in London. He studied at the Manchester Metropolitan University, at Jan van Eyck Akademie (Maastricht) and at Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten (Amsterdam). Recent solo exhibitions include Villa Arson (Nice), Kadist Foundation (Paris), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (Rotterdam), Ikon Gallery (Birmingham), South London Gallery (London), CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts (San Francisco), MUMOK (Vienna) and Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam).

All photos: Luca Cerizza

building houses the Sara Lane Studios, where Gander’s small studio can be found. This austere highrise, probably dating from the 1960s, reminds me of an old work of his. *The Boy Who Always Looked Up* (2004) is a short story written by the artist and illustrated by Sara De Bondt. It tells of the troubled relationship between the boy, Tom, and the place where he lives: the famous Trellick Tower, built in 1972, an iconic modernist highrise in London which has just been inaugurated in the story. The relationship between Tom and Ernö Goldfinger, the architect of this building (or rather “the archi-what?” as Tom calls him at the beginning of the book), makes *The Boy* an exquisite moral fable in a style reminiscent of Jacques Tati: an apologia on the limitations of modernist philosophy and the possibilities of the imagination, viewed from the perspective of a child, or someone who is always obliged to look at the world from a bit lower down.

When I pass through the corridor that leads to the small studio, I find Joseph waiting to tell me that Ryan is sick and can’t come. Looking around a house in the absence of its owner is always a curious experience. And a studio without its artist is a completely new one, though it is full of interesting aspects, especially if you have known the artist and his work for a few years and have wondered how the process of production functions with someone like Gander, whose innumerable ideas are translated into many works of different forms and in whom the manual contribution seems wholly absent. Gander works in the long tradition of conceptual art, which favors ideas over forms, or rather the coherence of ideas over the coherence of forms. If Sol LeWitt said that ideas in themselves can be works of art, Gander finds an objectification for each of his ideas as part of a particularly elaborate language that includes heteronyms and palindromes. Indeed Gander’s work is foremost a language, where each of his creations is like the letter of an alphabet. The object is the repository and the vehicle of this astonishing tongue is filled with traps, paradoxes, parallels, references and allusions. Gander is above all a “writer” of stories that are, in their turn, well aware of their mechanisms and their structures.

To satisfy my curiosity about how this language takes shape, I decide the best thing to do would be to talk to Alli, Joseph and Felix. Alli is the young woman whom Gander introduced me to at the fair. She handles the organization of production, the archive of the works, relations with the galleries, the finances and administration. Joseph is the young man



who went around the stands of the fair with a camera asking if he could take your picture while you looked at a work. Felix is the young man with almost clean-shaven blond hair that you see on the cover of *Heralded as the New Black*, the catalogue that was published on the occasion of a traveling exhibition of Gander's work staged in Birmingham, London and Rotterdam between 2008 and 2009. On the front and the back of the catalogue you will find photographs of Felix in the studio as part of the work *Felix Provides a Stage* (2008), absent-mindedly holding a black panel and thus giving visibility to sheets of paper suspended from the ceiling as though they are flying around the room. Metaphorically, those white sheets might represent the multitude of ideas and projects that come out of Gander's head, remaining suspended in the air until they find the most appropriate form.

On the back wall of the studio, I find one possible answer to my question about how all this occurs: pinned onto a large black panel are about thirty A4 sheets indicating the projects on which Gander and his collaborators are working. Each sheet provides a detailed description of the project, its deadline, the destination of the work, a reference image and a list of the things that still have to be done to finish the production. A cross made with a green felt-tip pen marks the completed projects.

Alli says that Gander's ideas can end up lying around for a while and that she and Felix always try to realize them in the way Gander had imagined (but that sometimes these ideas change form and turn into something else). Felix says that, on a more practical level, he is the one who turns the various requests discussed with Gander into reality, finding the technicians and craftsmen needed to fulfill them (hardly anything is produced in the studio). Joseph says that he is taking pictures of a work that has just been produced to show it to Gander and find out if it "works" (who knows if it has?).

At the end, as I look curiously at objects and notes scattered like small clues on Gander's table and desk, I'm almost certain that today, even without its mastermind, the small factory of ideas on Stanway Street will continue to produce new forms for new stories.



**CURRENT & FORTHCOMING**  
 Ryan Gander has recently been awarded the prestigious Zurich Art Prize and in 2010, as part of the prize, his work will be presented at the Haus Konstruktiv (Zurich). The exhibition will be accompanied by a new extensive monographic publication. His first solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery will open in May 2010. At the moment, his work is on view at Villa Arson (Nice) in the exhibition "Double Bind" and at MACBa (Barcelona) in the exhibition "The Malady of Writing."

**AUTHOR**  
 LUCA CERIZZA is *Kaleidoscope* Berlin editor. A curator, writer and art historian currently based in Berlin, he attended the De Appel Curatorial Training Programme (1997-98). Among the shows he curated are "Clues" (Montevideo, Amsterdam, 1999), "Strategies against Architecture II" (Fondazione Tesesco, 2001), "Banana" (Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, 2003), "On Air" (Galleria Pinksummer, Genova, 2004). He co-curated the work-shop, exhibition and publication of Yona Friedman at Fondazione Ratti (Como, 2008). He is author of several texts, essays, articles and interviews and editor of a number of publications, including monographs on John Armleder, Robert Barry, Massimo Bartolini, Daniel Buren, Liam Gillick and Daniel Roth. His book, *Alighiero e Boetti: Mappa*, has been published by Afterall (London, 2008) and Electa (Milan, 2009). He is a regular contributor to *Frieze*, teaches at NABA academy, Milan and is curator of BSI Art Collection, Lugano.

