

# INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

PRESS RELEASE

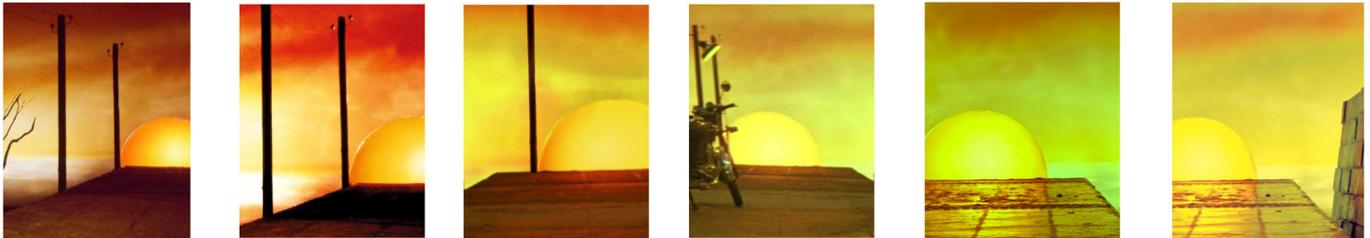
Gray Wielebinski: *The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low*

Wednesday 20 September – Saturday 23 December 2023

Press View: Tuesday 19 September 2023

Exhibition Preview: Tuesday 19 September 2023

From September 2023, ICA London presents the first solo institutional exhibition of cross-disciplinary artist Gray Wielebinski (b. 1991 Dallas, TX, USA; based in London and L.A.). The exhibition will feature all new site-specific work across painting, sculpture, installation and sound addressing the complex state of individual agency today, specifically, anxieties underpinning apocalypticism, simulation and the systems that mediate our behaviour.



Gray Wielebinski, *The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low*, 2023. Installation rendering, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Featuring altered images of video stills from *Querelle*, dir. Rainer Fassbinder, 1982.

Expanding Wielebinski's exploration of the boundaries of private and public spaces, with references spanning sci-fi, Cold War legacies and games, the exhibition transforms the ICA into an investigation of constructed worlds within worlds. In doing so, Wielebinski responds to the ICA neighbours on The Mall: Buckingham Palace, St. James's Park, and the Admiralty Citadel.

The exhibition's title, *The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low*, is taken from a 1978 essay by science fiction writer and critic Samuel R. Delany.<sup>1</sup> Delany uses the sentence as an example of the corrective and revisionary process of reading science fiction, in which 'each new word revises the complex picture we had a moment before.' The title functions as a fitting analogy for Wielebinski's installation environment in which overlapping worlds feel both familiar and strange. The ICA's Lower Gallery and Reading Room will contain various sculptural and readymade objects, paintings, audio and architectural elements, each of which solicits — through direct interaction or quiet imposition — our individual responses and our collective behaviour.

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Samuel R. Delany, *About 5,750 Words*. *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw: Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*. 1978. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009. 1–15.

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Continuing the artist's interest in sports iconography and the vernaculars of a waning American empire, a large electronic basketball scoreboard presides over the space. Its menacing and playful presence signals to visitors their unknown role in some mysterious, surely unwinnable, game. Circular seating, part 1970s conversation pit, part war room, likewise inveigles our physical participation. The motif of the sun appears in multiple and sequential instances, mapping a collapse of temporalities. We are suspended between a past, present and future in which the sun is a symbol of both apocalypse (nuclear or environmental, you pick) and a glorious life force. A sense of looming threat is pervasive, but we can't know if it is simulation, false alarm or even a joke. Comfort and cruelty, humour and doom, surveillance and spectatorship weave through the work in such a way that contradiction becomes obsolete.

The main gallery space is set in relation to the ICA's smaller reading room, here transformed by Wielebinski into an absurdist bunker, a physical embodiment of the mindset of a doomsday prepper. This dark, quiet space stands in stark contrast to the light-filled gallery, which is visible to those who place their eye on the aperture of a telescoping peephole connecting the two spaces. In its privacy, surveillance, and exclusivity, the bunker also speaks the language of illicit spaces—another kind of world within a world — where separating oneself leads towards community formation rather than isolation. We are asked to recognise those worlds we solicit and those that are thrust upon us, parsing our agency in the process.

Wielebinski's commission could be viewed as a processing of terminal capitalism and the omnipresence of a collective low-grade anxiety. In the wake of a pandemic that forced the tilling of our social ground, exposing our governing systems and conventions to scrutiny they could not withstand, this exhibition imagines how we might position our individual and public selves anew. And with it comes an unexpected playfulness and optimism, the ineffable condition of living in a time in which apocalyptic precarity feels realistic and maybe also revelatory.

*The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low* will be accompanied by a full event programme and small publication. The artist and new collaborators will activate the space throughout the run of the exhibition. In conjunction with *The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low* Wielebinski will take over the Selfridges' Orchard Street Windows from September to November 2023. Further, the new commission *Exhibition* by Wielebinski is currently on display at the Selfridges Art Block. Details will be announced later in the summer.

— ENDS —

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

*The Red Sun is High, the Blue Low* is supported by the Gray Wielebinski Exhibition Supporters Circle.

Gray Wielebinski

Gray Wielebinski (b. 1991 Dallas, TX, USA) received a BA from Pomona College, Claremont CA, USA in 2014 before completing an MFA from the Slade School of Fine Art, London, UK in 2018.

Recent exhibitions include group shows at Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London, UK; Francois Ghebaly, Los Angeles, CA; Bold Tendencies, London, UK; and V.O Curations, London, UK. Recent solo exhibitions include *Love and Theft*, 12.26 Gallery in Los Angeles, CA; *Oil and Water*, Hales Gallery in London; and *Two Snakes*, 12.26 Gallery in Dallas, Texas (2020). Recent residencies include V.O Curations, City and Guilds in London in 2021 and 2019 respectively and at the Academy of Visual Arts in Hong Kong in 2018. His first book "100 Baseball Cards" was published with Baron Books in 2022. Wielebinski's work is in the collections of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA, USA and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Library & Archives, CA, USA.

The Institute of Contemporary Arts

The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is London's leading space for contemporary culture. We commission, produce and present new work in film, music, performance and the visual arts by today's most progressive artists. In our landmark home on The Mall in central London, we invite artists and audiences to interrogate what it means to live in our world today, with a genre-fluid programme that challenges the past, questions the present and confronts the future. The cross-disciplinary programme encourages these art forms and others to pollinate in new combinations and collaborations. We stage club nights and film festivals, gigs and exhibitions, talks and digital art—with interplay and interaction at the core of all we do. Our history of presenting and promoting visionary new art is unrivalled in London: from Kenneth Anger to Kathy Acker, Kano to Klein, Jackson Pollock to Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gay Sweatshop to Forensic Architecture, Pop Art to queer techno. Today, as ever, our inclusive programme reflects and represents who we are as a disparate and diverse collection of cultures and identities.

Exactly 75 years after a group of artists and poets founded the ICA as an alternative to the mainstream, we are committed more than ever to pave the way for the next generation and to platform creative voices. The ICA continues to celebrate risk and champion innovation, and experimentation across the arts – a playground and a home for today's most vital artists.

The ICA is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organization and supported by the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund.

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