

GALLERIA FUMAGALLI
MILANO

Wallpaper
6.2014
Ossian Ward



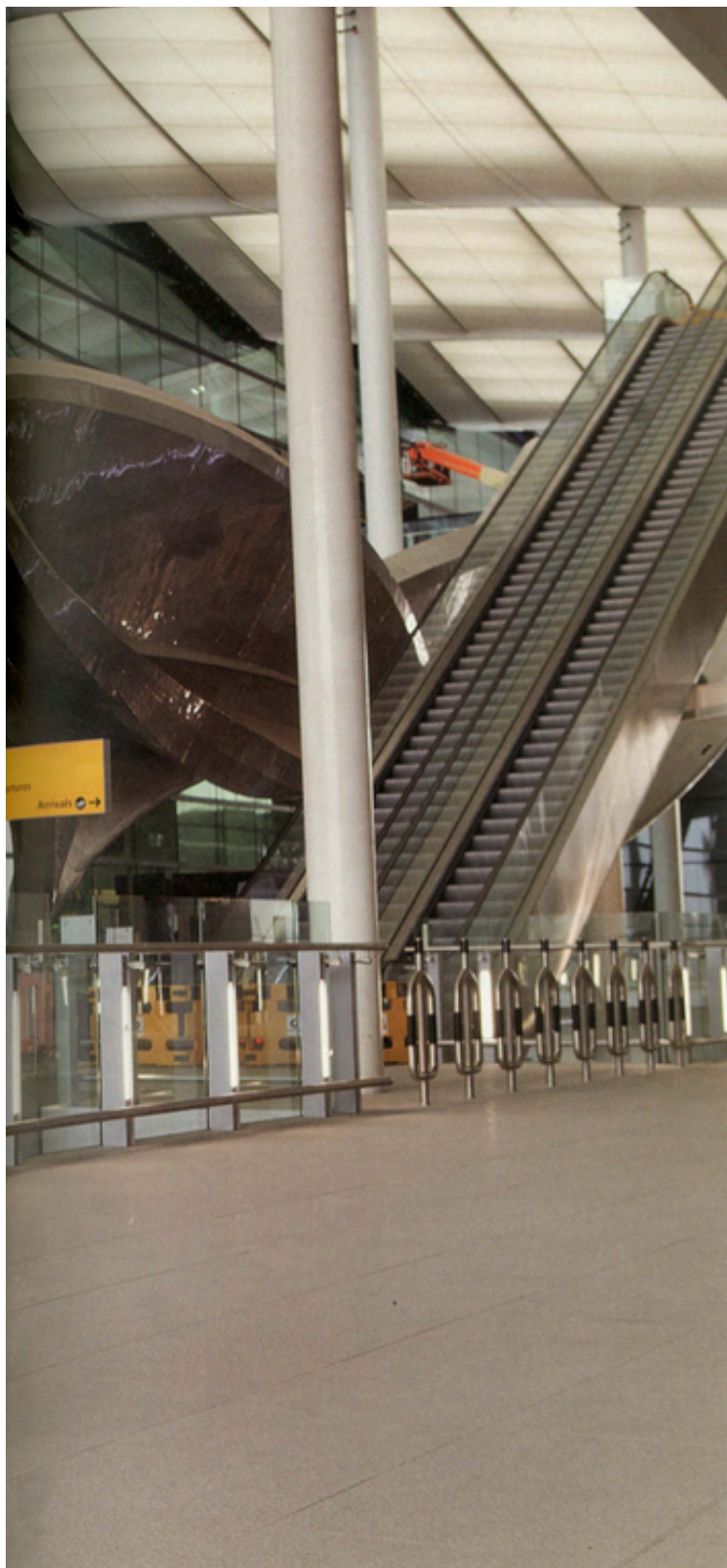
Via Bonaventura Cavalieri, 6
20121 Milano, Italia
+39 02 36799285



SCULPTOR RICHARD WILSON AT LONDON'S NEW HEATHROW TERMINAL 2, WHERE HIS 77-TONNE SCULPTURE SLIPSTREAM SHOWS THE PATH OF AN AIRCRAFT IN FLIGHT. THE TERMINAL IS SET TO OPEN IN JUNE

092 | Wallpaper*





FLIGHT PATH

Artist Richard Wilson's latest sculpture loops the loop at London's new airport hub

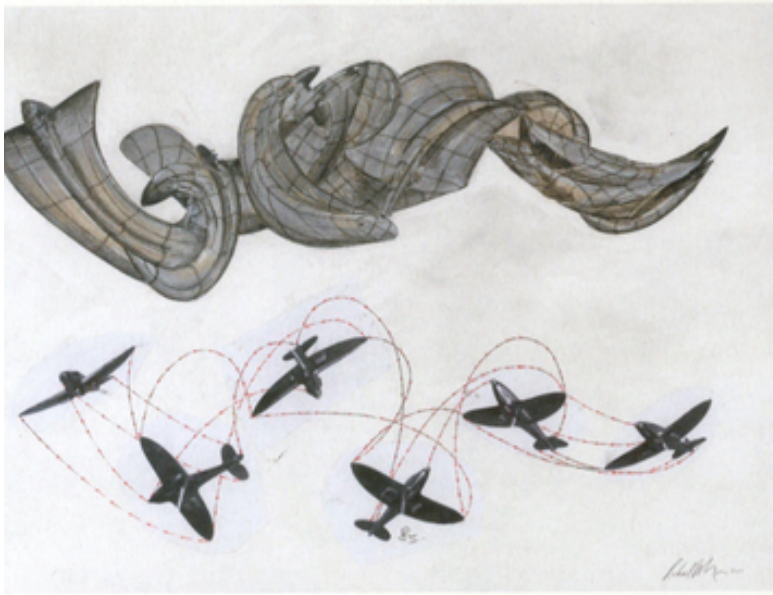
PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBI RODRIGUEZ
WRITER: OSSIAN WARD

'Richard, this is not a gallery' might be one of the most oft-repeated phrases in the life and career of serial despoiler of architecture and sculptural interventionist Richard Wilson. He has previously collapsed a caravan, disassembled a taxi, stacked up a series of shacks on top of one another and created a stairway to nowhere. More often than not, his works take place out in the open, perhaps because his vision tends towards the monumental in scale and ambition, but also because most museums and gallery spaces cannot contain him and so have stopped trying.

He once cored out sections of the architecture and took the windows clean out of the Serpentine Gallery, only to hang them back in the space itself (the show was titled 'Jamming Gears', 1996). He dug down through the concrete of Matt's Gallery to sink an entire billiard table below floor level, discovering a natural spring 4m below, that became *Waterable*, 1994. Perhaps his most famous work, for which he pumps an exhibition space waist-high with sump oil and invites viewers down a precarious channel into this gorgeously reflective black pool (known as 20:30 because of the ratios of recycled oil in the mixture), is still lurking darkly and smelling ominously in the basement of the Saatchi Gallery, more than 20 years since it was first conceived.

Having done all that and more to many of London's most esteemed exhibition venues, it was only a matter of time before Wilson started moving out of the art world into the urban fabric of the real world. Indeed, today I am stood not in an art institution, nor really inside, or even quite outside, a freshly constructed building. 'You've got to be aware of the breeze on your face as you come out of the lift,' says Wilson as we enter what is essentially a vast >>





covered court, with both ends open to the elements. 'It's like the Italian loggia isn't it? It's somewhere that's in-between.'

This is actually Heathrow's £2.2bn Terminal 2 refurbishment as it nears completion (it's due to open on 4 June), with Wilson's latest creation dangling spectacularly above us, over the walkways, escalators and various floors of arrivals and departures, linking the outside with the 'airside', as it's known once you cross customs and passport control. Snaking overhead in what will soon be a site of mass transit, ferrying some 20 million passengers around the world every year, is Wilson's *Slipstream*, an 80m-long, 77-tonne sculpture showing the path of an aircraft in flight. 'There's a sensation of velocity and speed – and a sense of the aerodynamic and the smoke trail and all of those things. You're aware that you've either just finished a journey, or you're about to embark on one,' says Wilson.

As it's very unlike Wilson to embark on anything by travelling mundanely from A to B – without first visiting Z, say, or at least entertaining the thoughts of G, H, I and (why not?) X – the trajectory of the life-size plane he plotted for this daring sculptural fly-through is not one of take-off and landing. Instead, the plane appears to tumble, dive, spin, yaw, pitch, roll and all those other aviation terms one might encounter on a flight simulator game.

'I didn't want it to fly like a plane would normally do, I wanted it to do cartwheels and things and move as a volume in space.' Wilson began by experimenting wildly, as is his wont, by putting a toy plane into a plastic ball ('the hamster ball', he calls it) and rolling it around the studio floor, then by making rotating 3D models and

taking pictures of them, before employing computer visualisations and eventually calling the engineers in. 'It has got to be secure, it's got to withstand all sorts of situations, you know, wind being one of them,' says Wilson, because after all, *Slipstream* is not only a contorting abstract sculpture, but also, in structural engineering terms, a bridge, supported only every 18m by the columns that hold up the roof of this new terminal, designed by Madrid-based architecture firm Luis Vidal + Architects.

You might have thought that, at the point when Wilson started playing around with tumbling aircraft, someone indeed might have turned to the artist and said, 'Richard, this is not a gallery.' In actual fact, he says, 'The commissioning body, BAA, or Heathrow as it is now, didn't see it as a plane out of control, but as a very choreographed and inviting form about velocity and motion that undulates as you move along it.'

'There aren't any bits flying off, or any jagged shards of metal. It isn't a fragmented form, or anything that an airport would worry about. It is accommodating and refers instead to the occasion of an air show and the dance that an aeroplane might do, even if it's ultimately impossible to achieve.'

Having said that, a double world champion stunt pilot, Paul Bonhomme, took up the challenge of recreating the flight path of *Slipstream* at Saffron Walden's Audley End Airfield in the same Zivko Edge 540 stunt plane immortalised in Wilson's sculpture. Bonhomme largely succeeded in pulling off most of the daredevil manoeuvres contained in Wilson's design, albeit while plunging vertically, rather than travelling horizontally. 'He would take the plane up and then seemingly turn the engine off as he



For more images of *Slipstream* at T2, download the iPad edition at Wallpaper.com/iPad



THIS MONTH'S LIMITED-EDITION COVER (AVAILABLE TO SUBSCRIBERS, SEE WALLPAPER.COM) FEATURES A DETAIL OF *SLIPSTREAM*, PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIYAKO NARITA AND MANIPULATED BY WILSON ABOVE LEFT, A SKETCH SHOWING *SLIPSTREAM*'S INSPIRATION, AND, ABOVE, ITS INSTALLATION AT T2



hurtled back to earth, but he always pulled up at the last minute.'

Indeed, there's a happy ending for Wilson's piece, which comes together once you stand at its nose. This final, upwards thrust of the form, which Wilson describes as being 'optimistically up and away at the end', also recalls the famous shot of a crop-duster just above the head of Cary Grant in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*. Wilson's plane, now stretched into something resembling an old-fashioned cruise liner or airship, references the spirit of heroic, early aviators. 'We're not talking Concorde or Boeing 747 here. I made many visits to the Science and National Maritime museums to look at aluminium speedboats and DC-10s riveted together by hand. It's Meccano.'

Surely, I suggest, when the panel at Heathrow awarded him this prestigious

commission for Terminal 2, it had seen a previous Wilson project in which he crushed and then unfurled a light Cessna airplane (*Butterfly*, 2003). 'No. But it's interesting, I'm going to put that piece in an exhibition this October. I've also been working on a tumbling car that rolls and comes to rest that will be on show this autumn, too.'

Hopefully, he has dispelled his reputation as 'the mad axeman of the art world', as Wilson recalls one of his nicknames. Indeed, even such violent acts as removing and revolving a portion of a building's façade (for *Turning the Place Over*, 2008) or chopping out a section of an ocean-going trawler to make a sculpture and a studio for himself (*A Slice of Reality*, 2000) emerge from his awareness of disused public spaces or his interest in ship-building techniques, for example, as much as any wanton appetite for destruction.

Wilson is not afraid to think big and brave, he tells me: 'I've never been afraid of spectacle, even though it's a rude word to many artists. I want first to stop that person on the street - maybe by hanging a coach off the edge of a building - it's about seizing someone.' This recent work he's describing, shown at the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill in 2012, was entitled *Hang on a Minute Lads... I've got a Great Idea*, an obvious homage to the precarious finale of the film *The Italian Job*. Despite his new-found establishment credentials as a Royal Academician and darling of public sculpture committees, I can't help feeling that another exhortation from that film still applies to Wilson's risk-taking practice: 'Richard, you were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!' ★ *Richard Wilson will have a major solo show in London in autumn 2014. www.mdsfineart.com*