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PRESS RELEASE

MARK WALLINGER

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Wallinger is one of the most influential and important artists of our time. His statue, *Ecce Homo* , which stood upon the notorious Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square as we passed into the third millennium, was and remains the most powerful, popular and pertinent of all projects for that enormously symbolic site. His exhibition for the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2001 was remarkable for its aesthetic, intellectual, emotional and political intensity. The subsequent, expanded exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery received massive critical acclaim and exceeded the daily attendance at the Turner Prize. Addressing some of the most difficult yet crucial issues that face us today and placing them firmly in the context of a timeless humanity, **Wallinger** has consistently surprised and enthralled us with paintings, sculptures, installations, films and videos that represent an anthology of unrivalled richness and invention.

We are proud to present two new works: *Third Generation (Ascher Family)* and *Via Dolorosa*

Third Generation
The Aschers were a wealthy Jewish family who escaped to Palestine in 1938. Their home movies are run on a loop in the Jewish Museum in Berlin. The museum is racially defined, suggesting that the story that unfolds within its jagged walls is an inevitable and defining part of Jewish identity. It is a monument to what Joyce referred to as the nightmare of history - the utter contingency of our lives which is then a lifetime's work to escape or transcend; a role traditionally filled by art or by religion. Within these walls, it is difficult not to observe the Germans confronting their past or watch ourselves observing them. The levels or degrees of scrutiny are manifold. Is the past another country?

By the simple device of reframing the footage in the museum, with the existing ambient sound, **Wallinger** presents a view of the past seen down a receding perspective and through a deteriorating picture quality. The third framing device, once more in a gallery or museum and suggesting the here and now, has no other recognisable activity to offer a context - literally no frame of reference. There is a sense of a vanished age of innocence preserved on an endless loop, haunted by the shadows we add to the happy optimism of this young family and their friends. Just as the work is third generation in terms

of its physical construction and presentation, it is also, of course, a metaphor for the experience of immigrants the world over.

Via Dolorosa

Viewed at the end of the space is a feature-film version of Christ's progress from the presentation to the people (*Ecce Homo*) to his death on the cross. The screened image has a black rectangular mask resembling an over-large censoring device so that the remaining imagery is a frame to the blank, black vacancy at its centre. Nevertheless, the rhetoric is familiar, in fact the device serves to accentuate the cuts, pans, angles and the pace of the direction so that the viewer is confronted with the residue of their own knowledge - even as a non-believer the sequence of events is recognised and anticipated. We project our own perfect crucifixion scene.

The obliteration of 90% of the image creates a void at the centre, which then, paradoxically, frames its own absent heart. The suggestion of censorship and the denial of explicit content to the viewer evoke both the modern history of conflict, which continues to unfold in ways that provide a real and painful gloss to scripture, and the common knowledge of the story of Christ's journey. Either way, we are denied a vision of redemption.

Wallinger states: *"What interested me was the degree of common knowledge or imagined shared vision; how expectations are met or disappointed and how contemporary events and recent history have coloured this vision. We may not be believers nor have much hope for peace in the Middle East but what is known, denied, felt, endured, is a matter of common intuition."*

The links between the two journeys evoked in the exhibition are complex, but clear.

Third Generation (Ascher Family) is one of three works of the same generic title completed last year. This is the first time the work has been exhibited. *Via Dolorosa* was originally commissioned by Foundation Tensta Konsthall . This is the first presentation in this country.