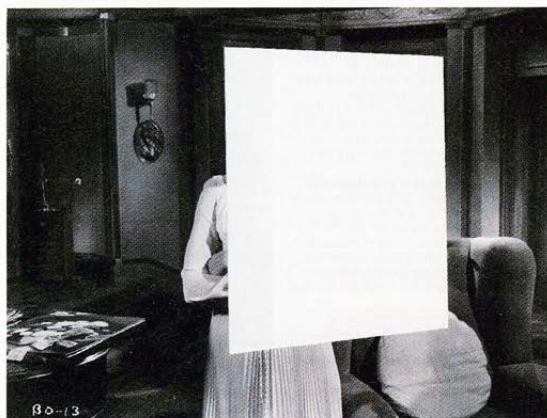




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## In the studio *John Stezaker*



John Stezaker is the king of collage. Taking a scalpel to photographs, old postcards and publicity stills of forgotten British actors, he creates uncanny hybrids that tap a darkly psychological vein. His current show, 'Tabula Rasa', includes collages and silkscreens that feature an ominous, rectangular void (as above). He lives and works in Chalk Farm.

### **Because of your noir-ish subject matter I have you down as a night person.**

'Yes, I've always preferred the night, but as I'm getting older I can't do the all-nighters I used to do. I used to work until 5am, just as it goes blue outside. There's something about that time, when you're totally exhausted; things seem to happen magically in the collages. I think it was Kokoschka who called it "the hour of the wolf"... I know that feeling.'

### **Have you ever been tempted to use digital technology to make your work?**

'No, I have a phobia about computers, I don't even like to touch them. I feel as though the image is vanishing and my fear is that we may not be able to get a hold on the image again. That's why collage is so important to me. My work is a response to that fear.'

### **But computers must be handy for sourcing material?**

'Yes, of course.'

eBay. It's accelerated the whole process of collage for me, but there's something slightly sinister about the over-consumption it encourages. I'm beginning to be aware of the pathology of collecting. It's a strange thing when you get hold of half a dozen copies of *Good Housekeeping* and they all come back with different kitchen stains. There's something strangely pathological about that.'

### **Your current show includes work from the 1980s. How did it feel to be revisiting early examples from the 'Tabula Rasa' series?**

'I loved it, I felt 30 again looking at them. Now I've got the urge to do exactly what I was doing at that time, which is to do the collages on the wall, to take it outside the frame and substitute the wall for the page. Suddenly that process of translation seems very exciting.'

### **Can we expect to see a few more contemporary faces in your work?**

'I've tried using contemporary portraits, but I just can't. I feel sick when I look at the results: it's quite visceral. It's not that I'm nostalgic. I'm finding a space in what is the world of the dead, really. How morbid. How did we get on to that?'

*Interview and portrait: Martin Coomer  
John Stezaker's exhibition, 'Tabula Rasa', is showing at The Approach until Mar 7 (see Bethnal Green to Hackney).*

