

Press Release

12 December 2003

Populus Tremula

Tate Britain Christmas Tree 2003 by Mark Wallinger

12 December 2003 – 6 January 2004

Tate Britain, Rotunda, Level 2

Open 10.00-17.50 every day except 24, 25 and 26 December

Admission free

Each year Tate Britain asks a different artist to create a Christmas Tree. This year, Mark Wallinger has installed a large, bare aspen tree in the gallery, and dressed it with about 500 mass-produced, lightly-scented, Catholic rosaries. Mark Wallinger's Christmas Tree will be on display at Tate Britain from 12 December until 6 January

Wallinger's work is distinguished by its engagement with issues of spirituality and faith, and its use of historical reference points. According to legend, it was wood from the aspen tree (*populus tremula*) that was used to make the cross on which Christ was crucified. Rosaries are designed to assist in meditative prayer. Wallinger's tree thus combines strongly symbolic elements, redolent of death, rebirth and ritual. These may be seen as disrupting or enhancing the conventional imagery of Christmas celebration.

Mark Wallinger was born in Chigwell, Essex in 1959. He studied at Loughton College, Chelsea School of Art and Goldsmiths College. Using video, painting, sculpture and installation, his work has explored questions of British national identity, the culture of horseracing and royalty, class and the politics of representation. Since the late 1990s, he has focused on religion and spiritual belief as areas of inquiry, most prominently with his acclaimed contribution to the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, *Ecce Homo* (1999). His most recent solo exhibitions have been at The Wolfsonian, Florida; the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Carlier Gebauer, Berlin, and at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. His work has been included in numerous group shows around the world, including *Contemporary Art in the Traditional Museum* (Russian Museum, St Petersburg 2003), *Seeing Salvation* (National Gallery, London, 2000) and *Sensation* (Royal Academy of Arts, London and Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin 1997). Wallinger represented Britain at the 49th Venice Biennale (2001) and was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1995. He lives and works in London.

This is the sixteenth year that Tate has marked Christmas in this way. Previously commissioned artists are: Tracey Emin (2002), Yinka Shonibare (2001), Catherine Yass (2000), Mat Collishaw (1999), Richard Wilson (1998), Michael Landy (1997), Julian Opie (1996), Cornelia Parker (1995), Cathy de Monchaux (1994), Shirazeh Houshiary (1993), Craigie Aitchison (1992), Boyd Webb (1991), Lisa Milroy (1990), Tim Head (1989) and Bill Woodrow (1988).

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