

RA Summer Exhibition 2009 - Making Space

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The 2009 exhibition features around 1,200 works in all styles, forms and media, including – for the first time – film. This year's theme is *Making Space* which has been belittled by some critics. But just how would you label the world's largest open-submission exhibition with works of established and unknown artists, comprising paintings, prints, sculptures, architectural models and creations, photography, digital art and film? Now in its 241st year, this is the most diverse Summer Exhibition ever.

Stepping into the gallery on a hot summer's day, the light, bright, white coolness serves to calm, and Anselm Kiefer's serene, snowy forest scene in mixed media (through 3-D branches) sets the mood. In contrast to the spacious, thoughtfully laid-out main rooms, the Small Weston Room - crammed with Mick Rooney's collection of almost 300 pieces – has the intimacy of a packed pub on a Friday night. Dancing around each other to get close to the pieces (including a deserted Woolworths shop-front, a sign of the times) serves to engage in passing conversation and comment with others.

This year's highlights include Basil Beattie's *No Known Way* (which gives the sense of a road-trip, seen through a windscreen with several views as snapshots in time); Ann Winder-Boyle's *The Dealer* (a man and boy exchanging something at night in the style of a Rupert Bear children's illustration); Richard Wilson's *Joint's Jumping* (Battersea Power Station outlined in orange neon at a displaced angle giving an impression, when lit at night, of leaning); Richard Wilson's film showcase (19 film-works shown on a tilted, ripped-out room wall) and top-of-the-bill Tracey Emin's touchingly simple *Space Monkey* (a bemused-looking, space-suited monkey stepping forward into space).