

# ***Ian Wallace:***

## ***At the Intersection of Painting and Photography***



*Lookout, 1979 (detail)*  
hand-coloured silver gelatin print  
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery, Acquisition Fund

## **TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE**

### **Winter 2013**

**Vancouver**  
Artgallery

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*At the Crosswalk VIII, 2011*  
photolaminate, acrylic on canvas  
Collection of the Vancouver Art Gallery  
Commissioned with funds from Arts Partners in Creative Development

# Vancouver Art Gallery

## Teacher's Guide for School Programs

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The exhibition *Ian Wallace: At the Intersection of Painting and Photography* features more than two hundred works in a retrospective of one of Canada's most significant contemporary artists. Based in Vancouver, Ian Wallace has become internationally recognized for his large-format photographs, which he juxtaposes with expanses of monochromatic painting—panels in a single flat colour. An art historian, writer and teacher, as well as an artist, Wallace uses places and people from his immediate world to explore ideas and make meaning in the world at large.

### DEAR TEACHER:

This guide will assist you in preparing for your tour of the exhibition *Ian Wallace: At the Intersection of Painting and Photography*. It also provides follow-up activities to facilitate discussion after your Gallery visit. Engaging in the suggested activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas generated by the tour and build continuity between the Gallery experience and your ongoing work in the classroom. Most activities require few materials and can be adapted easily to the age, grade level and needs of your students. Underlined words in this guide are defined in the Vocabulary section.

The tour of *Ian Wallace: At the Intersection of Painting and Photography* has three main goals:

- to introduce students to Ian Wallace's body of work and artistic practice,
- to consider the meanings that arise from the artist's use of materials,
- to explore individual artworks within their particular contexts and narratives.

## BACKGROUND TO THE EXHIBITION

### *Ian Wallace: At the Intersection of Painting and Photography*

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*At the Intersection of Painting and Photography* is a two-floor retrospective that explores work from Ian Wallace's long career as an artist. Using monochrome (single-colour) paintings and photographs in various combinations and juxtapositions, Wallace is neither painter nor photographer; he is a contemporary conceptual artist working with ideas.

"What is possible to think through art?" asks Wallace—teacher, writer and art historian as well as visual artist. For him, art is about the pursuit of ideas and the importance of asking questions about it. As long as his work is making viewers ask questions, he says that is enough of a response to his work. "I wanted to create a new language of modern art," he says. "I wanted to draw on the tradition of painting, but embrace the latest technologies and ideas in photography, and open art to the possibilities of new values and new ways of seeing."

The work of this internationally acclaimed Vancouver-based artist straddles the art of cinema, advertising and history painting. Wallace is an academic whose work is discussed in the context of conceptualism, photo-conceptualism and minimalism. His art clearly requires a thoughtful and considered response in order to understand it. However, his work also feels familiar and accessible, reminding us of places we've been—Hornby Island, the streets of Vancouver—and people going about their regular lives, stories unfolding in cinematic sequences, everyday objects and subjects. The meanings become layered when we realize that these are not simply documentary images. The photographs are undercut and interspersed with large, single-colour painted expanses that encourage us to reassess the scenes we are witnessing. They make new meanings; they make us ask questions. "What is possible to think through art?" he asks.

Over his long and productive career, Wallace has returned to several themes and interests, reworking them over and over again. He painted his first *Monochromes*—single-colour painted panels with contrasting borders—in the early sixties, to address the ideas of minimalism and conceptualism. To this day he continues to use the form and idea of the monochrome, but they no longer stand alone. The painted surfaces accompany—or block—parts of the photographs, interrupting an easy or literal reading of the images.

In the series *My Heroes in the Street*, Wallace presents photographs of his friends—regular people elevated by title and scale to heroic proportions—accompanied by large expanses of white painted canvas. *Clayoquot Protest* consists of nine large panels of photographs of protesters taken the moment before police intervention. A segment of each image is disrupted by a monoprint of plywood. Wallace explains this monumental work as an "attempt to create a modern (or postmodern) history painting." *Lookout* is a panorama of a west coast landscape that he constructed by photographing individuals separately in his studio, pasting these figures onto images of the landscape, then re-photographing and hand-colouring the enlarged images. The resulting sequence seems to suggest a narrative unfolding at a single moment in time, but it is an artistic construction that presents an idea, not a reality.

The exhibition is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and curated by Daina Augaitis, chief curator/associate director.

## ARTIST INFORMATION

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Ian Wallace is an internationally acclaimed Vancouver-based artist known for his conceptual photo-based work. His work relates strongly to the work of other Vancouver photo-conceptual artists including Roy Arden, Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Stan Douglas and Ken Lum, who became known collectively as the Vancouver School.

Wallace was born in England in 1943, moved with his family to Canada a year later and made Vancouver his home in 1952. After receiving his master's degree in art history from the University of British Columbia, he taught in the Fine Arts Department at UBC until 1970, then at Emily Carr University from 1972 to 1998. As a teacher, Wallace has had a profound impact on several generations of Vancouver artists, and his teaching strategies have been crucial to his own practice as well as to his continued engagement as an art historian. He has written extensively on film, literature and art, contributing important scholarship to Canadian art history. Wallace continues to be a driving force and, along with his contemporaries, has brought international attention to Vancouver's dynamic art community.

Wallace's work has been widely exhibited, in solo and group exhibitions in major museums and private galleries from Toronto and New York to Rotterdam and Paris. Wallace has been recognized by receiving the Molson Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts in 2009, the Governor General's Award in Visual Art in 2004 and the Excellence in Teaching Award from Emily Carr University in 2008.

# Ian Wallace: Essential Terms 101

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## **Contemporary art**

Art galleries frequently use the term “contemporary art” to define work produced since World War II. The term is most commonly used to refer to artwork being produced by artists living today.

Contemporary art defies easy categorization in its refusal to accept traditional organizing principles of art, often rejecting historical definitions of what constitutes art. Viewers are expected to play a significant role in constructing meaning, to engage with the artwork by bringing their own experiences and opinions, and to consider whether the artwork is challenging, raises interesting ideas or is even relevant.

## **Conceptualism**

*“Conceptual art is an art which questions the very nature of what is understood as art.”*

—Art Historian Tony Godfrey

In conceptual art, the idea behind the art is seen as more important than the execution or craftsmanship of the work; these become secondary or unnecessary. Many conceptual artists have left a set of instructions for someone else to create the actual artwork. Conceptual art rejects the idea that talent or craft is necessary to create art, which should be primarily concerned with ideas, knowledge and thought processes. Conceptual art asks questions about the nature of art and creates a space to engage the viewer in the dialogue.

## **Photo-conceptualism**

The group of photo-conceptualists that emerged in Vancouver in the 1970s became known internationally as the Vancouver School. Their work is characterized by high-quality large-format photographic prints or back-lit transparencies. This work usually explored the ideas behind the photograph, the assumed “truth” of photography and the nature of photography as fine art versus commercial art. Ian Wallace was one of the first artists to use large-format photography—together with painting—to challenge the restrictions and limitations of both conceptual art and fine art photography.

## **Minimalism**

Minimalism is a form of abstract art that emphasizes extreme simplification of colour and form. Minimalist artists sought to remove the presence of the artist’s hand, stressed repetition and frequently used geometric shapes. It rose to prominence in the 1960s, concluding that art should not refer to or imitate anything outside of itself: i.e., an artwork should concern itself with the arrangement of colour, line and shape, and not try to represent anything else such as a person or object.

## PRE/POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: Ian Wallace and His Art (adaptable for all grades)

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### **Objective:**

Students explore Ian Wallace's background, art processes and body of work.

### **Materials:**

- writing materials
- Artist Information Sheets (pages 8 and 9), Student Worksheet (page 10)
- Internet: <http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/>

### **Process:**

1. Divide students into four groups. Give each group one of the categories from one of the Information Sheets (intermediate/secondary students: page 8, primary students: page 9).
2. Give each student a copy of the Student Worksheet (page 10) and ask them to consider what they need to find out to complete their section. Have them conduct research using the Internet, either at home or at school.
3. Ask each group to find/copy/sketch a piece of work by the artist and add it into the space provided in the Worksheet.
4. Have each group present their information while the rest of the students fill in their worksheets.

### **Conclusion:**

Points for class discussion and/or individual writing assignments:

- What makes Ian Wallace a significant or important artist?
- What is interesting about his work and life?
- In what ways does his work connect to or resonate with students' lives?
- What else are students interested in finding out about the artist?

# Artist Information Sheet: Ian Wallace

(intermediate/secondary students)

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## Personal information

- Born in England in 1943
- Moved to Canada in 1944 and settled in Vancouver in 1952
- Master's degree in art history from the University of British Columbia in 1968
- Has taught at UBC, Emily Carr University: many of his students became internationally recognized artists
- Has played an important role in the development of contemporary art

## Art processes and materials

- He is neither a photographer nor a painter but an artist who uses both to express his ideas
- He used to take black-and-white photographs and hand-colour them
- He began to make large colour photographs when the technology became available in the 1980s
- He paints large monochromes (one colour) that he places next to photographs

## Main bodies of work

- *Monochromes*—tall, thin rectangles painted in one colour with a contrasting border
- Cinematic works—series of images that tell a story of a particular place and time; works include *Clayoquot Protest* and *Lookout*
- The street—the place where people meet and connect with the city; works include *My Heroes in the Street* and *At the Crosswalk*

## Major Achievements

- Internationally respected artist, teacher, writer and art historian
- His work has been shown across Canada, the United States and Europe in major museums and galleries
- Has written many essays and articles about his own work and the work of other artists, which have been important in developing ideas about Canadian art history
- Received the Excellence in Teaching Award from Emily Carr University, the Molson Prize from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Governor General's Award in Visual Art



# Artist Information Sheet: Ian Wallace

(primary students)

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## His Life

- Born in England and lives in Vancouver
- Known as an artist, teacher and writer
- Works with painting and photography
- Teaches at universities and art schools

## How he makes his work

- He used to take black-and-white photographs and hand-colour them
- Now he makes large colour photographs
- He paints large paintings called monochromes (one colour) that he places next to photographs

## Groups of work

- *Monochromes*—tall, thin paintings in one colour
- Cinematic works—a set of photographs that tell a story (*Clayoquot Protest* and *Lookout*)
- The street—the place where people meet (*My Heroes in the Street* and *At the Crosswalk*)

## Important Achievements

- His art has been shown across Canada, the United States and Europe
- He has written about his work and the work of other artists
- He has received many prizes for his art and teaching

## Student Worksheet: Ian Wallace

His life	
How he makes his work	
Groups of work	
Important achievements	
An artwork: title & description	
Artwork: sketch	

## PRE- or POST-VISIT ACTIVITY: History Paintings Now (secondary students)

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### Objective:

Students look at the tradition of European history paintings and Ian Wallace's non-traditional version (*Clayoquot Protest*), and discuss ideas for making a contemporary history painting.

### Discussion:

- A traditional history painting usually depicted a moment in a story—which could be historical, biblical, mythical or allegorical—and is defined by its subject matter rather than a particular artistic style. It does not necessarily portray the accurate or documentary description of events from history. History paintings were large, and several figures were involved in the narrative. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel is an example of a history painting.
- Ian Wallace decided that he wanted to create a contemporary version of a history painting. After considering various possibilities, he settled on the protests against clear-cut logging of old-growth forests in British Columbia. He travelled to Clayoquot Sound in 1993 and photographed the confrontation between environmentalists and the logging company. He then returned to his studio, where he created his nine-panel work. He developed the photographs, enlarged them and removed rectangular pieces from each one, inserting mono-prints showing the grain of plywood into the spaces created by the cut-outs.

### Materials:

- paper and coloured pencils or pens
- Internet images of history paintings  
<http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg61/gg61-main1.html>
- Internet images of Ian Wallace's *Clayoquot Protest* (see page 12 for image)  
<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/clayoquot-protest-august-9-1993-i-1993-95/>

### Process:

1. Present the idea of history paintings (described above) and show some examples in the government website shown above. Discuss the particularities of a history painting—significant moment in a biblical/historical story, several figures involved in the narrative.
2. Show images of Wallace's *Clayoquot Protest*. Ask students to consider why Ian Wallace called this a history painting. Think about materials, idea, meaning, scale, etc. In what ways is this work different from a traditional history painting?
3. In small groups, have students decide on a subject they would consider appropriate for a history painting they would like to make:
  - Choose a moment in time—in the group's shared memory—that they think is significant. It could be an event at the school, in the neighbourhood, in the city, country, etc.
  - What medium would they use to make their version of a history painting if they could? Would it be a painting, collage, sculpture? Using paint? Fabric? Bronze? Wood? Pastels?
  - What size would it be? How would it be installed or hung?
  - Where would they want their history painting to be shown? In the school? Museum? Art gallery? Private home? Shopping mall?

4. Have students sketch out their idea on a large sheet of paper. Make notes annotating their sketch.
5. Display and discuss

**Conclusion:**

Discussion points:

- Do these sketches fulfill the criteria of a history painting as discussed earlier?
- How are they different from traditional history paintings?
- Do students think particular subject matter is more suitable for a history painting? What? Why?



*Clayoquot Protest (August 9, 1993) I, II and III, 1993–95*

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Heroes in the Street (intermediate and secondary students)

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### Objective:

Students consider Wallace's series *My Heroes in the Street* and create their own photographic and written response.

### Discussion:

Ian Wallace frequently uses his close friends in his photographs, often showing them engaged in everyday activities in their neighbourhoods. The figures in *My Heroes in the Street* are Wallace's friends, pictured casually in the streets, often dwarfed by the urban landscape. Wallace describes them situated in the "confusion of advertising signage, monumental architecture and traffic that comprises the urban environment."

### Materials:

- paper and writing materials
- cameras—cell phones are fine; prints of photos
- coloured paper, glue, tape
- internet images for the series *My Heroes in the Street*:  
<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/my-heroes-in-the-street-i-1986/>  
<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/my-heroes-in-the-street-ii-1986/>  
<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/my-heroes-in-the-street-iii-1986/>

### Process:

1. Look at some of Wallace's works from *My Heroes in the Street*. Discuss:
  - The figure—what can we learn about this person/people?
  - The surroundings—where is it?
  - What's the relationship between the person and the environment?
  - What's going on? What's the story here?
2. Ask students to think of someone they know and admire, who they think would make a good photographic subject. Why would they choose this person? What would they want to say about them? Which neighbourhood would they connect this person with? What would the person be doing?
3. Have students plan out their photograph—sketch it, and annotate the sketch. Where exactly do students want to take the photograph? Why? What's in the background? What's the person doing? What are they carrying? What kind of expression do they have?
4. Have students go with their subject to their chosen location and photograph them.
5. If students can print the photographs at home, have them do so; otherwise print at school (regular printer paper is fine).
6. Mount the photographs on coloured paper. If possible, laminate or cover in clear plastic.
7. Display photographs alongside sketches.
8. Discuss. How are the photographs and sketches different? What are the differences? Did the students' idea change? Was the situation different from how they had imagined it? Was the subject co-operative? Did the subject have different ideas?
9. Have students write a piece about their photograph, either describing the image or developing a narrative. Younger students could write a sentence or two, older students a paragraph or more.
10. Have students edit, write/type a good copy and mount on coloured paper.

11. Have each student read their piece.
12. Display the written word alongside the photograph.

**Conclusion:**

Discuss:

- How does the written piece on the subject change the way you look at a photograph of that subject?
- Look at each of the Wallace images again. Point out the expanse of white painted canvas alongside images. Why did he do this? How does it change the way we look at the image?

## PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY: Architectural Interventions (intermediate and secondary students)

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### Objective:

Students explore Wallace's ideas in his monochrome paintings and create architectural interventions around the school building.

### Discussion:

Wallace created a series of monochrome paintings that he describes as an attempt to explore the limits and possibilities of painting:

“Between 1967 and 1969, I painted and exhibited several monochromes in an attempt to define what was possible as a painting. Anything was possible in a painting, but not much was possible as a painting.”

He created thirty paintings in primary colours and basic tones (black, white and grey). Each had a contrasting border and they were all the same size and shape. The tall, narrow works were installed in unconventional locations—next to a door, around a corner or in a stairwell—interrupting the architecture and the space occupied by the museum visitor.

Two other ideas are important in connection with Ian Wallace and this body of work:

- **Minimalism**

A form of abstract art that emphasizes extreme simplification of colour and form. It became important in the 1960s. Minimalist artists sought to remove the presence of the artist's hand, stressed repetition and frequently used geometric shapes. Minimalist art did not refer to or imitate anything outside of itself: i.e., a minimalist artwork merely contained and displayed colour, line and shape, and didn't try to represent anything else such as a person or object.

- **Conceptualism**

The assumption that the idea behind the work is more important than the object itself. Conceptual art rejects the idea that special talent or craft is necessary to create an artwork, which should be primarily concerned with ideas, knowledge and thought processes. Conceptual art asks questions about the nature of art and creates an opportunity to engage the viewer in a conversation.

### Materials:

- large sheets of coloured or white paper (rolls of newsprint or construction paper are ideal)
- masking tape, scissors
- paint and paintbrushes (optional)
- monochrome images, available on the internet:  
<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/untitled-blue-monochrome-with-white-1967/>  
<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/untitled-red-monochrome-with-yellow-19672009/>  
<http://catrionajeffries.com/artists/ian-wallace/works/#88>  
<http://catrionajeffries.com/artists/ian-wallace/works/#87>

### Process:

1. Define and discuss minimalism and conceptualism (see definitions above).
2. Show some of Wallace's monochromes. Discuss the ways they work as:
  - architectural interventions,
  - interruptions in the viewer's space,

- minimalist paintings,
  - conceptual objects—is special skill needed? Is it still art if anyone can make it? Why or why not?
3. Tell students they are going to create large minimalist architectural interventions around the school. Divide them into small groups and ask them to decide:
    - Where will they hang their piece? (hallway, bathroom, entrance, gym...)
    - What shape, colour, size do they want to make their work?
    - What effect/impact/response do they want the work to have?
  4. Have students the work—by cutting shapes out of large sheets or rolls of coloured paper, or by painting flat, strong colour onto shapes cut out of white sheets or rolls.
  5. Install their pieces around the school.
  6. After a couple of days, have the students compose two or three questions to ask viewers of the artwork, then have them stand near their work and interview other students as they pass by.
  7. What did they discover? Were the responses different from what they expected?

**Conclusion:**

Discuss:

- Were the works effective? Why or why not?
- Is the work successful if the response is not what was expected? Why or why not?
- Whose responsibility is the response to the work—the viewer's or the artist's? Why?



# VOCABULARY

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**abstract:** a style of art that can be thought of in two ways:

- a) the artist begins with a recognizable subject and alters, distorts, manipulates or simplifies elements of it;
- b) the artist creates purely abstract forms that are unrecognizable and have no direct reference to external reality (also called non-representational art).

**conceptual art:** art in which the ideas behind the creation of the work are more significant than the end product. During the 1960s and '70s, conceptual artists rejected the idea of the unique, precious art object and focused on intellectual explorations into artistic practice.

**contemporary:** created in the last thirty years. Most contemporary artists are living artists. Challenging traditional boundaries, many contemporary artists use a limitless range of materials and ideas to reflect, explore and comment on today's world.

**minimalist art:** a type of abstract art that emphasizes extreme simplification of colour and form and often includes geometric shapes.

**photo-conceptualism:** an artistic movement that emerged in Vancouver in the 1960s. The work is characterized by large-format photographic prints. This movement explored the ideas behind the photograph, the assumed "truth" of photography, and the nature of photography as fine art versus commercial art.

# RESOURCES

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## Print:

- Augaitis, Daina, ed. *Ian Wallace: At the Intersection of Painting and Photography*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012.
- Cahan, Susan, and Goya Kocur, eds. *Contemporary Art and Multicultural Education*. New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art/Routledge, 1996.
- Godfrey, Tony. *Conceptual Art (Art and Ideas)*. London: Phaidon Press, 1998.
- Golden, Herbert, and Thelma Storr. *Art: 21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.
- Robertson, Jean, and Craig McDaniel. *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art after 1980*, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Stallabrass, Julian. *Contemporary Art: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Weintraub, Linda, ed. *In the Making: Creative Options for Contemporary Art*. New York: Distributed Art Publishers Inc., 2004.
- Wells, Liz, ed. *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. New York/London: Routledge, 2000.

## Online:

[www.artcyclopedia.com](http://www.artcyclopedia.com)

Online art encyclopedia, listing international artists, and museums and galleries with collections of their work.

[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

Online dictionary and encyclopedia, created collaboratively by laypeople

[www.ccca.ca/artists/lan\\_Wallace](http://www.ccca.ca/artists/lan_Wallace)

<http://projects.vanartgallery.bc.ca/wallace/about-the-exhibition/>

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