

# Hamad Butt

(1962 - 1994)



For the attention of:

**Freya Stannard**

Collections British Art  
Tate Britain,  
Millbank, London, SW1P 4RG

**Cc Dr Penelope Curtis, Chris Dercon, Frances Morris, Nicholas Serota**

We, the undersigned, are absolutely thrilled to hear that Hamad Butt's Family have proposed that the Tate British Art Collection acquire as a gift to the nation and future generations the artist's set of three sculptures, *Familiars* (*Hypostasis*, *Substance Sublimation Unit* and *Cradle*). It is now seventeen years since we were able to see this exceptional body of work, and we unreservedly support the Tate in this acquisition.

Those amongst us who were staff, students and visitors to Goldsmiths' College's fine art degree show in 1990 cannot have been less than astonished by Hamad's installation, *Transmission*, which consisted of a wall-mounted vitrine comprising a substratum saturated in sugar solution and impregnated with maggots that would go through their metamorphic life cycle to flies and ultimately death; and the circle of glass books engraved with the Triffid figure, but whose illumination by strips of ultraviolet light meant that the work could only be safely viewed through special spectacles. As we were to realise, Hamad's sculptures were elegant metaphors for his innovative investigations into the dialogue between art and science, for which there is no precedent in British art.

The exhibitions that followed the degree show quickly established Hamad as an accomplished artist of international quality. In 1995 *Familiars* participated in the acclaimed Rights of Passage, Art For The End Of The Century exhibition at the Tate, alongside the work of Miroslaw Balka, Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, John Coplans, Pepe Espaliu, Robert Gober, Mona Hatoum, Susan Hiller, Jana Sterbak, and Bill Viola.

In 1992, a solo exhibition of *Familiars* was held at the John Hansard Gallery. In 1996, in collaboration with Iniva, the gallery published a book, which included Hamad's writings on the innovative aesthetic and scientific ideas that informed *Familiars*. To realise *Familiars*, Hamad had spent over a year understanding the behaviour of the halogen gases with the engineer Dr Garry Rumbles at Imperial College. As a result, Hamad was able to determine how the precise point at which iodine sublimates between solid and gas could be visually demonstrated and realised in the artwork *Substance Sublimation Unit*. This unique demonstration is now recognised in the scientific canon.

Hamad's work opened up an entirely original avenue of aesthetic research that has yet to be explored, and to which end the proposed Tate acquisition of *Familiars* will provide a uniquely valuable resource. Hamad, with a Leonardo-esque eclectic curiosity, rigour of thought and attention to detail, was in the process of exploring ways to critique, reconcile and enhance several interlocking philosophical knowledge systems informing art and science, the sensuous and the abstract – an inexhaustible list of concerns that included, amongst others, 'apprehension' of the known and the unknowable, which, prompted by the hysteria over Aids, extended to the politics of representation as it is distorted (or 'distracted') by irrationality, myth, fear and desire; and the affinities and dissonances in the evolution of Islamic alchemy to European chemistry, where an excess of rationalist 'enlightenment' began to risk blinding us to other truths. Hamad explored all these controversial issues under his neologism 'metachemics', which he intended to complement metaphysics. (See the essay by Clement Page, 'Hamad Butt: The Art of Metachemics' in *Third Text*, no 32, 1995.)

Hamad's premature death in 1994 deprived us all of an exceptional thinker, an outstanding artist and a generous soul, always willing to share his thoughts. We can only imagine regretfully the contribution to British artistic and scientific practice he would have made; but we do have the opportunity to share Hamad's legacy with the next generation of artists and researchers. It is in this spirit that we fully support the generous offer by Hamad Butt's Family to gift his work to the Tate permanent collection.

## Signatories

**Karen Alexander:** Writer, Curator and Consultant; Senior Tutor, Royal College of Art, CCA

**Jeremy Akerman:** Artist

**Rasheed Araeen:** Artist; Founder of *Third Text* and Black Umbrella

**David A Bailey:** Artist-photographer and Freelance Curator

**Jon Bird:** Artist and Freelance Curator; Professor in Art and Critical Theory, Middlesex University

**Sutapa Biswas:** Artist

**Sonia Boyce MBE:** Artist; Professor of Fine Art, Middlesex University and University of the Arts

**Guy Brett:** Freelance Writer and Curator

**Angela Bulloch:** Artist

**Dr Virginia Button:** Head of Dept of Art, Falmouth University

**Dr Janice Cheddie:** Freelance Producer and Writer

**Dr Annie Coombes:** Professor of Material and Visual Culture, Birkbeck College

**Judith Cowan:** Artist; Reader in Fine Art, Middlesex University

**Damien Duffy:** Artist in Residence, Void, Derry

**Dr David Dye:** Artist

**Charles Esche:** Director, Vanabbemuseum, The Netherlands

**Diego Ferrari:** Artist and Lecturer

**Dr Jean Fisher:** Freelance Writer; Professor emeritus, Middlesex University

**Dr Tony Fisher:** Senior Lecturer, Central School of Speech and Drama

**Stephen Foster:** Director, John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton

**Anya Gallaccio:** Artist; Professor of Visual Art, University of California at San Diego

**Helena Goldwater:** Artist

**Paul Goodwin:** Freelance Curator; Professor of Black Art and Design, University of the Arts

**Nicola Gray:** Artist; ex-*Third Text*

**Andy Harper:** Artist

**Dan Hays:** Artist

**Susan Hiller:** Artist

**Isaac Julien:** Artist, Filmmaker and Writer

**Omar Kholeif:** Essayist, Critic; Curator, Whitechapel Gallery

**Robin Klassnik:** Director, Matts Gallery

**Pablo Lafuente:** Reader in Art, Context and Theory, Univ. of the Arts; Editor *Afterall*.

**Dr Kate Love:** Artist and Writer; Fine Art, University of the Arts

**Sarah Lucas:** Artist

**Dr Sarat Maharaj:** Professor, Malmo Art Academy, Lund University

**Guy Mannes-Abbott:** Writer, Essayist, Critic

**Steve McQueen CBE:** Artist and Filmmaker

**Mark Nash:** Essayist, Curator and Film Producer

**Avis Newman:** Artist

**Dr Michael Newman:** Writer and Critic; Professor, Dept. of Art, Goldsmiths College

**Prof. Louis Nixon:** Head of School, Fine Art, Kingston University

**Clement Page:** Artist

**Dr Nikos Papastergiadis:** Professor School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne

**Mark Pimlott:** Affiliated Lecturer in Architecture, University of Delft

**Keith Piper:** Artist; Reader in Fine Art, Middlesex University

**John Roberts:** Writer and Critic; Professor, School of Art and Design, Univ. of Wolverhampton

**Dr Susan Pui San Lok:** Artist; Reader in Fine Art, Middlesex University

**Santi de Quesada:** Artist and Web Designer

**Dr Garry Rumbles:** National Renewable Energy Laboratory, USA

**Stella Santacatterina:** Writer and Critic

**Pam Skelton:** Artist

**Dr Margherita Sprio:** Senior Lecturer, Film History and Theory, University of Westminster

**Dr Julian Stallabrass:** Professor, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

**Bridget Smith:** Artist

**Amanda Stuart-Fisher:** Senior Lecturer, Central School of Speech and Drama

**Gilane Tawadros:** Freelance Curator and Writer; Founding Director of Iniva

**Pádraig Timoney:** Artist

**Jon Thompson:** Artist; Professor emeritus, Middlesex University

**Richard Wentworth:** Artist

We are grateful for your kind attention. If you have further queries or comments regarding this appeal, please do not hesitate to contact us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamal Butt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamal Butt  
([jamal.butt@boots.co.uk](mailto:jamal.butt@boots.co.uk))

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Diego Ferrari', with a horizontal line underneath.

Diego Ferrari  
([diegoferrari@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:diegoferrari@yahoo.co.uk))

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jean Fisher', with a horizontal line underneath.

Jean Fisher  
([icoyotic@btinternet.com](mailto:icoyotic@btinternet.com))

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