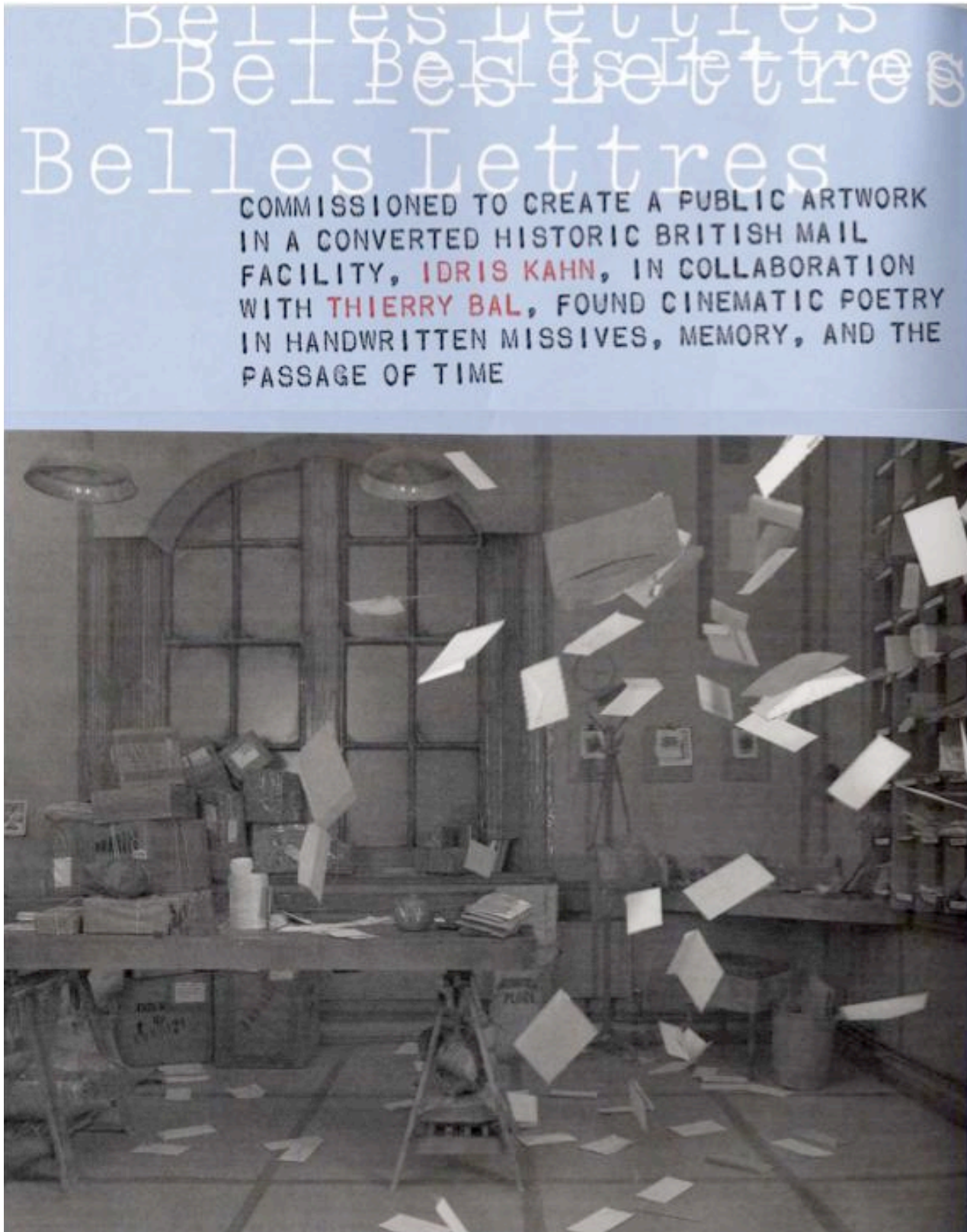


SEANKELLY

"Belles Lettres, Idris Khan and Thierry Bal," *Modern Painters*, May 2008.



9 Howick Place, in the Westminster borough of London, is a former Royal Mail sorting facility built in 1894 that is being converted into a creative hub dedicated to art, fashion, and design. The London-based artist Idris Khan--known for his abstracted photographs of books, the printed word, and references to obsolescence and the passage of time--was commissioned to create a public artwork to celebrate this transition.



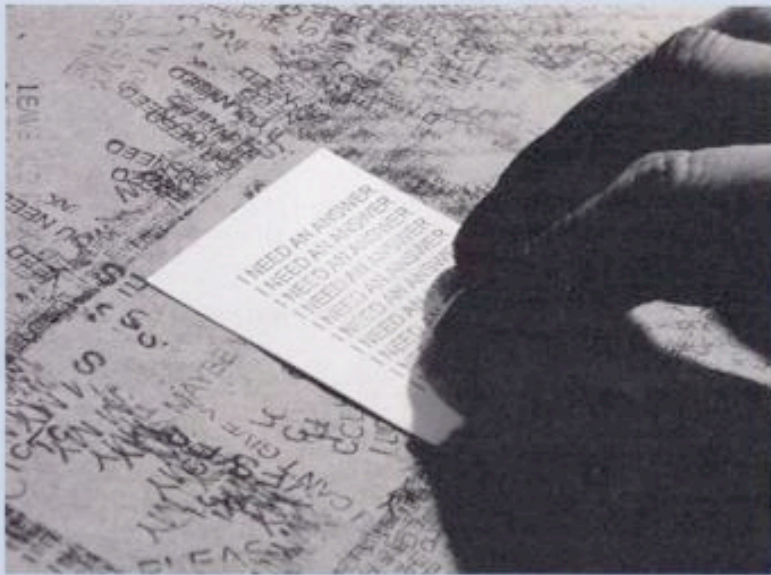
Kahn, for what is his first public artwork, elected to create a series of short films that will be shown on four plasma screens permanently embedded in the pavement at the entrance to the building. For the piece, titled *Fragile* and organized by the curatorial agency Artwise, the artist collaborated with an architect, a set designer, and light and sound technicians, who together constructed a life-size mock-up of an historic post office interior.

Evocative and illusory, the black-and-white films they made there depict letters being torn, flung, and stamped by Kahn's hands. The choreographed movements are poetic gestures that give physicality to the notion of collecting, sorting, and releasing ideas, and invoke the processes of communication, loss, and connection that are profoundly ingrained in the rich history of Howick Place.

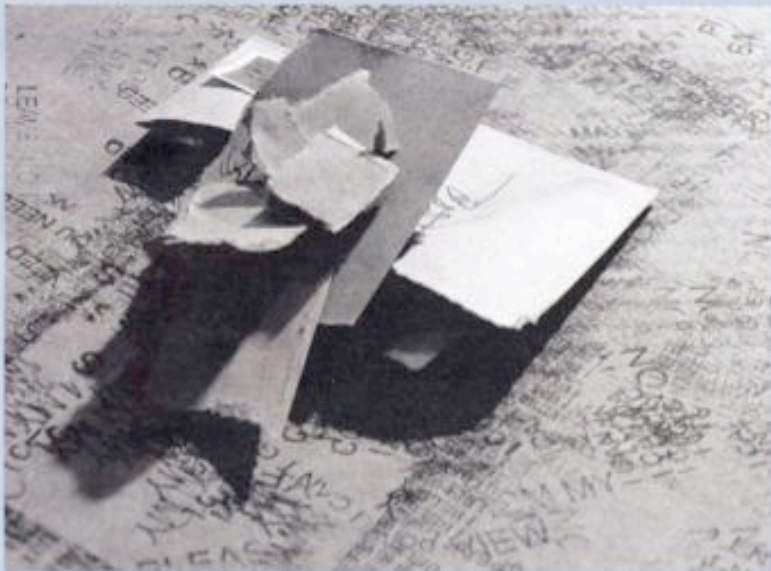


Kahn also brought in photographer Thierry Bal, with the intention of documenting the project, but Bal's role soon morphed into that of collaborator. Here, Kahn and Bal reflect on *Fragile* (opening this month) and on Bal's photographs, which, as Kahn puts it, have a "dream-like" quality all their own.





"I BECAME FASCINATED WITH THE REALIZATION THAT HOWICK PLACE WAS A BUILDING THAT HAD SO MANY THOUGHTS AND WORDS FLOODING THROUGH IT DAILY AND THAT IN ITS NEW FUNCTION WOULD ALSO BE A PLACE OF FLOWING IDEAS AND CREATIVITY. WRITTEN LETTERS ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE OBSOLETE, SO THE FILMS SHOW ME RIPPING, THROWING, SKETCHING, AND STAMPING, PLAYED IN REVERSE, SLOWED DOWN, OR SPED UP. BY MANIPULATING TIME, WE ENTER INTO A ZONE WHERE TASKS LOOK BEAUTIFUL AND MESMERIZING. THIERRY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC SIDE OF THE PIECE TOOK ON THE FORM OF FREEZING OUR ACTIONS. THE STILL IMAGES SEEM TO HAVE A DREAMLIKE QUALITY...



...WHEN WORKING WITH ANY SPECIALIST IN THEIR OWN FIELD I ALWAYS WANT THEM TO ADD THEIR OWN VISION TO THE PROJECT. I THINK SOMETIMES ONE GETS TOO IMMERSSED IN ONE SIDE OF THE PROJECT, IN THIS CASE THE FILMS I WAS MAKING. IT TAKES THE VISION OF ANOTHER PERSON COLLABORATING WITH ME TO LET ME HAVE A BIT OF DISTANCE FROM THE WORK."
 --IDRIS KHAN

"FROM THE START, I SAW A WRITTEN LETTER AS A MINI-TIME CAPSULE, SO FREEZING THE LETTERS AS THEY FLEW THROUGH SPACE BECAME THE MOST IMPORTANT IDEA IN THE MAKING OF WHAT I FEEL IS A VERY ICONIC IMAGE. WE WERE AFTER SPATIAL ARRANGEMENTS, NOT JUST IN A PHYSICAL SENSE, IN THE ENVIRONMENT OF A "FAKE" POST OFFICE, BUT ALSO IN OCCUPYING A CERTAIN PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACE, WHERE MEMORY AND TIME WOULD PLAY CAT AND MOUSE, WHICH ALSO COMES THROUGH IN THE FILMS." --THIERRY BAL

