Collaboration
Will Alsop spills beans

Not so, Will Alsop, whose collaborators already include Gareth Jones, Bruce Mclean and Brian Clarke. Alsop's policy is to circumvent the arts administrators by working with artists who become 'friends.' Liking each other is part of a natural process.

He feels art is so much a part of architecture that paying for it by a 'per cent for art' scheme should be pointless. It is possible to include artists fees in the contract to the point that the client (and more importantly those who tug the purse strings) need not know what is in store until it is too late. A level of deceit, says Alsop is a good thing!

The new lCA should be a giant toy! But where should the toy box live? Paddington Station? Jubilee Gardens? With more artists living in Hackney than in Paris a shift to the east might well prove popular. The site chosen and bought for it is the set of bridge supports spanning the Thames between Blackfriars road and rail bridges. They are, in fact, the remains of an old Blackfriars rail bridge. This clever choice links Southwark with the city, (perhaps funding from both councils?) comes complete with existing foundations and cocks a snook at the Bankside Tate 2 minutes walk away. A gleam came into Alsops' eye as he asked "where is the museum of modern art? Answer. Behind the new Tate.

The few weeks spent on ideas for the new gallery started with drawings of the new bridge structure as a rectilinear box subdivided into smaller boxes penetrated by light to a lesser or greater degree. This 'light moderator' idea seems to stem from earlier work with Bruce Mclean. (I remember seeing a painting of a rectangular stick of coloured boxes for a project in Berlin). Alsop indicated how this light moderator could be utilised by artists to manipulate the resultant space, thus retaining the concept of the gallery as a toy. The new gallery will hopefully rectify the present disproportionate ratio of admin to gallery space.

Presently the form looks like a long box extending over the river (linking with Railtracks plans for the adjacent rail station) and on the north side opposite Unilever House an amorphous resin coated plywood shell looking like a baked potato wherein the main entrance and offices would be
housed. One difficulty will be the strict planning laws that insist on keeping views of St Pauls. This might mean the cinema will be suspended beneath the new structure. Alsop is confident to the point of combatancy that the new project will happen. He feels the ICA's remit to constantly question what new art can be needs active support. He hopes to collaborate on the project with Jean Nouvel and Nigel Coates.

Failure to be shortlisted for the New Tate irritates Will. He showed his ideas and plans for the new gallery starting with a consideration of the vast size of the Bankside Station. The Tate Gallery at Millbank shows some 7000 sq. m. of art. The Bankside is 7 times bigger. His solution is to introduce a whole new architecture in the form of rectangular boxes that sit on and push through the outer brick walls. Up to 8 of these new buildings could be introduced, some on the same grid and some at eccentric angles. Extending beyond the outer wall of the existing building was a surprising move. But why should one want to make a huge building even bigger?

These long boxes were similar to the ideas that surfaced in his plans for the ICA. Such a lecture is invaluable in helping us to understand the nature of Alsop's creativity. His fascinations have included the egg which surfaced in the ovoid Cardiff Bay Visitors Centre and in two parts of his 'Grand Bleu', and currently the light moderator series of boxes laid end to end. He also seems interested in the idea of a building as a table that can be 'laid' in various ways.

He explores these themes through paintings and drawings that make simple, tentative explorations into form. These are brightly coloured gestural works and draw upon his collaborators, Mclean in particular. Mr Alsop builds, as he paints, as he talks, a hugely enjoyable showman.

Jonathan Butler