

# Art & Protest: What's there to be mad about?



bethlem  
gallery

# Art & Protest

**7 September–8 November 2019**

Bethlem Gallery is pleased to present this group exhibition of artworks and protest ephemera curated by artist and activist Dolly Sen. Dolly became involved in mental health activism after her own experience as a psychiatric patient and as a witness to other's experience.

There are people who rise up against what has hurt them, whether it be psychiatric coercion, benefit cut deaths, austerity, or any other form of oppression. *Art & Protest: What's there to be mad about?* is a celebration and acknowledgement of the role of art in political activism by those who take a stand.

Dolly says: *'This exhibition will honour our right to be ourselves and to be treated with humanity and respect, and even our right to stay alive, by using art to confront, to embolden ourselves with, to stand tall, and to show others they are not alone.*

*We need to protest to reject the status we have been given. It is art to create an effect and affect; it is to change things; it is switching the power relations to make perpetrators look like twats.*

*Art is our armour to go into battle with; a way to create a world where we can claim some of our soul back.'*

The mental health protest movement has been around for decades, this exhibition presents and rejoices in some of the current and recent work coming out of the UK and aims to provide a platform for dialogue around art, activism and the mental health care system.

Featuring: Bobby Baker, Chas de Swiet, Colin Hambrook, Dolly Sen, Nat F (F.E.E.L. — Friends of East End Loonies), gobscore, Hamja Ahsan, John Hoggett, Mad Chicks, Mad Pride, Nick Lloyd, Paul McMichael, Rachel Rowan Olive, Recovery in the Bin, Speak Out

Against Psychiatry (SOAP), Thompson Hall, the vacuum cleaner and Hana Madness, Vince Laws and BA Curating students from Goldsmiths College.

## Thanks

Dolly says: I would like to thank Alison Rose, my partner. Scamp the wonder dog. Penny Shaughnessy & Shirley Pearson for providing the Mad Pride stuff. Sarah Taylor and Robert Dellar for introducing me to the world of madness, art and protest.

Together we'd like to thank all the contributing artists, activists, writers and groups who have kindly let us share their artworks and ephemera for this very important exhibition.

Thank you to Sue and Mike for their technical expertise. And a huge thank you to all the Bethlem Gallery volunteers who help make everything we do, possible: Susannah, James, Beth, Kim, Emily, Harriet, Amy, Alex, Anna Maria, Ann, Ben, Michelle, Kim, Xavier.

# Contributors

## **Bobby Baker**

### ***Pull Yourself Together***

First performed in London, 2000

Commissioned as part of the performance series Small Acts for the Millennium curated and produced by a consortium of Tim Etchells and Verity Leigh of Forced Entertainment, Lois Keidan, Adrian Heathfield and Hugo Glendinning.

Displayed here: Video documentation of *Pull Yourself Together* performed as part of the third International Madness and Arts Festival, Het Dolhuys, Haarlem, The Netherlands

Photographic documentation of *Pull Yourself Together*, London 2000 by Hugo Glendinning  
Credits: Artwork by Bobby Baker. Managed by Daily Life Ltd. Daily Life Ltd is an Arts Council Funded National Portfolio Organisation.  
Photograph: Hugo Glendinning. Video: Regie: Esther Vossen. Camera: Thomas Kist. Montage: Daan van de Westelaken. Met dank aan Gili Cronwel. ©2010 Het Dolhuys, national museum van de psychiatrie.  
[www.hetdolhuys.nl](http://www.hetdolhuys.nl)

## **Can art affect social change?**

Blimey these are massive questions. My answers will be tiny in comparison. YES IT CAN.

## **What's there to be mad about?**

I got better when I finally realised, rather late in life, that the world is mad not me. People can be wicked and cruel, terrible things happen, injustice and evil exist and so on. As a start I try not to be all of the above. *I got stuck in a ridiculous traffic jam in Piccadilly once on my way somewhere supposedly important for work. Everyone was going crazy shouting at each other, but my driver was laughing and relaxed. I asked him*

*how he put up with it all. He said, "I'm not going to let this ruin my life, so I let it pass me by."*

I choose my battles now and act with low down cunning and wit to try and change things when I can.

## **What is protest to you?**

Definition: Protest—a statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something.

The new major project I'm working is *Epic Domestic*—which is my plan to create a Domestic Revolutionary Party fit for the Twenty First Century. I'm focusing on creating the Propaganda material for now.

I am the leader of this Epic Party but am looking for other highly skilled domestic experts to join in this important artistic venture—more a crusade than a protest.

My aim is that we will take to the streets wearing exquisite, strange yet utilitarian outfits to campaign for a New World where we are finally rewarded for our grossly undervalued domestic labour.

## **Colin Hambrook**

### ***The Jealous Psychiatrist***

#### **Oil on canvas**

Colin Hambrook is a survivor artist and poet who has had a connection with the mental health system since early childhood. He has allied with the Survivor Movement since the mid-1980s and was on the committee for Survivors' Poetry at its outset in the early 1990s. He has exhibited his paintings, drawings and prints widely, and has had two illustrated collections published: *100 Houses* (DaDaSouth, 2011) and *Knitting Time* (Waterloo Press, 2013). He has 25 years experience working at the hub of the Disability Arts Movement as an editor/producer, publishing and showcasing work by disabled

artists, fostering networks and enabling debates around the development of disability arts practice, supporting artists whose work reflects the ways in which society disables and marginalises sections of our community.

*The Jealous Psychiatrist* is one of a series of paintings made in the early 1990s which explores the relationship between current psychiatric practice and the persecution of witches from the 16th to the 18th centuries. A common practice at witch trials in Britain was the use of the ducking stool where a witch if drowned when lowered into water was declared to not have been a witch, but if floated was declared in allegiance with Satan and was killed anyway. The artwork reflects the parallel between beliefs in witchcraft and beliefs in mental illness as pathological disease. The painting expresses the continuity of ways and means that society uses to control individuals deemed to be 'other'. A psychiatric patient is declared to have insight if they conform to the idea that they are subject to a psychopathology and therefore in current parlance to be in recovery. However if a person rejects diagnosis and refuses the idea of having a mental illness, they are deemed to be lacking insight and historically have been subjected to even more punitive forms of 'treatment' with sectioning, neuroleptic drugs and electric shock.

## **Can art affect social change?**

Art can change minds. It can inform people's attitudes about issues of social justice and it can raise debate about ways in which society can change for the better. So as such it can affect the microcosm, although at a wider societal level we tend to see social change move in waves between the radical and the regressive, making it difficult to see how art can affect social change for the better.

## **What's there to be mad about?**

The ways in which the capitalist system shores up its interests in ways that are detrimental to society and to the survival of animal species on the planet. The ways in which our leaders continue to make blank denials of the ways in which we are destroying our planet as a way of justifying their own short term interests and goals.

## **What is protest to you?**

Protest can be having the right conversation at the right time. It can be a conscious decision to do something that has a positive effect on the world or not do something that has a deleterious impact. Protest is in the minds eye. Protest in its purest form is love in a world that continues to speed swiftly towards its own demise.

## **Dolly Sen**

### ***Help the normals***

#### **Plastic collecting can**

#### ***Mr Men do Psychiatry***

#### **Poster**

#### ***Broken Hearts for the DWP***

#### **Cardboard, paint**

My works in the exhibition show that protest can take different forms—it can be literary, a subverted object, a parody or a broken heart. It can be anything, in fact. Throughout history people have used what they have and don't have to protest.

I use humour in much of my work, whether it be literature, art, performance or film. What power does anything have if you laugh at it? I have always said that being human is an absurd and ridiculous career, and sanity is the jobsworth in charge. I have used it to help me get through the humiliations of life, and against systems that humiliate people. Humour as the armour of protest has helped

me and others emerge with less wounds and more hope.

### Can art affect social change?

Art brings alternative stories to the table in a world where a dominant story has the upper hand. It allows stories and action to reach people under the radar so to speak. It has the power to speak more beautifully, eloquently, and empathically than those who create stories that hurt and demean people. Art can tell the stories people long and need to hear, and give them strength. Art can change the way people think about the world, and therefore change the world itself.

### What's there to be mad about?

Trauma, poverty, oppression, all the isms, indifference of the world to the face of pain, pain itself, injustice, too many people being broken, the current welfare system, global warming, bastards in control, stepping on lego, being trapped in systems that just want to use you, hate you, exploit you, or demonise you, psychiatry, Boris Johnson, Mr Trump. As Krishnamurti said, 'It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a sick society.'

### What is protest to me?

To not turn my back on wrong and wrongdoing, but to stand up and stare it straight in the face with more beauty, talent, strength, love and fire than it can ever muster.

### Nat F

#### F.E.E.L.—Friends of East End Loonies

#### *The Loonies Proverb*

#### Digital Print

F.E.E.L.—Friends of East End Loonies is a grassroots self-funded collective of survivors of psychiatry activists, carers and allies. Since 2007 F.E.E.L. has been campaigning and

raising awareness about the harm done by the over-medicalised, degrading, dehumanising and oppressive psychiatric procedures for inpatients and mental health patients in general, having lived experience of these.

The exact causes of mental disorders are still unknown and can be originated by very different sorts of problems. The lack of scientific evidence for psychiatric diagnoses makes psychiatry in fact a pseudoscience.

Many psychiatrists still use the '**chemical imbalance**' theory to get patients to accept their mental diagnosis and take their medication. However it is broadly known among activists that the theory is a fiction created by pharmaceutical and organized psychiatric industries, which often take advantage of people vulnerability and gullibility.

Psychotropic medications are known to be dangerous mind-altering drugs that easily create dependency and cause a variety of side effects and severe health problems (**iatrogenic damage**), including tardive dyskinesia, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, heart disease, suicidal ideations, hallucinations and delusions, to name a few.

The effect of trauma on an individual that experienced abuse, neglect, homelessness, poverty or extreme stress, as per in war zones or extreme life events, are more likely to be reasons that trigger mental and emotional distress in people.

It's important that an individual experiencing severe mental distress have access to safe spaces where to deal with their crisis and take or refuse medication at their own will.

However still today people often end up experiencing coercive detention, forced restraint (physical and/or chemical), ECT (electro convulsive treatment) without giving consent. These aggravate their health & wellbeing, putting lives at risk, creating a toxic

environment for both patients and hospital staff members alike.

These are severe violations of human rights, as they are transgressions of the treaty declared by the United Nation Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in 2006 and agreed by most country in the world.

People should have freedom of choice in the way they are treated when they need help and most importantly should be informed about the side effects and addictiveness of psychotropic drugs.

There are safer and gentler alternatives around the World that respect people's human rights and wellbeing, such as the Soteria Crisis Houses and similar, the Open Dialogue approach and many ancient, shamanic healing techniques that do not require taking personal freedom and dignity away from patients.

We can no longer turn a blind eye to the injustices, deceits and lies psychiatry has been adopting for such a long time. If more and more people are now feeling the urge to speak out their own truth and question what is not feeling right or fair is because all the lies are being exposed.

We hope that psychiatry will change its approach, giving more consideration to the multiple aspects of psycho-social-emotional health, and operate with more empathy and compassion towards the patients and all involved in the care.

Love and Solidarity to all Loonies Brothers & Sisters!

For more information: [twitter.com/EastEndLoonies](https://twitter.com/EastEndLoonies), [www.facebook.com/feel.campaign](https://www.facebook.com/feel.campaign), [friends-of-east-end-loonies.blogspot.co.uk](https://www.friends-of-east-end-loonies.blogspot.co.uk). F.E.E.L.—Friends of East End Loonies meets the 3rd Monday of each month 18:30 to 20:30 at LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES.

### Can art affect social change?

Art can have an immediate impact and straight effect in people perceptions. This has been happening more frequently in the past few years thanks to the advent of the internet and social media, which have allowed like-minded people around the Globe to find each other and join forces in the campaigns of change.

### What's there to be mad about?

- The high number of children (wrongly) diagnosed with ADHD and drugged since early age, often up for life.
- The lies that psychiatry uses to justify horrific treatments.
- The torture-like methods used with distressed & vulnerable people, such as physical and chemical restraint, ECT, solitary confinement in toxic environment.
- The abuse & experimentation people are subjected to.
- Societal inequalities and the different way patients are treated.
- Being locked up and tided up in a confined space; physical restrains are still used in some countries around the World. In Indonesia metal CHAINS are used!!!
- Having any emotional state/response diagnosed as mental health disorder by the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).
- Considering 'diagnosis' a reason to denied insurance, jobs, dignified lifethe addictive and damaging effect of psychotropic drugsthe unfair austerity policies that are bringing the most vulnerable to despair.
- Capitalism, which is destroying people's wellbeing and the planet.

### What is protest to you?

A person would not be protesting if hadn't experience on own skin the detrimental

effects of injustice, oppression, abuse, the trigger for the need of change.

The chance to hear alternative voices other than the “usual ones” are the opportunity of breaking the silence and status quo. Radical / critical thinking is what makes change happen.

### **gobscure**

#### ***provoked to madness by the brutality of wealth***

came from life in a hostel, post sectioning where a ‘support worker’ said what dya need books for yr homeless? we got our revenge—spending 13 years studying for open university degree, graduating 2016 c.e.. the title comes from a course book (engels). this art is actually the set for a solo show—supported by camden peoples theatre, arc stockton and now third angel sheffields boost scheme. the full performance tours in 2020 & beyond. book us!

**pillbox outfoxed** uses found objects, pillboxes, sound art and remixed fragile tape to laugh at the lunacies of psychiatry repeatedly forced on us, giving us heart-attacks, friction burns, broken ribs, homelessnesses, a criminal record & more!

**gobscure**’s been reclaiming the languages of lunacy across artforms, timezones, and realities/virtualities for more than a decade.

More info here: <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/showcase/gobscure-raging-against-the-machine>. <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/podcast-ep-2-disability-and-psychiatry-with-gobscure/>

### **Can art affect social change?**

yes—augusto boal—cardboard citizens—museum of homelessness, elif shafak / mary wollstonecraft / matana roberts (just for e.g.)—by refusing to lie down.

### **What’s there to be mad about?**

theres nae sanity left is there—downing street / press / mental services desperately need therapy.

### **What is protest to you?**

creative resistance, rewriting top-down narratives, asking questions, aka ‘oppositional defiance disorder’.

### **Hamja Ahsan**

#### ***Shy Radicals: The Antisystemic Politics Of The Militant Introvert***

#### **Book. Published by Book Works**

Shy Radicals are the Black Panther Party of the introvert class—a coalition of shy, quiet, autistic spectrum peoples rethinking the state, nationhood and citizenship. Described as a work of speculative activism, the project draws from ideas from anti-psychiatry, the neurodiversity movement, decoloniality and the tropes of teen movies, revolutionary constitutions and alternative music. The movement aims to establish an independent homeland—Aspergistan, a utopian state for introverted people, run according to Shyria Law and underpinned by Pan-Shyist ideology, protecting the rights of the oppressed quiet and shy people, the world over. The book has gained a cult international following and is used as a curatorial project, archive and zine distro. Over a dozen new works inspired by the ideas in the book—this produced by artists and writers around the world from the collective Academics Against Networking to Ipek Burcak The Autistic Turn artist book. Described as the commander-in-chief of the Internationalist Introvert Revolution. Hamja is on a never-ending world tour to overthrow the ideology of extrovert-supremacy.

Hamja Ahsan is an artist, writer, activist and curator based in London. He is author of the

book *Shy Radicals: Antisystemic Politics of the Militant Introvert*. He was recently awarded the Grand Prize at Ljubljana Biennial 2019 for the work *Aspergistan Referendum* based on this book. He is founder and co-curator of the DIY Cultures Festival of Creative Activism, zines and independent publisher since 2013. He was shortlisted for the Liberty Human Rights Award for the Free Talha Ahsan campaign on extradition and detention without trial under the War on Terror. His recent writing was anthologised in *No Colour Bar: Black Art in Action 1960–1990*. Ahsan archives a collection of mental health zines, developing workshops and lectures series’ around them. He is a Guest Lecturer in Art Practice at Universities across the UK & Europe, including Goldsmiths, Oxford, Artez (Netherlands), Staedelschule (Germany) and the Royal College of Art.

Ahsan has presented art projects at PS1 MOMA New York, Tate Modern, Gwangju Biennale, Guild Gallery New York, Shaanakht festival Pakistan, Shlipa Academy, Bangladesh and most recently at Printroom in Rotterdam, Netherlands. His practice encompasses conceptual writing, building archives, performance, video, sound and making zines. He is currently working on a project on the role of zines in the Hillsborough Justice campaign, Britain largest police cover up. His forthcoming exhibitions include *Dial 001: Introvert Emergency Rescue Hotline* at Art Licks Weekend—a sound walk and street poster series across Brick Lane in October and ‘Shy Radicals Film Season’ at Glasgow International 2019.

### **Can art affect social change?**

Yes, directly by keeping public memory alive, create new identities, keep the imagination alive, reimagining. But I also think uselessness, and non-instrumental art is an affirmation

of humanity and existence as resistance, it keeps alive the right to be non-productive. The flower painting and abstract painting is a demand for meditative time, leisure, space to just be, soulfulness.

### **What’s there to be mad about?**

Inequality. Injustice. The Extrovert—supremacy.

### **What is protest to you?**

#ShyPower is a my own signal for my party Shy Radicals and Introvert Liberation Movement. I also see my depressive episodes as a form of strike, which goes beyond positive or negative binary, and is an affirmation.

### **John Hoggett**

#### ***Fossil Fool Days Talk***

#### **Audio. 6:09 mins duration**

I have been looking at psychiatry with a critical eye for about 30 years. I have also been involved in climate change campaigns for 20 years. What strikes me is how big money influences government policy around both climate change, the fossil fuel industry, mental health policy and how we view mental distress.

Psychiatry was set up early on in industrial revolution and the emergence of capitalism as a way of removing severely distressed people who were living in poverty from the community. Doctors saw warehousing the mentally distressed as a way of making money from the state. Huge sums of money are now made by drug companies by selling psychiatric drugs yet the recovery rates from those diagnosed with mental illnesses are not much different from Victorian England.

Much of my work is often focused on making explicit power relationships explicit, whether they be within families and personal relationships or between the state, commercial interests and those with less power, i.e. the



Opposite: Nick Lloyd  
What's there to be mad about?

poor and marginalised. I am an experienced performance poet, dramatist and visual artist often using participatory methods that use art to spark off conversations that build the confidence of those most marginalised in our communities.

### Can art affect social change?

I see art effecting social change in four ways:

1. Art in the Community: where fine artists put on shows in working class communities, bringing fine art to the masses and bringing money and audiences with it.
2. Community Art: where the poor and marginalised make art together, often with paid workshop leaders. This can increase people's confidence, build relationships and foster careers of people the poor and marginalised. Cooltan Arts is a good example of Community Art with mental health service users and survivors of psychiatry.
3. Campaign Art: trade union banners are a prime example of this, as are political badges and banners at rallies and demonstrations. This is where a campaign or movement uses art as a way of identifying itself or celebrating its achievements and spreading its message.
4. Art as Tactic: where art challenges people to think in ways that challenge power holders, where the art is the tactic that holds the powerful to account. Dolly Sen's Trip Adviser review of The Maudsley Hospital is an excellent example of this. My friend Tom wants me to perform my poem, *Let's Celebrate Benefit Claimants* inside a job centre, get chucked out, film it and put it on YouTube as a move towards organising a benefit claimants union and protesting against this brutal governments benefit cuts. The Reclaim Shakespeare company

stage invasion of the theatre in Stratford where they performed mock Shakespearean soliloquies protesting BP sponsorship of the arts is another excellent example of where Art is integral to the campaign and not just an add on.

### What's there to be mad about?

What is there not to be mad about? Benefit cuts and landlords who can evict at short notice leading to a massive rise in people begging on the streets for one thing. Being physically man handled and chucked out of my local psychiatric hospital because I was advocating for a friend and sneaked in outside of visiting hours for another.

### What is protest to you?

Protest is the only way to survive this oppressive world where the rich eat the poor for breakfast and spit us out into the waste receptacles that are psychiatric hospitals.

### Mad Chicks

#### Archive material

Mad Chicks began in London in 2004 as the women's wing of Mad Pride by Melanie Clifford, Esther Leslie, Debbie McNamara, Dolly Sen, Penny Shaughnessy, Gini Simpson, Rachel Studley, Sarah Tonin and Esther Wheatley.

Mad Chicks is a movement, which focuses on issues specific to women mental health service users, using creativity to achieve our aims and attract attention to our causes. We have developed from within Mad Pride, an international user-led movement which challenges discrimination and misinformation in relation to mental health and celebrates mad culture.



### Mad Pride

#### Archive material

Mad Pride is a global mass movement, including users of mental health services and their allies, seeking to reclaim terms such as 'mad' and 'nutter' from misuse.

It aims to educate on potential causes of mental illness and the experiences of those who use mental health services; but most of all, it celebrates and stands in solidarity with those who experience any form of mental distress.

Mad pride is set to become the first great civil liberties movement of the 21st century. Sick of discrimination, marginalisation, medication and being treated like shit, psychiatric patients are preparing to rise from the ghettos and make the world a fit place to live in...

We are committed to ending discrimination

against psychiatric patients and challenging negative assumptions about 'madness'. Rather than medicalising it, we see 'madness' as a product of the shit society that we live in. Rather than try to fit into 'Normality', which is a materialistic, sheep like concept we are trying to create alternatives. Where's SANITY got us anyhow?

### Nick Lloyd

#### **UK Society Repair Manual (No deal Brexit Edition) 2018/2019**

#### Archival inkjet print

My work uses photography and design to confront the unacceptable and unpalatable lies and propaganda we receive from the world around us. I used to make 'straight' photographs. I still do occasionally. But I wanted to do more. say more. And photography wasn't making me happy.

Or fulfilled. And that's a tough thing to realise after decades of work.

After a series of mental health crises, when I'd recovered enough, I needed to make a lot of permanent changes.

Seeing Dolly's work, looking at Jenny Holzer and other activist art helped steer me towards the direction I'm now taking.

### **Can art affect social change?**

Yes. By changing the original and unacceptable messages about the world we constantly receive. the world we know. from Austerity to the Bedroom Tax, from Climate Heating to No Deal Brexit. Confronting lies and propaganda with truth and personal experience has never been more important. my work uses subversion to re-frame the original message and intent. Often using the same imagery and techniques originally employed but to different ends.

I believe in influencing by example.

demonstrating why change is necessary. using humour (which sugars the pill) and making the case for change with either subtlety or the full force of a sledgehammer using whatever creative tools are at my disposal.

### **What's there to be mad about?**

See image on previous page,.

### **What is protest to you?**

About the personal choices I make in my life and about confronting through my creative work, using Twitter as a creative platform, the intolerances, prejudices and nonsense abroad in our world. My first activist contributions were to the mental health magazine *Asylum* in 2018, since then I've been a supporter of ROAR [roarmag.org](http://roarmag.org) and also AdBusters [adbusters.org](http://adbusters.org).

Joining, talking with, and viewing the work of other artists and writers, particularly the work of other activists in the survivor/activist mental health community has also been an important act, seeing how protest takes shape at first hand. All of which has helped shape the direction of my recent work.

### **Paul McMichael**

#### ***Anti-Psychiatry Protest Banner***

**Cardboard, coloured paper, lettering, paper streamers, sellotape**

### **Can art affect social change?**

I'm not sure whether I believe that art is directly involved in affecting social change. Art is often a reaction to social situations— injustice, inequality, etc. I think art can have a powerful effect on its audience as a consequence as it offers space for reflection and debate about issues in society which affect us all. So I try to remain open to the argument as to whether it can affect social change. I think that, in order to answer a question like this, one ought to be able to come up with some examples of great art works that have fulfilled this intention. Personally, I find this harder to do. I think about a masterpiece like Picasso's *Guernica* (where the artist expressed justifiable outrage about the effect of war on the innocent people of this Spanish town) or the political murals in South America and closer to home in Northern Ireland, where sectors of the community have expressed their feelings of oppression or discrimination directly onto walls in public spaces where the whole community is forced to confront such issues; the banners and placards that people make and use on protest marches are another example—which my art work for this exhibition was created for. However, the question seems to remain open to debate:

have these art works actually brought about change specifically, or can they at most raise awareness about the issues involved. Either way, I still think this provides good enough evidence for using and promoting art as an essential tool in the pursuit of social change.

### **What's there to be mad about?**

I think there is more to be mad about in 2019 than ever, certainly in my lifetime! As a Socialist, I am constantly in despair about the state of our world—from the people we elect to power who have no credentials other than money and friends in high places so that the system remains that way, to the way the poorest members of society are made to pay for the gambling of banks and financiers that bring about economy crashes followed by long periods of austerity imposed on those same poor by those same rich and powerful—in turn leading to cuts to healthcare, schooling and social care budgets and general degradation of quality of life for all; to the exploitation and destruction of the climate that big business is equally to blame for and which seems to continue regardless, despite our constant protesting, which can only lead to an inevitable catastrophic outcome for the planet. One can only ask how has it come to this and why don't the majority of us 'mad citizens of the world' rise up and revolt for change as one united voice.

### **What is protest to you?**

For me personally, protest is about using what little power or voice I have to express my dissatisfaction with the circumstances I seem forced to deal with day to day. This can be through direct participation in street protests and marches and also through my art—I paint from a political stance although not in a way that is obviously ramming my

views down people's throats; being true to one's values is a good basis for creating art in a way that exhibits a subtle form of protest, I think. The subjects I choose to paint, for example—I recently completed a series of paintings of outdoor working people who maintain the cleanliness and quality of our streets but who often go unnoticed despite the crucial job they do and how hard they actually work; also the artists who have influenced me greatly, e.g. Van Gogh and others who represented ordinary people in their work and battled with their own mental health conditions to do so—this is a form of protest in that it altered the tradition of only painting the elite and made us radically rethink who art is for by raising the 'insignificant nobodies' to a deserved elevated status of relevance and importance. This all seems to relate back to the 'affecting social change' question in that, if artists observe their social environments closely and focus on those who deserve genuine credit for maintaining standards for all of us, we as artists can potentially help to influence those looking at our work to equally take more notice of the little things that, accumulatively, can matter enormously and shows how we can and should all feel more empowered to play our part in bringing about major social changes in the future, hopefully, if only through acknowledging those subjects and themes that artists actually regard as deserving and relevant of representation in their work.

### **Rachel Rowan Olive**

#### ***A is for Awkward***

**Digital print and watercolour**

I'm a self-taught artist. I never really drew much until after I had a breakdown in 2013. So a lot of my work is about mental health and that's always been a political thing for me,

because all my experiences of madness have been in the context of a system reeling from the impact of austerity. And I was given a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder, which is also intensely political, because it's the diagnosis given to queers and women who don't perform our pain in the correct, socially acceptable ways.

My art has a history of getting kicked out of clinical settings for being 'inappropriate'. *A is for Awkward*, the piece in this exhibition, was originally a zine, and the version on display was created to show at the Institute of Group Analysis in 2018. But they took it down after one of their members complained about the word 'cunt'. To be honest, I was surprised that was the thing they objected to; I would've understood if they were concerned about triggering people by talking about overdoses, say, or discussing suicidal ideation. But I don't understand why people are more offended by the language I use to describe my experiences than the absurd and unjust situations which led to them.

### Can art affect social change?

Honestly, I'm not sure. I've certainly had my mind changed by art but I don't really make it in the expectation or even the hope of changing anything anymore—I make it out of frustration, because if things are going to be this awful I'm damn well going to get a laugh out of it. I run some training with mental health professionals and I do use my art to try and get them to change the way they think and act; but that always comes later, it's not why I make it. Where I do have hope for it changing things is in the solidarity art can create between disabled and otherwise marginalised people, when we can draw strength from shared experience and at least not take to heart so many of the toxic

messages surrounding us. I guess that's a prerequisite for practical resistance—at least remembering that there is something to resist, and gathering strength for the fight.

### What's there to be mad about?

\*Gestures wildly\* have you seen... everything?

### What is protest to you?

Well, firstly it's survival. As a disabled person you get these constant messages from government and media that you're nothing, you're a burden, you're a drain on state resources. Resisting and subverting that narrative is a way to survive being under siege. Making each other laugh is resistance.

A lot of get-on-the-streets-and-shout kinds of protests just aren't accessible to me as a mad person. I can't cope with crowds and noise, I'm in and out of mental health crises too much to reliably commit to more practical organising, and it makes me feel like a terrible activist a lot of the time. I hate it. So survival and pissy cartoons is pretty much all I can manage for now. I hope it won't be that way forever.

### Rita Bins—recoveryinthebin.org A2 poster

We are a User Led group for MH Survivors and Supporters who are fed up with the way co-opted 'recovery' is being used to discipline and control those who are trying to find a place in the world, to live as they wish, trying to deal with the very real mental distress they encounter on a daily basis. We believe in human rights and social justice!

We want a robust 'Social Model of Madness, Distress & Confusion', placing mental health within the context of social justice and the wider class struggle.

We consider 'Unrecovered' is as valid and

legitimate as 'Recovered', and we accept and respect the political and social difference. So some of us have accepted a new word / signifier 'Unrecovered'. However, this doesn't mean we want to stay 'unwell' or 'ill' (whatever that means), but that we reject this new neoliberal intrusion on the word 'recovery' that has been redefined, and taken over by marketisation, language, techniques and outcomes.

We recognise that the growing development of MH 'Recovery' in UK/US, during the past decade or so has been corrupted by neoliberalism and capitalism is the crisis! Some of us will never feel 'Recovered' living under these intolerable and inhumane social pressures.

We believe that there are core principles of 'recovery' that are worth saving, and that the colonisation of 'recovery' undermines those principles, which have hitherto championed autonomy and self-determination. These principles cannot be found in a one size fits all technique, or calibrated by an outcome measure.

We ask that mental health services should never put anyone under any pressure to 'recover', by over emphasising or even imposing 'Recovery Stars' or WRAP's (Wellness Recovery Action Plan). We stand opposed to mental health services using 'recovery' ideology as a means of masking greater coercion. We believe that this rise is a symptom of neoliberalism and that a meaningful 'recovery' is impossible for many of us because of the intolerable social and economic conditions, such as poor housing, poverty, stigma, racism, sexism, unreasonable work expectations, and countless other barriers. The underfunding and under resourcing of mental health services means that service users are under pressure to

conform to a narrow idea of recovery. The changes to the social security system promote the ideal of work being good for everyone's health while undermining any real hope of a good life, which is what recovery is supposed to be about.

### Thompson Hall

#### **Universal credit**

Acrylic on canvas

#### **Breadline**

Acrylic on canvas

These new painting are a continuation of the work I created for *My Life in London* where I thought about myself and things that effect me. At that time it was about me as a person from Ghanaian heritage living in London. That made me think wider about how things happening in the world effect me, eg. politics, social change, being marginalised—we live by rules and regulations that say you can't do this and you can't do that. In my paintings I am trying to tell people how this makes me feel.

Thompson Hall works primarily in acrylic paint and pastel. A frequent visitor of museums and galleries, he sketches the urban landscape and uses these observations to create flat and patterned compositions. Hall has a nurtured interest in art and art history, citing references like Auerbach and studying the free exhibitions across London intently.

Hall's use of colour is spontaneous, using his palette to express the feelings and emotions a space can create. Describing his depictions as 'more abstract' than true to life, Hall's interpretations of buildings and places are windows into his experience and history.

Of his process, Thompson has said, 'I kind of have a plan in my head but it's not really set. If I'm at home I tend to spend a bit of time thinking about what sort of images I use, or to draw. Sometimes I use colours to express



feelings and emotions. I suppose it's also to describe my personality.'

### Can art affect social change?

Yes. What art does is it highlights some of the issues that we hear about every day and makes people aware of them and think about them.

### What's there to be mad about?

- Changes to the benefit system where they think people are trying to get out of working and don't understand that this is not possible for everyone.
- People finding it hard to make ends meet and not getting enough help from the government.
- Political leaders who show their ignorance to everything and not acknowledging what is happening under their leadership.

### What is protest to you?

- Making art talking about what I am thinking and what I feel so that other people can see it and may think about how they can help make things better.
- How people make a stand for things that they believe in.
- People working together.
- the vacuum cleaner and Hana Madness.

### The vacuum cleaner and Hana Madness *In Chains*

Video. 17.32. Spoken Indonesian with Indonesian and English Subtitles.

*In Chains* is a short documentary that comes out of a new collaboration between artists and mental health activists 'the vacuum cleaner' (UK) and Hana Madness (Indonesia).

The film focuses on Istana KSJ (or informally The Palace) a radical and autonomous mental health community that is rebuilding lives in

West Java, Indonesia. Many of those living at KSJ have previously been subjected to a practice of shackling, chaining or confinement known as 'Pasung' because of their disability, some for decades. The film is a portrait of this community and its residents, and how it works to humanise those who have been denied their humanity.

Trigger Warning: This film includes descriptions of torture and confinement.

### Can art affect social change?

Of course it can, but you have to be smart and efficient about how you make it and the context you place your art in. For me that's about using my experience as an activist to make art.

### What's there to be mad about?

The exploitation of artists labour by arts professionals—Pay Exhibitor Fees Bethlem Gallery. Also torturing disabled people for being disabled is pretty messed up—that's something that's very clear in our *In Chains* film about the practice of pasung in Indonesia. But the UK is just as violent towards disabled people, it may be done through policy and institutions but... you get my point.

### What is protest to you?

Resisting, stopping or preventing injustice or creating the alternatives to the systems that create injustice.

### Vince Laws

#### *DWP Deaths Make Me Sick shrouds*

#### Spray paint on recycled bedding

I became a poet and an artist after testing HIV positive in 2004. I always did a bit of art and creative writing, but never really gave myself permission to have such a financially unstable career. I always thought 'I'll do that when I

retire.' Suddenly I wasn't so sure I'd still be around at retirement age, so I made the decision and got on with it. By 2007 I'd moved from a flat in a block in the city of Brighton, to a rural picture postcard cottage in Norfolk, and I love it.

One of the first things I wrote there was *A Very Queer Nazi Faust*, which began life as a 'depression diary' (something which would have been too expensive to publish and another example of the barriers faced by disabled or otherwise marginalised authors and this kind of protest art), and developed into a play protesting against the press and government's ongoing violence towards disabled people in the UK.

My next project was *DWP Deaths Make Me Sick*, a series of shrouds that began as giant pages in the Faust play's 'blasphemous book of state sanctioned torture,' and were on stage as backdrops in 2018. They highlight the deaths of people dealing with the DWP in the UK.

I felt that the shrouds deserved to be seen in their own right, so I'm concentrating on that this year. They've been on street protests, in Parliament, and hung on gallery walls. They definitely attract attention. They're bold and vibrant, and when people read them they are shocked or sad or angry, or pleased to see their story represented.

### Can art affect social change?

Whilst starting a political party might be considered one of the more obvious political statements to make, art has given me a platform to engage with, and challenge, an even wider audience. Put simply, art taps into the emotional rather than the logical. By using art to respond to these issues, I want to share a message with people who might not otherwise engage with them during such politically turbulent times.

### What's there to be mad about?

Since 2010, when a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats took over from Labour Party in the UK, a squeeze on public finances has been linked to nearly 120,000 excess deaths in England according to a study published in the online journal *BMJ Open*.

Cambridge University Professor Lawrence King, who contributed to the study, has said that 'Austerity does not promote growth or reduce deficits, it is bad economics. It is also a public health disaster. It is not an exaggeration to call it economic murder.' The United Nations describes this as 'a grave and systematic abuse of disabled peoples' human rights.' If nothing changes, that figure will rise to 200,000 excess deaths by 2020.

If anything the situation is getting worse. There have been more cuts to social security payments, alongside more tax cuts for the wealthiest. As a disabled person I feel I am treated as an enemy of the state. I've just had my own claim for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) turned down, despite support from my GP, my HIV consultant, a psychologist and five support workers.

Despite widespread protests and some mainstream media coverage, resistance to the cuts and the subsequent deaths is brushed aside by the current UK government, while disabled people and their organisations are ignored. The Department of Work and Pensions' (DWP) response to concerns regarding the mortality rates of disabled claimants was to refuse to publish them anymore.

# Events

For all workshops, unless advertised as a drop-in, please book via our website [bethlemgallery.com](http://bethlemgallery.com) or by calling us on 0203 228 4101. No previous art experience necessary, all welcome. Under 16's must be accompanied by an adult.

## Workshop

### ***Protest t-shirts: what's there to be mad about?***

**Saturday 7 September**

**10:30am–12:30pm**

**Bethlem Gallery**

What makes you mad? Join us to print your own protest t-shirt. Inspired by our new exhibition 'Art and Protest—what's there to be mad about?' we will be designing our own slogans and stencilling them onto t-shirts. Bring along your own t-shirt to upcycle. We will be looking at art by activist Vince Laws which has been used in street protests and in parliament.

## Workshop

### ***Art of Protest: 1***

**Saturday 28th September**

**1pm–5pm. Drop-in. No need to book.**

**Bethlem Gallery**

Join artists and students from Goldsmiths College, UoL to make banners, placards and protest objects for the 'Art of Protest' march for World Mental Health Day on 10th October.

## Workshop

### ***Protest banners: what's there to be mad about?***

**Saturday 5 October**

**10:30am–12:30pm**

**Bethlem Gallery**

Have your voice heard! Join us to make your own protest placard. Pick a cause you are passionate about, be it the environment, human rights or mental health rights, create a slogan and use stencils, paint and tape to get your message out there.

## Workshop

### ***Art of Protest: 2***

**Saturday 5th October**

**1pm–5pm. Drop-in. No need to book.**

**Bethlem Gallery**

Join artists and students from Goldsmiths College, UoL to make banners, placards and protest objects for the 'Art of Protest' march for World Mental Health Day on 10th October.

## Workshop and march

### ***Art of Protest: 3 and march***

**Thursday 10th October**

**ORTUS, Maudsley Hospital site**

**11am–4pm. Drop-in. No need to book.**

Join artists and students from Goldsmiths College, UoL to make banners, placards and protest objects for the 'Art of Protest' march and join the march.

## The Robert Dellar memorial lecture 2019

**Saturday 26th October**

**2pm–3:30pm**

**Bethlem Museum of the Mind, Wolfson Room**

Denise McKenna, co-founder of the Mental Health Resistance Network will be delivering the annual Robert Dellar Memorial lecture. Co-founder of Mad Pride, Robert Dellar was a talented writer, survivor, advocate and activist for improvements in mental health services, and was a key force behind the Mental Health Resistance Network. Robert Dellar passed away in 2016.

## Workshop

### ***Protest zines: what's there to be mad about?***

**Saturday 2 November**

**10:30am–12:30pm**

**Bethlem Gallery**

Join artist and writer Rachel Rowan Olive and artist Beth Hopkins for a workshop exploring the political power of the zine and have a go at making your own zine.

## Dolly Sen and Chas de Swiet

### ***mad passports***

**Saturday 2nd November**

**12:30–2pm. Drop-in. No need to book.**

**Bethlem Gallery**

Dolly & Chas are on the border of mad heaven. Border controls check to see whether people are sufficiently mad enough to go in. Dolly is dressed as the doctor in charge, Chas is the pharmacist who has morphed into a non-binary cyber punk. Dolly interrogates people and when they have satisfied the questioning they are given a mad passport, then they are allowed into heaven with... well, wait and see.

## BETHLEM SALON #13 'The Art of Protest'

### **Discussion**

**Saturday 2 November**

**3–5pm**

**Bethlem Gallery**

Join artists, researchers and activists to discuss the histories and ongoing impact of mental health activism through the arts.

## Mini-Bonkersfest

**Monday 11 November**

**6:30–8pm. Drop-in. No need to book.**

**Dragon Café**

Join Dolly Sen and a group of artists, activists, writers and performers for a resurrection of Bonkersfest, the celebration of all things creative, eccentric and crazy. Line up TBC!

**‘Protest in its  
purest form is  
love in a world  
that continues  
to speed swiftly  
towards its  
own demise.’  
—Colin Hambrook**