

# Bethlem Gallery | Press Release

for immediate release

**Key Dates:** Exhibition opens from 1 February to 13 May 2023

**Press Preview:** 31 January 2023 2pm - 8pm Bethlem Gallery, BR3 3BX

Artists' performances: Michelle Baharier and Chris Lewis-Jones at 4pm and 7pm

## Bethlem Gallery announces Being Present: an exhibition of new artist collaborations and its 2023 exhibitions programme

Anxietea and biscuits, and a game of pass the artwork-parcel are two of the artworks exhibited in a new partnership between artists connected to Bethlem Gallery in London and artist-run space Primary, in Nottingham. 'Being Present' presents new artworks created through virtual collaborations between eight artists working in pairs during the pandemic, as an antidote to their artistic isolation. The 2023 programme includes two more curated shows and the annual Bethlem Gallery Art Fair.



**Artist pairings:** Frank Abbott with Mr X, Michelle Baharier with Chris Lewis-Jones, Courtney with Roger Suckling, and Fatma Durmush with Jo Wheeler.

Developed as a response to combat pandemic imposed isolation, artists from Bethlem Gallery, London and artist-led contemporary visual arts organisation Primary in Nottingham

came together in 'Artist Meets'. This artist-to-artist support project enabled them to share their approaches and ideas and create new work together.

Four Bethlem Gallery artists were selected and paired with four artists from Primary who had similarities in practice and approach. *Being Present* is an exhibition of paintings, collage, photography, sculpture and performance works created through these new collaborations. The show is accompanied by an artist's performance and sharing at Primary.

### **Michelle Baharier and Chris Lewis-Jones**

Michelle Baharier and Chris Lewis-Jones' work together is titled *Teatime Presence* and explores ideas associated with being, presence, well-being and the 'great British tea break'. During timed performances on specific days, the artists will serve tea to visitors at Bethlem Gallery. The names of their teas evoke psychological conditions: *anxiete*, *hostilite*, and *hospitalite*.

### **Fatma Durmush and Jo Wheeler** (Images below)

In their collaboration, Fatma Durmush and Jo Wheeler explored an exchange between their painting and photographic practices. As a starting point, they parcelled up prints and canvases to post to each other with a loose idea that they'd each respond in some way to what the other offered. Jo Wheeler's photographs of the scarred floor from an old textile mill were integrated into Fatma Durmush's collages reflecting deeply rooted childhood memories and dreams. The surface of Fatma's paintings were closely examined by Wheeler's photographic lens to explore and reframe Durmush's mark-making and colour.

**Jo Wheeler said:** "I work in collaboration a lot so I'm fairly used to working with the uncertainty that that brings. In the beginning, how we'd work together didn't feel obvious. I'd been playing with some ideas and sent photographs to Fatma to use. She sent me her drawings. The contrast between our practices was what became really interesting for me, making work that combined Fatma's expressive mark-making and personal narratives with my camera's more formal, conscious observations. I think some interesting, unexpected things materialised as we swapped the work back and forth."



### **Courtney & Roger Suckling** (main image)

Courtney & Roger Suckling's collaboration projects images over objects to explore community, identity and gender. Overcoming their difficulties in distance and lockdown communications has

been translated into their work, exploring the concept of community and distance. Films they have created together will be projected onto sculptural pieces and the architecture within the gallery.

### **Frank Abbott & Mr X**

Frank Abbott and Mr X's work features a construction making a surprise visit to a small park in Nottingham. The visit takes place in April 2023 during the blossoming of the cherry trees as a surprise 'message for the future' and culmination of a ritual. At Bethlem Gallery, the artists will show the construction, their messages for the future and a filmed documentation of the surprise visit.

Sessions to accompany the artistic collaboration included archiving from Wellcome Trust archivists and a session on collaboration. It provided the artists with a chance to have conversations about their work, and to try new approaches through new ways of working online, which the pandemic has necessitated.

**Sophie Leighton, Director, Bethlem Gallery said:** "During the pandemic lockdowns we wanted to find a way to support artists to engage in meaningful dialogue and share the challenges of working, communicating and developing relationships remotely. The artworks shown in *Being Present* are a successful and direct response to the experiences of lockdown in many ways. All the artists embraced the opportunity to connect with another artist, and generously share their practice, while working together in very different ways, with each artist telling us how their practice has positively shifted in this process. The constraints of not meeting in person, and of developing a relationship and work over time, were difficult but also resulted in some brilliant work which we are excited to share."

**Colette Griffin, Artist Development Coordinator / Curator, PRIMARY said:** "The collaboration between ourselves and Bethlem Gallery has grown beyond all of our expectations. The quality of connections and work developed by participating artists during the project has been inspiring, with each pair of artists taking a unique approach to collaborating during an unprecedented time. Working with an artist you've never met and whose practice you're unfamiliar with isn't a typical starting point for developing a partnership, but all eight participants fully invested in the process and its nuances, finding ways to co-create that worked for them both, and also pushed them. The project kicked off during one of the multiple lockdowns and our participating artists defied geography and circumstance to create new work together that we're all extremely excited to see exhibited at Bethlem Gallery in *Being Present*."

### **Bethlem Gallery shows in 2023:**

- **Being Present**, 1 February – 13 May 2023  
Four pairs of artists who have worked together remotely throughout the pandemic across the UK present their collaborative works.
- **Open Spaces** [working title], 24 May – 9 September 2023  
Artists Abu Khan and Beth Hopkins curate this exhibition exploring our relationship to public space.
- **Keith Clapson: Clay** [working title] 16 September – 18 November 2023

Ceramics as described by Clapson: 'bright, beautiful, colourful, bold, funny, sarcastic, crude, drips, blobs, gloop and glaze'.

- **Bethlem Gallery Art fair**, 25 November 2023 – 20 January 2024  
Our annual art fair returns, including affordable paintings, drawings, prints and ceramics.

Being Present opens from 1 February to 13 May 2023 at Bethlem Gallery in London. For more information visit <https://bethlemgallery.com/whats-on/being-present/>

## **Editors Notes:**

**PR representative:** For interviews, press preview RSVPs and further information please contact: Binita Walia 07734 507799 [binita@thespaceinbetween.co.uk](mailto:binita@thespaceinbetween.co.uk)

**Press Images:** [Google folder link](#)

**Detailed artwork descriptions:** [Google doc link](#)

**Artists Biographies:** [Google Doc link](#)

**Bethlem Gallery 'Being Present' Website:** [LINK](#)

**Credit:** *Being Present* is an exhibition of four pairs of artist's collaborations developed by Bethlem Gallery London and Nottingham Primary. It is funded by Maudsley Charity and Arts Council England.

## **Listing Information:**

Title: Being Present

Venue: Bethlem Gallery, Bethlem Royal Hospital, Monks Orchard Road, Beckenham, BR3 3BX.

Nearest Station: Eden Park

020 3228 4101 [info@bethlemgallery.com](mailto:info@bethlemgallery.com)

Dates: 1 February to 13 May 2023

Open to the public: Weds-Sat 10am - 5pm, Mon–Tues pre-bookings only.

Admission: FREE

## **About Bethlem Gallery**

Bethlem Gallery is a visual arts organisation in south-east London. Established in 1997 at Bethlem Royal Hospital, London, and working across South London and the UK, we support the professional development and socially engaged practice of the artists we work with. We bridge communities, aiming to make art an everyday practice and mental health an everyday conversation. <https://bethlemgallery.com/>

## **About Primary**

Primary is an artist-led contemporary visual arts organisation. We prioritise artistic research, provide studios and residencies to artists, and run a free public programme of exhibitions and events. We believe that artistic research is a public process, so we encourage participation in artistic production. We've established an engaged and outward-looking community which supports artists to experiment and develop their practice. We provide high quality studios for over 50 resident artists, alongside a free programme of exhibitions and events which are free and open to everyone. <https://www.weareprimary.org/>