

Bodies in Space - Instagram posts - Curator's Insights

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - NICOLA BEALING

Nicola Bealing [@nicola_bealing](#) (born 1963) is a Cornwall-based British artist who works in both painting and printmaking.

Ben Borthwick ([@borthwickben](#)), curator of Bodies in Space writes:

"The first and last piece in the exhibition is Nicola Bealing's 'When All Things Act Contrary' (2019) although this is more of a curatorial idea than reality - when you enter the gallery it is behind you so most people will only see it on their way out. The painting is like a contemporary danse macabre, the popular medieval allegory in which Death whips up a carnival atmosphere where social hierarchies melt away as kings, peasants and everyone in-between dance towards the grave. There is a cliché that you know you are looking at contemporary art if it is preoccupied with death - I like to think that medieval or renaissance audiences were saying this about artists of their day as much as we do now. Many of Nicola's paintings feature bodies in or around water so I have always seen this painting as a sub-aquatic bacchanal, reinforced by the perspective of looking down into a vortex of skeleton's dancing and riding on fish back. I used to be a music journalist and I can't help but connect this painting to the Detroit techno group Drexciya. Their brief but influential output on [@undergroundresistance313](#) was themed around an underwater society whose first inhabitants were children born to pregnant African women thrown overboard during the transatlantic slave trade. Maybe this rave macabre was sparked when news reached Drexciya that slave trader Edward Colston's statue had been torn down and dumped in Bristol Docks, symbolically re-enacting the fate their own ancestors?

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - BRUNO PACHECO

Bruno Pacheco [@bbrunopacheco](#) (b.1974, Lisbon, Portugal) lives and works in Lisbon and London. He studied painting at the Lisbon School of Fine Art and at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he received an MFA in 2005.

Ben Borthwick ([@borthwickben](#)), curator of Bodies in Space writes:

"The idea for Bodies in Space started to take shape over the course of a few years through doing studio visits and seeing exhibitions by some of the artists in the exhibition. Although I hadn't seen Bruno's work in person for many years, he was one of the artists I thought would be interesting for the show. I was specifically thinking of paintings of crowds he had done but the two paintings I have ended up including are nothing like those. Torso (Cameo) 2017 is of a solitary antique Greek sculpture while the other, Sunshine & Sentiment 2014, is of two naked figures, a man and a woman. Torso is a painting of an art historical object painted in the palette of a colour photographic negative, making it a confusing optical experience so the subject almost dissolves into abstraction. Sunshine & Sentiment couldn't be more different. The naked figures are standing in shallow baths, maybe more like paddling pools, with the sea behind them. They are different colours which makes them seem disconnected from one another, or could it be that they are so at ease in each other's presence there is no self-consciousness or feeling of shame? The artist plays with the palette but in a very different way from Torso. The peach and rose tones make clear reference to Pierre Bonnard's impressionist paintings of bathing figures,

the sense of immersion in light is at once a homage but there is also an absurdity to these figures who, far from being immersed, are standing ankle deep in a paddling pool. I love paintings like this where things that seem self evident end up becoming questions to which it is hard to find answers."

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - CLAUDETTE JOHNSON

Claudette Johnson [@claudartuk](#) (born 1959, Manchester, UK) lives and works in London, UK. Johnson started her career as part of the newly formed BLK Art Group, which she joined in 1981 while she was a student at Wolverhampton University.

Ben Borthwick [@borthwickben](#), curator of Bodies in Space, talks about her work:

"Standing in front of Claudette Johnson's drawings, the figures that meet your gaze and look back at you are usually at 1:1 scale with your own body. They might be mediated by materials, looking out of the frame and through the glass but her work is still, fundamentally, about staging an encounter between the person looking and the person depicted. While the drawing is being made, the person looking is always the artist in the first instance who then steps aside and invites us to share their vision. They broker the terms of our encounter by choosing what details to include or leave out and whether to anchor someone into, or free them from, their context. She often makes self-portraits and portraits of loved ones and while this would only be clear if you know the people involved, it is the intimacy of the encounter that comes through so powerfully. The person depicted is comfortable with the artist showing them as she sees them, whether that is relaxed or focused, playful or enraged, or any combination of the above."

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - JOY LABINJO

Joy Labinjo ([@joylabinjo](#)) uses multiple modes of representation including abstraction, naturalism; and graphic patterns inspired by Ankara print designs. Labinjo's eclectic visual vocabulary and mixed technique (she uses household paint, acrylic and oil) echo her experience of multiple identities - growing up Black, British, Nigerian in the 90s and early 00s.

Ben Borthwick ([@borthwickben](#)) , curator of Bodies in Space writes:

"Standing in front of Joy Labinjo's paintings of family life can feel like an invitation to join the gathering and share space with the figures depicted in someone's living room or at a community event. It was therefore a surprise to encounter this painting of the deposed statue of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston. It zooms right into his face which we see up close against a blue background. Until the statue was torn down during Black Lives Matter protests, this blue would have been the sky we see behind statues as they look down on us from a pedestal. It now reads as the 'watery grave' of Bristol harbour, the very docks where Colston's profits were landed and where, with a certain poetic justice, the statue was dragged and thrown. The face is made up of fragmented and contorted planes like a cubist death mask. An afro pick covers one eye like a pirate's patch while the juice carton resting on his shoulder is like a proxy parrot. This association isn't with the jolly pirates of cartoons but rather men like John Hawkins, the Elizabethian pirate from Plymouth who created the template for the Atlantic triangular slave trade and whose profits built the navy which enabled Britain's colonial expansion. Although it is a very

different kind of painting from the family groups I first became interested in, perhaps there is still an invitation - in this case to join the Black Lives Matter protests and stand in solidarity with the recently acquitted Colston 4."

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - NICK JENSEN

Nick Jensen is an artist and a professional skateboarder. Born in London in 1984, he studied at Central St Martins, and at Chelsea School of Art and Design, graduating in 2010. He is one of the founders of Isle Skateboards which feature heavily in the celebrated Atlantic Drift videos.

[@borthwickben](#) Ben Borthwick, curator of Bodies in Space:

"The figures in Nick's paintings often emerge out of - and fade back into - abstraction like apparitions. I love the way his paintings give visual form to how memory works as a series of fragments that assemble into a narrative. Frances and Edie is a departure from his recent large scale paintings of bustling street scenes and, instead, the figures float on a blank plane. The atmosphere is intensely concentrated and quiet with two female figures at the front, one of whom is breastfeeding, and a reclining male figure reading. They are sharing space but atomised from their surroundings which resonates strongly with the experience of lockdown. The composition is a homage to and reworking of a Lucien Freud etching, one of many art historical references in the exhibition."

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - ANDREW PIERRE HART

The main focus of Andrew Pierre Hart's practice is the symbiotic relationship between sound and painting - an ongoing rhythmic research and play of improvised and spontaneous generative processes.

Ben Borthwick, curator of Bodies in Space, talks about Hart's painting:

"The most abstract painting in the exhibition is probably Spaces is the Space with its rich dark blue forms that interact with each other, punctuated by flashes of pinkish orange. Its surface is highly variegated with matt washes that absorb the light next to areas of thick paint that glisten and jump as you move in front of it. It is a painting about movement - of the person looking at it, of light on its surface, and ultimately of the figure who momentarily accumulates from the abstract forms, as if it is a split second portrait of someone dancing under a strobe light."

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - FLO BROOKS

Brooks self-identifies as a queer transperson, and his own experiences often feed into the scenarios he depicts. Trans embodiment, family, care and labour are some of the themes scrutinised and reimagined within Brooks' paintings.

Bodies in Space curator, Ben Borthwick [@borthwickben](#) talks about Flo's paintings:

"Flo's paintings refuse easy categorisation in both literal and figurative ways: their multipart shaped form exists somewhere between sculpture and painting, literally rejecting the conventional 'window on the world' of the square or rectangular canvas. This in-between quality

is given visual representation in the works in Bodies In Space. It is not clear if these subterranean public toilets are urban or rural and the wandering fox in 'To Be Or No To Be' is a metaphor for these blurred boundaries. The boarded up toilets in these paintings comment on the evisceration of public services as well as the closure - or cleansing - of liminal spaces associated with 'antisocial' behaviour, in this case the long history of public toilets as gay cruising sites. I love the way the cubicle panel borders on abstraction, resembling a display in a science museum of different organisms in petri dishes."

BODIES IN SPACE - ARTIST HIGHLIGHT - ANDREA BÜTTNER

Andrea Büttner lives and works in Berlin, Germany, and is Professor for Art in the Contemporary Context at Kunsthochschule Kassel. Her practice connects art history with social and ethical issues, exploring broad-ranging topics such as poverty, work, community, belief, botany, Catholicism, and philosophy.

Bodies in Space curator, Ben Borthwick [@borthwickben](#) talks about Andrea's work in the show:

"Andrea Büttner's woodcut shows a woman breastfeeding a baby, one of the most intimate connections between two humans that it is possible to make. Both bodies are laying on a bed which locates it in the home which is significant as it is a space free from the continued stigmatisation of breastfeeding in public in some places. Even so, for many women breastfeeding is also associated with feelings of guilt and anxiety that their bodies are not producing sufficient milk, that weaning becomes a traumatic experience, or that their lives are structured in ways that they are unable to fulfil the breastfeeding ideal. I am interested in how the physical and psychological connections between bodies might be layered simultaneously in such a simple yet complex image."