

Press Release

July 2021

Brunton Correspondence School

presents

I DIDN'T LICK IT

Abigail Fallis, Abigail Hunt, Aileen Harvey, Alexandra Lethbridge, Alice Bowen Churchill, Alice Workman, Allison Anne, Alys Scott Hawkins, Amanda Davies, Amanda Lynch, Andrea Wright, Andrew Davies, Sally Walton, Andrew Davies, Stewart Walton, Andrew Malone, Angelo Bramanti, Ann Jones, Annabel Tilley, Annette Masterman, Annie Musgrove, Annis Joslin, Arabee Beveridge, Arbroath Correspondence School, Augusta Akerman, Bea Denton, Beth Evans, Daisy Cook, Beth Ross, Bindi Vora, Maarten Van Denbos, Boglarka Eliz Les-Varga, Carole Evans, Caroline Kent, Celine Siana Djakoua, Charles Mulford, Charlotte Churchill, Chloe Briggs, Chris Barnes, Clare Schmidt Norris, Claudia Klein, Cleo Broda, Dafna Talmor, Daisy Maya Richardson, Damien Poulain, David Blackmore, Oswin Tickler, Deane Hodgson, Debbie Hillyerd, Debi Angel, Deborah Manson, Pam Williams, Deborah Manson, Deborah Parkes, Diane Frost, Dora Batalim, Elaine Andrews, Elaine Duigenan, Elenor Matthews, Elise Corvaglia, Elizabeth Hammond, Ellen Bahr, Emli Bendixen, Emily Besser, Emma Bennett, Emma Coop, Emma and Ross Perkin, Emma Tod, Eugenia Ivanissevich, Eugenie Shrinkle, Ewan John, Rob Nichol, Fabio Almeida, Fiona Goldswain, Fiona Hingston, Florence Libotte, Flynn Goulding, Frances Watts, Francesca Colussi, Cramer Frankie Fathers, Gail Evans, Gail Cope, Grynne, Gemma Gore, Geoff Hands, Giovanna Petrocchi, Giddens, Glynis, Graham, Graham, Graham Lister, Hannah Dipper, Robin Farquhar, Hannah Nielsen, Harriette Meynell, Hayley Cove, Tonia Gunstone, Helen Frost, Helen Pilkington, Henry Estorffe, Hilda Reis, Ian Parker, Bridget Harvey, Ian Tothill, Ivy Mei, Jackie Brooks, James Reynolds, Oswin Tickler, Jan Stradtman, Jane Chipp, Jack Ravi, Zoe Heath, Jane Cradock-Watson, Janette Carter, Janine Partington, Jean McEwan, Jenny Klein, Jo Hudson, Jo Lewis, Jo Ortmans, Jo Parkin, Jo Stanness, Joan Beadle, John Booth, John Short, Stewart Walton, Jojo Momo, Jonathan Lawes, Julie Avisar, Julie Cockburn, Justine Smith, K Young Collage, Karolina Sekula, Kasper Pincis, Kate Pickering, Kate Street, Bridget Harvey, Katharina Holstein-Sturm, Kathleen McShane, Katie Smith, Katrin Klink, Kelly Reed, Petros and Andrew Gallimore, Kerri Sandve, Kirsty McKeown, Kris Bierfelt, Kristin Ann Fuller, Laura Mcnamara, Leigh Burrows, Lene Bladbjerg, Leonora Oppenheim, Camilla Emson, Leticia Valverdes, Liaqat Rasul, Lidia Bianchi, Linda Chew, Lisa Hochstein, Liz Elton, Liz Horn, Louisa Chambers, Louisa Crispin, Louisa Jay, Rachel Brownlow Brown, Lucie MacGregor, Lucy Steggals, Luminara Star Florescu, Madelaine Smith, Mail Art Archive Vienna, Maja Jones, Marco Ammannati, Margot Birgitte, Maria Ahmed, Mark Murphy, Mark Thomson, Chris Thomson, Joanna Simpson, Mary Bergs, Mary Webster, Marysa Dowling, Matilda Bevan, Matt Moseley, Matthew Harkleroad, Maureen Nathan, Max Ososki, Michael Leigh, Michelle McKeown, Miriam Tolke, Natalie Jones, Nick Kennedy, Nick Pett, Nick Scammell, Nick Waplinton, Nicky Harwood, Nicola Ryan, Nieves Mingueza, Olivia Browne, Paul Cope, Penny Fellbrich, Petrus Maree, Phillip Carter, Pippa Healy, Regina Hawkins, Rhed Fawell, Rhonda Drakeford, Richard Howell, Richard Shed, Rick Sanders, Rob Nichol, Rob Wyn Yates, Robert Hoffman, Rosalind Lawless, Rosemary Rae, Rosie Zielinski, Roz Edenbrow, Rupert Loydell, Ryan Doyle, Mark Edwards (Dr. Me), Ryan Moule, Ryan Todd, Sam Hodge, Sam Walton, Samin Ahmadzadeh, Sarah Earney, Sarah Eyre, Sarah Feinmann, Sarah Hardacre, Sarah Horn, Sarah Tulloch, Saskia Takens-Milne, Sayako Sugawara, Sean Myers, Selina Ogilvy, Selina Rose, Sharon Hall Shipp, Sharon Haward, Shinsuke Aso, Silke Dettmers, Silvia De Giorgi, Somewhere In Between, Lauren Collier, Sophie Mackfall, Sophie Main, Stephanie Morris, Stewart Walton, Toby Stevens, Sue Green, Tabby Cooper, Tara Murphy, Thomas Brown, Tim Moore, Tina Dempsey, Trine Stephensen, Uli Jaeger, Umiko Seadon, Valentina Cozzi, Vanessa Rolf, Vicky Cull, Vicky Saragouda, Victoria/Victorias Art, Studio Victoria Ahrens, Virginia Woods-Jack, Wendy Mcurdo, Zara McQueen.

The Bruton Correspondence School is pleased to present I DIDN'T LICK IT, its first major exhibition of three hundred artworks made in collaboration with the new correspondence school between March 2020 – June 2021.

During the lockdown, they initiated a mail art exchange brief with local and international artists resulting in a richly personal and political survey of contemporary collage.

In this exhibition each art work is displayed as part of an ambitious installation of paintings, collage, photography and written correspondences. The collection will be across four sites in Bruton to enable a walking tour of the work – The Bruton Museum and The Old Pharmacy Wine Bar on the High St, The Dovecote Gallery and The Cellarhand. The exhibition continues the school's investigations into connectivity, community and personal experience.

The collection showcases the innate ability of collage to construct a fresh and new visual exchange beyond the two dimensional into the structural world and craft of visual making. Whilst experimental, each collage is also didactic, layered with hidden messages, reoccurring motifs and shared concerns that speak as an abstract indicator of the surreal times we are living in.

This exhibition is being sponsored by Bruton Museum, The Dovecote Gallery and The Cellarhand.

Notes to editors:

I DIDN'T LICK IT is a mail art / correspondence art project created by The Bruton Correspondence School. The school was founded by Chris Roberts and Rebecca McClelland from their new creative home, the Old Pharmacy Building, a 16th Century building on the High Street in Bruton, Somerset. The Old Pharmacy Building also houses chef Merlin Labron Johnson's new eatery, The Old Pharmacy, a small plates wine bar and deli.

Over a period of 12 months, artists have been invited to participate in an exchange of practise/ideas and analog miniature artworks through a mail art project inspired by the late great Ray Johnson and our frustrations under lockdown.

For more information or to receive high resolution images please contact:

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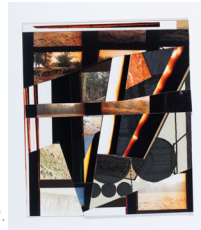
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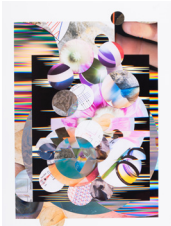
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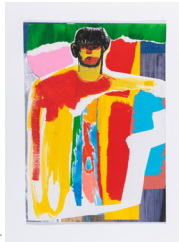
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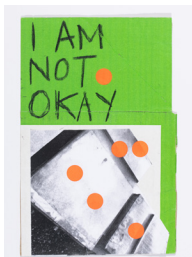
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I DIDN'T LICK IT exhibition essay by Diane Smyth:

The post is nothing new; humans have been sending messages for millennia. But it really took off in 1840 when the Penny Black stamp came along and introduced sender charges, standardised rates, and affordable prices. Alongside innovations such as the railway, the telegraph, and the telephone, the postal network improved communications in a newly industrialised Britain, helping construct a modern mass society.

Soon after the Penny Black stamp launched Sir Isaac Pitman started the first distance learning course, using the post to send shorthand lessons to students and, crucially, get them back for marking. Emphasising a two-way approach to education, Pitman's system was a success and by 1843 the Phonographic Correspondence Society was set up to run it, named for its sense of a dialogue. The society soon spawned imitators, and correspondence schools started to pop up around the world.

By 1962, the artist Ray Johnson had adopted "New York Correspondence School" as a playful name for his experiments in mail art, which were born out of early Pop Art. Creating collages incorporating everything from Lucky Strike logos to photographs of film stars, Johnson would post his artworks to friends, often urging them to: "Please add to & return." Johnson's oeuvre was collaborative and collective, a network just like the post, and in 2020, inspired by his example, Chris Roberts and Rebecca McClelland set up the Bruton Correspondence School to do something similar.

Mailing DIY art out to friends, they invited their collaborators to add and resend the work, either back to Bruton or on to the next pair of hands. Starting the project up during the first Covid lockdown, Roberts and McClelland were largely at home and therefore forced to be resourceful. They used materials they found close at hand, including cardboard, used envelopes, and even old wallpaper, and their collaborators responded in kind. Partly because of this, the Bruton Correspondence School soon became about collage, but collage also seems an appropriate form.

Like the postal system, collage connects disparate points. It was popular with the Surrealists, for example, because of its ability to create unexpected, previously neglected associations; each collage is itself a kind of network, though if the post creates links, collage is perhaps more subversive. By undercutting familiar forms, or putting them together in unfamiliar ways, collage can test and reveal old assumptions. For the Surrealists, it could even show unconscious, long-suppressed thoughts.

Like the postal system, collage was also a product of mass society. The first modern collage was made in 1912 when Georges Braque paired his drawings with printed faux bois wallpaper; his example suggested that mass-produced materials could be used to make something unique, a new piece of work that expressed something about both the author and their time. For the artists whose work is shown here, that time included the Covid pandemic. The collages, at least initially, were made small so they could be sent via post boxes, not post offices.

The artworks themselves are often colourful, but often hint at a state of unease. The layering fragments suggest falling narratives, the sense of a rug being pulled out from under; repeating motifs start to evoke spreading microbes, dots or squares or even birds repeating across the frame. Elsewhere words culled from papers and stamps give new messages, in something akin to ransom notes; even the word 'fragile' takes on new meaning, though it came from a packing label.

The accompanying letters feel more jaunty, the correspondents polite and happy to have been included. "I DIDN'T LICK IT," writes one participant, solicitous of the founders' well-being. Perhaps you can say, they're a return to the conscious mind. The Bruton Correspondence School gathered unique works, made by 300 artists, based all over the world. But by taking a collaborative approach, by using the stuff of our everyday life, and by encouraging a trip into collage, it created a kind of group portrait. Like the post, it connects disparate points; it gives an insight into our time.