

While we belong to ourselves, a little bit of us belongs to everyone

15 February - 14 April 2018

About the exhibition

Following a period of research with a diverse group of experts, including a clairvoyant, a writer, an impressionist, a cognitive anthropologist, a community psychologist, a neuroscientist and a tulpamancer, artist Caitlin Griffiths presents her new exhibition: *While we belong to ourselves, a little bit of us belongs to everyone*. Drawing from the experts' knowledge and experience this exhibition investigates how we build our identities, navigate our wellbeing and relate to other people. A number of key themes are threaded throughout the work, as Griffiths explores the areas of romantic love, connection and healing.

Using performance, installation, photography, film and text-based media, Griffiths exposes how our identities are formed through a complex arrangement of social, emotional, cultural and political influences and asks if an increased understanding of how we construct our idea of self can have a positive impact on our well-being.

Speech act

J. L. Austin's theory of 'performative utterances'¹ states that some acts of speaking are capable of effecting change in the world and qualify as a decisive moment in time in which a situation is altered. Judith Butler further recognizes this 'speech act' as integral to constructing a theory of identity in which gender is decided at a specific point in time through speech:

"Gender norms operate by requiring the embodiment of certain ideals of femininity: from the moment we are born and the performative: 'It's a girl!' is pronounced, we are compelled to perform the role of woman."²

Griffiths work starts with the idea that saying something can change something fundamental about who you are. In her earlier film *Love Letters* (available to view online at <http://www.lovecamden.org/index.php/while-we-belong-ourselves-little-bit-us-belongs-everyone>) the artist writes love letters to people and asks them to read them out loud. The act of documenting these readings on video and having audiences witness them provokes the participant to change how they see themselves.

Placebo effect

In *Love in Red and Blue*, Griffiths accelerates a relationship through three scenarios: a first date, a romantic dinner and a wedding ceremony. Drawing on psychologist Arthur Aron's experiment called '36 Questions To Fall In Love To' in which participants answer a series of questions designed to create closeness by following a path of "sustained, escalating, reciprocal, personalistic self-disclosure", Griffiths enforces a trajectory of intimacy in which two people, with opposite beliefs and values, build a genuine affection and connection with each other.

¹ Austin, J. L (1976) How to do things with words. 2nd edition. Oxford University Press.

² Butler, J (1993) Critically Queer. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Routledge. p.232

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List of works

1. *Art Histories #9 - Text*

Art Histories is an ongoing series of short stories. Started in 2007 these micro-fictions use other people's memories as their point of departure. Each series documents a particular group Griffiths encounters and for this edition she will create a new piece for each of the expert-participants she worked with. A new one will be added each week.

2. *Envy & Narcissus*

Digitally manipulated portraits where the artist has mirrored and expanded or narrowed her face resulting in the formation of two characters Envy (black) and Narcissus (white). Envy defines herself by what she lacks, looking out at what she desires but does not have; Narcissus focuses inward, reducing herself through self-reflection.

3. *Exchange*

Revisited work from 2006. Visitors to the gallery are invited to write their own business card, answering the question: Who are you today? and leave it on the gallery wall. They are encouraged to take one of the artist's cards in its place.

4. *Love in Red in Blue*

Using Aron's '36 Questions To Fall In Love To' as a starting point, Griffiths seeks to generate interpersonal closeness and accelerate intimacy. The three set-ups (from left to right) show a first date scenario, a dinner date for a proposal and a wedding ceremony further designed to manipulate the participants toward a romantic relationship.

5. *What is Socrates' Phone Number?*

1 - 1 performance. Friday 22 March, 2018

Join the artist for a 1-1 experience where you read through a script and she acts out her part. This performance begins with an understanding of how our brain works: how actions and memories of actions create the same neural pathways. To participate you will need to be able to read from a script. A large print / accessible version is available. This performance is suitable for ages 16+.

About the artist

Caitlin Griffiths is an artist working in video, text and performance. She gained her BA (Hons) in Fine Art from The University of Reading in 2001 and MPhil from The University of Birmingham in 2006. She is currently a lecturer for the BA (Hons) Photography and BA (Hons) Photography with Industry Placement at Salford University. She was born in 1977, in Birmingham. Lives and works in Birmingham and Manchester.

#wwbto

artist_caitlin

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