



Archives at Play

6 March — 24 April 2022

This exhibition explores how we relate to the past, and how these relationships inform the way we make the future. From family albums to photo apps, online archives to oral traditions, how we remember our history affects our understanding of the worlds we find ourselves within.

Curator **Thomas Dukes** has been looking into Castlefield Gallery's archive, and how the gallery's activity over the last 37 years is recorded, held and shared. His research considers the gallery archive as an active and complex entity. He questions how we understand what archives are, and what they can tell us about ourselves.

In the upper gallery Dukes has laid out a selection of material reproduced from the archive. Items include meeting minutes, correspondence, and the gallery's publications. Photographs that tell the story of the gallery shift from black and white contact sheets to 24-hour processing, to digital images shared via online platforms like Flickr. Presented outside the confines of archive boxes or chronological order, visitors are welcome to browse this material at will, finding their own connections.

The artists Gregory Herbert, Kelly Jayne Jones, Dr. Yan Wang Preston, and Chester Tenneson were invited to take the concept of the archive as a starting point to produce works for this exhibition.

English Gardens (2022) by Dr. Yan Wang Preston, is a series of work-in-progress photographic prints, inspired by compositions found in traditional Chinese bird-and-flower painting. They depict common plants found in English gardens, the majority of which are not native to the UK. When British botanical expeditions brought these plants to the UK, their native cultural and ecological heritage was often overlooked, and they were instead given new names and cultural significance. This series addresses this historical absence and marginalisation of non-British cultural knowledge, bound up in the attitudes and language toward these foreign species. By presenting them using a 'foreign' visual language, Wang Preston re-positions the cultural associations of these plants, connecting the British archival knowledge about these species to their homeland of millennia.

Much of what is presented to us as 'normal' and 'natural' has been shaped by social, political and economic forces. Wang Preston's work points to how these forces shape the world around us. We can bring a similar critical approach to archives; the point where decisions are made as to how things are remembered. Often presented as neutral records, they are similarly subject to idiosyncratic forces, chance encounters, social changes and technological advances.

Gregory Herbert's *Entangled Ways of Being* (2022) is an development of Gregory's piece, *Mesocosm* (2018). Working with our non-human kin of lichen, moss and fungus, the project develops Gregory's practice with interspecies collaboration and nurturing systems. Attaching itself to the gallery's plumbing, the work interrupts this pre-existing structure to support a new network of organisms living alongside each other. The work points to the physical systems that support Castlefield Gallery's activity, whilst

figuratively propagating the idea that collaboration and supporting each other in a community of overlapping systems could bring about mutual thriving. Archives, like buildings, have their own obscured structures and systems, which govern growth in particular ways. Herbert's work proposes we can disturb these structures to develop new thinking within them.

For *Archives at Play* **Chester Tenneson** has focussed on the act of recording exhibitions through writing. Text constitutes the majority of the archive, and in this project, Tenneson develops a personal approach to travelling through the stories of Castlefield Gallery. Tenneson's sign paintings take lines of text directly from the archive, highlighting moments of meaning for Tenneson, and transforming the written words back into an artwork. Alongside these text pieces are objects associated with support and movement, referencing the work of Castlefield Gallery with communities of artists. Through playful adaptations, Tenneson keeps these familiar objects open to unusual uses and ideas – imbuing them with new possibilities.

Tenneson has a history of collaboration with Castlefield Gallery, and his position as a transgender man brings a personal perspective to the way that archives allow change within their records. Through both painting and sculpture, a theme of movement and possibility playfully provokes the idea of a static archive – encouraging your own story of Castlefield Gallery's history.

Sound and performance artist **Kelly Jayne Jones** has been thinking about how we can become more attentive to the traces we leave in our environment.

In this project titled *Shrine*, Jones uses materials and audio visual equipment accumulated by the gallery, to create a shrine-like space. Somewhere to think differently about how we acquire things over time, and the pathways they open to the future. Far from a traditional definition of an archive, this installation expands the notion of what an archive could be, creating a space of emotional attentiveness to the objects and past experiences we gather. Made with the climate crisis in mind, it is a call for space in which to focus on our relation to ourselves, each other, and our environment.

At a time when it is more important than ever to challenge inherited ideas about ecology, equality, and identity, this exhibition explodes archival structures to form tools for questioning the worlds we find ourselves within.

Archives at Play is part of a wider Castlefield Gallery research project led by Thomas Dukes, a curator and PhD Candidate working with Castlefield Gallery and Manchester School of Art at Manchester Metropolitan University.

***Archives at Play* is supported by**



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