

**PRESS RELEASE: Issued 9 March 2023**



Background image: detail of Alistair Woods, *Men of Letters*, 2022. Image by Michael Pollard

## **Archives at Play 2**

*An exhibition of unruly art, posing new perspectives on past, present and future*

**Exhibition dates: 26 March - 4 June 2023**

**Artists: George Gibson & Grace Collins, Gherdai Hassell, Anna FC Smith, Alistair Woods.**

**Archives at Play 2** is the second in a two-part series of exhibitions inviting an exciting roster of artists to delve into Castlefield Gallery's archive. These exhibitions are part of a process of reflection as the gallery approaches its 40th year in 2024 and looks ahead to the next 40 years of working with artists.

New works by **Alistair Woods** and **Gherdai Hassell** explore cultural and historical narratives, prompting questions, and encouraging us to look at the past anew. Installations by **George Gibson & Grace Collins** and **Anna FC Smith** respond directly to the gallery's archive, inviting visitors to join a conversation about how the gallery's past might inform its future.

**Gibson & Collins'** installation carves out space in the exhibition for visitors to engage with objects and ideas from the gallery archive, playfully reimagining archive boxes and invoking historic ideals. Drawing from zine culture the artists gather visitors' wishes for a future Castlefield Gallery and give these hopes, dreams, and ideas, agency.

**Smith's** work references the centuries old tradition of craft guilds and amateur folk plays in the UK. In the early 2000s Castlefield Gallery's logo featured heraldic beasts, inspired by the wild animals which roamed the local area thousands of years ago. Intrigued by how this logo and its mediaeval aesthetic might have affected the gallery's identity at the time, Smith's installation imagines a story of Castlefield Gallery told with the imagery of folklore.

**Hassell** explores the relationship between collective and individual memory. With her new watercolour and collage works on paper, *Onion Spawns Studies* (2022 - ongoing), Hassell continues her artistic research into historically loaded symbols and mixes social research with personal experience. These

complex works open conversations about how we carry our past, and how it can grow and change with us.

**Woods** also has an interest in how symbols, logos and motifs create and communicate shared cultural identity. For Archives at Play 2, Woods exhibits paintings where symbols and icons from art history and the urban environment are intertwined: laurel wreaths, marble busts, streetwear logos and football insignia. Woods challenges the power of these motifs, playing with ideas of high and low culture, giving a new perspective on the past through the language of the present and vice versa.

**Archives at Play** is a research project led by curator Thomas Dukes as part of a collaborative PhD between Castlefield Gallery and Manchester School of Art at Manchester Metropolitan University. Through events, exhibitions and collaborations, Dukes is looking at how we can activate the archive to ask what Castlefield Gallery means to the communities around us. As well as working with artists through his research process Dukes has drawn many voices into Archives at Play, including Castlefield Gallery's volunteers, placements, students / learners, peers, partners and supporters, and many of the gallery's creative communities, including working with Back on Track, Venture arts and Castlefield Forum.

Like Dukes, the artists taking part in the Archives at Play series approach the archive as a living entity – as something not fixed, existing beyond objects, documents, ephemera; existing in the very fabric of the places and spaces the gallery occupies, within people - through our experiences and held in memory.

Archives at Play therefore invites visitors to get directly involved, to be part of the conversation, to co-imagine Castlefield Gallery's next 40 years, through the exhibition, events programme, on site and via social media.

ENDS //

**For further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact: Leslie Remonato at Castlefield Gallery on [leslie@castlefieldgallery.co.uk](mailto:leslie@castlefieldgallery.co.uk) or 0161 832 8034**

## **More about the artists**

**Grace Collins** (they/them) is an artist and artworker based in the Northwest of England. They create art with other people, support artist-led activity, ask lots of questions and listen to people's answers. With a bit of luck, this means creating spaces for justice and expanding our idea of what the world is allowed to look like.

**George Gibson** is an artist and bookmaker interested in archiving niche fanaticism in print; obsessed with obsessions. Previous publications have explored cryptozoology, queer retellings of *Godzilla*, the brief history of '*Goblin Mode*', and an evaluation of the psychological impact of the hit 00s science fiction drama *LOST*.

**Anna FC Smith** is a Wigan (UK) based multimedia artist who has exhibited internationally. With a longstanding obsession with the overlooked in history, folk culture and communal traditions, she locates herself between artist, historian and anthropologist. Through her practice, Smith celebrates 'low culture' relating with concepts of the carnivalesque, bawdiness, irreverence and ambivalence.

**Gherdai Hassell** is a Bermudian born, China trained, artist & creative director based in Manchester. Hassell's work investigates memory and nostalgia to create unexpected narratives surrounding identity. She uses collage to weave histories and tales of transformation passed down through family

lineages. Diasporic pasts become re-informed by Black futures, where the resulting present is experienced as living “Artifacts”, an act toward Afrofuturism.

**Alistair Woods** is an artist living and working in Manchester who has exhibited across the UK, and co-founded the Manchester based *Depot Artist Studios*. Woods’ minimal abstract paintings bring together references from every day and social observations, using a combination of traditional and non-traditional materials. The works address politics and underground subcultures with a nod to British sitcoms and personal sentiments.

## More on Castlefield Gallery

We are a contemporary art gallery and artist development organisation. Established in 1984, we’ve led the way in artist development for almost 40 years. We provide creative and career development, exhibition opportunities and commissions for artists and independents. We work from our galleries in Manchester, off-site, online and in the public realm. We create long-lasting impacts in our city region, North West and beyond. Our national and international activities focus on artist exchange. Castlefield Gallery’s public and participation programmes provoke new ways of thinking, bringing together artists, creatives, communities and audiences to explore the art and issues of our time. We believe when artists and communities come together they can help shape a better world.

We support more than 250 Castlefield Gallery Associates and a host of creatives through person-centred development programmes. Castlefield Gallery New Art Spaces provide affordable making and project space in the North West of England, including on the high street. We are a home for artists and creatives. We are advocates for what we believe in. We believe in the power of new art. We make new art happen.

Ryan Gander OBE is Castlefield Gallery’s Artist Patron. We are a registered charity, supported by Arts Council England and Manchester City Council.

## Public Programme and events

**Alongside the exhibition**, events and activities go deeper into how archives can play a vital part in our present and future.

**- Zine Making Workshop, with George Gibson and Grace Collins**

**Tuesday 28 March, 6:30-8:30pm**

**£3 / free for anyone on a low-income and for Castlefield Gallery Associates**

**This is an in-person event at Castlefield Gallery**

Throughout Castlefield Gallery’s exhibition *Archives at Play 2*, artists George Gibson and Grace Collins will be collecting written wishes from gallery visitors. In this workshop participants will make some of these wishes come true through zine making.

A zine (like magazine!) is a short publication that might contain photos, texts or drawings. These DIY publications are one way of sharing ideas directly with other people, without needing to go through a publisher. For this reason, zine making has often been embraced by groups who can’t access mainstream publishing and want to do things their own way.

Join Grace and George for the evening to create zines in response to the collected wishes.

**- ASHOK MISTRY // BEING THE POLEMIC**

**Saturday 22 April, 1-3pm**

**Associates Only**

Artist Ashokkumar Mistry invites Castlefield Gallery Associates to join him in a workshop that explores new ways of creating meaning beyond our assumptions and the conventions of creating exhibitions.

Responding to the gallery exhibition Archives At Play, the workshop will break down the taxonomy of conventional groupings of archival objects and artworks, rearranging them to uncover unseen narrative associations. Together participants will interrogate how the role of the curator has been viewed as either a gatekeeper, interpreter or ultimate authority before looking at ways of allowing the object to reassert its own authority through the process of interrogative seeing.

Through conversation, hands on exercises, play and a dissection of the curatorial process, the workshop will consider the importance of playing with polemical approaches to unpack conventional narratives and present new meanings.

**- Archiving Artist Led Activity, with Alistair Woods & Kwong Lee**

**Saturday 13 May, 3-4.30pm**

**£4 / free for anyone on a low-income and for Castlefield Gallery Associates**

**This is an in-person event at Castlefield Gallery**

Artist Alistair Woods (Archives at Play 2) and Kwong Lee (Manchester International Festival Producer Kwong Lee and former Director of Castlefield Gallery), share an interest in the ideas and connections that can be brought to light when exploring the histories and archives of artist-led spaces and artist facing organisations. This in conversation will unpack some of their discoveries as they explore how archival practices play out in artist led and focused communities.

**- An Open Table Tuesday**

**Tuesday 30 May, 6.30-8.30pm**

**Public Event - free**

Part of Castlefield Gallery's ongoing collaboration with Corridor 8, **Open Table** invites Castlefield Gallery Associates to explore the gallery programme, sharing their text based or performative responses via public events. Artist Grace Collins and a Castlefield Gallery Associate will be sharing their responses to *Archives at Play 2*.

**Exhibition Title:** Archives at Play 2

**Exhibition dates:** Sunday 26 March - Sunday 4 June 2023

**Preview:** Thursday 23 March, 6-8pm

**Slow Saturday Preview:** Saturday 25 March, 12noon – 5.30pm

**Easter closing:** 7 April - 10 April 2023 inclusive

**Images available [HERE](#)**

**Venue:** Castlefield Gallery, 2 Hewitt Street, Manchester M15 4GB

**Tel:** 0161 832 8034

**Web:** [castlefieldgallery.co.uk](http://castlefieldgallery.co.uk)

**Email:** [info@castlefieldgallery.co.uk](mailto:info@castlefieldgallery.co.uk)

**Opening Times:** Wed to Sun 12noon – 5:30pm

**Archives at Play is supported by**



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