

# Broken Ecologies

15 March 2026 - 19 April 2026

## Alana Lake and Deeqa Ismail

Through hand-carved woodcut prints and sculptures made with blown glass, marble and found objects, this exhibition reflects on power, protest, memory, and survival. Exhibiting together for the first time, Deeqa Ismail and Alana Lake's works weave together narratives that are personal, political and historical. Their works invite us to consider how histories of erasure and survival continue to shape the present, especially in a moment marked by war, censorship, and the criminalisation of protest.

This exhibition was co-selected from proposals made by Castlefield Gallery Associates, by Castlefield Gallery's Head of Programmes, Matthew Pendergast, and guest selector, Curator, Cultural Producer, Art Consultant & Writer Cindy Sissokho.

"Against a backdrop of climate crisis, social inequality, political unrest, and the erosion of human rights, the proposed exhibition asks: what is the role of the artist in times of crisis?" (Alana Lake and Deeqa Ismail, 2025).

## More about Deeqa Ismail's work

Printmaking frequently acts as the starting point in Ismail's work, which explores speculative ecology, memory, and the repetition of erased or hidden histories. Drawing on family archives and on her investigation into what she describes as Somali culture's 'stuck-ness,' Ismail reflects on the feeling of living within recurring histories and carrying them across generations. For this exhibition, Ismail has produced a new series of large-scale woodblock prints, layering imagery, wood grain patterns and cosmic textures, treating the carved surface as an astral plane. Figures emerge moving through multiple worlds at once, forming a threshold between the living, the lost, and those preserved in remembrance.

***What Survives Between Us*** (2026) focuses on connection and distance. Using a limited palette of orange, black and red, it depicts a mother with a child. The carved patterns in this work and others in the exhibition are influenced by henna, connecting the figures to traditions of care, intimacy, and protection. This print and several others in the exhibition are made by a reduction method where the same wood block is carved and printed in stages. Each time, more of the surface is cut away, working towards the final image through a process of removal and loss. Ismail feels this process results in a tension being sustained in the surface of the work and the image between something being built and broken simultaneously; a tension which is then underscored by the wider context of global destruction and loss of infrastructure through war, politics and environmental damage.

***Gaza Gaza Gaza*** (2026) combines a digital photographic print with woodcut printing, it depicts a landscape of destroyed buildings, overlaid with delicate bird feathering carved into the composition.

***Blood from Space*** (2026) holds a tension between the celestial and the bodily, built up using layers of bird feathers and displaced people in a cosmic shower. Deep reds and dark expanses suggest both wound and cosmos, printed onto translucent cotton voile, the image is suspended in space; something intimate and something immeasurably distant. The work draws on reports that satellite imagery has been used to identify blood patterns on the ground during the violence in Sudan, reflecting on the unsettling possibility of witnessing human suffering from vast distances above the earth.

***March 1969, Hargeisa*** (2026) is a silkscreen print made from a photograph taken by Ismail's parents, showing her mother and aunt. The work captures a moment of upheaval in Somalia 1969. Where a military coup ushered in a communist-inspired government. The work situates personal memory within sweeping political change that led to her father's arrest. The silkscreen process connects the work to traditions of protest graphics and archival image reproduction.

***We Are Not Singular*** (2026) takes inspiration from *Kintu*, a 2014 novel by Ugandan author Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi. Figures and forms overlap and shift across the surface, holding multiple states of being at once. The work engages with a queering of African histories and identities. Bodies are not fixed or singular. Instead, they move between different states, resisting clear boundaries.

Different times, presences, and lives exist together within the print. It reflects on how histories are carried across generations, and how identity remains open, shared, and changing like nature. **Rafah Is Gone** (2026) restages the Pietà, (the pity) a subject in Christian art depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary cradling the mortal body of Jesus Christ after his Descent from the Cross. The work reflects on grief and loss. It is a response to the destruction of Rafah, Palestine. For Ismail the darker tones and dense textures of **Bound to the Dark** (2026) suggest pressure and uncertainty while the imagery holds a sense of resistance.

### **More about Alana Lake's work**

Alana Lake's recent works address climates of fear, precarity and instability, examining cycles of destruction and repetition as symptoms of the systems we build and depend upon. These works are made with reference to her working-class, post-industrial background as well as the field of queer minimalism. Lake challenges the often masculine rigidity of the clean lines and geometric shapes of 1960s minimalism, infusing them with sexuality and socio-political commentary, and using abstract forms to evoke intimacy, desire, and bodily experience. Working primarily through sculpture, the works in Broken Ecologies combine glass, marble, waste materials, metal and concrete to explore compulsion and risk, exposing the fragile architectures that shape contemporary life. Lake's practice is shaped as much by her lived experience as material enquiry. With recent works she has begun to also reflect on the artist's position within a broader landscape of crisis.

**Hopscotch** (2025) consists of a series of concrete slabs with needles embedded in their surfaces, arranged on the floor like paving stones. The work speaks to addiction - the fine line between pleasure and pain, between having fun and losing control - while also addressing climates of fear and precarity, and how these conditions shape our shared social spaces. A sense of contamination and contagion runs through the piece, echoing wider societal concerns around borders, invasions, and the ongoing presence of danger, whether real or imagined.

**Fallout** (2025) features small flecks of uranium glass melted into pools of deep red and copper hues that resemble blood or bodily fluids. The colour palette evokes environmental degradation, war, contamination, and the depletion of natural resources. An ultra violet torch can be used to highlight the presence of uranium in the work.

A stack of uranium-glass crockery in **Hidden Danger** (2025) rises up reinforcing these themes of instability and precarity and suspended tension whilst Lake's **Blood Drop** (2021) pieces echoes feelings of vulnerability and fragility.

**With Force** (2025) is a series of cast glass police truncheons based on items in the collection of Bury Art Museum that reflects on the shifting boundaries of state power, public voice, and the right to assemble and protest. While **Strike** (2025), a marble baseball bat, aligns contemporary violence with the material language of classical sculpture.

Lake sees a lot of the work she has made recently as warning signs for the systems we build and become dependent on. This plays out directly in her work with found objects. A police riot helmet and a brass bullet appear in this exhibition. They draw obvious connections to current wars and the shifting legislation around the right to protest emphasised by their titles **Public Order** (2026) and **Under Threat** (2026).

**No Neutral Ground** (2026) consists of a set of high visibility vests like those worn by people playing team sports, as a safety precaution in an emergency or whilst stewarding events such as protests. They have the potential to signal division, caution or control. They hang on the wall waiting to be occupied by the bodies of one team or another, perhaps suggestive of the inevitability of having to take sides in an increasingly polarised society.

**Reichstag, Reichstag** (2026), a text by **Fayann Smith**, accompanies Lake's works. The text engages with many of the same tensions that underpin the Broken Ecologies exhibition. Smith approaches these tensions between power and instability, protest, control and systemic breakdown through the lens of digital culture, internet mythologies and emerging technological ethics. Smith will be at the gallery on 18 April to give a reading of the text.

**Shape of an Event** (2026) is a pair of prints made from a photograph of powdered glass, which when poured out on a flat surface looked like an explosion. Translating the photograph into a laser etched woodblock resulted in a ghostly image reminiscent of a news print article about an imagined disaster. Alongside the hand-carved and in places repeated or repeatable imagery in Ismail's work there is a shared interest in the technology and infrastructure of image reproduction and circulation. Throughout the exhibition, there is a commitment to explore our experiences of the present moment through different materials, histories, imagery, and processes.