

SUPERMEDIUM: KELAN ANDREWS AND PETRA SZEMÁN

11 October 2026 – 31 January 2027

This exhibition brings together new and existing work by artists **Kelan Andrews** and **Petra Szemán** alongside items from the archive of legendary Manchester animation studio **Cosgrove Hall**. New works by the artists have been developed in dialogue with the archive that is home to items from some of the UK's most iconic and beloved hand-drawn and stop motion animations. Exhibiting items from the Cosgrove Hall Films Archive alongside works by Andrews and Szemán is intended to open up a dialogue between animation past, present and future and to consider what it might mean to animate something: to bring a character, story or feeling to life through movement, sound, drawing and sculpture. At a time when digital technologies seem to overshadow analogue processes these artists are thinking about how the digital and the physical might interact and what happens when you push the possibilities and limits of both.

Sound has become an important element in Kelan Andrews' works as a way to animate objects with the everyday noise of the world. **Scene** (2024) an appropriated dolls house fallen on hard times, is accompanied by the sound of the street, football fans, cats and passing police cars. **Trolley Problem** (2026) features a runaway railway track and the ominous sound of an oncoming train. Both works place childhood memories and toys into a less innocent context whilst fully embracing the joy of interacting with them as an adult. **Planned Obsolescence** (2025) is made from a box of VHS tapes which hold recordings of programmes and movies watched over and over by a young Andrews. After leaving home as an adult the box was sentimentally carried from house to house as Andrews began to wonder what to do with its contents, eventually it became a sculpture contemplating its own state of disuse. Andrews has referred to **Just One More** (2026) as an exercise in 'reanimating' memories. The work features two speakers, one placed at the height of his mother's mouth and one his father's. They play the sound of his parents 'doing the voices' of characters from *'The Wide-Mouthed Frog - A Pop-Up Book'* written by Keith Faulkner (1996). The fun and accessible nature of the pop up book animates characters and actions in the story, bringing them to life alongside the readers' voices; possibly encouraging multiple retellings.

Suspicious Package (2026) invites visitors to interact with a small packing crate, the kind Andrews routinely makes and handles in his day job as a museum and gallery technician. The contradictory warnings and instructions encourage visitors to turn the box over and hear what happens, before having to figure out how to put it back down for the next person. **Afloat** (2026) and **The Mirror or Erised** (2026) make further reference to the everyday routines of working life. Keeping it together whilst being stuck behind a till all day or staring at your reflection in a vending machine whilst waiting for your shift to start. Andrews describes his artwork as a response to his lived experiences.

His work enables him to explore various aspects of himself from performing mundane daily tasks, to living with a chronic illness. His life-size animatronic sculptures based on his own body such as **Legs** (2023) might convey a sense of physical discomfort, trapped in an endless loop of repetitive motion, anxiously awaiting some respite that never arrives. Perhaps overall there is something hopeful for us, witnessing Andrews finding amusement or pleasure in his memories and daily rituals; from making model railways to his daily commute.

Petra Szemán's digital avatar is often found journeying through a mixture of animated realms and real world footage. In *Border as Interface* (2025) Szemán considers software and digital screens as well as languages and our bodies to be interfaces: sites of fluid, multifaceted entanglement where the boundary between spectator and screen dissolves into life. Such interfaces blur the boundaries between the physical and the digital, the real and the imagined. **To Pry Open** (2026) is a new series by Szemán inspired by animation techniques used at Cosgrove Hall. In the lower gallery you can also find a pair of 'cels' from **Danger Mouse** (1981-92). An animation cel is a transparent plastic sheet (originally made from celluloid) used in traditional hand-drawn animation to paint characters and objects on so that they can be moved over a static background. One of the *Danger Mouse* cels shown here has been turned over, revealing how it has been handpainted on the reverse side. By first drawing the outlines of objects and characters and then painting the back of the cels animators are able to create the appearance of smooth solid blocks of colour when the cel is viewed from the front. Other cels and backgrounds from **The BFG** (1989), **Count Duckula** (1988) and **Little Grey Rabbits**, (2000) further demonstrate how animators layer background imagery and foreground objects or protagonists on cels which are placed on top of each other; so that they can be animated separately whilst creating cohesive images of a world. Though many people today will use digital software, the animation process still often requires a similar sense of layering different elements so that they can be manipulated and edited separately. Looking at **Border as Interface (Installation)** (2026) whilst moving in front of it causes the imagery to shift and align, in a manner reminiscent of the relationship between the camera, animation cels and backgrounds. The work also invites us to carry out Szemán's long held desire to slip between these layers of animation.

Szemán's avatar often makes 'Anime Pilgrimages', visiting real life locations featured in animated films and tv shows. **Crossing** (2026) a three minute looped audio piece includes: field recordings taken at a rail crossing on the Odakyu Line near Yoyogi Park in Tokyo and excerpts from members of political parties: Reform (UK), Sanseito (Japan), and Fidesz (Hungary) edited with samples of folk and video game music. The rail crossing was featured in **5 Centimeters per Second**, a beloved 2007 anime and a particular favourite of Szemán's. **Burns Red** (2025) includes imagery that resulted from an attempt to 3D scan the lake at Hitotsubashi University (Tokyo, Japan), the lake appears in **Heaven Burns Red** (2022) a role-playing video game.

Amongst the items from Cosgrove Hall there is a black and white image of buildings featured in the opening titles of **The BFG** (1989) visible on the central building is the name S'White, named after production coordinator Simon White. Displayed alongside it is a series of photographs of a street in present day Nantwich, roughly 40 years ago this street inspired the look of the buildings in **The BFG**. Water appears in several of Szemán's works as a metaphor for something that connects and separates us, as both sites of transportation and borders between places. These works are also informed by childhood memories of swimming in the river Tisza, in Hungary including an experience of near drowning. The river was also used to help mark changes to Hungary's borders with its neighbouring countries following World War One. A process recounted in stories to Szemán in which members of her extended family ended up on different sides of the new border. The title of **Remains of images** (2026) also refers to the strange sensation of the afterimage which usually occurs when we look away after staring at a bright image. A phenomenon which is caused by the body but appears as if it is external to it, suggesting a challenge to our understanding of what is really there or not in our experiences.

Following the pioneering work of the likes of Cosgrove Hall, animation has moved from the margins to become a major part of our culture. Referred to as a *Supermedium* by theorist Debora Levitt, animation today is made with multiple processes including hand drawn illustration, puppets, AI, VR, CGI and various digital and post production programmes. Animation also appears in many different places throughout our daily lives from blockbuster movies, video games and advertising to car parking assistants on our dashboards or health apps on our phones - blurring the boundaries between representation, creation and reality. Through animated worlds at the intersection of different technologies, experiences, politics, bodies, language, memory, humour, nostalgia and hope; the works in this exhibition invite us to consider how we are shaped by the world and how we shape it.

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