

HUMBER STREET GALLERY

EXHIBITION GUIDE
GALLERY 2

JAMIE CREWE

SOLIDARITY & LOVE

Sat 15 August – Sun 13 December 2020

Humber Street Gallery (Hull) and Grand Union (Birmingham) have co-commissioned sister exhibitions of new work by Jamie Crewe comprising video, sculpture, text, and print: *Solidarity & Love* in Hull, and *Love & Solidarity* in Birmingham. These exhibitions, which were also previously open in these spaces at the beginning of this year, have led to Crewe being selected to receive a Turner Prize Bursary – the new format for the Turner Prize in 2020 celebrating artists for their significant contributions to new developments in British contemporary art.

This body of work is about repulsive kinships. It thinks about places, cultures, histories, communities, and individuals that are tied to each other, whether they like it or not. It is stuck on the pain and compromised pleasure of such entanglements.

The work begins with Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel *The Well of Loneliness*. This book is a portrait of Stephen Gordon, a masculine lover of women who wants to be a country gentleman like her father. The book thwarts her desires, and has been an influence on many anglophone queer and lesbian women, regarded both as a stirring representation and an insidious antique. It has also been interpreted as a transgender narrative, with some readers arguing that Stephen might be better understood as a trans man. Stephen, however, refers to herself as an 'invert': a sexological term from the early 20th century which has fallen out of use, and an identity which falls between the divided categories of 'homosexual' and 'transgender.'

SISTER EXHIBITION

**GRAND
UNION**

LOVE & SOLIDARITY
Grand Union, Birmingham
Fri 7 – Sat 29 August 2020

INTRODUCTION

by Jamie Crewe

Solidarity & Love at Humber Street Gallery opens with a blood-drenched portico: the entrance of the top floor gallery has been flooded with red light. Beyond this is a darkened space containing two new videos, both based around conflict and camaraderie, looping simultaneously. One video, titled "Morton" – "Beedles" – "An abyss", is projected on a screen; the other, titled "The Ideal Bar" – "Le Narcisse" – "Alec's", is played on a smaller monitor which stands before the projection screen, intruding upon the larger and longer video, and intruded upon in turn.

"The Ideal Bar" – "Le Narcisse" – "Alec's" is a dramatised exchange between two characters in a Glasgow nightclub, inspired by a sequence in *The Well of Loneliness* in which Stephen encounters a repellent reflection of herself in a Parisian gay bar. These characters are portrayed by performance maker and ogre Sorcha Clelland, and performance artist and music producer TAAHLIAH, who switch roles in the version shown at Grand Union. This exchange is punctuated, as in Radclyffe Hall's text, by the image of a panting, dying fox. Though it demands compassion, this fox is not real, and its blood looks perhaps more like lipstick. The video is scored by a hyperventilating concertina.

"Morton" – "Beedles" – "An abyss" is a video documenting Radclyffe Hall – a concomitant group of artists, writers, and others, working under the author's name and in this case composed of Jamie Crewe, Nicky Crewe, Vicky Crewe, Seán Elder, Laura Guy, John Heffernan, Mason Leaver-Yap, and Kim McAleese – engaging in a traditional craft from the Peak District, where Jamie grew up. The video shows this group, over the course of two days in Birmingham's Modern Clay ceramics studio, making a bastardised version of a well dressing.

Well dressings are decorative pallets of clay into which designs are formed with fresh flowers, seeds, wool, and other natural materials. These are erected around the wells of certain Derbyshire villages and towns each summer, in a tradition which dates from the 1800s. "Morton" – "Beedles" – "An abyss" focuses on the group's hands doing the detailed, demanding work of constructing such designs, which, in this case, are not traditional: drawn from disparate sources, they touch on themes of heartbreak, LGBTQIA+ solidarity, the legacy of *The Well of Loneliness*, and more. The audio reflects this, as conversation recorded during the assemblage branches into varied discussions: of going to — or refusing to go to — Pride celebrations; of the social function of well dressing as experienced by Jamie, Nicky, and Vicky; of instances of transphobia; and more. In this, there are small moments of friction and revelation, born from the combination of disparate people — and deep investments — working together under one name.

There is a crack in the olive green curtain which splits Humber Street Gallery's top floor gallery and forms this dark space for video viewing. Through this aperture daylight enters, and a steel rail is installed, cutting through the gap and leading into the second half of the gallery. On this steel rail are copies of a printed work, titled "Womanhood", of which around 3,000 copies exist, displayed across the two venues and available for any viewer to take away. The cover design of this is based on the cover design of *The Sink of Solitude* (1928), an illustrated lampoon of *The Well of Loneliness* written by Beresford Egan, P.R. Stephensen, and "Several Hands". "Womanhood", too, has things to say about Radclyffe Hall: through collaged excerpts of the novel, drawings, and a first-person narrative written with a knife, the work addresses the pain of disenfranchisement, and the contrary, almost spiteful endurance of hope.

Past the rail is the second half of the gallery, in which a free-standing wall faces the far window, illuminated from behind by the glow of the dividing curtain, which on this side is fluorescent orange. This wall displays a series of fired clay slabs: the products of the labour depicted in "Morton" – "Beedles" – "An abyss".

Traditionally a well dressing would be erected for one or two weeks, then begin to dry out and degrade, and so be taken down. Its design would be destroyed, and the clay and boards would be reclaimed and stored for the next year. In this case, however, the design has been cut into sections and fired in a kiln. What remains on the pale clay are marks of imprint, shadows of pigment, and a few scorched remains. These 25 fired clay objects — all called "A slab", and subtitled (as with all works in the exhibition) with quotes from *The Well of Loneliness* — are split across Grand Union and Humber Street Gallery, often leaving designs partial or cut in half. What remains can be closely observed: a quote from gay activist Randy Wicker about his late friend and former enemy, the transgender activist Sylvia Rivera; a wordless poster design for a Valentine's Day event at a lesbian SM club in the late 80s; an androgynous breast on which a labrys pendant hangs; Germaine Greer's recoiling hand; and more.

Alongside these slabs is another small sculptural work: "Little red fox", which is the fox model seen in "The Ideal Bar" — "Le Narcisse" — "Alec's", curled up on a plinth topped with fake grass. Its tail has been cut off, and taken to Grand Union as a separate work. Through the resulting sacrococcygeal wound an armature of aluminium wire and blue foam can be seen. This model — gangly, oversized, not entirely convincing — echoes the foxes Stephen Gordon hunts in *The Well of Loneliness*, as well as the 'male inverts' she despises.

Bluntly split, this body of work survives in partial form, spread across two cities, two venues, and two exhibitions. This is in accordance with its themes; together, and apart, *Love & Solidarity* and *Solidarity & Love* test the possibility of living with a wound.

As part of Humber Street Gallery's extended programme for *Solidarity & Love* a publication with new writing by Juliet Jacques, Nat Raha and Shola Von Reinhold has been co-commissioned. This will be distributed digitally as a PDF designed by Jamie Crewe.

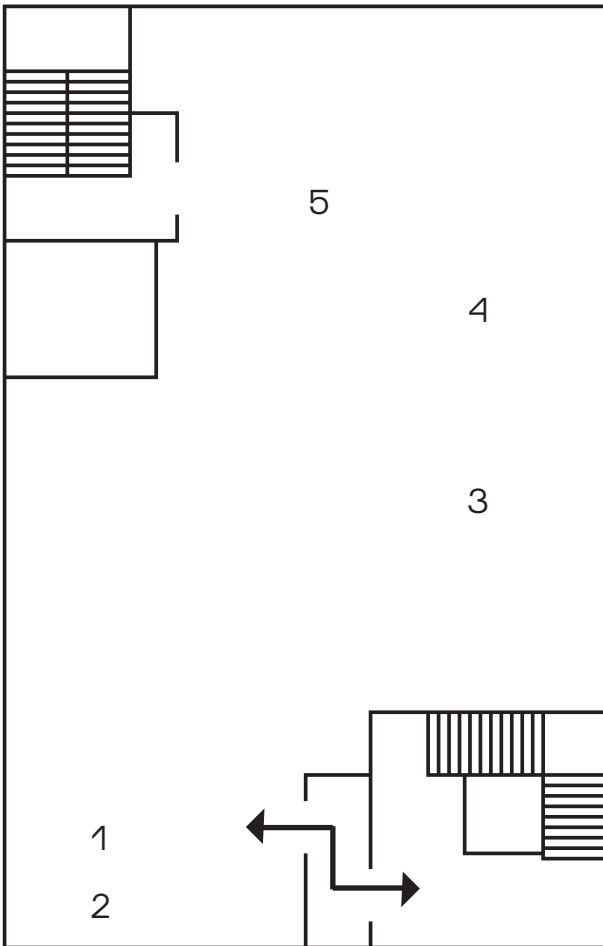
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jamie Crewe was born in Manchester and raised in the Peak District, and they now live and work in Glasgow.

They have presented three solo exhibitions: *But what was most awful was a girl who was singing* (Transmission, Glasgow, 2016); *Female Executioner* (Gasworks, London, 2017); and *Pastoral Drama* (Tramway, Glasgow, 2018). They have participated in many group exhibitions, including: *STILL I RISE: FEMINISMS, GENDER, RESISTANCE ACT 2* (De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill On Sea, 2019) and *ACT 3* (Arnolfini, Bristol, 2019); *I, I, I, I, I, I, I* *Kathy Acker* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 2019); and *Cellular World, part of the Director's Programme for Glasgow International 2018* (Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, 2018). They have also presented their performance lecture Potash Lesson at a variety of venues in the UK and Europe, and authored a book titled *GLAIRE* (published by MA BIBLIOTHÈQUE, 2017).

In 2017 they were awarded a commission by KW Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin, as part of the KW Production Series. The resulting moving image work — a two channel video titled *Pastoral Drama* — was exhibited at the Julia Stoschek Collection in Berlin alongside fellow award recipient Beatrice Gibson's *I Hope I'm Loud When I'm Dead*. In 2019 they were announced as the tenth recipient of the Margaret Tait Award, Scotland's most prestigious prize for artists working with moving image. The resulting work — a rural horror film titled *Ashley* — will be premiered at

WORK DETAILS, GALLERY 2



1. *"The Ideal Bar" — "Le Narcisse" — "Alec's"*, 2020

Video, 2 mins duration. Featuring TAAHLIAH and SORCHA CLELLAND. Camera by TOM TURRELL.

2. *"Morton" — "Beedles" — "An abyss"*, 2020

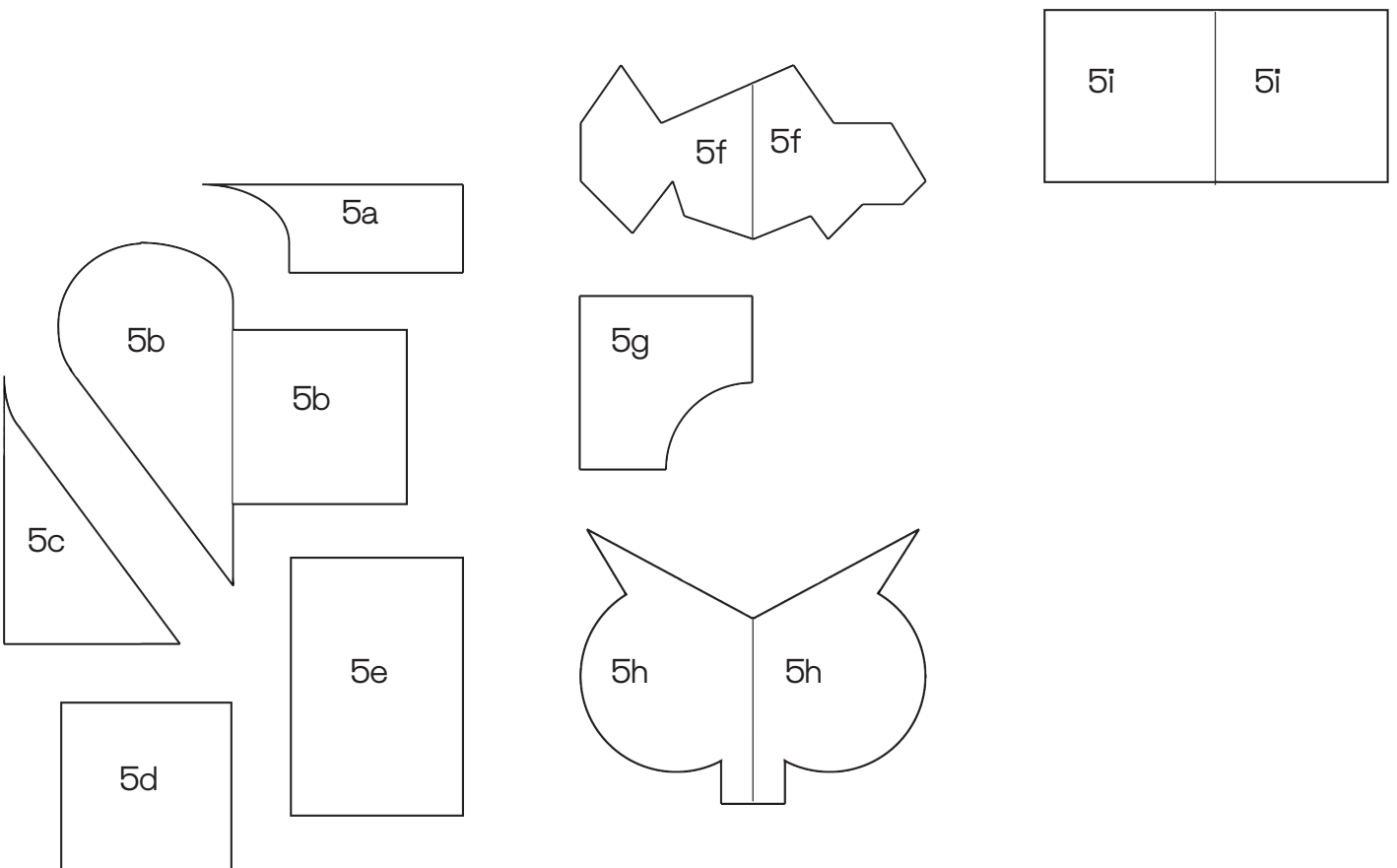
Video, 30 mins duration. Featuring RADCLYFFE HALL. Camera by TOM TURRELL. Sound recording by JOHN TURRELL.

3. *"Womanhood"*, 2020

Risograph print on paper, staples. Printed by THE HOLODECK.

4. *"Little red fox"*, 2020

Faux fur, foam, foam clay, glass, plastic, aluminium wire, ink.



GLOSSARY

ANGLOPHONE: English-speaking.

APERTURE: a hole or an opening through which light travels.

CONCERTINA: a small musical instrument played by stretching and squeezing a central bellows between the hands to blow air over reeds, each note being sounded by a button.

CONCOMITANT: naturally accompanying or associated.

DISENFRANCHISEMENT: the state of being deprived of a right or privilege

DISPARATE: essentially different in kind; not able to be compared.

INSIDIOUS: proceeding in a gradual, subtle way, but with very harmful effects.

KILN: a furnace or oven for burning, baking, or drying, especially one for calcining lime or firing pottery.

PORTICO: a structure consisting of a roof supported by columns at regular intervals, typically attached as a porch to a building.

THWARTS: prevent (someone) from accomplishing something.

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

David Cleary, David Priestman, Louis Jones, Steve Potter, Matthew Moore, Alice O'Rourke, Kim McAleese, John Heffernan, Mason Leaver-Yap, Laura Guy, Nicky Crewe, Vicky Crewe, Seán Elder, Joseph Lilley, John Turrell, Tom Turrell, TAAHLIAH, Sorcha Clelland, Mark Essen, Sarah Taylor Silverwood and Cheryl Jones.

5. SLABS BY RADCLYFFE HALL

5a. "A slab" — "Large brown hand", 2020
Pumpkin seeds, acrylic wool, chamomile, sweet william petals, chrysanthemum petals, daisies, fired clay.

5b. "A slab" — "Sore heart" — "One", 2020
Poppy petals, acrylic thread, ground coffee, fired clay.

5c. "A slab" — "Aunt", 2020
Hessian, straw, grass, wooden tooth-picks, acrylic thread, carnation petals, elderflowers, pumpkin seeds, fired clay.

5d. "A slab" — "Unfruitful breast", 2020
Chrysanthemum, acrylic wool, rose petals, carnation petals, fired clay.

5e. "A slab" — "In the gold haze of late afternoon", 2020
Coffee beans, pine chips, hydrangea petals, carnation petals, fired clay.

5f. "A slab" — "Dignity and pride without ostentation", 2020
Poppy seeds, dried chamomile, acrylic thread, fired clay.

5g. "A slab" — "Mirrors thickly painted with cupids", 2020
Chrysanthemum petals, acrylic thread, fired clay.

5h. "A slab" — "Our three selves", 2020
Rose petals, sesame seeds, chrysanthemum petals, acrylic thread, fired clay.

5i. "A slab" — "Protesting roses" — "Two", 2020
Coffee beans, acrylic wool, fired clay.

ABOUT US

Humber Street Gallery is an Absolutely Cultured project, bringing a vibrant, high-quality contemporary art space to Hull. The gallery's free programme of exhibitions is supported by a series of talks, performances, screenings and workshops.

Absolutely Cultured puts culture at the heart of Hull's ambition and aspirations, commissioning and producing a programme of events and projects which are ambitious, surprising and imaginative. In addition to the gallery and our broader cultural events, we continue to develop our world-class volunteer programme, to deliver initiatives to support the cultural sector and to offer access to creative learning opportunities.

OPENING TIMES

GALLERY

Thu – Sun: 11:00 – 15:00

CONTACT US

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