

PRIMER

Elizabeth Bowley, Chloe Brooks,
Laurence Chalk, Brin Frost
& Zoe Williams

Gallery 2
19 January - 2 March
Tuesday - Sunday, 12-6pm

Spike Island

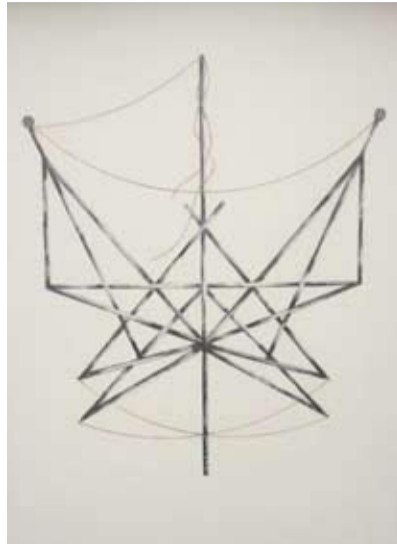
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PRIMER

PRIMER brings together five emerging Bristol based artists all of which, have been awarded the University of the West of England Graduate (UWE) Fellowship at Spike Island between 2005-2007.

Spike Island and UWE have agreed a Strategic Partnership and through this the two institutions work together on a number of initiatives to support the visual arts in Bristol. The annual UWE Graduate Fellowship is made possible through UWE's financial support. This enables two graduates each year the opportunity of a studio at Spike Island for twelve months, directly after they have graduated. Each artist applies as they near the end of their under graduate study. Spike Island is delighted to be supporting the practices of these excellent young artists at such a crucial time. This show, Primer, enables Spike Island to assist these artists to gain visibility for their work and to further establish their early stage practices.



Brin Frost, Tock Tock, 2007, pencil on paper & MDF, courtesy the artist

Elizabeth Bowley

Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, follows the life of the devastatingly beautiful Dorian, a decadent who devotes his time to the discovery and fulfillment of new and great passions. As a young man, Dorian falls head over heels in love with Sibyl Vane, a pretty actress, while watching her perform on stage. On learning of his love for her, Sibyl questions her life as an actress. "The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real.... My love! Prince Charming! Prince of life! I have grown sick of shadows."¹

One evening, watching as she gives an utterly unconvincing performance, Dorian, humiliated, renounces his love. Devastated by this declaration, Sibyl, in desperation, takes her own life.

Bowley's interests lie in the dream world that theatre and performance can create. The artifice and fantasy that the construct of theatre provides is a powerful seductress whereas, against this artifice, actual life seems awkward and ugly. The threshold between the viewer and the performer is fragile; the viewer must trust the performance. When this construct breaks down, Bowley believes this discomfort provides a new and interesting insight.

Confronted with an actual possibility of real love, real romance and passion, Sibyl Vane's fate is tragic. Ironically, through her 'Prince of life', Sibyl Vane only finds death.

¹ Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Penguin Group, London, 1891), p. 84



Elizabeth Bowley, Glassmaster, 2007, DVD still, courtesy the artist

Cover Image:
Zoe Williams, Glory Hole, 2007, mixed media on fabric, courtesy the artist

Chloe Brooks

Through blunt interferences into the architectural idiosyncrasies of a space Chloe Brook's 'archi-sculptural' installations offer an initial and refreshing clarity of response. Paradoxically it is their humorously physical and literal examination of a space that allows the conceptual mists to roll in. They force a closer re-evaluation of themselves and subsequently their place of inhabitation, revealing themselves to not just be a physical response to the site but 'an expression of social context through sculptural form'¹.

Her works' seamless integration into the fabric of a viewing space activate and consume areas of the room, areas that we - the audience - are viewing from. Establishing a symbiotic relationship of this nature allows her to create 'a space that a viewer cannot make sense of, rather the space makes sense of them, acting upon them, simultaneously thrilling and incapacitating through a sensory overload'²; indeed they stimulate a reaction in audiences before inviting response.

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Zoë Williams

'Leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial chalices dry; this occurs repeatedly, again and again: finally it can be reckoned upon beforehand and becomes a part of the ceremony.'¹

In Kafka's text these leopards transform from self-contained, independent beings to fetishized objects. Their original context has been distorted and forgotten, so that they cease to be leopards but become symbolic entities, used as part of a ritual.

William's conjures up reams of image equations; a chrome fox head crying in to a glossy orifice, is disguised from its origins as a cheap joke shop mask, giving it, for a fleeting moment a sense of higher purpose. Somehow by placing seemingly unrelated objects together their original functions and meanings lessen, and they begin to take on a more abstracted mode of being, drawing up a myriad of associations. The objects cavort with one another to build a new and fertile language from these abrasions.

Her concern is to create a sense of movement and erotic tension between appropriated objects and imagery. The processes that Williams employs to produce work are fickle and material based, her indulgent use of materials combines with the apparent disregard that she ultimately pays to them.

¹ Kafka, F, 'Reflections on Sin, Pain, Hope and the True Way', *The Great Wall of China*, trans. By W. and E. Muir, New York 1948



Laurence Chalk, Black Flags, 2006, fabric, wood & gloss paint, courtesy the artist

Chloe Brooks, Answer to a child's question, 2007, cardboard, courtesy the artist

Laurence Chalk

Laurence Chalk makes absurd, tragic, sad, funny and pathetic sculpture. His works are an exercise in humorous futility. From flags that wave hopelessly in the dark, to light bulbs that wobble on bending poles. The potential usefulness is always thwarted. They are precarious, yet despite this, they manage to exist comfortably between holding it together and falling apart, Chalk's commitment to eternal, faltering optimism is always in evidence.

A boyish woodshed charm pervades the work with its perfunctory lick of gloss paint and low tech construction. He uses simple and everyday materials to create lo-fi sculptures with punkish twists. He champions a do-it-yourself philosophy and avoids high tech options for the more hands on trial and error kind of making.

A distinctive feature of Chalk's work is his fascination with kinetics. Most of his works feature a mechanical device such as a record player or electric motor, which in turn raises a flag or animates a pole. Any object is transformed by movement whether a flag, the branch of a tree or a plastic bag.

Brin Frost

Simone clenched Sampson's gaze, bound in several locks,

The whites of my eyes captured the petrified trickle,

Humpty Dumpty had a glorious fall,

The triumph of the Hell's Angels became studded with studded studs.

Brin Frost hosts a set of highly restrained theatrical moments, drawing upon particular poetic and symbolic imagery. Wooden and fabric compositions tied, dyed and worn accompany intense framed drawings. Torn battle flags, harlequin boards and metal studs generate and embrace a series of new relationships and hierarchies. The scattered work slips a given function, its constant re-evaluation allowing a state of unrest.

